





EC1 ECHO

AUG/SEP 2020 • N°.5 FREE

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Credit Peter Neill

Crafty crooner

A new craft brewery in Clerkenwell has a celebrity backer – singer Rick Astley

● BY OLIVER BENNETT ●

The coronavirus has not been kind to EC1's hospitality industry. Some bars and restaurants may unfortunately have to close.

But there have been openings too – including Mikkeller on Exmouth Market, a Danish craft

brewery. With a gleaming new open brewery at the back, a bar/diner in the front and a cellar space for events it's a growing business that opened during lockdown.

And Mikkeller has another claim to fame: it's backed by pop star Rick Astley. Still busy making music – he had to cut a world tour short earlier this year because of the coronavirus –

Rick spoke to the *EC1 Echo* at the brewpub with his wife and manager Lene.

"Lene is Danish and knew Mikkel Borg Bjergsø, who started the brewery," says Rick. "He told me he was a bit of a fan of mine when he was young." The two conversed, a contact suggested the Exmouth Market site and the idea "just grew".

Rick has now had three beers dedicated to him, including Astley's London Lager, and he is enjoying the whole business. "I'm starting to become a beer aficionado," he says. "I never wanted to be the 'pop star turned publican' type but this is an adventure: always moving and exciting, and in a great area of London with a good community.

It's great to think that someone's making beer on your doorstep."

It's also true, he says, that beer culture has changed. "Beer was once a bit of an old chap's thing and this is a total reversal," says Rick, who grew up drinking Tetley's in his home town of Newton-le-Willows, near Manchester. "Beer is now paired with food which was never the case before. But to be clear: I'm not going to be down here pulling pints. For me it's a side project – but one that's very exciting and gratifying."

To set things off, Rick did a short gig late last year. Then came lockdown, pausing projects and causing a huge hole in the hospitality industry.

"Every city in the world is now going to up against it," says Rick. "The scary thing is that if your business was not in good shape beforehand, it's going to be hard to survive." It will have an effect on London, he says – while the family are west-London based, Rick and Lene's daughter chose to live in Copenhagen and he fears for a loss of new ideas. "Cities like London and areas like Clerkenwell need young energy," he says. "I hope that the bar in this beautiful area will become part of the community. That would make it good for me."

● See profile on Page-5

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N°.5

AUG / SEP 2020

1st August 30th Sept
 Waxing Gibbous Waxing Gibbous
 95% / 0.52 98% / 0.5

EC1 Echo is the area's free community newspaper. We publish bi-monthly and distribute 5,000 free copies each issue – and we will continue to do so during the ongoing public health crisis.

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NEWS |

Streets ahead

The coronavirus has brought anti-car measures forward

Our streets are changing. The pandemic has hastened policies to rid them of cars and encourage walking and cycling. TfL has added extra space to paths in London, giving space to walk while maintaining social distancing – and there are other initiatives afoot that will impact traffic in Clerkenwell.

Islington's PeopleFriendly Streets initiative was announced recently to motivate walking and cycling, help air pollution and enable Islington Council to achieve a net-zero carbon borough by 2030. These streets are designed to allow social distancing by way of bollards, planters and smart cameras, and while residents will be able to access their streets in vehicles, they're designed to cut out 'rat runs'.

Cllr Rowena Champion,

Islington Council's executive member for Environment and Transport, said: "We are working hard to create people-friendly streets, where it is easier and safer for local people to walk and cycle, and where streets are more pleasant for all."

Another Islington initiative moving apace is School Streets, set up in 2018 to reduce traffic outside schools and create safer environments for children. Numbers of School Streets are set to rise to 39 by the end of this year.

Meanwhile, the Greater London Authority, in one of the biggest car-free initiatives

of any city in the world, has announced that main streets including between Old Street and Holborn will be limited to buses, pedestrians and cyclists. London follows Milan and Paris both of which have instituted car-free measures.

As Cllr Champion said, "We therefore welcome the Mayor's announcement that the Old Street to Clerkenwell Road corridor will be prioritised for buses, pedestrians, cyclists and emergency services, creating a more people-friendly environment for local people. Eliminating through traffic on the Old Street and Clerkenwell Road corridor will help to achieve our goal of creating people-friendly streets all over Islington."

Last year Islington announced it would shut Old Street and Clerkenwell Road to through traffic, partly motivated by a series of bicycle accidents.

All change on Old Street

TfL is also working with the City of London Corporation to improve routes between Old Street and Bank, Cannon Street and Holborn to Bank, touching on parts of EC1.

Meanwhile, the Greater London Authority, in one of the biggest car-free initiatives

NEWS IN BRIEF



Action on clean air

Adding to several existing providers, Clerkenwell has seen the trial of London's first free and shared electric bike scheme, with 200 e-bikes across Islington.

The HumanForest bikes offer

20 minutes free – after which it is 12p a minute – calculated as the time that it takes to cycle 5km.

The e-bikes are electric, dockless and zero-emission and don't have an unlocking fee. The GPS e-bikes can reach up to 15mph. "The

transformation towards a more sustainable society has accelerated in recent months and transport is a very real way for Londoners to make a difference," said HumanForest's Caroline Seton.

Visit humanforest.co.uk

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EC1 Echo moves forward



We hope you enjoy this, the fifth issue of the free EC1 Echo. Thanks to the success of our recent crowdfunding campaign, not to mention the invaluable support of our members, advertisers and stakeholders, we're delighted to report that we will be publishing the EC1 Echo for months to come. Thanks to all our friends, old and new, equipped with our colourful tote bag (pictured).

With such changes in our area following lockdown, we are looking at a new environment. Opposite this page we look at the changed traffic priorities that have been hastened by the coronavirus and inside, how the Covid-19 Mutual Aid network will continue. And we've seen some sad losses but also some gains, such as the new microbrewery on Exmouth Market with its part-owner, pop star Rick Astley. And we'll continue to bring news from EC1 – its voluntary groups, projects and campaigns, news and events – as well as providing a platform for local writers and photographers.

Since EC1 Echo is a non-profit publication, all the money we receive is reinvested to help us be the best community newspaper we can. If you've enjoyed this issue do consider joining our membership scheme where you can help EC1 Echo to grow.

"This place is something of a gem in an unassuming part of town"

"It keeps all the charm of being the neighbourhood's best pub"

Quoted from Evening Standard's 50 Best Pubs in London



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Tomato & Basil Soup

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Burrata, Heritage Tomato and Summer Flowers

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House Burger, Bacon, Cheese, Tomato, Gem Lettuce with Chips

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Raspberry Pavlova with Lime Curd & Vanilla Cream

Vegan Chocolate Brownie

English Artisan Cheeses, Chutney & Crackers (+£4)

Think global

Set up to deal with the pandemic's effects, support groups have shone a more general light on local deprivation and vulnerability, writes Bella Saltiel

PROFILE

On a roll

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& BUNHILL**
COVID-19 MUTUAL AID

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To request assistance, or to volunteer to help in the Clerkenwell & Bunhill area, please visit **coronacorps.com**

Or email **clerkenwellmutualaid@gmail.com**
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FEATURE

Last orders no more

Clerkenwell boasts some of London’s finest bars and pubs, with a history going back many centuries – but the effects of Covid-19 have had a dramatic and damaging effect on them

WORDS • CHRIS WALKER

From Ye Olde Mitre in Hatton Garden dating back to 1546, to the Fox and Anchor in Smithfield that opens at 7am to serve the meat workers (it used to open from 4am), to Lenin’s favourite The Crown and Anchor, Clerkenwell pubs have always had a good story to tell. The heyday of the Clerkenwell pub was the late 19th century. An 1885 map shows 23 pubs on St John Street alone. But now many of these institutions face a difficult future. Over the last 20 years, there has been a 35 per cent decrease. And then along comes Covid-19 and this ‘unprecedented’ lockdown. All may not be lost, however. An unexpected and positive outcome of the pandemic has been a resurgence in localism and a sense of communities coming together. It’s too early to make any firm predictions, but this spirit may offer a glimmer of hope to our local pubs. The Sutton Arms on Great Sutton Street has found the support of locals reassuring. This gem of a pub has been run by Mike Duignan, and now his son Jack, for 30 years. Jack has introduced some of the best traditional ales and craft beers around and, part-way through lockdown, started selling them through the corner doorway of the pub. “Most of the office workers have obviously disappeared, but we’ve attracted quite a few new customers who actually live round here, but have never popped in before,” says Mike. “Bizarrely they include quite a few Americans who really

know their craft beer.” Hopefully they’ll keep coming now lockdown is easing, he adds. “What we’d really like is for the office workers to come back into town.” And according to Jack, “A lot of people just want a proper draft pint. And the fact that we’ve been here for our local customers seems to be really appreciated.” When asked about reopening, Jack confessed: “I’m scared, confused but also quite excited.” If there’s one thing tougher than running a pub while observing social distancing, it’s running a pub famous for live entertainment. The Betsey Trotwood on Farringdon Road is such a place. Run by landlord Richard ‘Raz’ Cobbing since 2006, it has developed a unique place in London gig-goers’ hearts. The pub has created a strong sense of community among those who use it and a reputation that has seen it booked for many unusual one-off events. The pub itself is a huge draw for music and comedy fans. Wired for sound on all three floors, it attracts acts from around the world. But indoor live events in a pub hardly lend themselves to social distancing. “My plans at present are to open September 2,” says Raz. “It’s very quiet out there and I can’t see there being much of an office population returning before September. And as we’re unable to put on gigs it leaves us

“What we’d really like is office workers to come back into town”



The Crown before the pandemic Credit Chris Walker



The Crown during the pandemic Credit Chris Walker

looking very quiet for the next month or two.” But such is the loyalty and affection held towards the pub that a Betsey tribute show to raise money to support this iconic venue was held in June. Musician Danny Wilson, who has played the pub numerous times with his bands The Champions of the World and Bennett Wilson Poole has joined with Raz and Patrick to pull together a stellar

line-up of Betsey ‘regulars’ and fans, including the Magic Numbers, Gospelbeach and comedy stars Henning Wehn and John Hegley for an online festival to support the pub. Hundreds of people watched the live-streamed event. “With the help of our dedicated community of gig goers and regulars we sincerely hope to be able to continue tradition and see the Betsey fly again. And the Shepherd Neame brewery has been great,” says Raz. “It’s has played a sterling role in supporting The Betsey in recent years and with the rent cancellation for tenants of its pubs during the lockdown.”

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Bar tab

Publicans face an uphill struggle, says EC1 publican David Lonsdale

When pubs re-opened on 4 July, there was a rush. “After such a long period it was a great rebirth,” says David Lonsdale, landlord of the Sekforde Arms. “But since then we’ve been quieter than normal: about 60 per cent down from last year.” David is not optimistic. “The crunch will come next March when they reinstate business rates,” he says. “By then fewer guests combined with the same amount of rent will kill some pubs.” He believes local authorities should do more to help pubs survive. “For example, pubs should be able to put tables out: even on streets like in Italy. It’s impossible on busy roads but back-streets should be fine. Westminster has permitted pubs to use pavements and parts of streets. “Islington Council organised a Zoom conference for pubs but focused on guidelines, not on survival. They seem to imagine everything will be fine but it’s unlikely office workers will return in numbers and I find older regulars are fearful of returning.”

Property patter

EC1 is still proving to be a hot zone for buyers and renters, says Charles Peerless, director of Winkworth estate agents’

With the move towards home working, we’ve seen a lot of interest in Clerkenwell from people who want a London base for when they are working from their offices a couple of days a week. It has been across all price levels, and stamp duty exemption is good news for everyone - but particularly in the £500,000 and below bracket. Farringdon is a particularly popular spot. With Crossrail, this is going to be one of the best connected places in the capital and it’s the perfect district for the post-lockdown era because you can walk pretty well everywhere – the City, the West End and South Bank. For such a central area it looks good too. Buyers particularly like Clerkenwell’s Georgian streets and garden squares, with Wilmington Square on many people’s wish lists, close to Amwell Street, Exmouth Market and transport links. We’ve just taken on a very smart three-bedroom ground floor and lower ground duplex with a garden in Wilmington Square for £1.4m (pictured), and we’ve just sold a house in the square. Visit www.winkworth.co.uk

Support independent local journalism

What we do

Here at *EC1 Echo* we do things differently. We combine professional journalism with voluntary contributions from people who live and work in the area and create content which is responsive to and reflective of the community.

These are challenging times for print media with many newspapers closing and advertising revenue in decline, but our not-for-profit model offers a new approach to creating local journalism which is inclusive and accountable.

How you can help

As a not-for-profit publication, started by The Peel, a longstanding Clerkenwell charity, we rely on the generous support of our community. We look to our readers, who recognise the value of independent journalism, to help support us.

You can do this by becoming a member either as an individual or as an organisation. See the rewards below and once you’ve decided what package you would like, visit EC1Echo.co.uk/join

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£5 per month upwards: Name in print and online, pin badge, tote bag, paper posted to you every month

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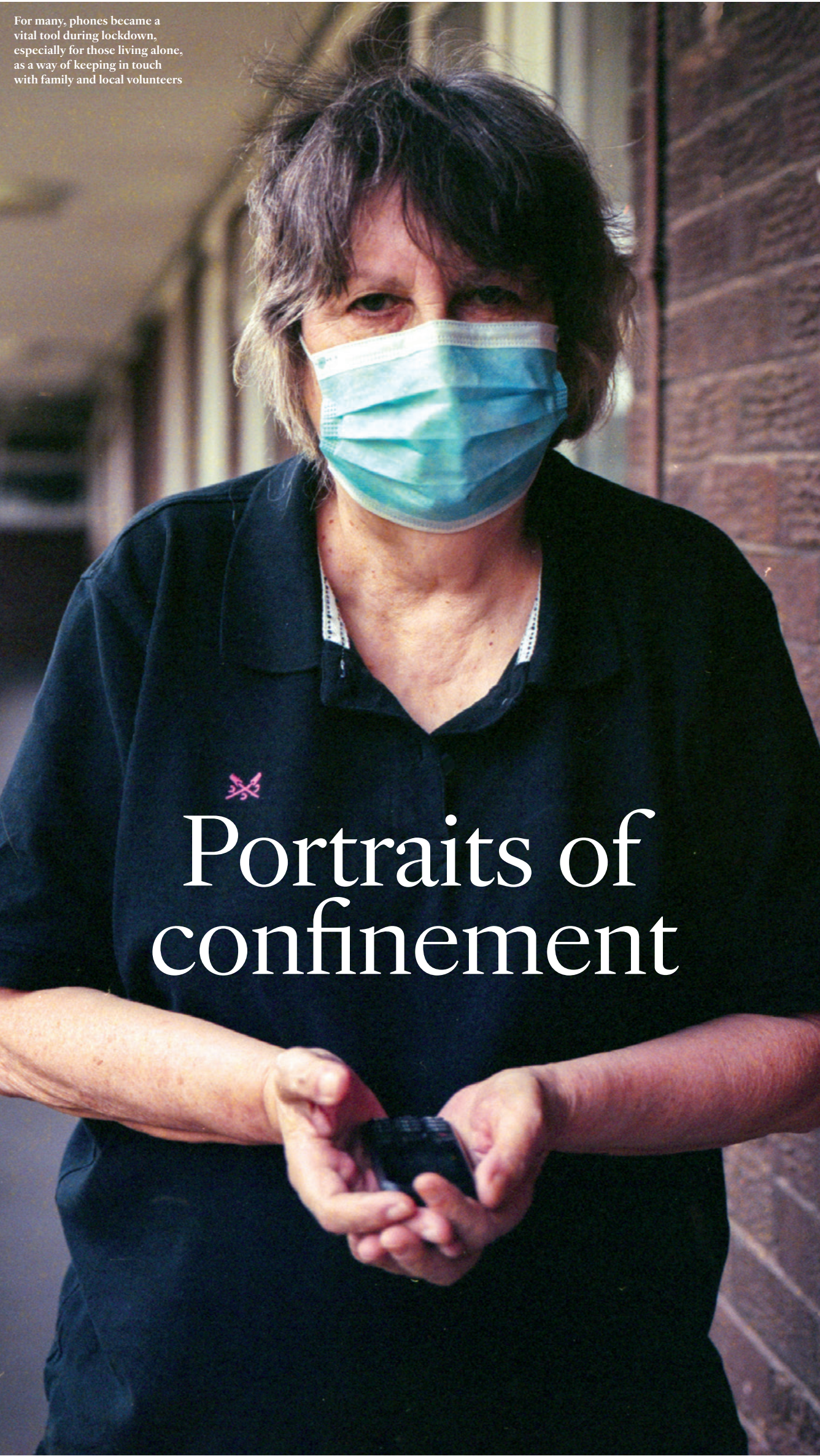
Thank you from the EC1 Echo

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to all our Crowdfund supporters and are delighted to report that we reached £1,915. We truly appreciate all your contributions and would now like to individually thank these readers and supporters:

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Thanks to all of the above for your generous donations and to our new advertisers who took our campaign offer: Culture Mile, The Sekforde Pub and Winkworth. As a result of your help we are now able to continue bringing you the EC1 Echo for the foreseeable future.

Yours sincerely,
Oliver Bennett,
Editor, EC1 Echo

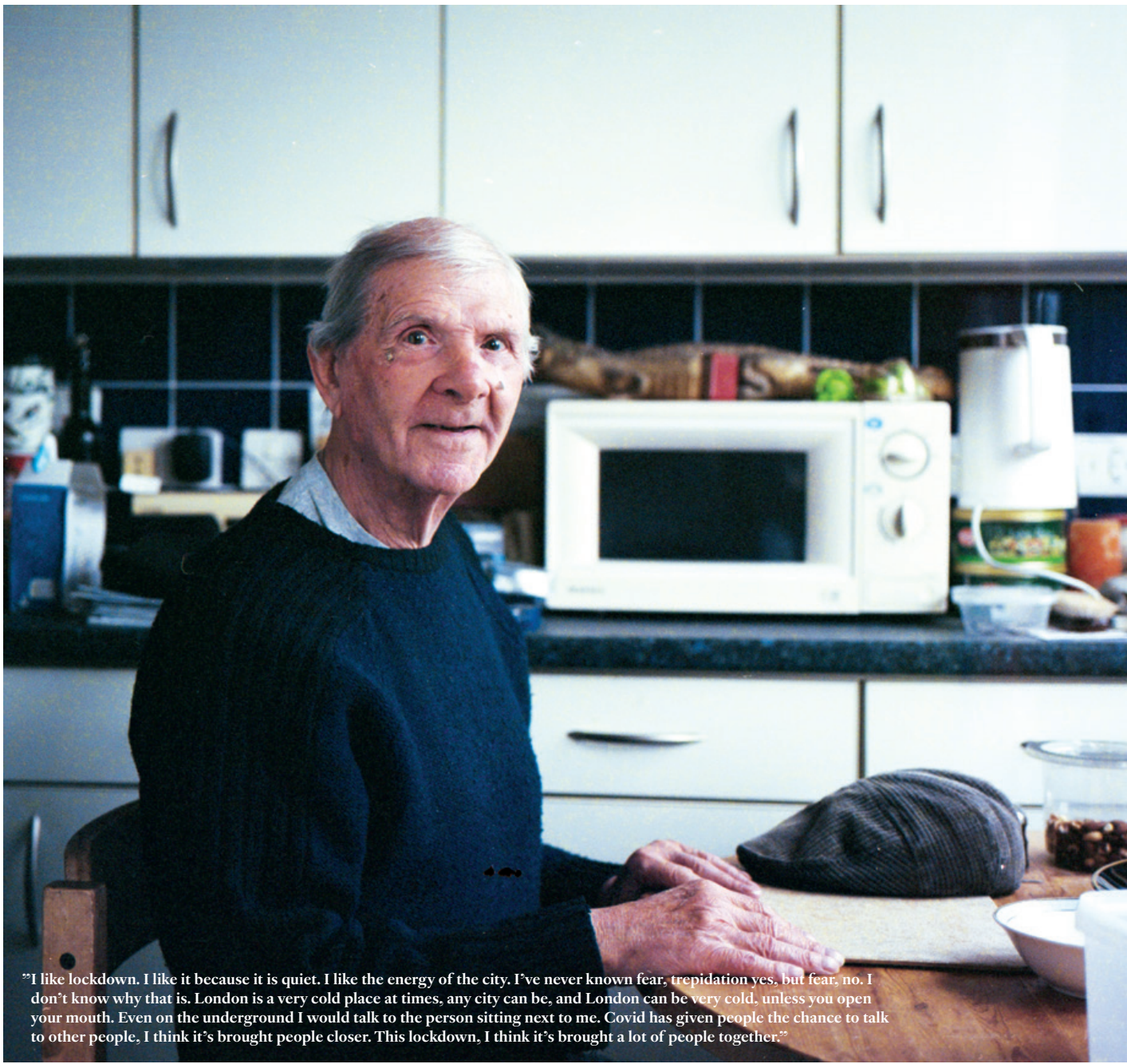


For many, phones became a vital tool during lockdown, especially for those living alone, as a way of keeping in touch with family and local volunteers

Portraits of confinement



"When it first started it was scary, but after a while you get used to it" – Ray
"It was strange going out for the first time, but it was lovely, a lovely day. Makes you appreciate what we've got you know. We've always been independent, we've not ever asked anyone for anything and now..." – Jean



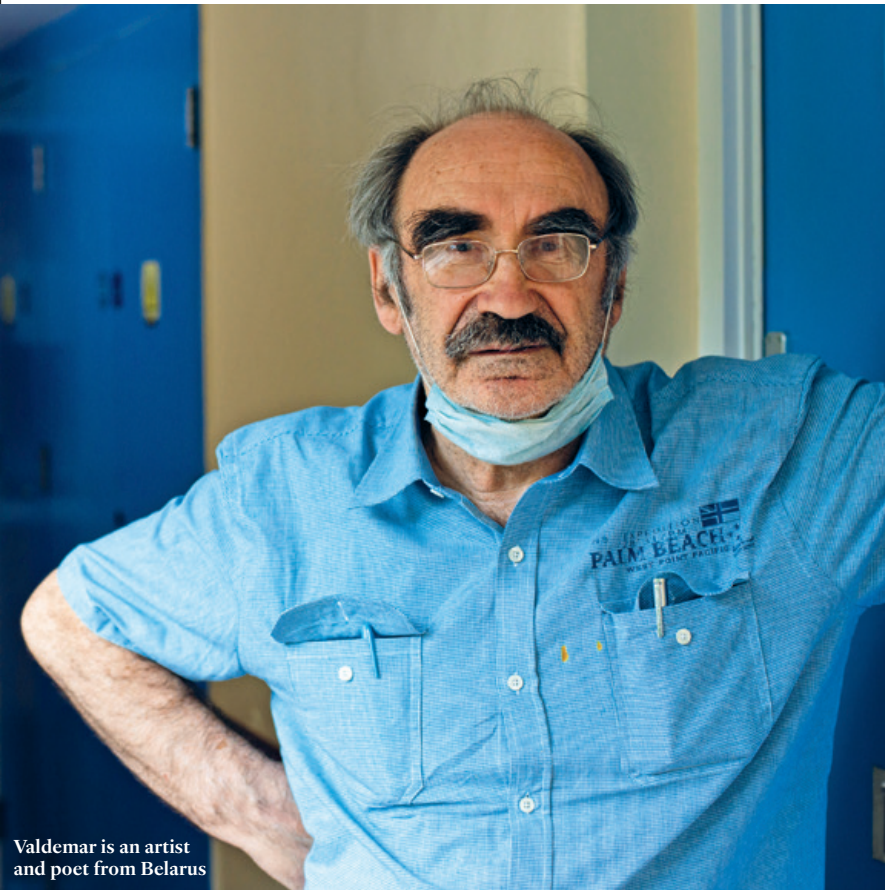
"I like lockdown. I like it because it is quiet. I like the energy of the city. I've never known fear, trepidation yes, but fear, no. I don't know why that is. London is a very cold place at times, any city can be, and London can be very cold, unless you open your mouth. Even on the underground I would talk to the person sitting next to me. Covid has given people the chance to talk to other people, I think it's brought people closer. This lockdown, I think it's brought a lot of people together."

Like many of us, during lockdown Clerkenwell-based photographer and documentary filmmaker Josh Hughes was unable to work as usual.

Instead, he joined the Mutual Aid group and set out on his bike, delivering meals twice a week to vulnerable people in Clerkenwell – and sometimes, taking their portrait to build up a record of this extraordinary time.

"The project is my attempt to create a record of the people and interactions I experienced," says Josh. "As the city shut down, many vulnerable people – often living on their own – found that they suddenly had to rely on the kindness of their local community to get food, prescriptions and other essentials." Using their doorsteps as a backdrop, he has captured the community shielding at this exceptional time.

To see more of Josh's work go to josh-hughes.co.uk and his Instagram account [@jshhughesldn](https://www.instagram.com/jshhughesldn)



Valdemar is an artist and poet from Belarus



Doris lives with her husband Alfred, they've only just started leaving the house, taking a weekly walk, but not going very far



Catch the post

The Postal Museum in Mount Pleasant opened in 2017 to great acclaim but is currently shut due to the pandemic. The EC1 Echo talks about the future with its CEO, Laura Wright

“I want people who live around us to feel it’s a local museum”

Three years ago, as part of the vast building project on the Royal Mail’s Mount Pleasant site, the Postal Museum opened to the west of the site on Gough Street, WC1. A new museum in this part of central London, it was very well received and in a short time built up an annual gate of about 140,000 people.

Now, although the building on the site has continued apace through lockdown, the museum has been closed since March 18 with the vast majority of its 100-strong workforce on furlough.

But it is due to reopen in autumn. Contrary to newspaper reports of its demise, as the Postal Museum’s director Laura Wright says, “We’re planning for early November for reopening but it could be October.”

With other attractions knocked sideways by the pandemic, it has been a tough call. “As an independent museum and educational charity, closing our doors was



Laura Wright and Mail Rail Credit XXXXXX

hard,” says Laura. “It has also been very frustrating as we’re still a new attraction. We have no gardens or outdoor space to speak of as we’re in the centre of London and social distancing is therefore difficult, and without car parking many people have to arrive by public transport, which cuts down on potential visitors.”

In the short term, therefore, Laura accepts that visitor numbers will probably drop, most notably its bedrock audience – domestic visitors who go to the excellent museum as part of a day out in London – a group augmented by many schoolchildren and a hard core of postal enthusiasts. Those international visitors who made it to the museum, most notably Americans, are expected to fall in numbers. When the museum reopens in autumn, it will – like many others – have a one-way system and other social distancing measures, reducing footfall.

Although Laura does not yet know if the Chancellor Richi Sunak’s £1.57bn arts fund will benefit the museum, she fears that well-established sites like the Victoria and Albert Museum and The British Museum will take the lion’s share.

“I think all museums are different and have different experiences of planning for re-opening,” she says. “The Postal Museum has less in common with the British Museum or V&A and more with attractions like the Mary Rose in Portsmouth and the Florence Nightingale Museum in Vauxhall and theatres and performance venues.”

Currently, the museum is funded partly by revenue generated by the archives of

the Post Office and Royal Mail, as well as ticket sales and merchandise. “We get no money from the Government or public funding,” says Laura. “But we’re lucky not to be 100 per cent reliant on one source.”

Part of the neighbourhood
It’s important to Laura and her team that the Postal Museum remains embedded in the area. “I want people who live around us to feel that it is a local museum,” she says. “The schoolchildren in particular really make a local connection and local residents can take advantage of our annual tickets.”

Laura is also making local links with partners such as the Free Word Centre on Farringdon Road and the Bloomsbury Festival. “Writing is in tune with our collection, if you think about it.” She hopes the museum will become part of a local circuit taking in places like Doughty Street’s Dickens House, the John Soane Museum in Holborn, King’s Cross’s Knowledge Quarter and the restaurants and bars of Exmouth Market.

The museum is also keen to emphasise that post is a living history and therefore it has what Laura calls a “contemporary collecting” ethos. “For example, we launched a recent campaign to collect items sent in the post, so we can document the role of post during the pandemic. We’re always thinking about how we can reflect our time.”

The main attraction of The Postal Museum is Mail Rail – the fascinating underground railway that whizzed letters and packages beneath London for many years.

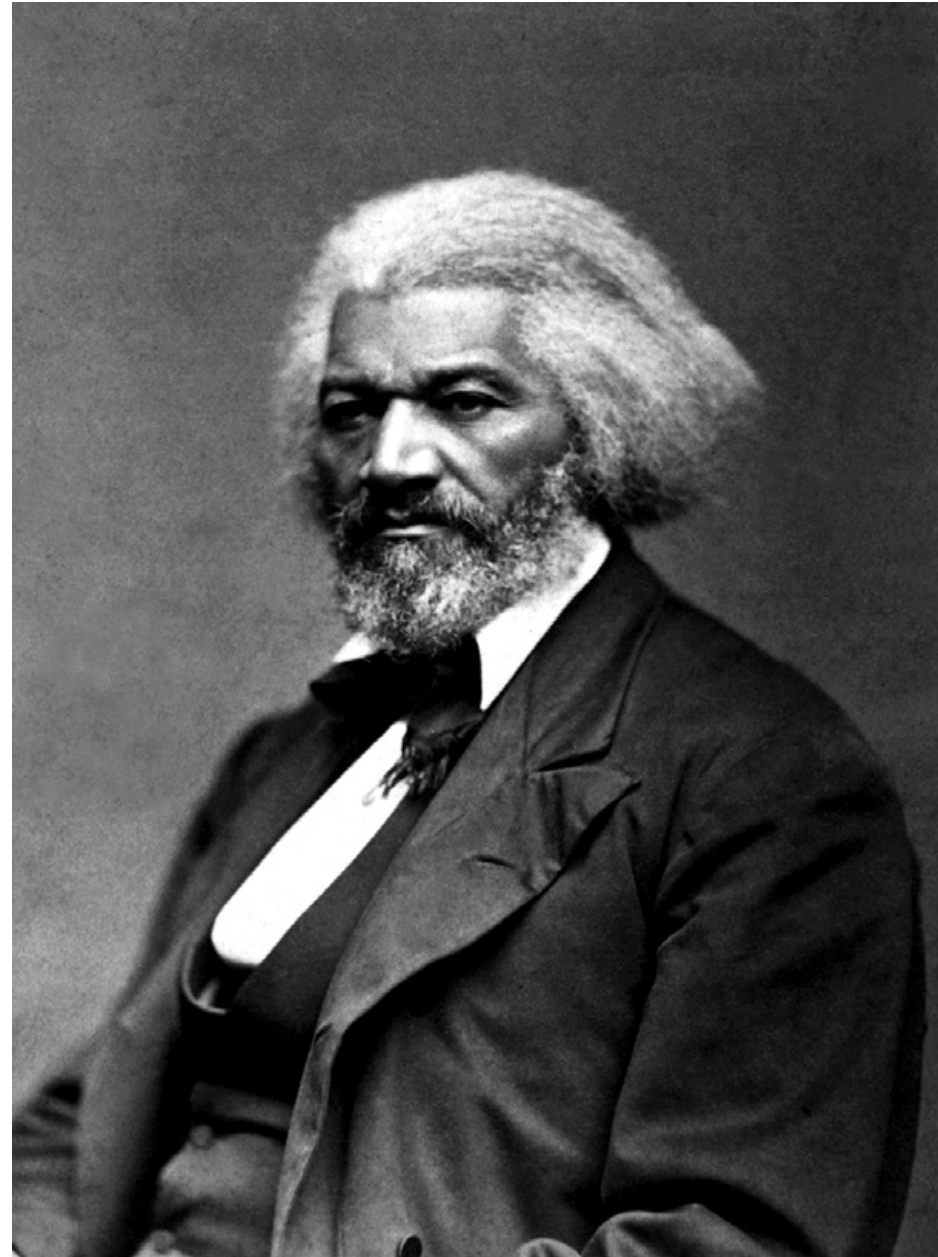
“It has massive interest, but Mail Rail can also be inaccessible to those who are claustrophobic or with mobility issues,” says Laura. “We’re planning an enhanced version of the virtual Mail Rail experience, so that people who can’t access Mail Rail can experience it in even more depth. There is currently a virtual experience as part of a visit but we know there’s an opportunity to improve it.”

The main thing for the museum is to make connections. “It is after all about communication,” says Laura. “It’s interesting that during lockdown there’s been increased interest in letter writing and a surge in parcels sent in the post, as people want to connect to others. We urge people to come to the museum when it reopens – and make your own connections.”

To plan your visit: postalmuseum.org
Mail Rail here: postalmuseum.org/attractions/mail-rail
The collecting project here: postalmuseum.org/wecollect

21 years a slave

A century and a half ago, the great US abolitionist Frederick Douglass spoke up in our area



After the Black Lives Matter protests, in which the statue of slaver Edward Colston was pulled down in Bristol, councils across the country did an audit of their monuments and street names to see if any had slavery connections.

Islington Council set up a working team led by Cllr Asima Shaik to look into whether any such memorials exist and so far has found little to speak of – although City University dropped the name Cass from its business school name for Sir John Cass, the 18th-century merchant who made money from the slave trade.

But the old Finsbury area has another more upbeat claim – that the celebrated US abolitionist Frederick

Douglass gave a speech at the Finsbury Chapel in Moorfields, 154 years ago, on May 12 1846.

Called My Bondage and My Freedom, the chapel’s Minister, John Campbell, described it thus: “Mr Douglass rose amid loud cheers, and said: ‘I feel exceedingly glad of the opportunity now afforded me of presenting the claims of my brethren in bonds in the United States, to so many in London and from various parts of Britain, who

have assembled here on the present occasion... you are aware that slavery is a very bad school for rearing teachers of morality and religion. Twenty-one years of my life have been spent in slavery—personal slavery—surrounded by degrading influences...”

In his long address, Douglass went onto to define slavery itself: “Slavery in the United States is the granting of that power by which one man exercises and enforces a right of property in the body and soul of another,” he said.

“The condition of a slave is simply that of the brute beast. He is a piece of property—a marketable commodity, in the language of the law, to be bought or sold at the will and caprice of the master who claims him to be his property; he is spoken of, thought of, and treated as property... He is as much a piece of property as a horse.”

Douglass’ lacerating declamation took in privilege and the influence of Christianity, alongside terrible details: “If a mother shall teach her children to read, the law in Louisiana proclaims that she may be hanged by the neck,” he said. “If the father attempt to give his son a knowledge of letters, he may be punished by the whip in one instance, and in another be killed, at the discretion of the court.”

After the speech, wrote Campbell, “My blood boiled within me... and thought that he had left behind him three millions of such men.” He went on: “No slaveholding American shall ever my cross my door. No slaveholding or slavery-supporting minister shall ever pollute my pulpit. While I have a tongue to speak, or a hand to write, I will, to the utmost of my power, oppose these slaveholding men. We must have Douglass amongst us to aid in fostering public opinion.”

”He that was covered with chains... is now being covered with glory”

A resolution of thanks was passed to Frederick Douglass, in the somewhat patronising style of the time: “He that was covered with chains, and that is now being covered with glory, and whom we will send back a gentleman.” And now, perhaps, a statue?

HISTORY

When Spa Fields was a mass grave

by Mark Aston

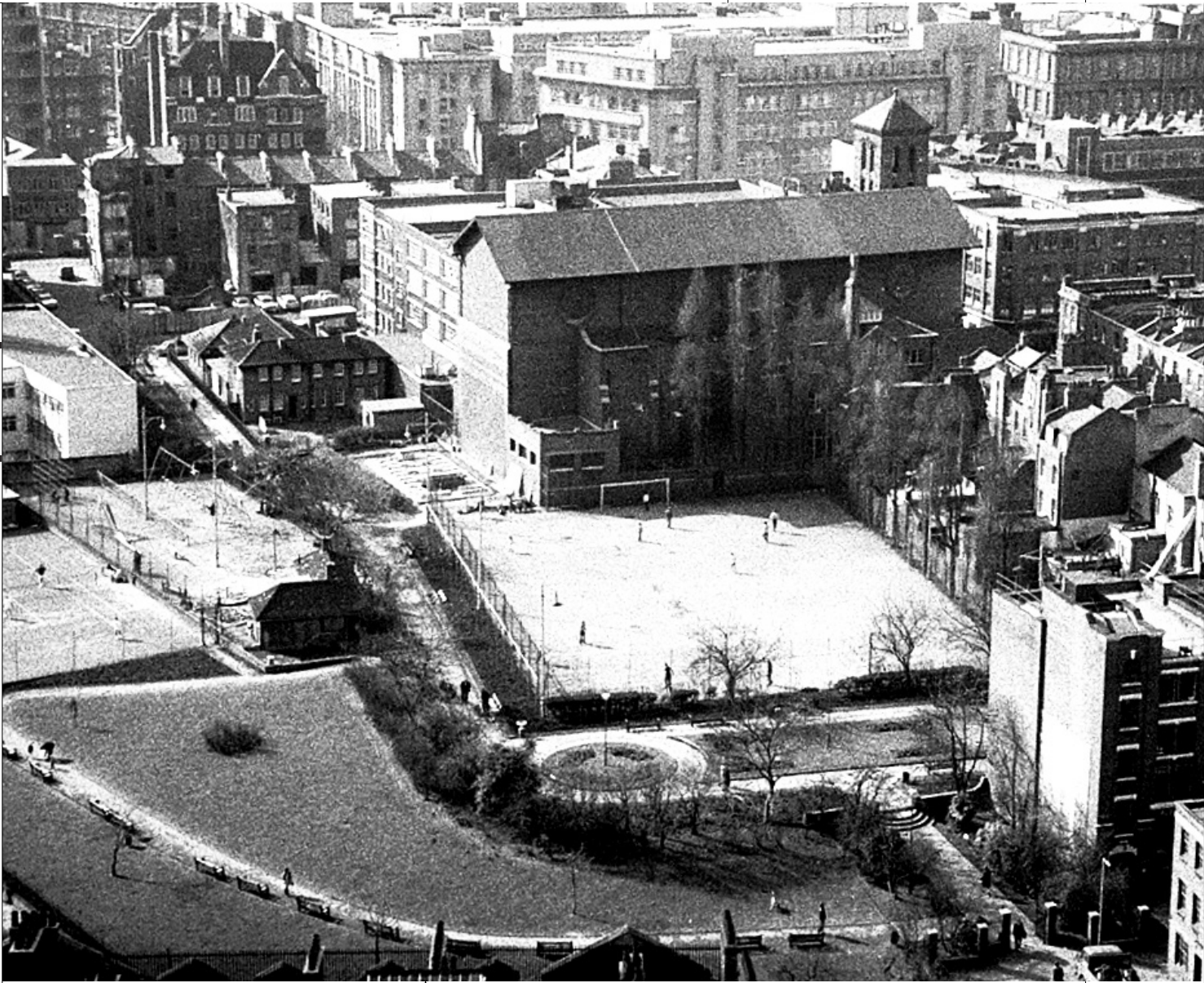
Throughout the spring and summer of 2020, while the nation was adhering to Covid-19 contagion measures, local parks and open spaces became sanctuaries for people escaping the lockdown. This was nowhere truer than EC1, where the majority of residents live in council blocks, multiple-occupied houses and private apartments, with only a lucky few enjoying their own gardens and backyards.

One such oasis of escape was Spa Fields Park, to the south of Exmouth Market, with its undulating ‘ridge and furrow’ hillocks and grapevine pergolas among its many unique features. But while residents enjoyed facilities in the park’s 2.02 acres, how many realised that they were actually relaxing on ground that was once home to one of the capital’s most notorious burial grounds?

Spa Fields took its name from the 17th-Century London Spaw public house, where water from an ancient spring was sold for its medicinal properties today, the Coin Laundry pub at 70 Exmouth Market occupies the site. The fields originally covered 29 acres, parts of which became a location for political meetings and, between c.1787 and 1853, an ‘intramural’ place of burial.

On this disused old pleasure ground, space was provided for 2,772 interments. Speculative burial grounds like this provided a cheaper alternative to overcrowded churchyards and were much used by the poor. However, over the next 50 years in excess of 80,000 burials took place, exceeding its capacity and resulting in a truly horrendous hazard to health and morality. It was calculated that 1,500 burials occurred annually, with up to 36 a day.

Housing built around the site helped create the conditions for the Spa Fields Burial Ground ‘abomination’ and served to shield disreputable activities. Each night, bodies were exhumed and burnt in the ground’s bone house to make room for fresh burials, and this routine carried on for years. In the process



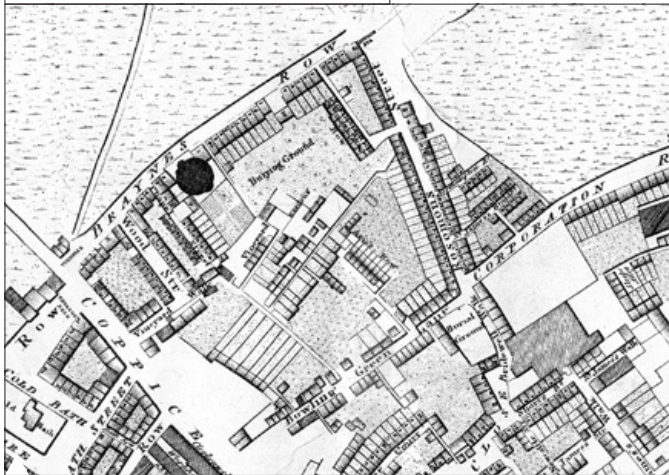
Spa Fields Park, with football pitch, 1960s

bodies were often chopped up to make space, and new graves were shored up with broken coffins and headstones removed.

Local residents became ill from the fumes and began suspecting that the burial ground’s manager, Charles Bird, and the watchman, Stephen

Bishop, were resurrecting bodies and burning them shortly after burial. On occasion, locals thought that the site’s bone house was on fire and

“Local residents became ill from the fumes”



Spa Fields Burial Ground (centre top). Section taken from Richard Horwood’s Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster 1792-99.

forced entry only to find Bird drying out coffin wood.

A report about the infamous activities at Spa Fields was published in *Gatherings from Grave Yards* (1839), in which witness statements were recorded:

“The inhabitants of Exmouth Street, Fletcher Row, Vineyard Gardens and Northampton Row have frequently complained of a ‘tremendous stench’ of a peculiar kind, which say proceeds from the burning of human remains and coffins ... and ... women who declared that ‘the stench was abominable’ adjured him [Bird] to ‘for God’s sake to all he could to get rid of this:’”

Further evidence was cited with the story of a highly respectable local family, and owners of a double family grave at Spa Fields, who opened their plot for a second burial only to find that up to ten coffins had been dumped in the grave. Furthermore, the original, family occupant was ‘doubled up’ and found thrust into the mud at the bottom of the grave. The plot

was also found to have contained a “most sickening compound” or ‘stew’ containing further body parts.

In 1843 a petition containing the signatures of 500 local residents was presented to the House of Commons, calling for action to be taken to stop the “shameful mutilations of the dead.” Eventually the complaints prompted an investigation into the practices. Dr George Walker, founder of the Society for the Abolition of Burials in Towns, took up the case; his later publication *Burial-ground Incendiarism: The Last Fire at the Bone-House in the Spa-Fields Golgotha* (1846) exposed the practices at Spa Fields and still makes for grisly reading.

The Spa Fields Burial Ground case came before the magistrates at which Reuben Room, a gravedigger, spoke of his working practices, “I have been up to my knees in human flesh by jumping on the bodies so as to cram them into the least possible space at the bottom of the graves.” Charles Bird pleaded guilty to one charge and was replaced, but the establishment was not forced to close.

Its closure was opposed as an infringement on liberty and an inconvenience to the poor. Nevertheless, this case was a stepping-stone towards the closure of inner-city graveyards and the introduction of the 1852 Burial Act, which sought the establishment of new cemeteries in London under the control of local burial boards.

A decade after closure, gravestones had been removed and a ‘make-belief garden’ formed but this proved a short-lived affair. The intended adaptation of the burial ground as a public open space finally became possible through the formation of the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association in 1883 and passage of the Disused Burial Grounds Act in 1884. In 1886 the new Spa Fields playground attracted crowds of children, with Charles Booth’s social surveyors recording that it was “a great help to the district.” A drill hall was erected alongside the location’s mortuary,

and the open space was also used as an artillery ground by the Finsbury Rifles.

In 1923 the Northampton Estate and Finsbury Council agreed a scheme for reconstructing the playground as a recreation ground and gardens. This was begun in 1936, with the laying out of flowerbeds and paths with a public shelter to the east, and the provision of conveniences, new swings and a slide to the west, near the then new Finsbury Health Centre (1938). Following clearances in the 1950s the ground was extended up to Northampton Road and Rosoman Street, and the mortuary was replaced with a tennis court.

Spa Fields gardens, as it became, was again refurbished in 2006-07, with new landscaping and structures, including undulating ‘ridge and furrow’ hillocks and grapevine pergolas, designed by Parklife Ltd for Islington Council and the EC1 New Deal for Communities project.

In 2020, and in spite of its dark and nefarious beginnings as Clerkenwell’s Golgotha, Spa Fields remains a place of rest and relaxation. Do, however, spare a thought for our EC1 ancestors who, some two centuries earlier, only wanted the fields to be a haven and a place of final rest for their loved ones in death but were sadly denied this last wish.

FEATURE

Glory of the micro-garden

Lockdown gave some of us the chance to exercise our green fingers, even those with restricted space. Here, local resident Jacqueline Shearman explains how she spent time in lockdown gardening her outdoor terrace which then became a local attraction



Jacqui, above, and her lockdown gardening (right)



Living in the centre of London, hardly anyone has a garden so a balcony or a space to grow things is a gift. I love the wildlife and the comments my little space receives from passers by and the joy it brings me and others. I’m learning all the time and every season my plants surprise me. My one top-tip for other gardeners? Welcome the dead plants too – they look beautiful, try not to pull them out too soon.

I’m chair of Fortune Street Park (near Golden Lane) and our group organises events every year bringing together the local community, promoting social cohesion and reducing isolation. We’re always looking for more volunteers – training is offered by Islington Greenspace. Come and join us.

Jacqui is chair of Friends of Fortune Street Park which organises a free community fun-day each year:
www.fortunestreetpark.com



Getting creative this summer with Culture Mile

SPONSORED CONTENT

Culture Mile is the City of London’s cultural district, stretching from Farringdon to Moorgate. Led by the City of London Corporation, with the Barbican, Guildhall School of Music & Drama, London Symphony Orchestra and the Museum of London, its five core partners work together on creating a vibrant, creative area in the north-west corner of the Square Mile. Usually, this collaboration would result in a summer packed full of public events, from large-scale family festivals for up to 20,000 people, to bespoke events with local residents such as family days and creative workshops. However, in March, it began looking increasingly obvious that summer wasn’t going to take the shape originally planned, so Culture Mile began conversations with its local communities about what was needed to support those around us. As a result, Culture Mile developed programmes and activities that highlighted and promoted everyday creativity, at a time when that was really necessary.

Creating magical and creative, noisy and wild, messy and weird times together

Firstly, Culture Mile developed Play Packs, which help everyone and anyone get creative at home. The Play Packs include suggestions and ideas, fun activity sheets and materials, and are delivered to local food banks and community centres to reach families that were most in need. The colourful activity bundles feature a range of activities from Culture Mile’s core partners – Barbican, Guildhall School of Music & Drama, London Symphony Orchestra, and Museum of London – as well as partners from the City Family Arts Network and Culture Mile Learning. Each pack also contains beautifully designed Playful Prompts that provide suggestions for easy fun ideas that families can do together, either without involving any special equipment or utilising everyday household objects. The Packs, which are produced on a monthly basis, are also available online for download on the Culture Mile website.

A hyper-local broadcast to the world

Radio Local in Culture Mile, created by performance artists Hunt & Darton, was an hour-long show streamed live every lunchtime from Saturday 30 May – Friday 12 June. Importantly it was built with, by and for residents of Golden Lane and Barbican estates



Radio Local in Culture Mile participant Mohammed Baaj, an Aldgate Estate resident © Culture Mile/Odera Okoye

in the City of London. Showcasing Hunt and Darton’s signature deadpan, playful and inclusive approach, the daily broadcasts celebrated everything from the charmingly mundane to the quite extraordinary. The line-up included interviews with residents and businesses within Culture Mile, as well as commissions from artists Scottee, Victoria Melody and guest presenters Bourgeoise and Maurice. Some shows even put the spotlight on dearly loved local legends, including *EC1 Echo*’s very own editor Oliver Bennett. Listen to the best of the broadcasts on the Radio Local in Culture Mile page on Culture Mile’s website.

Revealing the Hidden City

This year Culture Mile also commissioned photographer, Emile Holba, to explore what creativity means, not only within cultural organisations, but across the wide range of sectors that make up the Square Mile. Delving into hidden corners, secret gardens, and subterranean spaces, Holba has created a series of triptychs from 18 organisations across Culture Mile. From global law firms and ancient livery companies to its cultural institutions, big and small, the project captures each company’s unique character and reveals something that may surprise people. The full collection of photographic triptychs can be found as a virtual exhibition on the Culture Mile website.

To explore what Culture Mile’s been up to this summer, visit www.culturemile.london or follow @CultureMileLDN

High praise

Andrea Whittaker
Wilmington Square,
EC1

Very impressed with the wonderful new issue of our local rag. Well done and really nice to get it through the door.

Boundary dispute

Graeme Weston
Laystall Court, WC1

The *Echo* is fantastic. I’m generally not that interested in local papers, but this really does hit the mark. Hope Laystall Court will receive paper copies before too long – even though we’re in WC1.

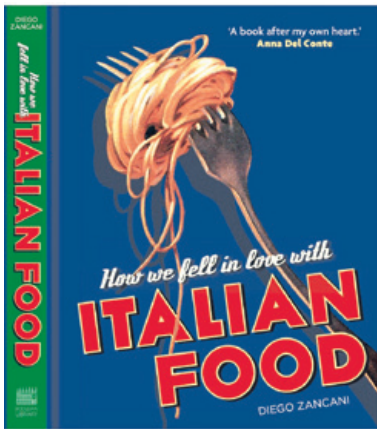
Submit your letter

Got an opinion on something in Clerkenwell? We accept letters of up to 200 words from people and organisations in the area. Email info@EC1Echo.com before the next deadline 16th September.

LITERATURE

Forza foodies

Author Diego Zancani talks to *EC1 Echo* about Clerkenwell’s role in the incredible rise of Italian food



When he arrived in the UK as a young man in 1969, Diego Zancani worked at Reading University and lodged nearby. “My landlady would make meat and two veg,” says Zancani, now an academic at Oxford University. “I was missing home and when asked if I could buy olive oil anywhere and she said ‘go to the chemist’.” Now our shelves are buckling with olive oil, not to mention pasta, risotto rice, ragu and all things Italian, and as *How We Fell In Love With Italian Food* suggests, it occupies a particularly strong place in British affections. And that has much to do with the immigrants that came from Italy to the UK from the 1840s onwards – most notably to Clerkenwell. “As well as being pedlars and organ grinders many of them worked in food and drink,” says Zancani. “They introduced the ‘penny ice’ – an ice cream sold

from a cart – which was a real novelty and reports from the time showed that Londoners complained that it made their ‘teeth hurt’.” Nonetheless, the gelato was born in London and one enterprising Italian, Carlo Gatti, even imported ice by boat from Norway. The denizens of Little Italy also bought new ideas such as ‘cook-shops’, places that would sell produce as well as fast plates of pasta, and ‘breakfast and tea houses for working men’ – as well as carts selling chestnuts and hot potatoes. “Clerkenwell was very important for the early Italian immigrants who went to form ‘Little Italy,’” says Zancani. “They worked very hard to promote ice creams and other products in London.” But in the City of London there were even earlier currents – the Romans. “With ‘stable isotope analysis’ archeologists can now study what people ate from human remains,” says Zancani. “We have found that the Romans in London already imported food including wine (for the wealthy), onions, garlic and olive oil – and amphora have been found in the Thames that carried olives.” Back then, he says our EC1 neighbours in ‘Londinium’ subsisted on ‘puls’ – a millet and barley grain for their 400-year sojourn. Things then went quiet on the Italian front, but by the 18th century the aristocratic ‘grand tourists’ got a taste for Italian food as they traversed Italy in search of art and one, Maryanne, Viscountess of Spencer, wrote of her delight at discovering a “lovely breakfast of pigeon and polenta”. At this time, Italian warehouses cropped up near the Strand and Lord Byron himself recommended a visit for delicacies such as anchovies, capers and dried figs. “He advised that if you wanted a certain sauce, head to the Strand,” says Zancani. By 1861 Italy came together and the architect of unification, Giuseppe Garibaldi was much admired in the UK, further popularising Italian food. As Zancani says, by 1868 one WB Jerrold has written influential *Epicures Year-book and Table Companion*, while by 1892 Maria Gironci’s *Recipes from Italy* introduced the exotic macaroni to the British table. Further London milestones included the opening of Trattoria Terrazza in Romilly Street, Soho in 1959 – so informal you could settle your bill on payday – and Pizza Express, which started in 1965. Ordinary households still didn’t really have Italian food until the late 1970s, but now, as Zancani says, “Everyone from Jamie Oliver and Nigella Lawson to the Hairy Bikers have done Italian books, and it is completely mainstream.” And to prove his point in today’s Clerkenwell going for a pizza or pasta is far more common than say, fish and chips.

‘How We Fell In Love With Italian Food’ by Diego Zancani (Bodleian Libraries, £25)



Mike Franks

The pandemic offers us the chance for a new social settlement, argues long-term Clerkenwell resident Mike Franks

Half a century ago I joined the Greater London Council’s Covent Garden Team as an architect-planner from Liverpool. Five years later I borrowed £1,000 and negotiated a deal for the tail-end of a lease to a 65,000sq ft former School Board Repository and embarked on a venture for which I had no previous experience whatsoever. This became the 140 units of Clerkenwell Workshops: a rich mixture of artisan craftsmen and women that gained awards and taught us lessons. Clerkenwell in 1975 was an unknown, semi-derelict, degraded victim of planning blight and failed property speculation. Most of the historic core was blighted by the 1944 Abercrombie Plan for London and Clerkenwell’s uncertainties continued with the 1973-5 property collapses fed by banks, the oil crisis and the three-day week. By the early 1980s, Thatcherism was in full swing and the recession continued the blight. Market forces and Islington Council’s blindness cleared out an earlier Clerkenwell, allowing two new groups to emerge in the 1990s: expensive ‘loft living’ and the so-called ‘creative industries’. In the process, I lost Clerkenwell Workshops together with the Finsbury Business Centre, developed in 1980, to takeovers. My failure to hold on to them is a testament to my inexperience, the market’s ruthlessness and a lack of support from the local authority. But my experience with the Workshops is proof that a crisis can reveal an opportunity. My social enterprise programme the Clerkenwell Commons could not have started had the big players not been in disarray. Perhaps it was too early to demonstrate the partnership potential of social activists but the uncertainties after this pandemic offer tremendous scope for new initiatives. We also know that we can never go back to the unsustainable ways that have polarised rich and poor. Central government has denied local government its proper role in this crisis. It will be even worse if local government fails to forge effective partnerships with initiatives such as the Peel’s Connecting Communities, my own Clerkenwell Commons programme and many others. Coming out of this pandemic, there are a host of workable ideas that can make a difference and hopefully point the way to a fairer, greener, more inclusive and sustainable future for one of London’s most remarkable districts.

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SALES



Myddelton Square, EC1
£1,200,000

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Wilmington Square, WC1
£2,500,000

This imposing three / four-bedroom Georgian freehold property is quietly situated on the preferred pedestrianised North side of the Square.



Lloyds Row, EC1
£750,000

A smart two bedroom apartment in the heart of Clerkenwell just off St John Street. Lloyds Row is within walking distance of Angel and Exmouth Market.



Kings Cross Road, WC1
£550,000

A bright one bedroom flat arranged on the first floor of a converted Georgian building. With large, impressive double glazed sash windows off the open plan kitchen reception, this quiet property has a large tiled bathroom and good size double bedroom at the rear.

LETS



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Clerkenwell Road, EC1
£920PW / £3,986.66 PCM

A superb three bedroom apartment located on the second floor of a warehouse conversion in the heart of Clerkenwell available furnished or unfurnished.

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