



## 18 Folgate Street: The Life of a House in Spitalfields

*Dennis Severs*

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Growing up in California, Dennis Severs fell in love with the England he saw in old black and white movies. At seventeen he came to London, looking for a home with a heart. In 1979 he found one, a run-down silk-weaver's house in Spitalfields, and over the next twenty years he transformed it into an enchanted time-capsule, transporting us back to the eighteenth century. From cellar to roof, he filled 18 Folgate Street with original objects and furniture, found in the local markets, lit by candles and chandeliers. More than that, he invented a family to live here, the Jervis family, Huguenot weavers who fled persecution in France in 1688, and bought the house in 1724. Sounds and scents bring their world to life, always just out of sight - floorboards creak, fires crackle, a kettle hisses on the hob. Visitors step through the frame of time, like entering an old master painting. As we move from room to room on a tour you will never forget, we follow the Jervis story from the days of the Georges and the Regency to harsher Victorian times - and even to the attic room of Scrooge himself.

## 18 Folgate Street: The Life of a House in Spitalfields Details

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Author : Dennis Severs

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## From Reader Review 18 Folgate Street: The Life of a House in Spitalfields for online ebook

### Zofia says

Wish I had read the book prior to visiting the house. Perhaps I "either would or would not have seen it better".

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### Graceann says

The book is structured in a way so that you find out how Dennis Severs came to own it, and you read the tour he offered. The conceit is that he created a family, the Gervais (later Jervis) family, and as you travel through the rooms, you gain the feeling that the occupants only recently vacated them. Candles are still burning, food is still on the plates.

The problem I had with the text itself is that Severs was so in love with the sound of his own voice that he continually takes you outside of the experience of 18 Folgate Street. He prattles on about the "in between" and "either you see it or you don't" and indicates that if someone says that they had a lovely time and isn't struck dumb by the awe-inspiring patter at the end of their tour, he knows that they didn't "get it."

This is a beautifully presented volume, full of glorious photos taken in natural light, so that you can get an idea of how the house looks as you pass through it, and what the intention was behind it. This is especially important for people who might not be able to visit in person, because it is like walking back in time. The prose, however, may set some eyes rolling - I know it did mine.

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### Rob says

This is tricky to review, being as it is a book about a specific house in a specific part of London, owned by the author. I received it as a complementary gift to a tour of Dennis Severs house. As such, it is a good accompaniment, taking one on a tour of the building and the fictional history of the family he makes you believe once lived there. Severs was clearly a bona fide eccentric, and his eloquent but ever-so-slightly-barking prose makes you wish that he was still conducting the tours himself, challenging visitors to perceive 'the in-between', encouraging them to watch the family they can't even see.

I can't work out why someone might read it without a visit to the house though. It works, I suppose, as an idiosyncratic history of the city, and there are all sorts of fascinating asides, often about the roots of language and nursery rhymes. But it is most firmly rooted in 18 Folgate Street, and I found my recent tour essential to my enjoyment of the book.

A visit is highly recommended, by the way - probably as close as you can get to feeling like Doctor Who, heading back to a long distant London, walking into rooms the occupants have only just departed.

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### **Donna Boultwood says**

This was a strange book, almost as strange as the house itself! I didn't follow a lot of it, but It made a little more sense once I'd been to the house - a clever concept.

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### **Jenny says**

An interesting read. The book is a mixture of historical facts and descriptions of the feelings the author wants you to have when you are actually visiting the house. Some of the things written about are based in fact but others are not. Good for creating an impression of what it might have been like to live in the house during different historical periods. I picked up some new information and there were things I had not really thought about before too.

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