

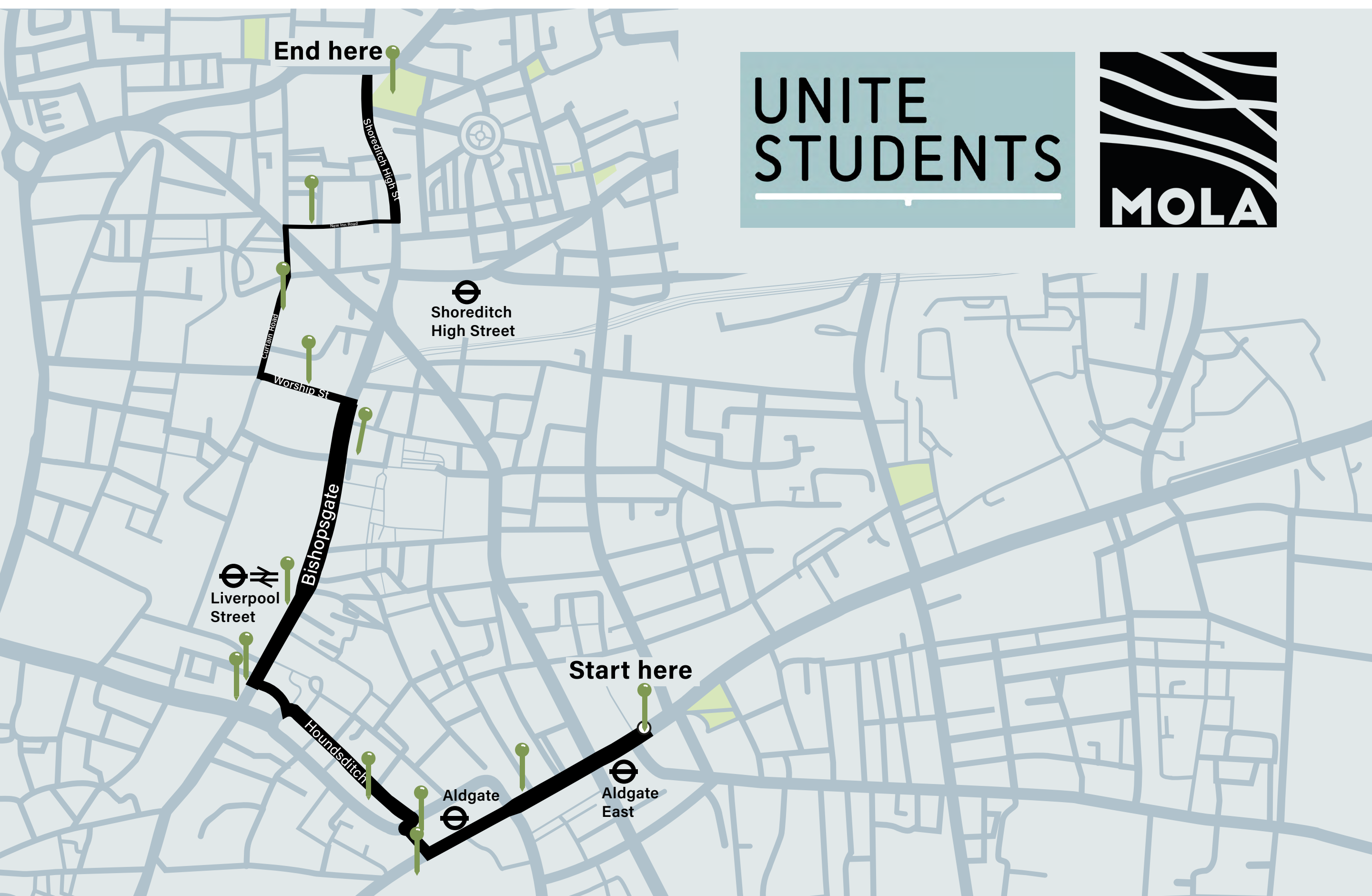
A self-guided walk through East London's theatre lands

Weave your way through Whitechapel and Shoreditch, following in the footsteps of playwrights and thespians - labelled as dangerous subversives - who plyed their trade on the fringes of the City.

Estimated
time of
walk



This walk features sites from the development of Elizabethan theatre. From butchers and leatherworkers in the east, to the infamous Bedlam hospital in the north, areas around the city walls were dirty, exciting and occasionally fatal places to be. In these lowly surroundings, playwrights like Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson and William Shakespeare fought, drank and changed the shape of English theatre, and with it the English language, whilst sharing space with other marginalised groups and industries.



UNITE
STUDENTS



▶▶ STOP 1

The site of the George Inn - White Hart pub

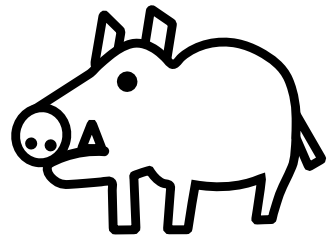


The layout of the White Hart partially reflects the coaching inn which once stood on this site. Following the line of the Roman road leading to Colchester, Whitechapel High Street during the 16th and 17th centuries would have been home to many establishments providing food and shelter to weary travellers. Like the Boar's Head, there were plans to turn the George into a playhouse, ultimately no alterations were made.



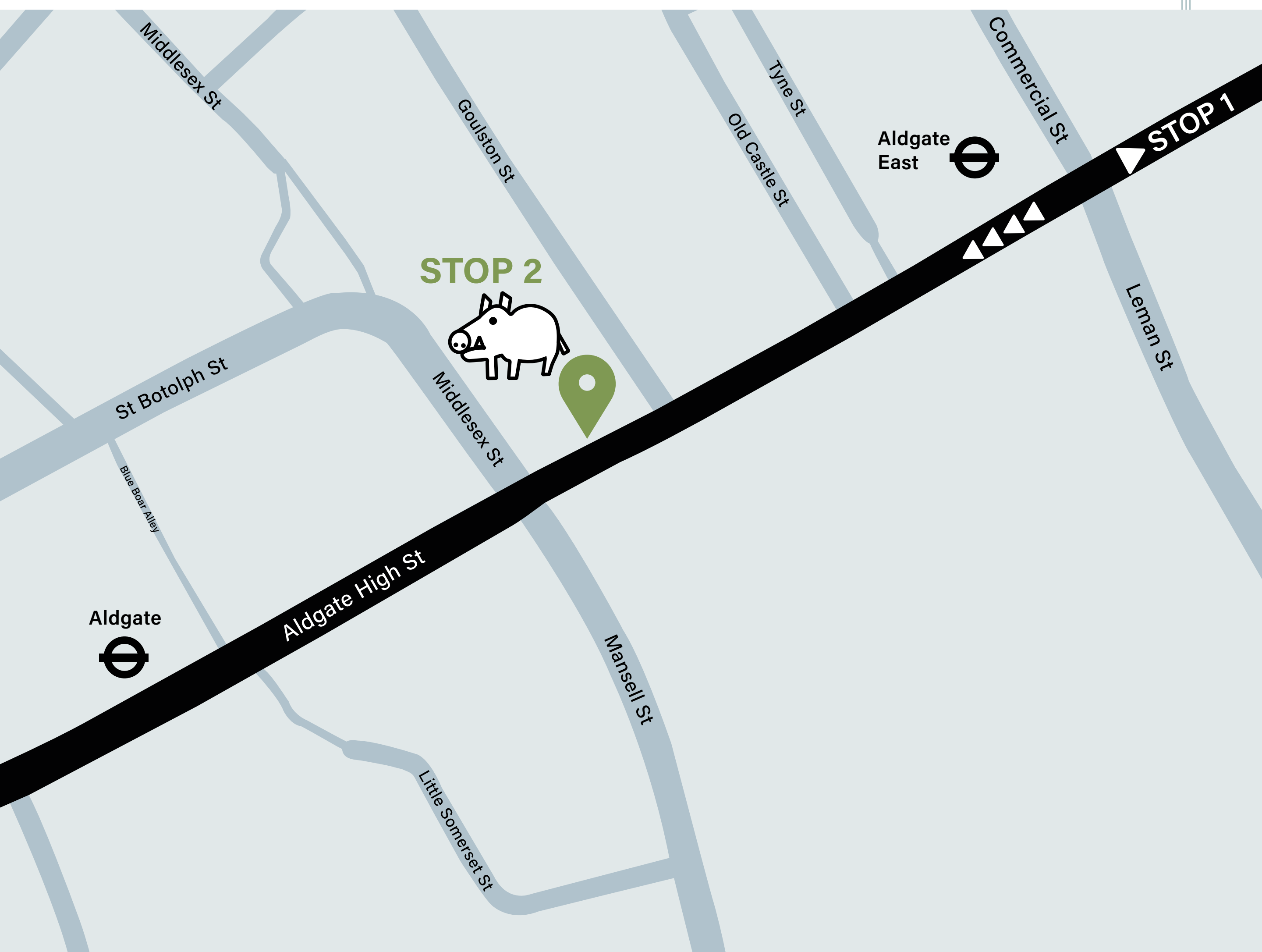
▶▶▶ STOP 2

The Boar's Head - 1598



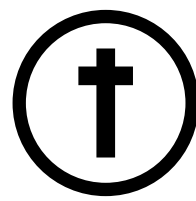
Originally a coaching inn, the Boar's Head operated as a playhouse with a purpose-built stage from 1598-1616. The earliest recorded performance here was in 1557 - a production of a 'lewd' play titled 'Sack full of News' that was stopped by the Lord Mayor's men'. During its heyday, the theatre played host to popular acting troupes such as the Lord Derby's Men, the Lord Worcester's Men, and the Queen Elizabeth's Men, as well as one of the most celebrated comedians of the age, Will Kempe, a contemporary of Shakespeare.

In 2019 MOLA excavated the site on behalf of Unite Students, ahead of their student accommodation development. The playhouse is to remain in situ and excavations revealed that following the closure of the playhouse, a series of 17th and 18th century light industrial activities had developed across the site, such as the discovery of a kiln used for making clay pipes.

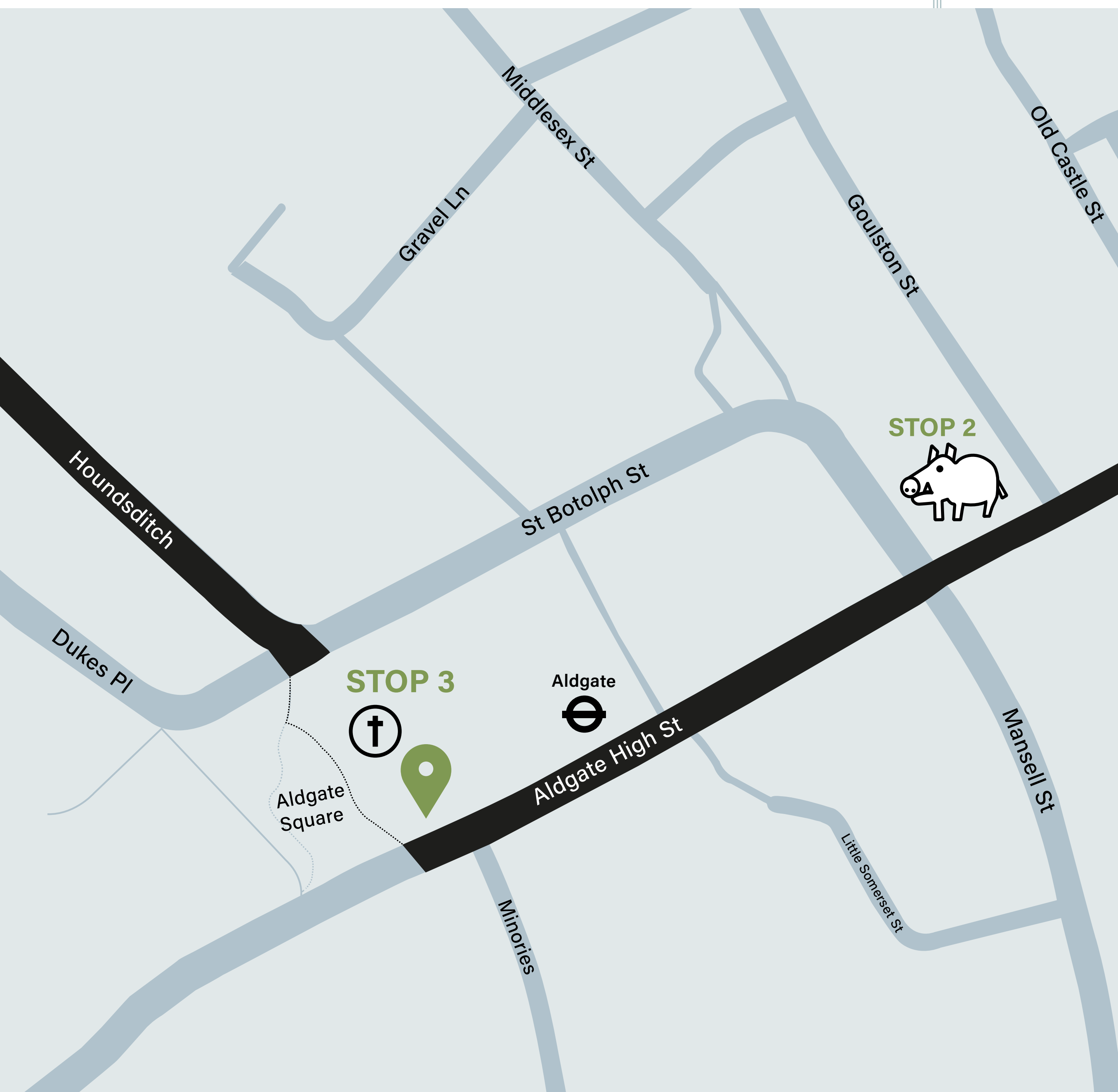


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St Botolph without Aldgate

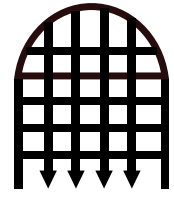


Around the City there are 4 churches dedicated to St Botolph, all near major transport routes, thought to be related to the fact that St Botolph was the patron saint of travellers. The current church at Aldgate dates from 1740, although it has been a site of Christian worship since the 12th century. Church records contain references to several actors, including Robert Armin, a comedian who worked with Shakespeare and was buried here in 1615.

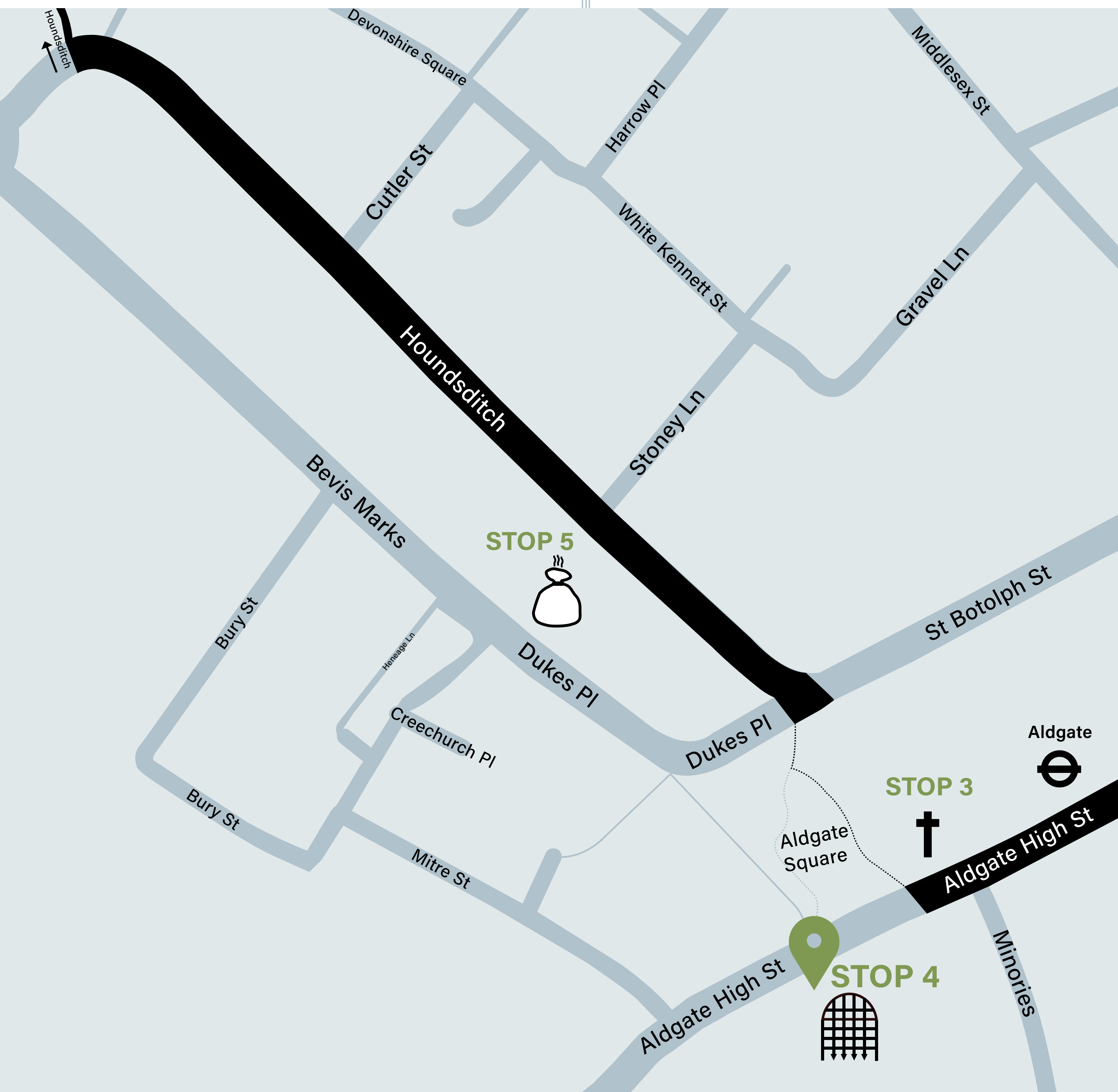


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Site of the Aldgate

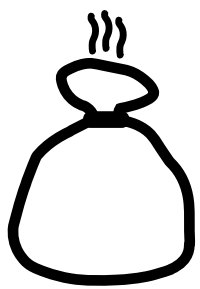


Aldgate was one of the original gates through the Roman City walls and was rebuilt multiple times. Between 1607-1609, during the operational life of the Boar's Head, it was revised again, this time in a classical style with less emphasis on functionality. This gate was only successfully breached twice in its existence, first in 1381 during the Peasants' Revolt and again in 1471 during the Wars of the Roses.

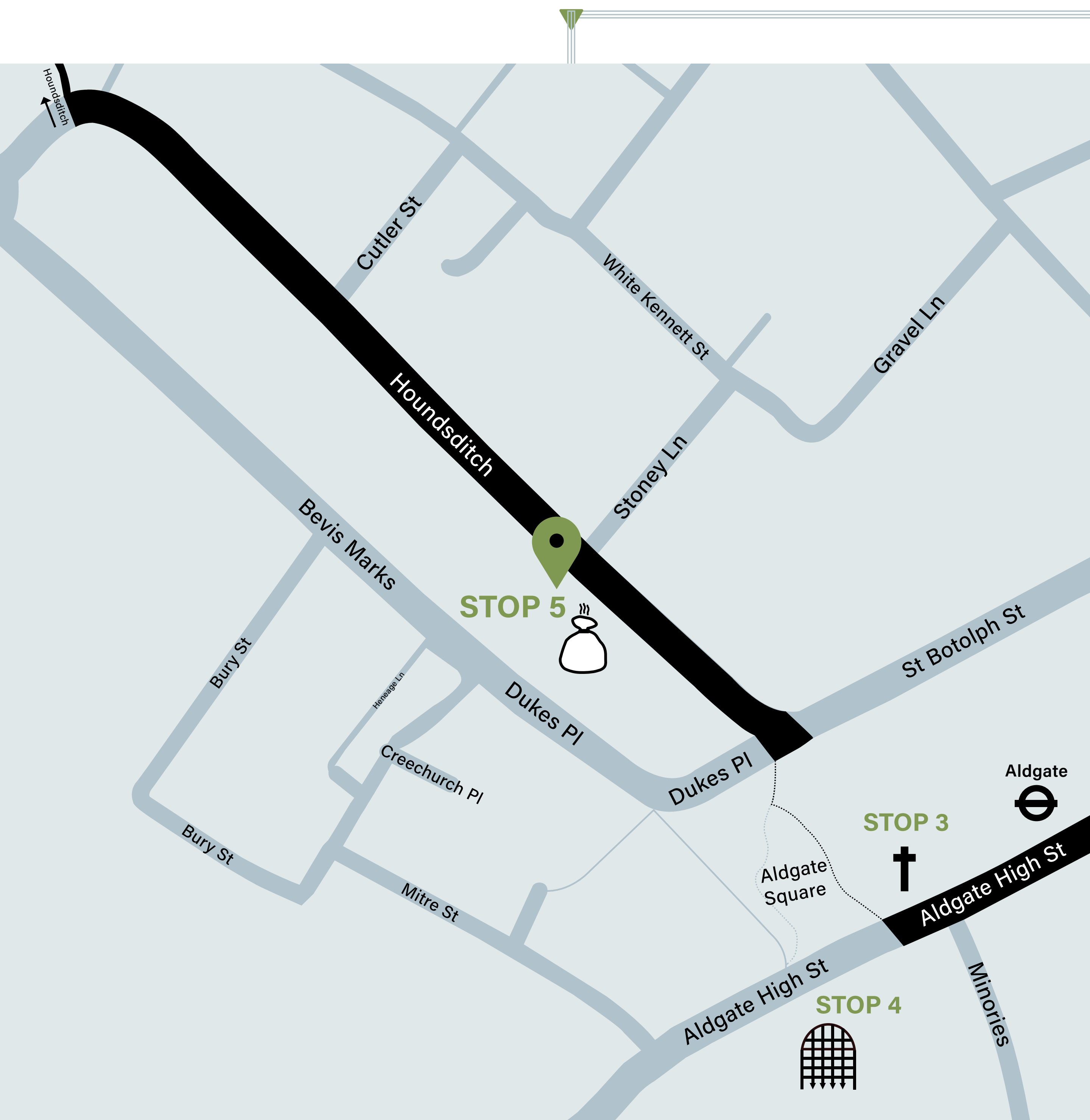


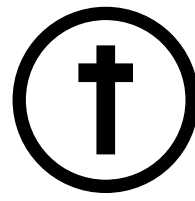
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Houndsditch

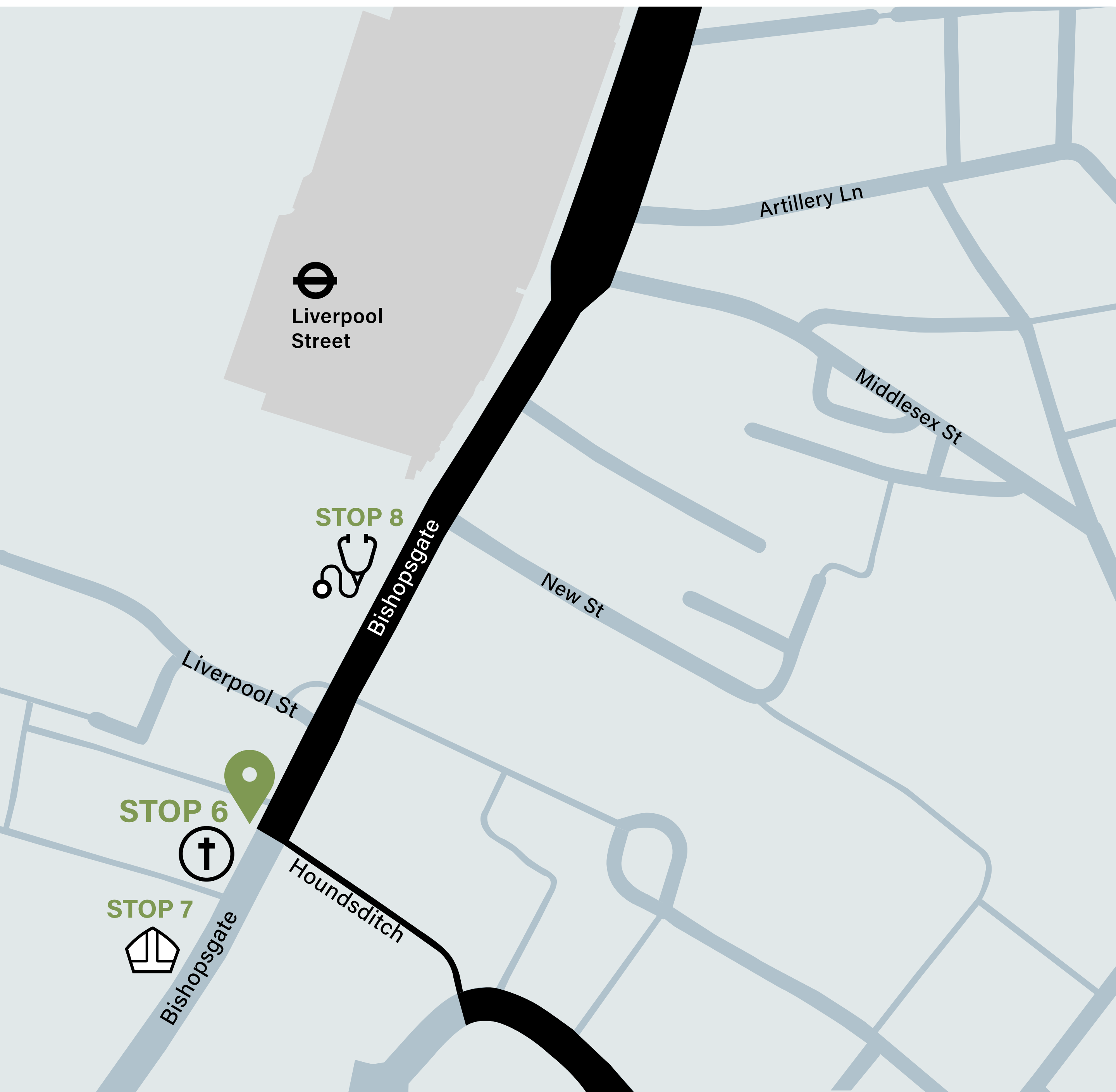


This defensive ditch associated with the Roman city wall ran along the south side of the road, however by the 16th century it was being used by local people as a general rubbish dump. Many industries that produced unpleasant smells were found in East London, due to fact that prevailing winds blew from east to west. Waste products from these industries would have been among materials dumped in the ditch, making it a decidedly unpleasant place to be.



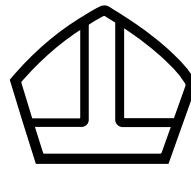
 **STOP 6****St Botolph without Bishopsgate**

Despite surviving the Great Fire, this church fell into disrepair and was eventually demolished and rebuilt. The current structure dates from 1729. Between 1600-1624 the church rector was Stephen Gosson, an ardent anti-theatre writer, known for penning the 'Schoole of Abuse' which carried the subtitle 'A pleasant invective against poets, pipers, players, jesters, & such like caterpillars of a commonwealth!'

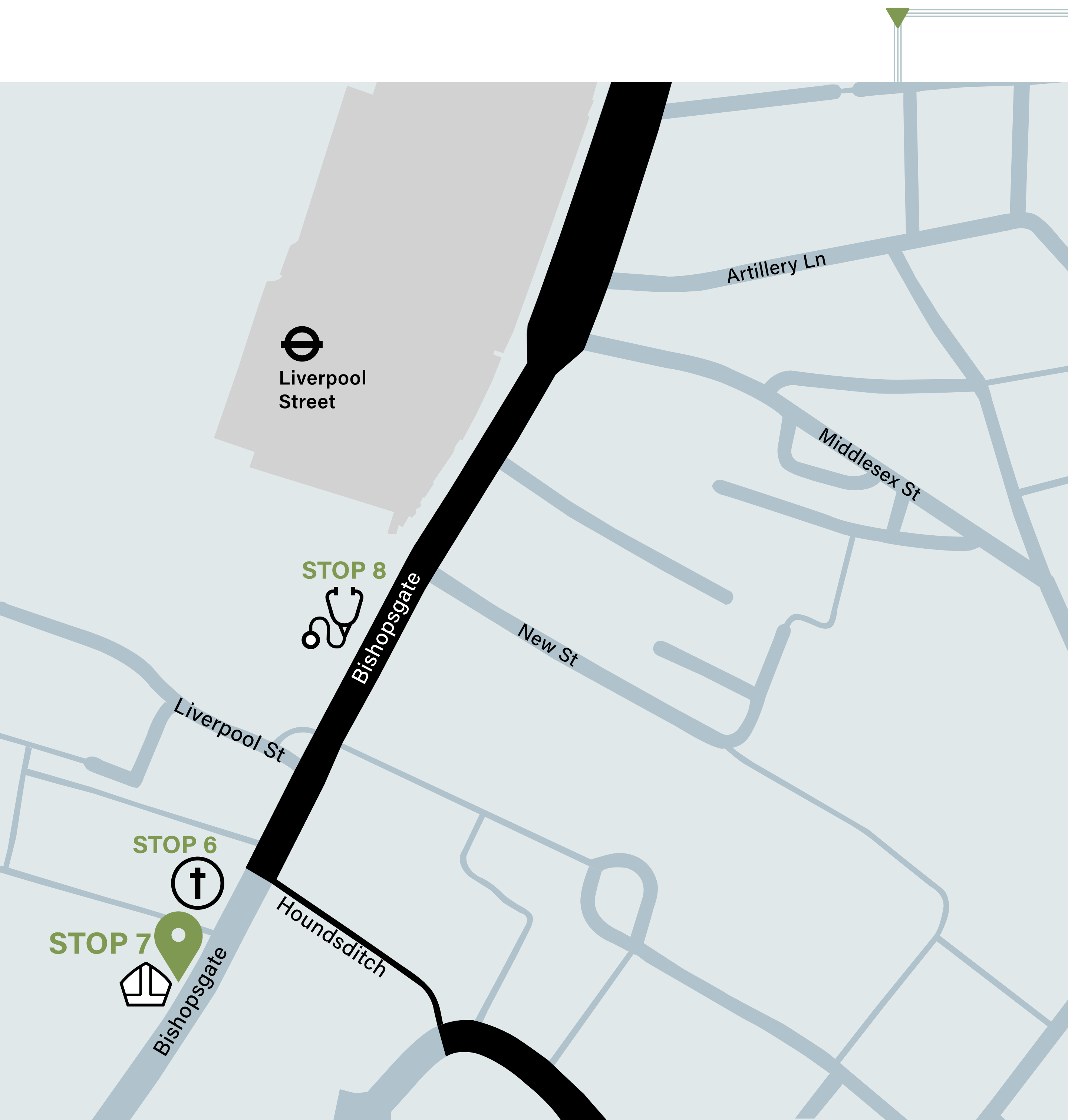


▶▶▶ STOP 7

Site of the Bishopsgate



In 1649, the 'Bishopsgate Mutiny' took place here. Parliamentary forces, spurred on by agitators from the Leveller's movement, refused orders to leave London and transfer to Ireland, until they had received back pay. Initially the situation was resolved without bloodshed, but recriminations quickly followed. 15 soldiers were arrested and one, Robert Lockyer, was sentenced to death. He is buried in the graveyard of St Mary Bethlehem.

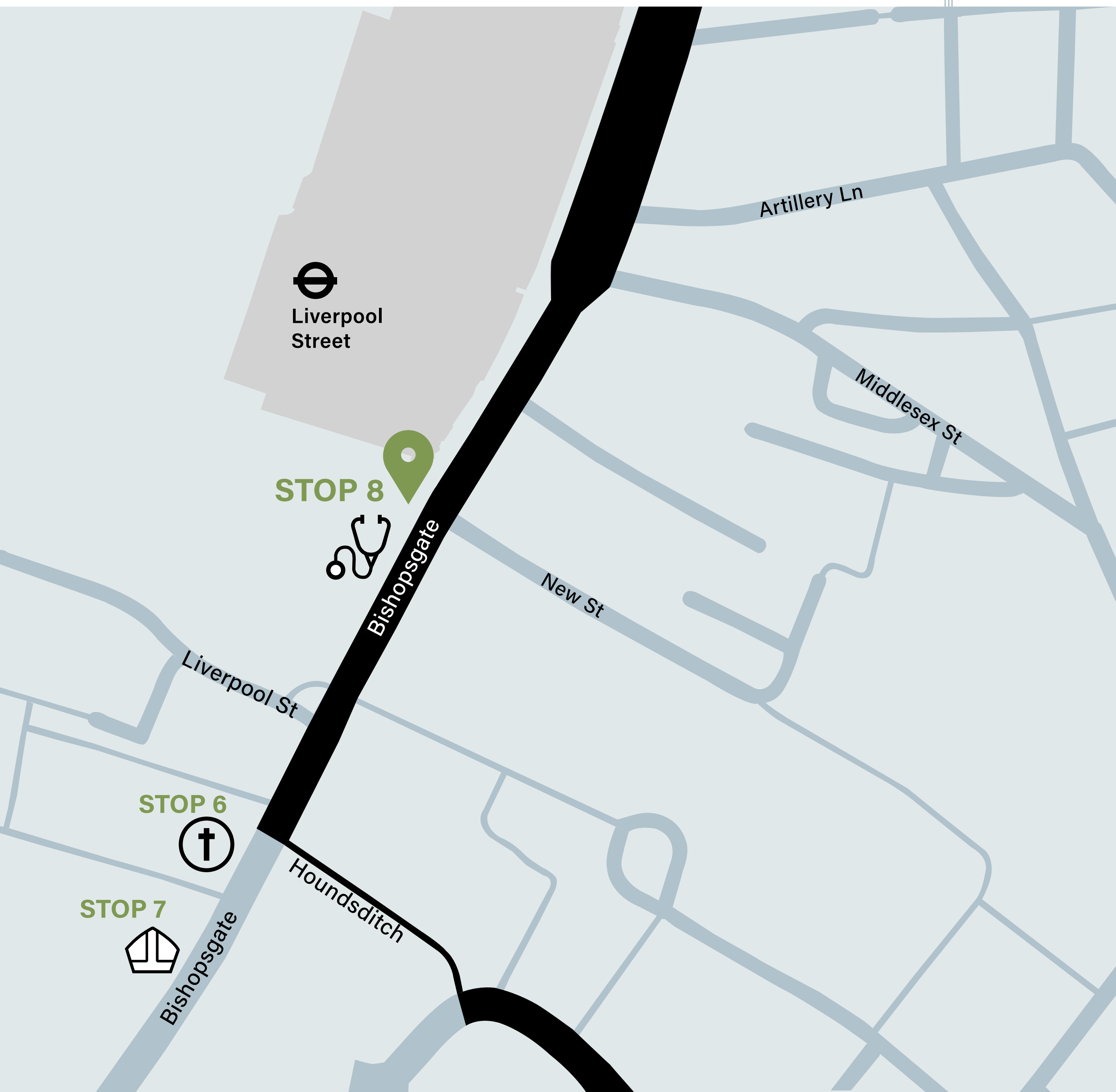


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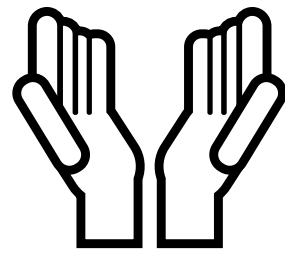
St Mary Bethlehem (Bedlam)



Founded in 1247, this hospital was in use until 1647 when activities were transferred to a site at Moorfields. MOLA began excavations here in 2015 and recovered around 3,000 skeletons. Used as an overflow cemetery for churches across London, a diverse cross-section of people were buried here, from non-conformists like the Levellers, to high-status burials, including Lord Mayors.

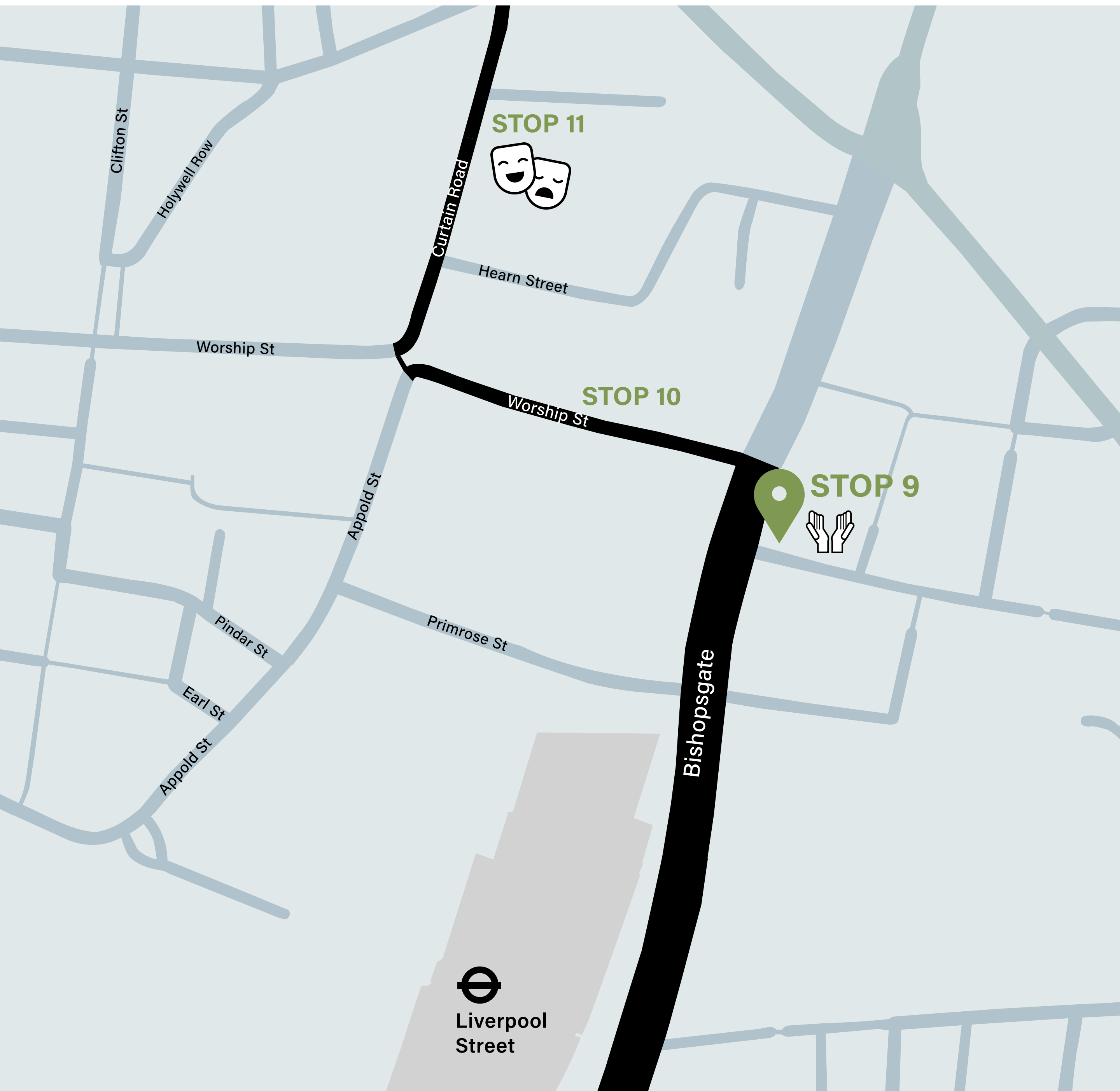


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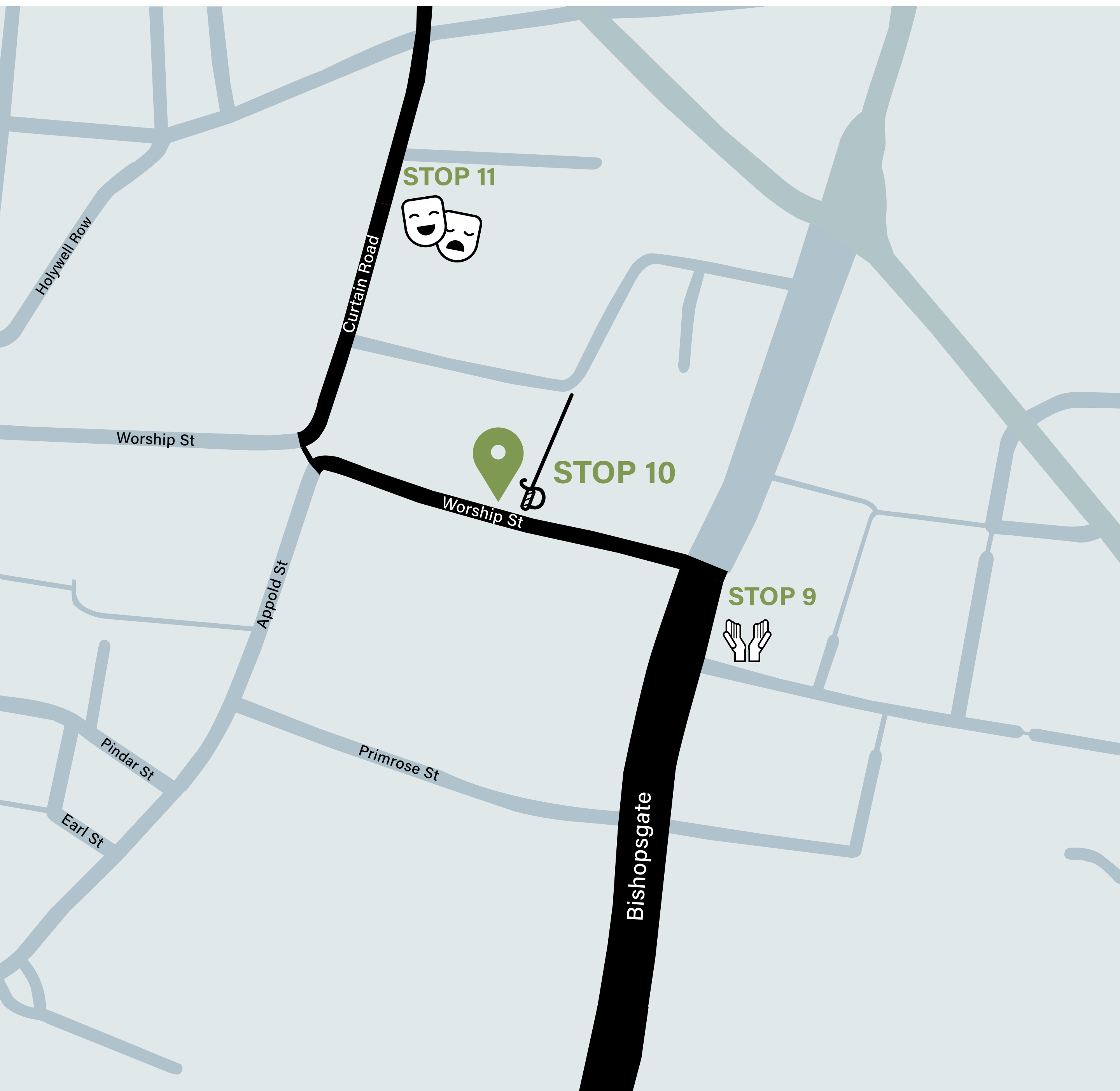
The Liberty of Norton Folgate

Liberties were areas of land, usually associated with a religious structure, which existed outside of the legal jurisdiction of the City. Norton Folgate was one such area, linked to the priory of St Mary Spital. Playwright Christopher Marlowe was known to have lived here, although the exact location of his premises is unknown.



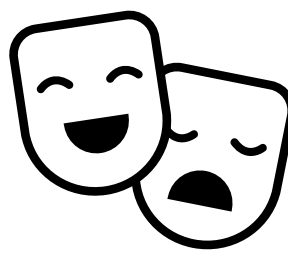
 **STOP 10****Hog Lane (now Worship Street)** 

Several deaths of people involved in the theatre occurred on or near Hog Lane. These included Thomas Watson, a poet and friend of Marlowe, who killed William Bradley following an earlier fight with Marlowe. Actor Gabriel Spencer mortally wounded James Feake, the son of a goldsmith, in a duel and was then himself later stabbed to death by playwright Ben Jonson in another duel.

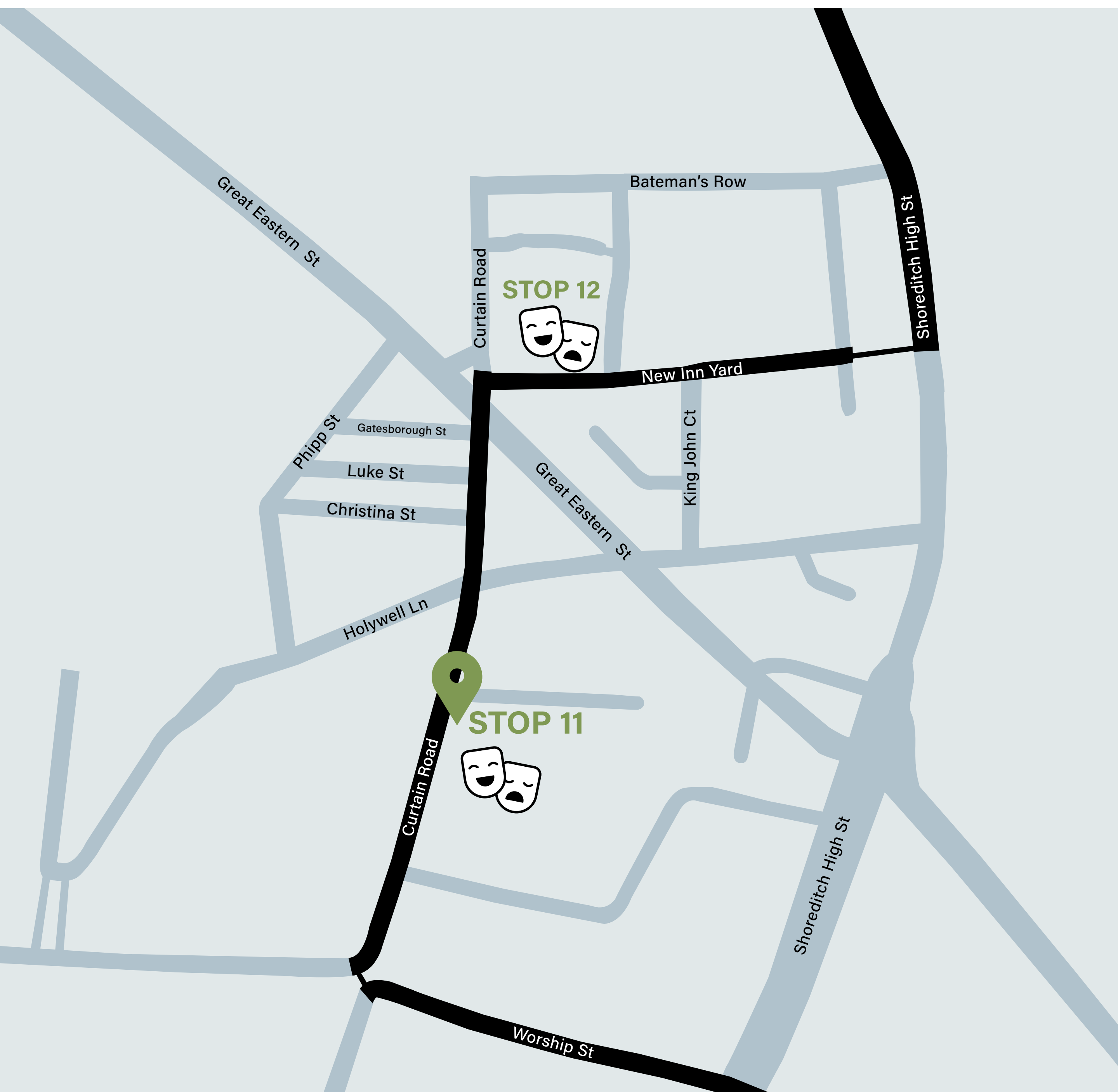


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The Curtain playhouse - 1577

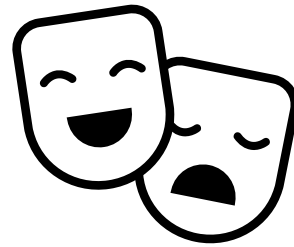


The Curtain had the longest operational lifespan of all the playhouses and was in almost continuous use until the mid-1620s. It was home to the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which Shakespeare belonged to, from 1597-1598. Recent MOLA excavations have revealed that, contrary to previous theories, the playhouse was rectangular and not polygonal, with a 14m panoramic stage rather than a thrust stage as with the Theatre and the Globe.

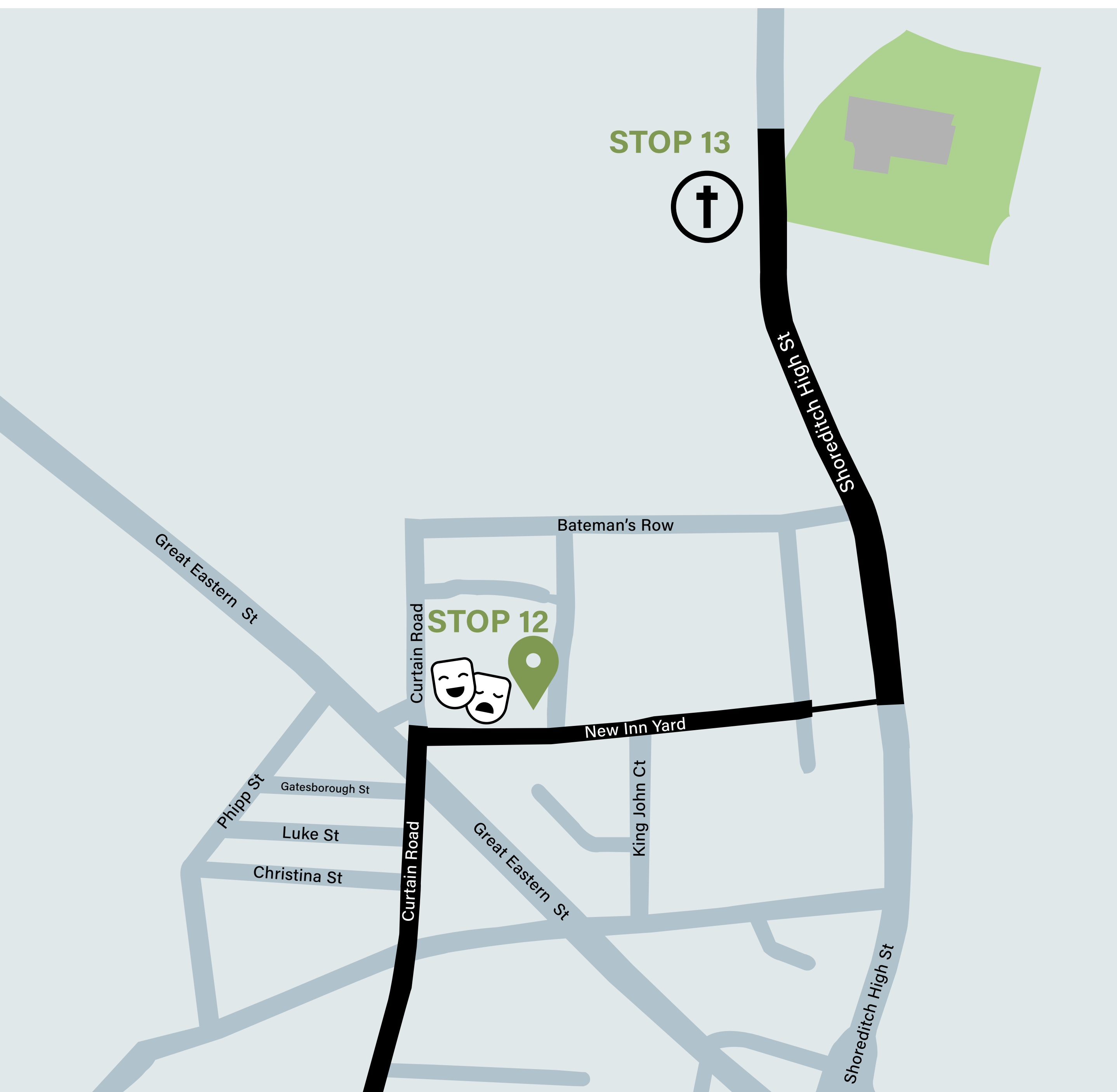


▶▶ STOP 12

The Theatre playhouse - 1576

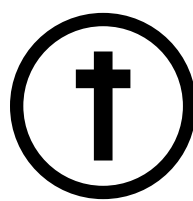


The Theatre was the first purpose-built playhouse and operated from 1576 until the winter of 1598. Several of Shakespeare's earliest plays were first performed here including Romeo and Juliet. In the final two years of its existence the building stood empty, due to an ownership dispute between the Burbage family and the land owner. Eventually, actors in the Chamberlain's Men broke into the site and, with the help of a team of carpenters, dismantled the building. Some of the material they recovered was used in the construction of the Globe.



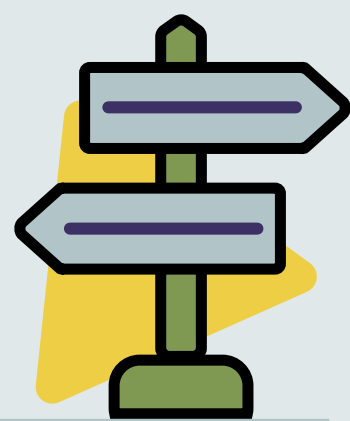
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St Leonard's Church



Often referred to as 'The Actors' Church', records at St Leonard's contain the names of theatrical individuals buried here, including:

- James Burbage: actor-manager and builder of the Theatre
- Cuthbert and Richard Burbage: both sons of James Burbage, Richard was the first person to play Hamlet and Richard III
- William Sommers: Henry VIII's jester
- Richard Tarlton: the clown of the Curtain theatre
- Gabriel Spencer: playwright, actor and criminal ne'er-do-well
- William Sly and Richard Cowley: colleagues of Shakespeare and actors at the Globe theatre



To read more about the Boar's Head and the excavations visit:

www.mola.org.uk

To find out more about Unite Students and its work visit:

www.unite-group.co.uk

STOP 13



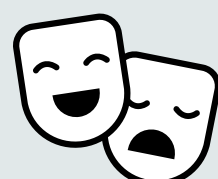
End

Shoreditch High St

Shoreditch High St

Bateman's Row

STOP 12



Curtain Road

Great Eastern St