We already have a national flag, anthem and tree. But were we ever to choose a national sound, I think most of us would suggest the noise which first emanated from these delightfully grimy old rooms more than 150 years ago.

It was on April 10, 1858, that a team of Victorian foundry workers tipped a vat of molten tin and copper between two enormous moulds crafted from sand, clay, horse manure and goats’ hair to cast the giant hour-bell for the new Houses of Parliament.

It would be known for ever after as Big Ben. A full-size template of the 13.5-ton masterpiece can still be seen at the building. Yet our most illustrious clanger is but one of uncounted famous names to emerge from the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in East London.

During the 18th century, this place made the Liberty Bell, symbol of American independence.

Locals remind you of another claim to fame. Londoners tell you that you can only be a true Cockney if you made the Bow Bells.

Or slang to that much-loved nursery rhyme — Oranges and Lemons, say the Bells of St Clement’s…’ — and most of those bells were created here on Whitechapel road.

In other words, this place is to bell-making what Rolls-Royce is to engineering. It is an almost five-hundred-year-old part of our industrial history, having made, marked and struck a bell from the reign of Elizabeth I through to that of Elizabeth II.

Though Whitechapel was beset by almost everything heretofore, the foundry somehow survived the war in one piece and then worked flat out making new bells for all those ruined churches.

When new bells were needed to mark the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee and to open the 2012 Olympics, they were made here. But then, in 2017, the furnace went out.

The premises were sold to an American financier with a new vision for the place: a chi-chi boutique hotel and private members’ club with a roof-top pool.

‘I started work at the foundry in the days of George II). The est factory (the foundry relocated to the edge of the City of London) was a downturn in the market for aVInG a full-time job. I was a victim to a combination of debts and defeatist management. There was a downturn in the market which the Hughes family interpreted as a permanent decline,’ he tells me. ‘But there is a buoyant market. We just needed some aggressive marketing.’

During his 46 years at the foundry, he met many VIP visitors, including the Prince of Wales. The latter looked round in 2012. He loved it, says Mr Taylor, ‘and I remember him saying to me: “You must keep this place going.”’

In the end, the fate of the foundry may hinge on its neighbours. A few yards away stand the East London Mosque and London Muslim Centre. Their views carry great clout with the council and are clear.

‘It would be a shocking loss to Tower Hamlets if this important, historic institution, which is a treasure of national renown, were to be sacrificed just to make a hotel,’ says the mosque in its formal protest to the licensing committee, adding that it stands full square behind the proposal.

It would certainly be a fitting epitaph to the extraordinary history of this place if the UK’s oldest producer of church bells ended up being saved by a mosque.