

Historians' meeting 23 February 2024

Danny Wells: 'The City of Dreadful Night'

Danny Wells began by outlining the various causes of poverty and overcrowding in the East End of London in the 19th century, a major factor being the population explosion: in 1801 the population of London was 11.5 million, rising to 42 million a hundred years later. During the same period other cities also had their problems due to population growth, including Manchester and Birmingham. Manchester grew rapidly in the 1830s due to the conditions in the cotton mills and Birmingham later on with the increase in employment in the metal industries. Several benefactors at this time helped to alleviate the problems of poverty caused in some ways by the collapse of the shipbuilding industry in London, a cholera epidemic in 1866 and the general drift to the towns from agriculture. These benefactors included, among many others, William Booth and Dr Barnardo. The evening was rounded off with tea, coffee and homemade cakes as usual.