

amnesty international in clerkenwell

Amnesty International's new offices are in Clerkenwell, an area of London whose history dates back to medieval times. Here, over 800 years ago, parish clerks performed the famous "mystery plays", reconstructions of Biblical stories that laid the basis for the evolution of British theatre.

Medieval Clerkenwell also became the site, in 1123, for the first hospital in Europe, St Bartholomew's. It still serves the local community.

After the Great Fire of London in 1666, artisans driven out of the ravaged city set up their workshops here. Clockmakers, silversmiths, bookbinders and printers transformed the area into a crafts quarter; by the 19th century it was a centre for major working class rallies.

Thanks to donations raised in countries around the world, Amnesty International has been able to renovate a local printing ink factory for its International Secretariat—headquarters for its worldwide campaign to free all prisoners of conscience, secure fair trials for political prisoners and abolish torture and executions. The Head Office of the British Section also has found

premises in the area, from which it coordinates membership activities throughout the United Kingdom.

Appropriately, for an organization that sends millions of letters around the world each year appealing for the protection of prisoners' rights, the offices overlook Mount Pleasant Post Office. Said to be the largest postal sorting station in the world, it stands on the site of an infamous 18th century prison, the Middlesex House of Correction.

1. The Clerks' Well: the original 12th century well can be seen at 14/16 Farringdon Road.

2. Mount Pleasant: the name comes from an old joke when the area was anything but pleasant—it was a huge dung-heap, or "laystall", from which nearby Laystall Street takes its name.

3. Clerkenwell Green: long a focal point for radical meetings, it was also here that Lenin printed his newspaper *Iskra* on thin paper for smuggling into Imperial Russia.

4. Sadlers Wells: the modern theatre now stands where Thomas Sadler built his 17th century music hall.

5. The Angel: this crossroads takes its name from a 17th century coaching inn.

6. The Almeida: recently reopened as a centre for avant-garde theatre, this architecturally imposing edifice was built in 1837 to house the Islington Literary and Scientific Society.

7. King's Cross: a major railway and underground station, it takes its name from a monument to King George IV.

8. Bloomsbury: home to the British Museum and the University of London.

9. Inns of Court: the four great "inns" provide lawyers' offices adjacent to the law courts. They date from the 13th century reign of Edward I when professional students of law took the place of clergy in the courts of justice.

10. Covent Garden: a flower and vegetable market for 300 years, it was originally a garden of the monks of Westminster.

11. Trafalgar Square: named after Nelson's 1805 naval battle, the square has seen numerous political meetings. Bertrand Russell and 1313 other

people were arrested here during a nuclear disarmament rally in 1961. It was here, that same year, on the steps of St Martin-in-the-Fields church, overlooking the square, that barrister Peter Benenson first lit Amnesty International's symbolic candle in barbed wire.

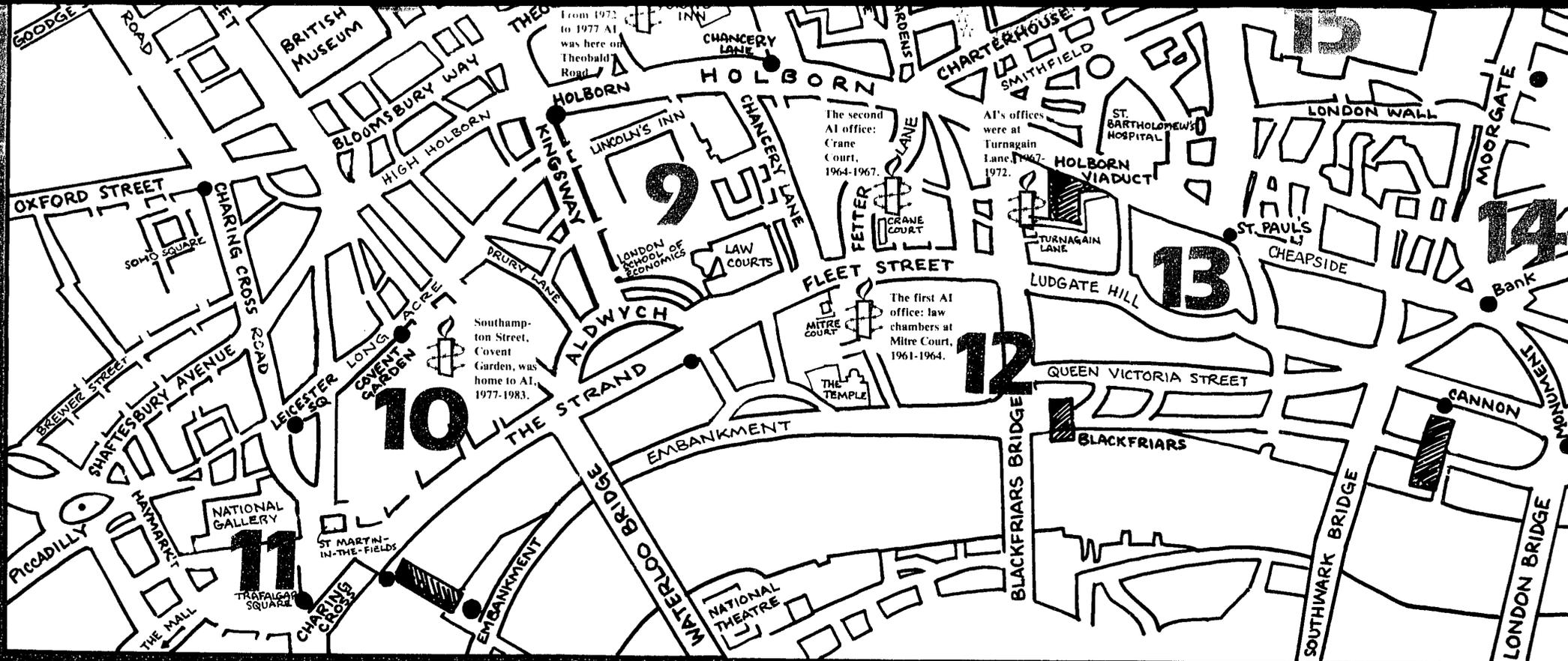
12. Blackfriars: at the end of Fleet Street, the centre for much of London's domestic and foreign press corps, the bridge and surrounding area takes its name from a 13th century Dominican (Black Friars) monastery.

13. St Paul's: the masterpiece of Sir Christopher Wren, rebuilt 1675-1710 after an earlier church was destroyed in the Great Fire.

14. Bank: the commercial centre of the City of London, the Bank of England holds the gold reserve, covers four acres and is passed by over 500 buses a day. The gate keepers wear long-tailed pink coats, scarlet waistcoats and top hats.

15. Barbican: near a Roman fort dating from the 1st or 2nd century, it is now the home of the Royal Shakespeare Company.

The stars show the boundaries of Clerkenwell; the candles indicate AI offices past and present.



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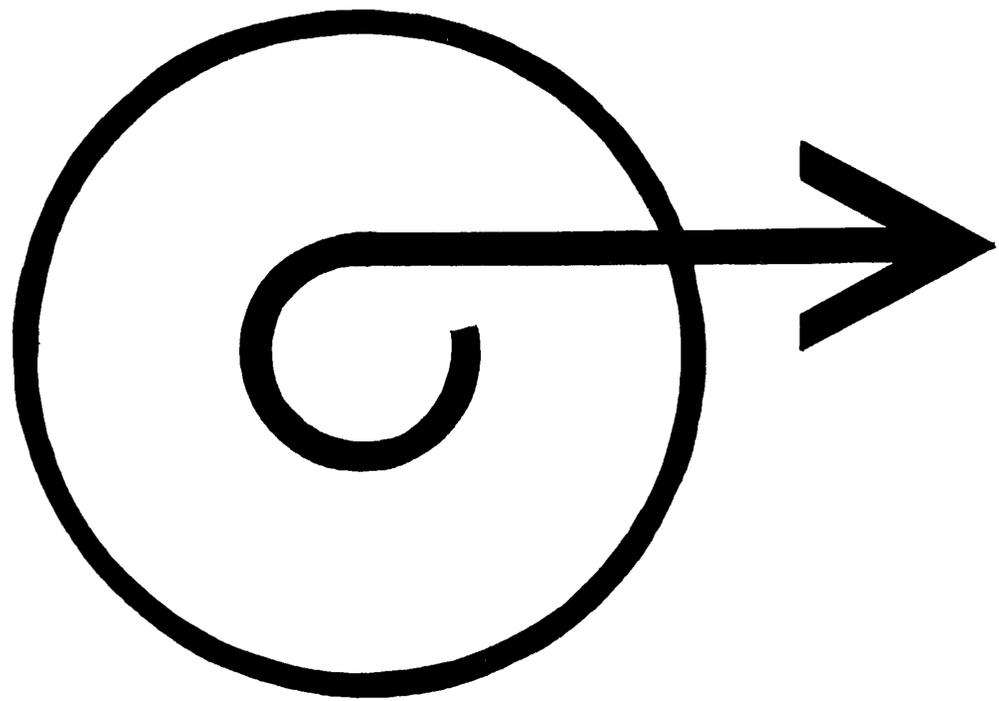
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