

# East2

The Insiders' Guide to Bethnal Green 2015

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GUIDE**  
– help  
yourself!



People • Places • Life • Cafes • Pubs • Shops • Community • Culture • Heritage

# Welcome to the Insiders' Guide to Bethnal Green

Who better to write about life in Bethnal Green than a group of local insiders? In spring 2015, we brought together a group of Bethnal Greeners for an eight-week community journalism project.

Through a series of practical workshops at Oxford House they learnt about the basics of journalism: how to research ideas, carry out interviews, structure and write articles, and use photographs.

And they also spent plenty of time out and about, meeting local people, finding out about community projects, discovering local heritage, and reviewing shops and cafes.

This Insiders' Guide is the result – we hope you enjoy flicking through.

**John Ryan,**  
Chief Executive, Oxford House



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We've tried our level best to ensure the content of this Insiders' Guide is accurate and up-to-date, and we apologise for any bloomers, blips or oversights. For further copies, email [heritage@oxfordhouse.org.uk](mailto:heritage@oxfordhouse.org.uk)

# EAST2

Places – go behind the scenes



Life – take a glimpse into



Listings – get the inside



# EXPLORED

enes at community projects and landmarks



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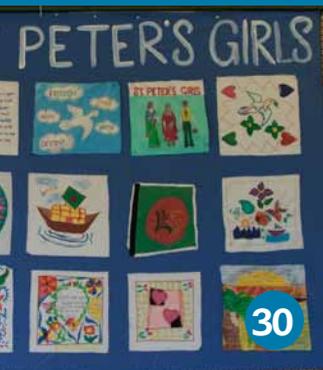


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the cultural life of Bethnal Green



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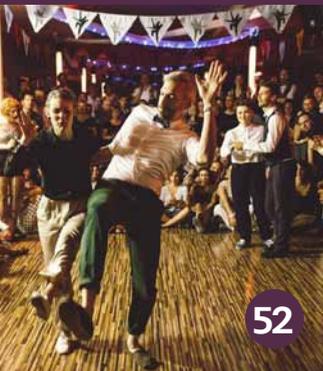


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rack on local hotspots



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# Flash, Bang, Wallop

Bethnal Green is a colourful place. Whilst out and about, our photographers discovered vibrant street art, delicious cafes and creative workshops. Take a closer look.





# - What a Picture!



# The inside track:

Emma Coleman grabs a snifter and snack near Paradise Row

## Satan's Whiskers

A graffitied, fly-postered exterior belies the glamorous charms within at this super-trendy, luxe cocktail bar. Surprisingly affordable for table service at swish, leather booths, listen to old-school hip-hop and sip on an eponymous cocktail for £7.50 in this no-website, neighbourhood bar. Snacks optional, evil hangover probable.

**343 Cambridge Heath Road, E2 9RA**



## Japanese Canteen

Nestled in the refurbished arches, this has a modern canteen feel. Dishes are either Japanese (classic sushi or ramen noodles, for example) or Korean (try the bibimbap or donburi). With food freshly prepared on site, and vegetarians well catered for, you can eat in, take out or enjoy a beer and edamame in their outside space.

**Arch 255 Paradise Row, E2 9LE**



## Resident

Order more, pay less. Keen on the idea of serving seasonal, home-cooked dishes, the price is progressively reduced at this minimalist restaurant as more people in your group order. Simple functional decor and a cosy mezzanine level emphasise bringing friends and families together to feast. Fish, meat and vegetable-lovers all taken good care of.

**Arch 252 Paradise Row, E2 9LE**



## Mission

Sonoma, Napa, Monterey - finest wines from the Golden State are poured under a huge palm tree in this extraordinarily stylish setting. Wood panelling, candlelight, a monumental backbar lit up with bottles shipped from San Francisco, five-star food – from Bethnal Green to the Bay area isn't such a leap, is it?

**Arch 250 Paradise Row, E2 9LE**



BETHNAL GREEN ROAD

PARADISE ROW

OLD FORD ROAD

**Benugu**

Rocking horses! Sandpit! Dressing up! Train tracks! After so much fun in this Temple to Tots, the museum cafe offers respite with a selection of littlies' lunches including fish finger sandwiches. Let the juniors pick a healthy item while you ponder the toasted deli sandwiches and salads on offer. Good for ages 0-110.

**V&A Museum of Childhood, Cambridge Heath Road, E2 9PA**

CAMBRIDGE HEATH ROAD

**Craft Cocktail Company**

Curried Carrot cocktail anyone? Settle in at brightly coloured tables to benefit from a boost of 100% natural fruit and vegetable ingredients with your spirits. Cocktails are fizzed, mixed and bottled before your visit, the better to serve you quickly. Pulled pork or grilled halloumi should stop the fun going to your head too quickly. Peep into the lab to see the bartenders at work.

**Arch 253 Paradise Row, E2 9LE**

**Mother Kelly's**

Should you be looking for a cool bar, find your way from the lyrics to a 1920's song "On Mother Kelly's doorstep, down Paradise Row". This cool bar-in-the-arches dispenses keg beer in 2/3 pint measures from a row of taps; a huge fridge offers serve-yourself bottles to take to a leather chair with a cheese, meat or veg board. Billyburg wannabes, your search is over.

**Arch 251 Paradise Row, E2 9LE**

UNDERGROUND

ROMAN ROAD

**The Roving Cafe**

I dreamt I strolled with my book through the beautifully planted Museum Gardens and found a friendly lady with a cute, vintage, Gallic van. She offered delicious, homemade cakes and Doppio coffee, and could rustle me up a steak sandwich or egg and bacon at a little table with a spotty cloth – wake up, it's true! Monday to Saturday 8am -

4.30pm; cookery lessons also available.

**Museum Gardens, E2 9PA**



# Cranbrook's Children

Eleanor Image meets one of the first Cranbrook Estate residents, Doreen Kendall

The need for more housing in Tower Hamlets is not a new phenomenon; since the opening of the first council estate in 1900 – the Boundary in Shoreditch – new blocks and estates have risen up over the East End.

One remarkable development was the Cranbrook Estate. It sits between Old Ford and Roman Roads, part of Globe Town, and was designed by architects Lubektin, Skinner & Bailey in the late 1950s. The Cranbrook's concrete blocks and geometrical designs stand out, catching the sun, and are visible from Victoria and Mile End Parks.

Doreen Kendall moved into Puteaux House in 1963 with her husband and daughter, embracing a new, high-rise lifestyle.

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*“That’s when my time as a campaigner started.”*

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The estate was built for 500 families, so there were hundreds of new children in the area, all wanting to go to Bonner Primary School. “The school wasn’t ready for them and only had outdoor toilets. That’s when my time as a campaigner started.”

Doreen and other mums marched to County Hall with children and prams, demanding better conditions at the school. They got them too – County Hall funded toilets, and more besides: “We got a little swimming pool because, little devils, they would go down by the canal.”

Life as a campaigner suited Doreen; she was featured on the radio – “you didn’t make the TV in those days” – and more success followed. At one point, children were banned from playing on the grassy slopes throughout the estate. Doreen and other mums took action, petitioning the authorities to get the rules relaxed, so that children could play on the grass, ramps and other spaces. “There were fewer cars then; they would be out for hours.”



*“There were fewer cars then; they would be out for hours.”*

A favourite place to play was the Infinity feature – a concrete ramp leading up towards Victoria Park. Previously, iron arches stood at the end, with flowers growing through them. Looking from Roman Road it seemed as if houses disappeared into the distance. “Infinity has gone, although the concrete ramp remains,” says Doreen.

A few children played a risky game inside Puteaux House on the stunning constructivist staircase – shaped like a teardrop, an integral part of Lubetkin’s design. Children slid from the top to the bottom, all 16 storeys. “They had a



great time – there were no accidents, they were proper East End kids!”

Lubetkin was proud of his development and used to visit Cranbrook. “He’d always be sure to come around when the children came out of school, to admire the flats and have tea and a biscuit.” It seems unlikely that architects nowadays would take such a close interest.

“It’s still a nice estate: young people hold the lift door for me, and I hear the twins on my landing after school giggling as they come home.” The stairs have been fitted with studs – so there’s no bannister sliding these days – but instead there are activities for children in the community centre, built in the 1990s. And thanks to Doreen and her campaigning, you’ll still see children playing on the grass.



# Bonding the Elements

Syeda Tasmia Tahia explores the chemistry of the Pill Box, with Centre Manager Aleksandra Miciul

“I wouldn’t swap my job for anything,” admits Aleksandra Miciul, Centre Manager at the Pill Box – Workspace’s flagship building in the East End, tucked away off Cambridge Heath Road. Sitting with her in the Pill Box Kitchen, the building’s café-restaurant area, her excitement is understandable; in February 2015, the building won the London Planning Award as the ‘Best New Place to Work’.

The Grade II listed building was originally a pharmaceutical factory for Allen & Hanburys – a firm known for their medicated pastilles, cod liver oil capsules, malt extracts and respiratory drugs. After extensive refurbishment, Workspace opened up the building to 100+ creative start-ups in March 2014.

The history of the building is evident throughout, with exposed brickwork, chemical jar lighting, molecular wall diagrams, and extensive use of neon lights, like the orange Pill Box Kitchen sign which gives a warm, welcoming glow to the place.

“Our main influence for the Pill Box is the location. We realised this was the place to be,” Aleksandra informs me, “a very up and coming area.” The unique character of the building has attracted lots of creative people to work here. Around 40% live a walking distance



away. There’s a sense of community, with many tenants preferring to do business with their neighbours in the building.

“We host at least one networking event each month, for people to get to know their neighbours,” says Aleksandra. But it’s not just the in-house community she’s keen to foster. “We’re always trying to welcome people from the local community into the building. One of our clients is the Fit for Less Gym.”

The Pill Box also offers a hot-desking area for part-time workers, called Club Workspace, for £75 a month. “Club Workspace members can network with tenant companies at special networking events.” Interestingly, the partitions forming Club Workspace are made of a wall of pill jars, another reminder of the building’s heritage.

# THE PILL BOX KITCHEN

WEEK COMMENCING 26 JAN  
 PAN GRILLED LAMB CHOPS SHIRAZ POTatoes, Artichoke & SPINACH 9.90  
 ROAST CHICKEN 7.50  
 TILapia 4 - OCTAL 8.50  
 CHICKEN, FENNEL, LEMON & STEW 7.50  
 LARD CRUST DUCK LEG, LENTILS & LILIA VERDE 9.50  
 SPAGHETTI - PUMPKIN & LENTIL PESTO 10.00  
 PINEAPPLE & CHOCOLATE 10.00  
 PUMPKIN LEAF SAUTON 7.00

SUP. BAYON & CHILLI 3.75  
 TART: SPINACH & RICOTTA 4.90 FRODO  
 JALAO, BULGUR, WHEAT, ARTICHOKE & MINT 2.90  
 SWEET, HOT & SPICY ONION 2.90

SANDWICHES:  
 ROAST CHICKEN & MASH 4.25  
 LAMB, ROAST BEEF & HERRING 4.25  
 CHEESE & CORN 3.90

***“The unique character of the building has attracted lots of creative people to work here.”***



The Pill Box Kitchen is open to the public, serving the likes of linguine with mussels and venison pie with mash as part of the daily-changing menu. The food is sourced fresh from organic

sources, including Chiltern Farm and Billingsgate Market. The dinner menu is usually a four-course meal of gourmet cuisine. “My favourite is Steak night on Thursdays,” admits Aleksandra with a smile. The Kitchen is available for hire as an event space, as are two meeting rooms – fittingly named Allen and Hanbury – which use the old pill factory doors as design features.

Aleksandra sees Bethnal Green as the next Shoreditch, because it has so much on offer. “I want to work with the local community, with local shops and small businesses, be it on a membership basis, or discounts for Pill Box customers.”

She also reveals an exciting new landscaping project outside the Pill Box for summer 2015. “It will be open to the public. We’re going to have seating and a pizza oven, and hopefully lots of summer sunshine to enjoy it.”

**The Pill Box, 115 Coventry Road, E2 6GG**  
[pillboxe2.co.uk](http://pillboxe2.co.uk)



# Puzzled?

## Sarah Beydoun navigates her way out of Escape Land

Along with a couple of friends, I find myself locked in a room filled with logic puzzles, hidden keys, word problems, and a female mannequin in pilot's goggles. We have exactly 60 minutes to solve all of the puzzles and open the final door, or be trapped in time forever! With the clock ticking down, and the adrenaline running high, I can only laugh at some of the alternative ways we're trying to figure things out.

Escape Land is no ordinary entertainment. In a city that has it all, Londoners are always looking for the next hair-raising challenge. Having to navigate your way through a series of brainteasers, under time pressure, offers a memorable experience.

Sandor Lengyel – the creative genius behind this 'live escape game' – opened Escape Land on Parmiter Street in June 2014. Inspired by his visits to puzzle rooms in Europe, and with a nod to the popular Crystal Maze, Sandor has created his own set of mind-bending puzzles here in Bethnal Green to test your creative intelligence.

As Sandor explains, the key is to work together, pooling your creativity, lateral thinking and logic skills to

find your way out. Families, friends or work colleagues – from 2-5 players – can collaborate as they grapple with anagrams and hunt down clues amongst the curious objects. It makes an alternative diversion for birthdays, social gatherings and team building, and Sandor tailors each game to suit guests and their occasion.

HELP! If you get stuck you can always grab a walkie-talkie to use your lifeline; Sandor is ready to give you a clue and point you in the right direction.

This is not for the faint hearted. But if you want to test your logic skills, have a laugh with your friends or just do something different – then this is the place for you.

**Escape Land, Seth Court, 23 Parmiter Street, E2 9EX**  
**[escapegameslondon.co.uk](http://escapegameslondon.co.uk)**



# Treasure Trove

Neesha Badhan and Liz Baume find out what lies behind Brick Lane

Striding down Brick Lane it's easy to miss the passageway that leads to the @work gallery. Tucked between Frameland and Brick Lane Convenience Store, it all feels a bit Harry Potter as you find yourself in a pretty little brick alley, lined with posters, design cases and ferns. However, here be not dragons, but a light and airy gallery that showcases the work of 50 contemporary jewellery designers.

"All the jewellery here belongs to the jewellers; we're simply displaying and selling it for them," explains Adele Tipler, co-owner and a jewellery maker herself. "We have a massively wide range of jewellery which wouldn't be feasible if we had to buy it in."

In business for 17 years, some of the jewellers have been with @work since it started; among the others are recent graduates who need a platform for their work. "We still go and find new jewellers but a lot of them now come and find us."

All the jewellers are independent, and all both design and make their products. Some make completely one-off pieces; others make batches of, say, 20 pieces.

Alongside the gallery, @work also run jewellery courses from bangles and beads to silver rings. "For example," says Adele, "on one of our day courses we provide the materials and teaching, and you come away with a really lovely silver ring. Our wedding ring courses are also very popular: you make each other's ring, with the help of one of our jewellers."



As well as offering repairs, @work also do bespoke pieces. "More and more, people want a say in what's being made for them. They might see a piece in the showroom and they'd like something slightly different. Or they might want to update a piece of jewellery they already own."

**@work gallery, 160 Brick Lane, E1 6RU**  
[atworkgallery.co.uk](http://atworkgallery.co.uk)



# A Congregation Revived

Rev Adam Atkinson tells Eleanor Image about a revival at St Peter's

St Peter's Bethnal Green sits off Warner Place, between Old Bethnal Green and Hackney Road. The vicarage is next door, the old school houses an organ works, and the church spire stands tall amidst the surrounding housing.

Now a thriving church community, this wasn't the case five years ago when the congregation of elders approached Rev Adam Atkinson for help. "We want to see children in the church again. We don't want St Peter's to close after we've died," was their concern.

So, in 2010, Adam and other local people gathered in support with the mantra, "Honour the past, navigate change in the present, and build for the future". As Adam explains, "It's really important not to just sweep in and make changes".

He and the others prayed, talked, listened and built new relationships; the elders were open to new ideas and things began to happen.

St Peter's has been a place of worship since 1841. Under Adam's stewardship, the traditional way of worship has been enhanced, adding family and reflective evening services to the Sunday morning prayer, and the doors are open during the week. The small team of staff and volunteers are keen to empower local people. "The area and congregation is diverse; we work hard to involve everyone so the vision and projects are not just about one person."

Now there are more community activities, children in the congregation, a youth group and big plans for the future. Under the footprint of the church, the crypt is now set to be transformed; they hope to have a parish nurse, linked with the local GP surgery, who will see people with non-clinical health needs, there will be space for a café, and more activities for children and young people.

The Heritage Lottery Fund has committed £1.8 million to the crypt project, and Adam and his team are currently raising match funding of £2 million. "It's an expression of new life," says Adam, extending the role St Peter's plays in Bethnal Green.



## Spear: Aiming for the World of Work

One of the projects run from St Peter's is Spear, an employability project for 16-24 year olds helping them gain skills needed to get into work. "Jesus says love God and love your neighbour," explains Adam, "and this project is a good example of that."

The Spear course is a London-wide project, recruiting via the job centre, referrals and word of mouth. Young people can try one session before committing to the six-week course. With 12-16 places per course, delivered six times a year, Spear is helping local young people get job ready. The coaches' role is essential, giving one-to-one support where needed and staying in touch with the student for a year after graduation.

Students develop the skills and confidence needed to find a job, practise how to write a CV and do interview training. They visit companies, attend classroom sessions and take part in a formal graduation ceremony, delivering a presentation to a full church of family, friends and community partners. It's a big achievement and a real confidence boost, as well as gaining a City & Guilds Level 1 in customer service.

Students and employers mutually benefit from the ongoing support: companies have said the student visits help their management teams improve on induction and training skills, whilst 75% of Spear graduates are in work or education 12 months after completing the course.

For more information about St Peter's and Spear visit [stpetersbethnalgreen.org](http://stpetersbethnalgreen.org)



# What's Brewing?

Helen Barstow finds out about Shoreditch Blondes, parma violet beers, and tap room tastings, from Mark Hislop of The Redchurch Brewery

## What's the story behind the brewery?

Our owner, Gary Ward – who began as a keen home brewer – quit his job as a solicitor to set up the Redchurch Brewery three years ago. He started off a couple of arches down from here in Poyser Street, but needed more space so moved to our current premises, which are twice the size. Gary lived on Redchurch Street, so started naming the beers after local areas: Bethnal Pale Ale, Shoreditch Blonde, Hoxton Stout, and so on.

## How does craft beer differ from mainstream beer?

We don't filter the beer – we let all the sediment and yeast drop out naturally, and we package it 'live'. It means our beer has got a short shelf life and it's



slightly temperamental, but generally it means you get a fresher taste and a fuller flavour. Most commercial beers take 48 hours to brew, whereas ours can take anything from two weeks to three months.

## What's brewing?

We've got some really experimental beers going on downstairs. We've managed to cultivate a strain of yeast that adds a parma violet flavour. We've also got a red ale that uses yellow coffee, which is half-roasted coffee with a peanut butter flavour. And we're experimenting with ageing beers in some imported French wine barrels. Other brewers are experimenting too, but we try to push that further, aiming to get flavours out that no one else has got.

BETHNAL  
PALE ALE



### Why do you only serve half pints and two-thirds in your tap room?

We didn't have that much space for glasses so we were like...pints? thirds? halves? two-thirds?... and we plumped for two thirds and half pints. A lot of the beers go well with those measures – you wouldn't really want a pint of the double IPA at 9%. Two-thirds is just a nice size and people can sample different types of beer while they are here.

### What's it like working in a brewery?

I joined Redchurch six months ago, after four years at Brewdog. This (the tap room) is essentially my office, complete with a dartboard, records, beer... it's not too bad. Today, for example, I'm meeting a guy who is going to smoke beers for us, and some people running an interesting food pop-up, before I drop some beers off at The Shard. You meet interesting, creative people all the time. I especially enjoy our 'meet the brewer' events; it's rewarding to see people try your beer for the first time and be really impressed with it. It's maybe not the healthiest lifestyle, but it's certainly a lot of fun.

### And your closing thought?

Come down to the tap room – it's open Thursday-Saturday evenings. This is the best place to enjoy our beer; we always make sure it's the freshest batch. You can choose a record to put on, and have a chat with us as you sample a beer or two.

**The Redchurch Brewery**  
275-276 Poyser Street, E2 9RF  
[theredchurchbrewery.com](http://theredchurchbrewery.com)



# 100 Years On

Emma Coleman has a gander at the changing face of Bethnal Green Road



Take a Butcher's down the old Frog 'n' Toad. See how it's changed over the past century. Would you Adam 'n' Eve it?

**Enough of the cockney rhyming slang, tell me about the history....**

By the turn of the twentieth century the population of Bethnal Green numbered 130,000; today it has fallen to around 25,000. In his semi-fictional 'A Child of the Jago', Arthur Morrison depicts the real-life stench, violence and overcrowding in the Old Nichol rookery during late Victorian times. The Old Nichol was swept away through slum clearance, to be replaced by the world's

first council housing in the shape of the Boundary Estate. Road widening, under an 1872 Act of Parliament, meant Bethnal Green Road became a main thoroughfare to the City.



The landscape may have changed, but what about the shops? The 1915 Post Office Directory reveals Isambard's Cycles at 145 Bethnal Green Road was a former purveyor of stewed eels; close neighbours included coffee rooms, a wardrobe dealer, milk can maker, surgeon, and birch-broom seller alongside various cabinet makers, plumbers, confectioners, butchers, dentists, corset retailers and army clothiers. Many people needed many shops; the dense population of old Bethnal Green liked to sit and chat over a drink as much as the new.

Between Brick Lane and Shacklewell Street there's a well-preserved section of Bethnal Green Road shops, set in a mid-nineteenth century Italianate terrace. I take a look at what's there today.

### Refreshment houses

Sip a 'moggiato' or frothy 'cattucino' at the grandly-monikered Lady Dinah's Cat Emporium, no. 152. Rescued furry friends purr while you enjoy a cream tea. Book well ahead; you'd think no-one had ever stroked a cat before. The gloriously mirrored and tiled Well & Bucket pub over the road has been serving pints since 1818. Find a secret cocktail bar, 5cc, in the basement.

Casa Blue – on the very corner of Brick Lane and Bethnal Green Road – combines pizzas and excellent happy-hour beer deals.

### Retail emporia

Buy rare vinyl at Flashback Records. Turn your gaze to the exhibitions at artist-run gallery Espacio. Skilled with a needle? Visit the beautiful London Fabric Shop at 141 with its exotic selection of tweeds, cottons, silks and velvets. Owner Ciara Jennings is "excited about the new life being breathed into this stretch of the road".

### What about Frank Skinner?

You mean dinner? 123 Bethnal Green Road is the most stylish, rosemary-scented setting in which to enjoy organic pizza at a communal rustic table – knock on the door behind the shop for entry. Maida serves excellent Indo-Chinese at no. 130. And there's halal dessert available at Motown.

A Victorian Cockney might not know what to make of all this change. But what's clear, me old China, is that there's still fun to be had... with a Score, Pony or Monkey in your pocket.





# IF I COULD TALK WITH THE ANIMALS

Syeda Tasmia Tahia chats with the animals of Hackney City Farm, on the eve of its 30th anniversary

How does one profile a farm? By speaking to its animals of course! Crazy as this may sound, I entered Hackney City Farm on a bright spring morning, with the intention of giving its residents a voice.

We are welcomed into the farm by the cows, who have arrived here from a farm in Kent, on rotation. In between posing for the camera, they told me about the Mini Farmer's Club. "Every Saturday morning, we get visited by groups of 8-12 year olds – under supervision of our worker – who have a chance to meet and play with us, and learn about nature. They also make arts and crafts, all of which is free."

Did we just catch a glimpse of the farm's very own TV star? Well, 18 year old Larry has been at Hackney City Farm for 10 years now, and between

his appearances on BBC and ITV, he relaxes with his friend Clover, who is currently training to do rides. Like most celebrities, Larry "is on a special diet", after a hectic Easter schedule comprising of four church visits in one day, from Trafalgar Square to Camden Town. When I suggest that must be hard work, he has an interesting reply: "I am humbled by the amount of hard work our volunteers put into the farm. They're the real stars, not us animals. Whether they are helping with the maintenance or are tending the garden, they're ever committed and an absolutely fantastic bunch."

With my visit drawing to an end, I decide to spend the last few minutes asking our feathered friends about their experience. The hens advertise their contribution to the farm's economy. "We lay fresh, organic eggs



daily, which are sold by volunteers at the farm shop. Also in the shop you'll find delicious honey produced by the beekeepers, during the workshops they hold in spring and summer."

Meeting the animals at Hackney City Farm has been a cheering experience, a dash of nature in amongst the urban. The farm celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, and as I pore over the café menu of breakfasts, brunches and weekly specials – many of the dishes featuring farm produce – I hope it continues to flourish.

**Hackney City Farm,**  
1a Goldsmith's Row, E2 8QA  
hackneycityfarm.co.uk



"I came here around a year and half ago as maternity cover and never left! I look after both the gardens, and supervise the volunteers who

come here twice a week, for two-hour sessions. I also run workshops for school groups – with topics ranging from habitats to growing food – and lots of local people drop by during the week.

**Rita, resident gardener**

"I'm an animal lover – I love the ducks, hens, pigs, donkeys. My work is to clean up and feed



the animals. It is my first time at this farm, but it's a good experience. I hope to be a farmer in the future."

**Ryan, work experience student**

**And closing thoughts from farm visitor Zoe, and friend Colette.**



"I live across the road, and often bring my friends here. It's a great way to start the

day. They also do some amazing breakfasts with fresh farm produce. My favourite is the Canadian Brunch, with farm eggs and maple syrup."



I meet John Ryan to get an insight into the past, present and future of Oxford House, an historic community hub overlooking Weavers Fields.

**The vision:** *“Our objectives, our constitution still has the Victorian inspiration.”*

Oxford House was one of the first settlements, established by social pioneers and philanthropists at the University of Oxford to tackle poverty in the heart of East London. Established by Edward Talbot, the then warden of Keble College in Oxford, the building continues to support community development in the area in many different ways.

**The shake-up:** *“We were at a crossroads: the organisation had to change.”*

When John joined as CEO in June 2008, the building “was at a crossroads”. As the impact of the financial crash hit the third sector, John had to take some very difficult decisions. The first was to transfer two-thirds of his staff to different employers, leaving him with a workforce of ten. Secondly, the focus was narrowed to just three main areas: being a community hub, an arts venue, and a centre for volunteering.

# Echoes from the Past

Syeda Tasmia Tahia explores the heritage of Oxford House, with CEO John Ryan



**The focus:** *“Firstly, we’re a community hub to support Bethnal Green life.”*

From the beginning, Oxford House was set up to serve the community. It still promises “to carry out religious, social, cultural and other acts of charity, among the poor of East London.” While the users of the building may have changed over the years – spanning the Somalian community from the early 1990s and the local Bangladeshi community, for example – the focus on reducing poverty and providing community services is an ongoing pre-occupation.

The sculpture displayed proudly on John’s office wall offers a snapshot of the “characters” of Oxford House in 1991; it depicts everything from bingo and the Somali cafe to the music workshop and youth club. “It was quite different from now,” says John. “None of that remains apart from the railings alongside Weavers Fields.”

Currently, Oxford House hosts around 25 different organisations and 15 or so others who regularly hire the spaces available – helping make it sustainable, without relying on outside subsidies. John considers this very important as “it’s like a ripple, this one building provides so much more.”

**The culture:** *“We’re also a centre for the arts and a host for volunteering opportunities.”*

Oxford House is home to several creative businesses, from PR and advertising to dance and theatre companies. The building also hosts

festivals throughout the year, including the Chelsea Fringe Festival in May, the Knowledge Festival and Open House in September, and Fun Palaces in early October.

There are volunteering opportunities on offer too, “from a few hours a week to longer, more structured internships.” It was an aspect very dear to the original values of the founders. “They were philanthropic champions of volunteerism. It was about arts and culture, but also about responding practically to the effects of poverty.”

**The future:** *“2015 will be very busy, shaping up our heritage activity plan.”*

The building is about to enter a new phase, having secured £800,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Next steps are to raise a further £400,000 of match funding and then repair work can commence on the Grade II listed building, including fixing the roof, restoring the chapel and creating a new café overlooking the park. The renovations should encourage greater footfall, and introduce new users to Oxford House. A heritage programme will accompany the project to share more of the building’s fascinating history while, at the same time, writing the next chapter of its story.

Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, E2 6HG  
[oxfordhouse.org.uk](http://oxfordhouse.org.uk)



# The inside track:

We give you a taste of life around Cambridge Heath crossroads



## Hackney Cycles

With knowledgeable staff, good prices and, above all, a wide range of bikes (both first and second hand), Hackney Cycles is worth a visit if you want advice, need your bike repaired or if you are looking for either accessories or spare parts. It's also got

a pretty colourful shop window which is hard to miss down the Hackney Road.

**507 Hackney Road, E2 9ED**

## Go-Go Organic Wholefoods

Seriously good-looking fruit and veg greet you as you enter this organic oasis. Recently refurbished, this small shop stocks an incredible variety of fresh produce and groceries, neatly displayed on wooden shelves. Take your pick from Karaway bread, purple kohlrabi, Alfonso mangoes, wheat grass, xanthan gum, corn wraps, coffee from Women Farmers and a wide range of coconut oil, spelt and quinoa products.

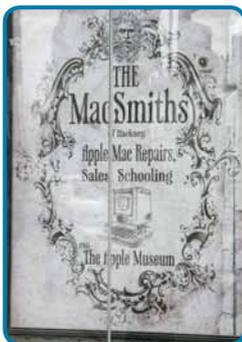
**531 Hackney Road, E2 9ED**



## The MacSmiths of Hackney

The clue's in the name: behind the slightly surreal shopfront lies a Mac repair shop, together with a display of old and new technology (the museum bit) along with a decadently decorated bar for private hire. If you love Macs, or you've temporarily fallen out of love with your Mac because it's stopped working, MacSmiths is definitely worth a visit.

**489 Hackney Road, E2 9ED**



## HACKNEY ROAD



## Docklands City Office Furniture

Behind the exterior of office chairs and filing cabinets spilling out onto the pavement lie four showrooms, with a mixture of new and second hand. There's everything an office could need here, home or otherwise, and there's also the quirky – second hand swimming pool type lockers, chairman of the board chairs, and cocktail bar stools.

**472 Hackney Road, E2 9EG**

#### 4Cose

Run by two artists, whose studio is behind the shop, this is the place for authentic Italian food based on what Italians eat at their own tables. Take your pick from single estate olive oil; Parmigiano-Reggiano; 100% Italian sausages and hams; and specialised balsamic vinegars, plus sundry Italiano grocery items including polenta, risotto rice and biscuits. Currently open Thurs-Sun.  
**7 Vyner Street, E2 9DG**



#### Russkij Bazar

Despite its name, this bargain bazaar stocks food east from the River Vistula to Russia. Recipes reminiscent of a trip to Riga left me salivating at the thought of oily fish, herby cheese and flavoursome cured meats. Don't let the dim lighting put you off exploring. A

slight communication problem was easily overcome with enthusiastic gestures, on both sides.

**276 Cambridge Heath Road, E2 9DA**

#### G&T Organic Shop and Coffee House

Tucked in next door to the Mission GP Practice, this tiny gem offers everything from cold pressed juices to candles and essences, as well as the regulars like sandwiches, snacks and a good cup of coffee served with a smile. Everything



is organic, be it the vibrant vegetables or the quinoa. Inside there is seating space for two, with additional tables outside.

**204 Cambridge Heath Road, E2 9NQ**

CAMBRIDGE HEATH ROAD

BISHOPS W

# Keeping Calm in Bethnal Green

Eva Carmona meets Vidyadaka and finds out there's much more to the London Buddhist Centre than yoga classes

## Tell us a little about yourself

I was ordained into the Triratna Buddhist Order in 2007. Apart from managing the centre, I also do some programming and design some of the centre's leaflets. My name means wisdom and spontaneous energy.

## What can a newcomer expect from their first visit to the centre?

We are all trying to deal with existentialist issues, looking for the purpose of life. And my impression is that there is generally not much on offer. Hopefully the centre is a place



where you can relax and embrace something that genuinely gives you a hint of something deeper in life.

## How is your teaching of meditation and Buddhism relevant to contemporary life?

We do it in a less traditional way, in a way modern people can understand. You can get involved without wearing robes and the centre is not a monastery. This is for anyone. It doesn't matter if you think you are a Buddhist or not because the message of Buddha is about life. This is for human beings, not just Buddhists.

## How has Buddhism affected your life?

I first came along in 1998 for a meditation class. At that time I was working as a graphic designer. I started meditating and gradually got more involved. After a few years I gave up my career, started working for the centre and moved into a Buddhist community. I was looking for something and I knew I wasn't born to be a graphic designer my whole life. I was very affected by the whole experience. Overall, Buddhism has changed the way I interpret life.





**How would you describe meditation to someone who has never tried it?**

Meditation can help you deal with all aspects of life. It integrates who you are and what is going on, and helps develop positive emotions instead of negative and scattered ones.

**And Buddhism?**

The world is a troubled place and we have troubled minds. Buddhism teaches us about the relationship between how we perceive the world, how we think about the world and how we create the world that we live in with our thoughts, actions and attitudes. Buddha would say that you just need to see what life truly is and you will then realise confusion and pain is created in one's own mind.



London Buddhist Centre,  
51 Roman Road, E2 0HU  
[lbc.org.uk](http://lbc.org.uk)



# Bethnal Greener

Sarah Beydoun gives Helen Barstow a tour of Teesdale & Hollybush's inspiring community gardens



"I was given an ultimatum by my boss to quit my community work or quit my job", Sarah Beydoun explains, "I chose to go with the community work and I've not looked back since". Sarah is now a full time volunteer and the secretary of Teesdale & Hollybush Tenants and Residents Association, a TRA that has transformed parts of the estate that were once focal points for anti-social behaviour into award-winning community gardens.

Sarah's involvement began with a sense that something needed to change. "I found syringes on my stairwell too many times, so when I noticed the TRA's flyer encouraging residents to come and discuss anti-social behaviour I wanted to get involved". Led by chairperson Margaret Cox, they decided to tackle the issue by bringing life back to neglected parts of the estate.

Starting with the community centre in 2008, they have renovated 13 disused sites with the help of corporate and local volunteers, creating a ‘mini Eden’ where local nature can thrive. The eye-catching sites include a children’s playground, a number of allotments and Tower Hamlet’s first orchard, Strawberry Fields. Creative in their use of resources, they keep sustainability at the heart of what they do – even some of the plants have been recycled from local park rangers or house clearances.

One of the year-on-year award winning sites, Rocky Park, provides free plots to residents to encourage them to grow their own, healthy produce. The original allotments were so popular they quickly had to expand to allow for more grow beds.

Sarah has seen the gardens have a big impact on her local community, providing not only a great opportunity to get to know the neighbours, but also stimulating a sense of ownership and pride in residents for their estate. “Even people who don’t live on the estate have thanked us for making them smile every day as they pass through”. The gardens have been recognised far and wide, with visits from the Prince of Wales and East End ‘royal’, Barbara Windsor.

It’s hard not to be inspired by the tenacity and time commitment of Margaret Cox and the wider TRA that enabled all this to happen with limited funds and resources. From Sarah’s perspective, though, it was a sacrifice worth making and she encourages everyone to get involved in bringing new life to where they live. “It’s so easy – we could make London the greenest city in the world with some savviness and a few seeds!”





# Comfort and Joy

## Emma Coleman discovers a haven of help and support at St Peter's Advice Centre

Tucked into Marian Place, just off Pritchards Road, the St Peter's Community and Advice Centre offers vital support for local residents. Set up 20 years ago by a group of women to look after those in need in their neighbourhood, it has blossomed into a registered charity with support from the council and a varied pool of funding.

St. Peter's has much to offer, whether you need advice on welfare, housing, loans, immigration issues, or help with more sensitive issues such as drug problems and domestic abuse. It's open to all, and particularly plays a role in helping the local Bengali community.

A main focus of St Peter's work is mental health. With drop-in sessions and one-to-one appointments, police-checked support workers guarantee confidentiality and discretion. Speaking Bengali, Sylheti and English, they ensure language barriers are not an issue. Some celebrities have recently been public and vocal about their own

experiences with depression "which helps our cause enormously," says Syeda Tasmia Tahia, three years into her advice-support role at the centre.

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**"It's vital to have a safe space for people to share experiences of health."**

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In the UK many levels of mental ill health are recognised, from anxiety and mild depression through bipolar and eating disorders, to dementia. Workers at the centre engage with local families to help dissipate the misplaced shame sometimes attached to such issues. St. Peter's can help with medical referrals too. Local Mission Practice GP Dr Louise Vaughan believes that "Mental health issues are sadly still stigmatised in many of the cultures in our local area. It's vital to have a safe space for people to share experiences of health and so move forwards on a journey towards greater wellbeing."

Elderly women can be a particularly vulnerable demographic where mental health is concerned. Often home alone all day while family members work, or

children attend school, a lack of friends or language barriers can leave them feeling isolated and depressed.

Lunch clubs and exercise classes at St. Peter's encourage social interaction and the ladies have been joining in with glee. English language, cookery and computer training are among the free classes offered, along with health checks. "Even feeling more confident about making a trip to the corner shop has made a huge difference to some of our women," says Syeda. "We're working to raise awareness of mental health issues in a culturally sensitive way and our aim is not to turn away anyone who needs help."

**St Peter's Community & Advice Centre**  
1 Marian Place, E2 9AX  
thch.org.uk

### Who can St Peter's Advice Centre help?

Anyone aged 18 upwards. Many centre users are of Bengali background, reflecting the local community, but it's open to all.

### What can I do there?

Mondays and Thursdays: Social coffee mornings and discussions, exercise classes and cookery/lunch club (women only). Community gardening in Spring and Summer. Call or email for advice session times and for appointments.

### Anything for younger people?

There's a homework club on Sunday covering children from late primary to late secondary years. Inter-generational projects such as embroidery also pop up, according to funding.

### Men-only and women-only sessions?

Yes, check the website for details.



# PLAY AWAY

Eva Garmona meets Glenys Tolley of PATH, who invites us to get outside and play for a healthier and happier life

Busy traffic, a lack of clean and welcoming play spaces, a radical change in our children's lifestyles... these are some of the reasons why children don't play on the streets as often as they (or we) used to do.

The consequences can have a long lasting impact on the next generation. Clinical researchers report increasing levels of childhood obesity and diabetes. And evidence suggests that children's sense of independence, resilience and creativity can also be compromised.

As Glenys Tolley – the director of Play Association Tower Hamlets (PATH) – explains, children can lose “fantastic experiences” that cannot be recreated in the future. She continues, “If you don't take risks as a child, how are you going to know how to deal with risk as an adult?”

PATH's philosophy is to encourage local residents to get to know their community spaces, to use them and to take care of them. In doing this, families living side-by-side can also get to meet and share time with one another.

“Nowadays, people tend to be confined to their flats” and the children play video games instead of going out and mixing with others. The opportunities to play outside are fewer as kids grow



older. “People think about children playing until they go to school. After reaching five years of age, kids start going to structured activities, after-school clubs, and so on, but to play for play's sake, just exploring and experimenting, being free” is also necessary for good development.

To encourage parents to let their children play outside, PATH tries to bring parents' memories of their own childhood back. And it

works. “People understand they are not allowing their children to do the same. We see the change in their attitude.”

PATH also works to transform the spaces within the borough and to send playworkers to the communities to foster the habit of using these spaces. “People feel that the space is safer if they can see the playworkers there, but we want to get the parents involved so in the end they don't need us.”

Since its beginnings in 2001, PATH has achieved a great deal for Tower Hamlets' children. As Glenys observes, “It's our job to get ourselves out of a job – local communities have to take over”. However, for the time being, she and her team have plenty to do, to ensure Bethnal Green's children get outside and enjoy playful adventures.

## Outward Bound in E2

- **Bethnal Green Gardens:** Here you can find a climbing net in the trees, a fixed play area, grass to picnic on, and plenty of tarmac space to learn how to ride a bike or to roller skate.
- **Gascoigne Estate:** Local families and children worked with PATH to create a play space – tucked away behind Leopold Buildings – where children can play with sand and water.
- **Middleton Green:** This big natural play space includes climbing structures, cute wooden sheep, a grassy mound to climb and a giant slide to whoosh down on.
- **Ravenscroft Park:** A popular park off Columbia Road, it's especially busy after school as children play on their way home.
- **Weavers Adventure Playground:** Established 40 years ago, and staffed by experienced playworkers, this site provides play activities and a sense of adventure for local children.
- **Weavers Fields:** With a nature walk, play area, a trim trail and plenty of green space this is a playful place for all ages.





# You Can Dance

Fergus Early OBE explains to Heather Qualtrough how Green Candle is keeping the invitation to dance alight for the over-50s, and those living with dementia

Even with restricted movement or cognitive abilities “if you can just move an eye or a finger you can dance,” says Fergus Early, Artistic Director, dancer and choreographer at Green Candle Dance, Oxford House. He believes everyone has the birthright to communicate, explore and enjoy their self through dance.

For Fergus, dance is a basic human (and animal!) attribute. Dance is used “for courtship, war, for a sense of community and to tell stories.” It enhances all the physical, emotional and psychological systems to produce an “immensely pleasurable experience.” For those living with dementia he has found it “reawakens the person” and sometimes “suddenly they are there, like the person they once were.”

For more than 25 years Green Candle Dance has worked with groups often deprived of the opportunity to dance, including those with learning difficulties, in hospitals and daycentres. The projects for ‘Older Men Moving’, and Bengali and Somali Men, reached more difficult-to-engage parts of the community. Among the remarkable current projects are ones for ‘Senior Dancers’, and for those living with dementia in the ‘Remember to Dance’ programme.

I visited the Seniors (50+) group, predominantly female, many of whom make considerable journeys to attend. They value the social contact of the group, and relish the challenges and the rewards that come from public performances – including the Sagacity Festival at Oxford House. Their current ambitious project is to create, in



response to music by Gottschalk, a suite of three dances: “one ‘frieze-like’ and serious; one ‘silly’; and one energetic.’

‘Remember to Dance’ is a two-year project for people living with dementia, and their carers. Run in collaboration with University of Christchurch Canterbury, it is gathering crucial evidence about improvements in cognitive and physical function.

Fergus is determined to keep dance and movement on the health agenda, and by harnessing the wider “wave of panic” about how the NHS will cope with the increasing demands for dementia care, these findings will help to challenge assumptions that it is easier to manage care by preventing or discouraging movement, and that medication is the only cost-effective intervention.

Alongside the statistics, supporting the case for dance as therapy are the non-quantifiable benefits that Fergus observes: “the miraculous transformation, the pleasure, the re-wakening of the person within”. He describes the remarkable and even mysterious experiences of working with, and learning from, the ‘Remember to Dance’ group in the NHS Dementia Assessment Unit: the “moment when lack of inhibition becomes wonderfully creative is astounding. The unpredictability is a wonderful test as a teacher to be ready to embrace anything. It’s like a wild party; it is very special.”

Senior Dancers: Tuesdays 10.30am-12.30pm

Remember to Dance (for those living with dementia): Fridays 10.30-12.00 noon

Green Candle Dance  
Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, E2 6HG  
[greencandledance.com](http://greencandledance.com)

# Built to Last

Unto This Last founder Olivier Geoffroy explains to Eleanor Image why local is logical

The idea behind Unto This Last's workshop in the city came from a desire to reduce waste in production. The business logic is clear: with no storage costs, their prices are competitive and, by keeping it local, the carbon footprint of customers is reduced.

The heart of the Brick Lane operation is the workshop, on show from the shop and the street, where furniture is micro measured to exact dimensions. The workshop is dust free, yet the shop has the evocative scent of freshly cut wood.

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*“Client choice is the key difference”*

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Whether you're after a place mat, a lamp or a table designed for your space, the product range is beautiful and varied. Digital cutting tools enable the



creative team of 10 to produce furniture to order with efficiency and elegance.

The core material, birch plywood, is finished with oak or walnut, white laminate, coloured linoleum or bespoke paints, giving thousands of options to choose from. With such bespoke credentials, it was listed in The Independent's top 50 furniture shops of 2015.

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*“The complex bit is creating the design”*

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A specially designed clock helps the team time how long each piece takes to make, analysing how the process can be improved to reduce time and waste.

“It's important to have good people working here: you need to be creative,” says Olivier. An example of their creativity and precision is the fact that a standard chair from Muji has 40 screws; here they have none.

“We hope to expand into a franchise – Australia and Brazil have both expressed an interest – but it's one chair at a time, at the right place and the right time.”

Unto This Last, 230 Brick Lane, E2 7EB  
[untothislast.co.uk](http://untothislast.co.uk)





# DRIVEN TO RECYCLE

Heather Qualtrough discovers the product and philosophy behind EcoPouffe

David Boswell perches in a tiny workshop paradise, where every wall, floor and bench space is crammed with tools, furniture and rescued pieces of oak. Here he turns tyres and bicycle inner tubes into EcoPouffes: firm enough to be a coffee table or seat, or to put your feet up on at the end of a hard day.

He is also committed to re-engaging another resource that society wastes, namely “people who are the off-cuts of society”. His motivation is to “extend the ladder down to those with mental health problems, or addictions, with creativity being the key”. The training he gives helps people into careers with respected furniture companies, having been transformed “from not knowing one end of a chisel from another to restoring quality furniture”.

With a team, David can make ten EcoPouffes a week. Keeping the business small lets him focus on the hands-on work and training he enjoys. At 16, his mum suggested he went to the local upholstery factory, and he loved it.



Now, as a skilled antique furniture restorer, cabinet maker and French polisher, his work for wealthy clients sustains his social enterprise.

He knows that he is “not going to get rid of the tyre mountains” but is determined to harness his skills and make a difference to lives, as well as making long-lasting furniture – as he quips, “If it doesn’t last 50 years, we’ll make you another one!”

**EcoPouffe, Unit 1, Sunbury Workshops,  
Swanfield Street, E2 7LF  
ecopouffe.com**

# Inspiring Women

Niki Stevens, President of the East End Women's Institute, tells Neesha Badhan there's a lot more to the WI than cakes and crafts

It all began in 2007, in a block of seven flats. Niki had just moved as a single parent to the East End. "Before that I'd lived in so many places where I hadn't known my neighbours; if I had have done, it would have been so much nicer for me."

The block of flats suffered with anti-social behaviour, an issue that galvanised the residents. "We became good friends, like a micro community." From those small beginnings grew a women's group – the East End WI.

"When we began there was a degree of humour about it. Other people would wonder what these women were doing. And we were only one of four WI groups in London."

"There's an interesting thing about living in a city and being isolated – you're surrounded by so many people. Compared to the very first WI groups, where women lived in a farmhouse in the middle of nowhere and it was a day's horse ride to the next person, it might seem strange to form a WI in the middle of a city. But being surrounded



by people and feeling alone can magnify your situation, something I could really relate to with my first experiences living in east London."

Seven years later, the group has 40 members and meets on a monthly basis. "We try really hard to programme events and activities that are interesting: art history, swing dance, self-defence lessons and African up-cycling are all topics or activities that we've covered. Some things don't always seem so sexy on paper – dealing with death, for instance – but often what happens on the edges of the activity or alongside it can be even more interesting."



"In the summer, we run a series of tea and cake stalls at events, which can be hard work and long hours, but are also good fun! It's a chance as well for new members to get to know other women outside the slightly more formal monthly meetings." The age range of members is wide, from twenty somethings upwards, and there have been six births in the last year. The meeting venue is wheelchair accessible.

"Unwittingly we've been creating a supported space over the last seven years, which we didn't necessarily know we needed. There's a definite need for women to meet other women."

The monthly meetings are open to visitors as well as members. "It's normally half and half – visitors and members. Visitors can come along and try us out. I would love it if our meetings could carry on being as successful as they've been."

The monthly meetings take place at St Margaret's House, Old Ford Road. The WI also has a monthly coffee meeting in cafes in the borough; a 'knit and natter' group; a cinema group; and a book group.

East End Women's Institute,  
St Margaret's House, 21 Old Ford Road,  
E2 9PL  
[eastendwi.blogspot.co.uk](http://eastendwi.blogspot.co.uk)





# BRUSH STROKES

Neesha Badhan chats with Jock McFadyen over coffee and biscuits, and finds out more about the man behind the artist

Jock McFadyen's paintings are often described as gritty. Put this to him, though, and he laughs it off. "I know this is what people say... I think my paintings are realistic. If you wanted to make something more grungy you would make it more grey".

He describes his work as an honest reflection of East London in the late 70s and 1980s: he had wanted to paint things he saw. "When people started writing about my work they said it was gritty. It's not gritty – it's just what it looked like when you opened the front door".

Also known for risqué imagery, I ask him if this was a comment on the depravity of the area? "No, I am quite amoral. As soon as you open the door

on Salmon Lane or whatever, you know you're going to see grit."

Born in Glasgow, a six-year stint in England as a child meant that, when his family returned to Scotland, Jock 'had become English', to his contemporaries anyway. He failed his first art foundation course. "I got chucked out and I hadn't gotten into a degree course like all my pals." This, along with having a young pregnant bride, led him to get "in the van and drive to London, so I went to art school in 1973 and I've been here ever since, 42 years."

Alluding to his humble background, we discuss the issue of class in England. "Doing art is not hierarchical in the sense that it is not a recognised profession...

you can't be pigeon holed". I agree with him that artists transcend class barriers. Jock laughs and says: "I've arrived! Where's the fecking chardonnay? I'm here to join in – I'm just like you."

He confides in me that he doesn't vote and doesn't think it should be compulsory to do so, making a comparison to "the Northern traditions of art and the act of observation." There are two stances: the first is where the artist watches and sees a reflection of themselves, reflecting their own ugly thoughts, like Spencer. The second is where the artist views people in a more aspirational way, like Lowry or Brueghel. "It's as if you're halfway up a mountain looking down on the people teeming with

light". In both types of observation there is a sense of detachment. "I think that you have to be clear about what you're thinking. I'm curious to see who's going to win the election but in that detached way of backing a horse you haven't got any money on, or watching a football game and not supporting either side."

So what would he have been if he hadn't been an artist? Cue Frankie Boyle's comment about Peter Crouch: "If he hadn't been a footballer he would have been a virgin. In my case, it was too late."

*Painter Jock McFadyen was born in Paisley in 1950. He studied at Chelsea Art School, works from a studio in London Fields, and lives in Bethnal Green. For details of his exhibitions and paintings, visit [jockmcfadyen.com](http://jockmcfadyen.com)*



Roman Road



Aldgate East tube station



# Peonies, Pubs & Prawns

## A Columbia Road Diary

Everyone knows the Sunday flower market but what happens in Columbia Road between Monday and Saturday? Emma Coleman finds out.

### Monday

Easily missed on a busy Sunday, stop to admire the enormous mosaic of tiny tiles running along the white wall outside the school. It colourfully depicts local life with scenes of animals, people and – of course – flowers.

Columbia Primary School



### Tuesday

Linger over traditional lasagne, spicy hunter's rabbit or rustic bread sandwiches at this Italian deli serving specialities from Campania. If you're in a hurry, grab a Neapolitan coffee from the window hatch.

95 Columbia Road  
[campaniagastromonia.com](http://campaniagastromonia.com)



**Wednesday**



Step into the Royal Oak to find a lively scene around a central wooden bar, with a modern European dining room upstairs. On Sundays, there are hearty roasts and the courtyard cafe offers Climpson's coffee and Brick Lane beignets.

73 Columbia Road  
royaloaklondon.com

**Thursday**

Read Linda Wilkinson's latest fascinating book: 'Columbia Road, a Strange Kind of Paradise' reflects on the influence of French silk weavers, tells of Angela Burdett-Coutts' philanthropic market-building project, and describes the present day cobbled thoroughfare that is the well-loved Columbia Road.

[www.lindawilkinson.org](http://www.lindawilkinson.org)



**Friday**



Choose your watering hole: the Birdcage serves excellent beers and a classy Pie & Mash; Stringray Cafe offers its famous pizzas and tiramisu; or at Brawn, you can sip bio-dynamic wines and feast on seasonal fare, such as oysters, quail, red mullet and cheeses.

Birdcage, 80 Columbia Road [drafhthouse.co.uk](http://drafhthouse.co.uk)  
Stringray, 109 Columbia Road [stringraycafe.co.uk](http://stringraycafe.co.uk)  
Brawn, 49 Columbia Road [brawn.co.uk](http://brawn.co.uk)

**Saturday**

Angela Flanders' boutique is "filled with bottles and jars of original scents that are found here and only here". It's a perfume mecca, producing beautiful scents with natural ingredients.

96 Columbia Road (Saturdays by appointment)  
[angelaflanders-perfumer.com](http://angelaflanders-perfumer.com)



...and what about Sundays? >>

Sunday



### Bloomin' Sundays

Here's a stall with a twist, or even a spike: Josie Ferguson started selling flowers with her husband fifty years ago. "Ferns and geraniums were too competitive," so they decided to focus on the cactus instead, this year's on-trend accessory if you read interior design magazines. In all shapes and sizes her display is a prickly and colourful delight; some are in flower, some are just sharp.

"Crowds and shops have changed over the years but lots of the originals are still here, running their stalls". Her daughter Denise has helped out since she was tiny and describes long-gone grocer's and butcher's shops, replaced with vintage clothing and antiques.

Carry on browsing and amongst perfumed bouquets, shrubs, ferns and herbs you'll find seasonal delights – giant bundles of spring pussy willow; lavender bags in summer; and orange slices dried with pine at Christmas.

Squeeze a half-lemon over battered shrimp in a tub, sip a coffee, listen to the busker – Columbia Road is worth getting up early for.

Sundays, 8am-3pm – come rain, wind, snow or shine.

[columbiaroad.info](http://columbiaroad.info)





## Keiron Phelan, manager of the Duke of Uke, tells Eva Carmona about the instrument's recent renaissance

The Duke of Uke is much more than simply a shop. "We've always tried to have a community hub element, as well as being a retail place," says Keiron.

Indeed, they run as many gigs as they can with an eclectic style of music being played. The Uke might be Duke but it's not the only instrument to feature in live performances. Keiron himself plays piano and guitar, as well as the ukulele.

And if, after the gig, you feel like giving the ukulele a try, private tuition is available. There are also 10-week courses, with an end of term performance to bring the whole thing to life.

London is probably the ideal place to get to know the ukulele. "Across Europe," explains Keiron, "there aren't many ukuleles available. But over here, it has gone progressively mainstream. After being neglected during the second half of the last century, it is now cemented back in the musical world."

And the best proof of that is that, nowadays, all kinds of people come to the shop to buy ukuleles. When it opened, almost nine years ago, it was an "East End hipster thing" but very quickly the instrument went mainstream.

Many customers are people living busy lives who also want to play music. "The ukulele is a great way in to music because, although you do need to put some time and effort in, you can learn to play very quickly. It's also a very good instrument for children."

"Unusually in the world of instruments, ukuleles tend to bring people together," says Keiron with a smile, his enthusiasm for this small but charming instrument shining through.

**Duke of Uke, 88 Cheshire Street, E2 6EH**  
[dukeofuke.co.uk](http://dukeofuke.co.uk)

# A Wheely Big Adventure

Heather Qualtrough talks about bicycles and business with Jim Blakemore, co-founder of Bikeworks

“Using a very simple product – the bicycle – that has been around for 150 years”, Jim Blakemore and his team have created a successful, “agile and dynamic” social enterprise with an annual turnover of £1.5 million. Bikeworks is much more than just another bicycle shop.



Created in 2006, Bikeworks aims to “make cycling available to everybody, help change lives and make bicycles and cycling a positive experience,” Jim explains.

With the shops (in Cambridge Heath Road and Leytonstone), workshops and training generating a healthy turnover, the Bikeworks team has grown over the past eight years to more than 30 people. They’ve achieved their long-cherished goal of creating a third All-Ability Hub in the Olympic Park, and continue to thrive locally and spread regionally. Expect the unexpected as they expand: innovations have recently included yoga for cyclists, and a chocolate brownie bake off.

Bikeworks reaches out to all local residents, minority and ethnic groups, elders’ groups and learning disabilities centres. It specially engages with women, dispelling myths about cycling

being dangerous or gender-specific – no Lycra or race stats in sight. There are also women-only maintenance classes. Now, pleasingly, more than half the customer database is female. But Jim recognises that they’re just “scratching the surface” of inclusivity.

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*“We love bikes and people, and that’s what makes us successful”*

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As for training, many of the team have come through Bikeworks’ courses themselves. “Staff need to live and breathe our values,” Jim says. “We love bikes and people, and that’s what makes us successful”. Bikeworks’ Employability programme actively engages with people in the criminal justice system and the homeless, and Bikeability training in schools and



cycle-awareness for HGV drivers improves safety for all road users.

Another element, Re-use and Re-cycling, shines through in the reconditioned bikes – stately and charming – standing in the shop alongside flashier, skinny-wheeled models. Cycling doesn't need to break the bank – although you may get hooked and acquire an impressive collection of bikes. Jim currently has twelve!

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*“Be big, be proud, and be confident on the road”*

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Jim emphasises that for safety and success, whatever your cycling ambitions, you don't need to buy expensive accessories. For the aspiring Special Olympian, he says, “Patience is the key”. For any rider, whether novice or skilled, he advises “Be big, be proud and be confident” on the road. “You simply need a safe bike that works and is well maintained; good brakes and pumped-up tyres will see you through most situations.”

**Bikeworks**  
138-140 Cambridge Heath Road, E1 5QJ  
[bikeworks.org.uk](http://bikeworks.org.uk)



# The inside track:

Liz Baume discovers just how upmarket the Redchurch Street area is these days

## Mast Brothers

Fresh from Brooklyn, Mast is more of a boutique than a shop – and it's where chocolate gets seriously grown-up. Choose from either origin chocolate, such as Belize or Tanzania, or from the artisan collection. And, if you need a pick-up, try the French tradition of a square of plain chocolate with a piece of sourdough, or perhaps some chocolate beer.

**19-29 Redchurch Street, E2 7DJ**



## MHL

Tucked away behind Redchurch Street is the standalone MHL shop. With a range more casual than the formal tailoring you normally associate with Margaret Howell, it shares with the mothership the designer's philosophy – clothes which will outlast a season. And, with the area's long history of weaving, it just somehow makes sense that there's a Margaret Howell shop here.

**19 Old Nichol Street, E2 7HR**



OLD NICHOL STREET

CHANCE STREET

REDCHURCH STREET

STREET

## Santa Maria Novella

A tiny scion of the iconic Florentine Officina Profumo-Farmaceutica, the (literally) fragrant product list, tied up with ribbon in a scroll, speaks volumes about the brand's history and quality. Products range from soaps and suncreams to concentrated handkerchief essences and ancient preparations. No frescoes or gold leaf, sadly, in the E2 branch; no prices listed either.

**9 Chance Street, E2 7JB**



## T2

This Australian company does what it says on the caddy: tea. Black, green, yellow, white and oolong teas are lined up in orange cubes on the shelves, along with herbal tisanes. Evocative tea names include Mudan Rose, Snow Dragon, and Choc Chai; Irish Breakfast and Tummy Tea are more down-to-earth. There's also a truly wondrous array of teapots and tea sets.

**50 Redchurch Street, E2 7DP**

### Tracy Neuls

With one of the most creative shopfronts in London, this is an enticing and quirky shoe shop. Neuls' 15 years of experience as a shoe designer are reflected in the shoes which are innovative, fun and comfortable – a rare mix. Prices start from £150.

**73 Redchurch Street, E2 7DJ**



CLUB

ROW

REDCHURCH STREET

BETHNAL GREEN ROAD

### Labour and Wait

A cornucopia of traditional household goods (enamel pots and dishes; feather dusters; soaps; dibbers; balls of string; chalk pencils; scrubbing brushes) coupled with bib aprons, casual linen jackets and quirky books ('Memoirs of a Chorus Girl', for example) ensures that you'll either find just the item you've been looking for, or something you didn't realise you needed.

**85 Redchurch Street, E2 7DJ**

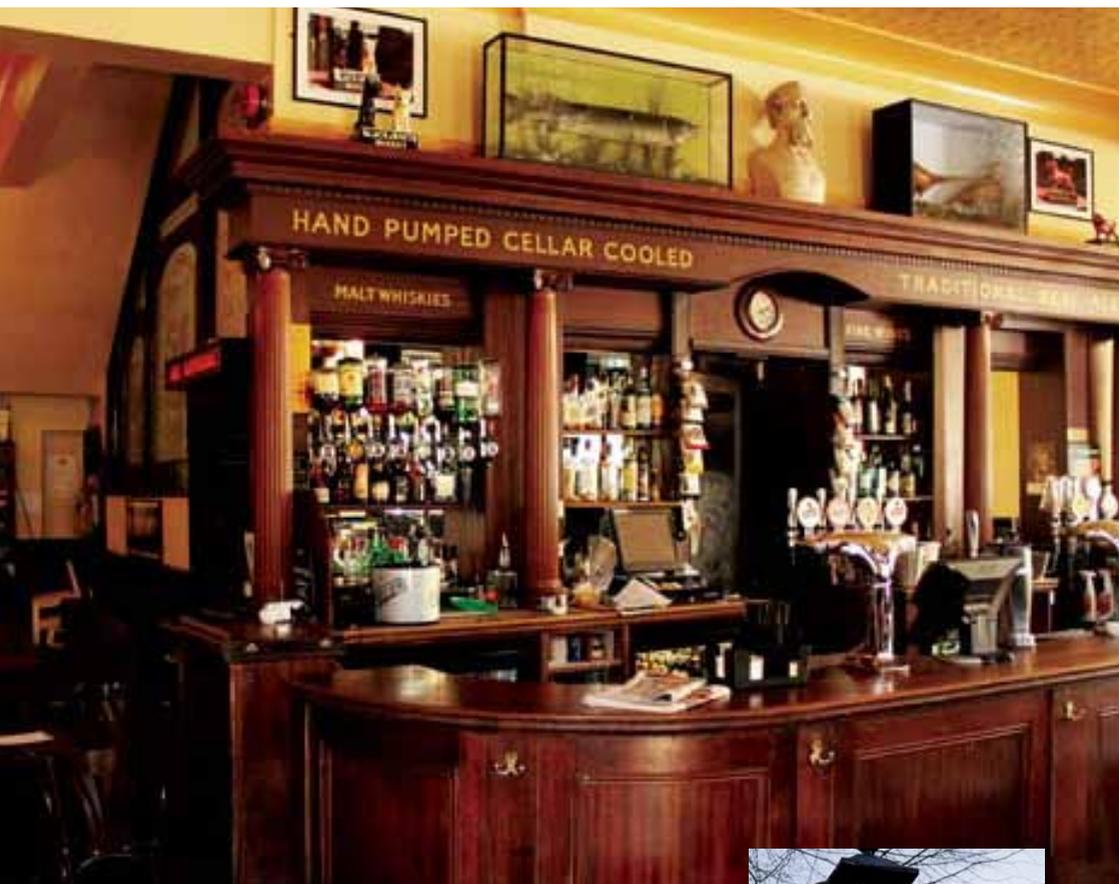


### Allpress Roastery Café

Founded in New Zealand, Allpress offers far more than coffee roasted on-site. The canteen-style menu includes breakfast dishes, sandwich fillings that are a cut above the normal (mortadella, artichoke and mint, for example) and old-fashioned cakes, including proper parkin and Redchurch apple cake. Depending (probably) on your age, it's either buzzy or noisy.

**58 Redchurch Street, E2 7DP**

# The inside track: a cheeky pint or crafty cocktail



## Approach Tavern

Outside space is at a premium in Bethnal Green pubs, which is why the large terrace at the Approach can get chock-a-block when the sunshine's out. Sunday roasts are popular – a welcome follow-on after a stroll in nearby Victoria Park – though you may have to wait a while. Inside, the Approach is spacious, with a traditional feel. A weekly quiz and a small art gallery upstairs complete the set up.

47 Approach Road, E2 9YL



## Birdcage

This historic Columbia Road landmark has recently been given a fresh lease of life by Draft House, the new owners. Craft beers – such as Kernel’s Indian Porter or Pressure Drop from London Fields Brewery – are showcased during Try It Tuesday. And as you tuck into posh pie ‘n’ mash Tony might entertain you with a few tunes on the old Joanna.

80 Columbia Road, E2 7QB



## Camel

Clad in distinctive brown tiles, the Camel is a small, skinny pub, wedged beside Sugar Loaf Walk. A few benches sit outside ready for summer sunshine, floral wallpaper runs a riot inside, and old photos of pub beans to Southend flank the bar. But it’s the upmarket pie and mash menu that sets the Camel apart... think steak and chorizo, or chicken and ham hock, all served with creamy mash, peas and lashings of gravy.

277 Globe Road, E2 0JD



## King’s Arms

Beer aficionados and experimentalists are spoilt for choice – at the last count there were 80 brews on offer at the King’s Arms, a recently revived boozier on the corner with Derbyshire Street. As well as the more familiar – Camden Town’s Hells Lager and Duvel from Belgium – you’ll find all manner of exotics on tap or bottled; with a drinks menu featuring Redemption Big Chief, Wild Beer Wildebeest and Beavertown Black Betty, there’s scope to be adventurous.

11A Buckfast Street, E2 6EY



## Star of Bethnal Green

A popular boozier that ticks many boxes. On Fridays and Saturdays there’s dancing – take your pick from themed nights, which range from reggae or techno, to Unskinny Bop or a guest DJ shaking things up. Alternatively, get together with friends to belt out a few verses in the karaoke booth. Food has a tropical flavour – jerk chicken or curried mutton shepherd’s pie – courtesy of White Men Can’t Jerk.

359 Bethnal Green Road, E2 6LE

## Sun Tavern

Established in 1851, and re-opened in 2014, the Sun is a snug, candlelit place, with exposed brick walls and red leather banquettes. Irish whiskeys and poutine (once an illegal ‘moonshine’ homebrew) are a speciality. Creative cocktails include Bogcutter, Barn Owl and a share-a-jug punch that changes weekly. Look out for the pop-up foody offerings too.

441 Bethnal Green Road, E2 0AN



**And a few shorts for good measure...**

**Carpenters Arms:** for a young professional crowd in the shadow of the Kray twins.  
73 Cheshire Street, E2 0JD

**Florist Arms:** for stone-baked pizzas and a friendly crew.  
255 Globe Road, E2 0JD

**George and Dragon:** for Hoxton hipsters and Bohemian beardy boys.  
2-4 Hackney Road, E2 7NS

**Marquis of Cornwallis:** for a friendly welcome and no-nonsense regulars.  
304 Bethnal Green Road, E2 0AG

**Royal Oak:** for top-notch food and the Sunday flower market.  
73 Columbia Road, London E2 7RG

# The inside track: let me entertain you



## Bethnal Green Working Men's Club

Camp, gender-bending larks and burlesque performances are in store for you here. Clown revues, David Hoyle's alternative magic, and poetry mash-ups rub alongside disco dancing under the glitterball. This is cabaret with a sprinkling of stardust and a dash of kitsch.

42-44 Pollard Row, E2 6NB

## Create Place

This converted shop has become a hub for crafty goings-on in Bethnal Green. There are drop-in workshops and classes, many of them free, in knitting, crochet, oil painting and life drawing. Whether you're a beginner or more experienced, you'll find a warm welcome, a cuppa and a chance to natter with neighbours around the central table.

29 Old Ford Road, E2 9PJ



## Electric Cinema

Settle into a plush armchair, snuggle under a cashmere blanket, and sit back to watch one of the latest film releases. At only 50 seats, the Electric Cinema – based in the former Aubin and Wills store – offers a cosy cinema-going experience, without popcorn flickers and mobile chatterers. Screenings range from mainstream to art-house. Full whack tickets are £18, but there are discounts for youngsters and on Electric Sundays.

64-66 Redchurch Street, E2 7DP

## First Thursday

On the first Thursday each month, local galleries and studios open up late for a free monthly art fest. It's a chance to chat with artists, hang out with the hip crowd, and enjoy a free beer or two as you study the artworks. Organised under the auspices of the Whitechapel Gallery, there's something fresh to see each month; hot spots around E2 include Cheshire, Redchurch and Vyner Streets.

[www.firstthursday.co.uk](http://www.firstthursday.co.uk)



## Museum of Childhood

Free drop-in activities for children aged 3-12. Let your kids get creative during the arts and craft workshops that run every afternoon during term time. And they'll enjoy making animal sounds and using the props during the story-telling sessions. In the school holidays things get even livelier, with toddlers dance sessions, Punch and Judy shows, and secret trails, often inspired by the latest exhibition.

V&A Museum of Childhood, Cambridge Heath Road, E2 9PA



## Rich Mix

Though strictly speaking Rich Mix falls into E1, as it hosts 650 events a year we felt it deserved a mention. Live music on the main stage has a global flavour – recent gigs include a marching band from Trans-Siberia, folk singers from the Ukraine, and an Ethiopian groove band. A rolling exhibition programme features on the mezzanine and in the sunken gallery, with the waft of authentic Indian street food coming from the adjacent Indi-go café. The regular Pongathon ping pong party is a hoot.

35-47 Bethnal Green Road, E1 6LA



## Swing Patrol

Strictly Come Dancing meets Bethnal Green. James Russell and Laura Hicks will put you through your paces at their Monday evening dance class. Step by step, they'll teach you how to Lindy hop and Charleston using boogie backs, caterpillars and heel digs. Sessions cost £8, no need to bring a partner, and refreshments are on hand. Within no time you'll be wowing them on the dance floor.

Backyard Comedy Club, 231 Cambridge Heath Road, E2 0EL

# The inside track: beauty and pampering

## A barber shop trio

Chaps... Whether you're sporting a discreet goatee, wild muttonchops, or a full-on Edward VII, you'll know the importance of keeping your beard in shape. Here we recommend three local salons for the hirsute man about town to get his beard or Barnet sorted.

### Hurwundeki (£)

For a fast, fashionable haircut, check out this salon under the railway arches, where a 15-minute session will cost you £13. If you have deeper pockets and more time, then you could opt for a half-hour £24 premium styling with Ki Lee, founder and creative brains behind this café-cum-salon.

242 Cambridge Heath Road, E2 9DA

### Murdocks (££)

Dapper young blades head to this barber's parlour with Victorian ambience. Alex, Gwen and the team offer wet shaves, re-styles and beard trims, and the extensive range of grooming accessories includes quince and oakmoss shampoo, and sea salt styling spray. Gift vouchers come in handy for birthday treats or Father's Day.

46 Redchurch Street, E2 7DP

### Rocket Barber Shop (£)

"You grow it, we mow it," the tattooed boys at Rocket declare. Come here for slick trims and sharp fades. This was once a butcher's shop, though back in the day they probably didn't serve muttonchops and ducktails as often as they do now. Car parts and other curiosities decorate the salon.

401 Hackney Road, E2 8PP



## Sparkling spas

### Cowshed at Shoreditch House (£££)

Cowshed offer luxurious therapies “from your horns to your hooves” using their range of natural creams, scrubs and essential oils. Choose from a comprehensive list of treatments, including ultimate manicures, micro polish facials, and waxing, from a Brazilian to a Hollywood. Linger in the small café whilst your freshly-painted nails dry.

1 Ebor Street, E1 6AW



### The Shoreditch Spa (££)

Exposed brickwork, lofty ceilings and leather armchairs set the tone for this spa at the quiet end of upper Brick Lane. Owner Marc offers a friendly welcome as he books you in for a Dermalogica facial and peel, detox body wrap, or full body massage. They've got waxing covered too – both ‘overground’ and ‘underground’ – and with a free glass of fizz and an ipad to play with, you won't want to leave.

167 Brick Lane, E2 7EE



### York Hall Day Spa (£)

Set in one of London's oldest Turkish baths, this is a spa to revive your spirits and restore your energy. Two aroma steam rooms, a sauna and hammam form the core, with treatment rooms alongside. Exfoliate and tingle with an ‘Escape in the City Salt Scrub’, de-stress with a massage, or brighten your look with an Elemis facial. Packages available for hens, brides and ladies who leisure. Whether you're here for beauty treatments or relaxation, you'll leave with a rosy glow.

York Hall, Old Ford Road, E2 9PJ



### Budget-friendly beauty

**Cheeky Parlour:** for speedy, good quality nails in a bold, bright boutique.

1st Floor, 64-66 Redchurch Street, E2 7DP



**Emma For Beauty:** for a waxing that won't tear a strip off your bank balance.

345 Bethnal Green Road, E2 6LG

**Nipa:** for eyebrow and upper lip threading at bargain prices.

274 Bethnal Green Road, E2 0AG

**The Painted Lady:** for hair styling, pedicures and manicures.

65 Redchurch Street, E2 7DJ



# THANK YOU

We owe a huge thank you to all of the Bethnal Green community workers, small business owners, shopkeepers and residents who agreed to be interviewed, and supported and encouraged us along the way. We're also grateful to the venues that hosted us during our workshop sessions: Oxford House, the Minerva Centre (THCH), the Young Foundation and Hawkhurst Vault.





## Capturing the Inside Stories of Bethnal Green

In spring 2015, a group of local residents came together to try their hand at community journalism. Some of us were first-time reporters, others more experienced. What united us was our fascination with Bethnal Green.

Together, we ventured out each week, intent on finding out more about our neighbourhood. We met community gardeners and choreographers, explored furniture workshops and jewellery studios, and chatted with advice workers, brewers and shopkeepers. Each had their story to tell, a reflection of life in Bethnal Green.”

We'd like to thank all of those who gave up their time to be interviewed. Thanks also to John Ryan and the team at Oxford House, Paul Lindt at Academy Design, and Awards for All for their funding support.

**Graham Barker and Liz Baume**  
Project coordinators



## MEET OUR ROVING REPORTERS



Top row: Syeda Tasmia Tahia, Eleanor Image, Heather Qualtrough  
Middle: Eva Carmona del Rio, Neesha Badhan, Sarah Beydoun  
Bottom: Helen Barstow, Emma Coleman

## OUR PROJECT PHOTOGRAPHERS



Natalie  
Clarke



Alan  
Dann



Alan  
Fraser



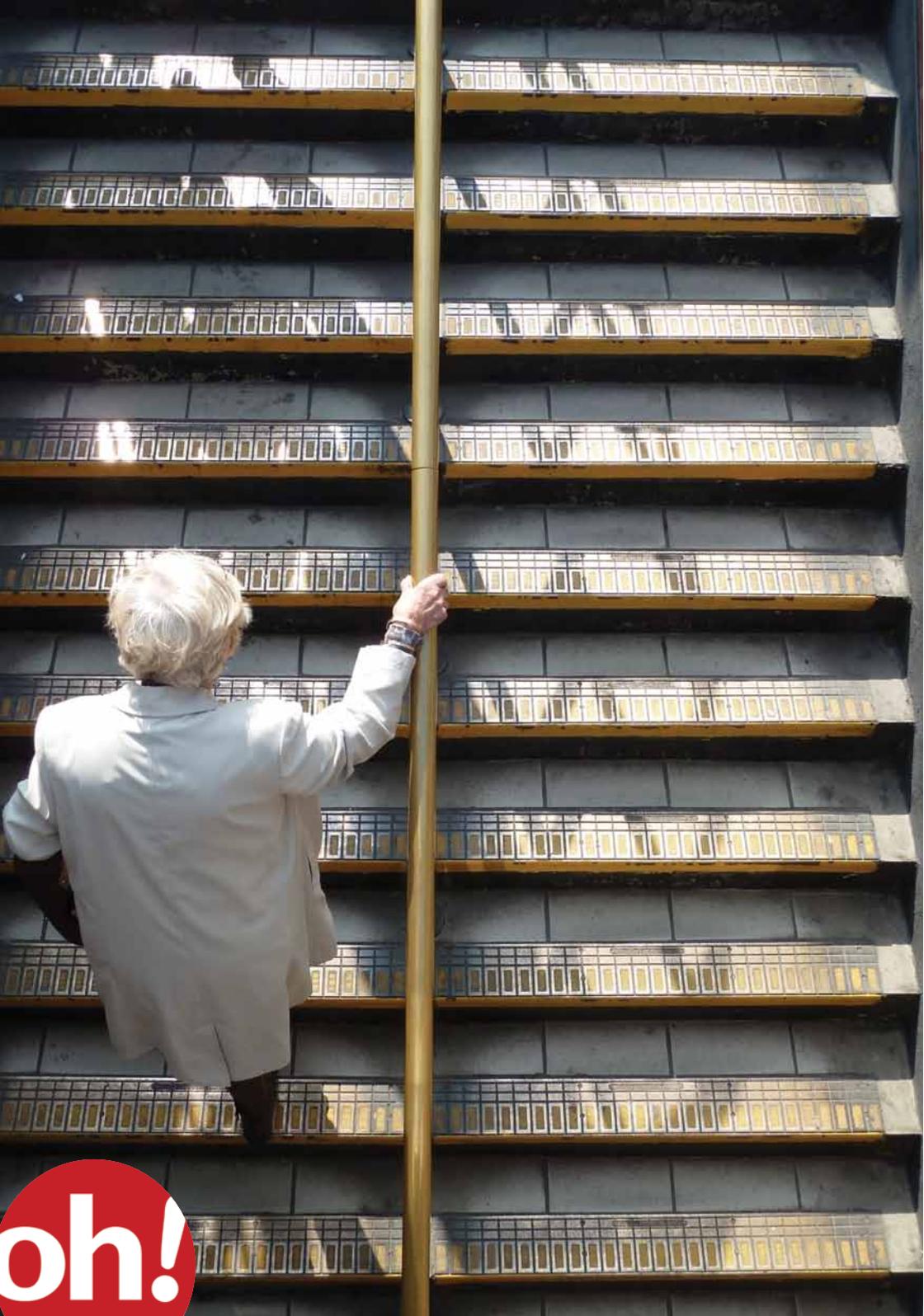
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Other photos by Liz Baume and Graham Barker.



oh!