

# EC1 ECHO

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Author Anthony Horowitz in Clerkenwell

## Riding out the storm

The novelist Anthony Horowitz OBE tells the *EC1 Echo* about his life in Clerkenwell, what he did during lockdown and how the area inspires his fiction

● BY OLIVER BENNETT ●

“I’ve lived in Clerkenwell for 13 years, in a converted warehouse in Cowcross Street. I moved here from Crouch End for reasons that I still appreciate today. Its centrality, its

ambience, and the way that it’s so very different from its neighbours. Clerkenwell doesn’t have the commercial brashness of the City, or the slight tawdriness of the West End.

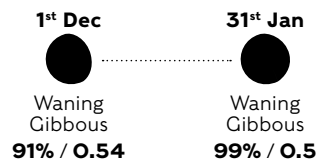
“You can walk to so many places from here. During the first lockdown, once

we were allowed out, I went on long and amazing walks with my dog, down to Blackfriars Bridge, through the City and all the way to Greenwich and the Thames Barrier. It made me feel that although it’s central, Clerkenwell never seems that far from the country.

“Although there are many modern developments here, Clerkenwell is still infused with a 19th century atmosphere. I’m a great fan of Dickens and the area is full of his echoes. Mr Jaggers in *Great Expectations* lived here.

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*EC1 Echo* is the area’s free community newspaper. We publish bi-monthly and distribute 7,500 free copies of each issue – and we will continue to do so during the ongoing public health crisis.

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NEWS



# Fear on the buses

## In the lockdown and beyond bus drivers want greater protection

BY JULIA GREGORY,  
LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

“People are saying ‘if I die, I die’, a bus driver revealed as he shared concerns about what could happen if we go through a bad winter dominated by coronavirus. The driver who lives and works in London said some of his colleagues are now fatalistic about Covid-19. He agreed to talk to the Local Democracy Reporting Service but asked to stay anonymous. He explained that “bus drivers never have a future, a career. Some people just do it to pay their bills. They are really down”. And he said many drivers do not have family – partly due to the hours and the stress of their work – which can lead to marriage breakups. “My biggest worry this winter is that potentially we might see double deaths,” he said. His comments come after

a challenging spring which saw 45 transport workers in London die from coronavirus, including 30 bus drivers, many from black and ethnic minority backgrounds, some of them with underlying health conditions which made them more vulnerable to the virus. It saw drivers campaigning for more safety measures, including boarding at the back or middle of the bus only, instead of at the front near the driver, protective screens round the driver’s cab and mandatory use of face masks. The measures were brought in during the spring. Transport for London (TfL) said researchers from University College London found that safety improvements made to screens made it possible to return to front-door boarding as they reduced the risk of drivers contracting coronavirus from passengers. The driver – who did not wish to be named – said: “We’ve had

loads of problems with over-filled buses and people do not obey the maximum limits. It should not be for drivers to enforce it. Some press a button on the radio to inform the customers because it does cause conflict.” As Londoners brace themselves to see if coronavirus rates rise again, the driver said he would like to see more safety measures. He called for: – Temperature checks when staff clock in at every depot – Shielding vulnerable staff on full pay – Sanitisers on every bus to protect customers and staff He claims that some transport staff are “not normally adhering to social distancing at bus depots, and are even shaking hands. “I think people think it’s going away” he said, some measures to encourage people into the city have helped, such as dedicated bus routes which have

“improved traffic flows”. However he fears that part of a bailout for cash-strapped Transport for London could see job cuts. TfL has lost millions as passengers stayed away during the height of the pandemic and bus capacity has still been limited. It was given a £1.6bn bailout in May and is now asking the government for a further £5.7bn to help it survive the next 18 months. Claire Mann, TfL’s director of bus operations, said: “We have been devastated by the tragic deaths of our colleagues during this pandemic and protecting staff continues to be our top priority. We commissioned an independent study from University College London so we could urgently understand what steps we can take to further reduce the risk of others contracting coronavirus while at work.” She said bus companies are signed up to a series of safety measures to prepare for any second wave. They include cleaning, inspections if concerns are raised and using long-lasting anti-viral cleaning fluid. She said drivers are encouraged to report symptoms and reminded people about the steps to follow to stay safe, such as social distancing at depots and mess rooms, and she added that hand sanitiser and face coverings are “readily available”. TfL also looked at the effectiveness of temperature testing to prevent the spread of coronavirus amongst bus drivers and said it is “allowing individual bus operators to decide on whether to introduce the measure, as the evidence is mixed”. Senior TfL staff are also visiting depots to inspect mess rooms and toilets to ensure they are safe. And Ms Mann added: “Enhanced sick pay is available for those suffering from coronavirus symptoms or having to self-isolate for up to 14 days because someone in their household has symptoms. This means drivers can take the necessary time off without fear of financial implications.” She said: “Those who were previously shielding and considered too vulnerable to work are currently covered by the government’s job retention scheme, and we are working with bus operators to ensure that when this comes to an end, they are able to continue to minimise risk.”

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NEWS

Restaurant woes continue

*The hospitality industry, which brings so much flavour to Clerkenwell, has truly suffered this year. Bella Saltiel reports from the front line*

St John has been a Smithfield staple since 1994, serving a repertoire of old-school British gastronomy. But like most venues across the country, it was forced to close its doors for the second time last month with new lockdown restrictions forcing guests to stay at home once again. “The effect of the pandemic is both profound and damaging,” says Trevor Gulliver, co-founder and CEO of the St John Group. “And it still has a way to run.” The continuing pandemic is having a catastrophic effect on the hospitality industry and has been uniquely affected by the ‘stay at home’ measures since, hospitality venues thrive when they are crowded. Stay-at-home workers can turn kitchens to makeshift offices but service workers have mostly been put onto the government’s pay-roll through the extended job retention scheme.

At its peak from March-July, 85 per cent of hospitality workers in the UK were on furlough and the Office of National Statistics recorded “muted growth” in many service venues even after the easing of lockdown measures in summer. Unable to work, the pandemic has as Gulliver puts it, “turned our life and work upside down. It will take time, effort and more to make it through”.

Venues already took a big hit this autumn with the implementation of a curfew that forced bars and restaurants to close at ten. Several high-profile hospitality professionals contested the measures, arguing that the government was preventing them from working even after creating safe environments, including Gulliver’s business partner, Fergus Henderson, who attended one of the hospitality professionals protests in Westminster. The protest, organised by the campaign Cancel The Curfew called for “an immediate government review of the 10pm curfew that’s crippling our venues, our jobs and our economy”.

Other venues in EC1 also supported the campaign on social

media. Bartenders at Tayer+Elementary on Old Street protested on Instagram with the caption ‘CANCEL THE CURFEW. This is not sustainable...#Cancelthecurfew.’ “The biggest issue with the curfew is that it wasn’t based on scientific evidence and undermined licensing objectives,” said Alex Kratena, the owner of Tayer+Elementary. “The curfew was a killer for hospitality businesses, and we’re now losing less money by being entirely closed since the extension of furlough has been announced. “While furlough is helping those who can benefit from it, it doesn’t stop viable businesses from going under. Hospitality venues are among the safest places to be and when the lockdown is over government must cancel the curfew and allow households to mix in controlled and

*“The pandemic has turned our life upside down”*

safe environments such as licensed premises. Otherwise, we will see the biggest wave of unemployment and tragic insolvency of an entire industry that in normal conditions is perfectly viable.”

Mike Belben, the owner of the Eagle gastropub on Farringdon Road, thinks the six-person booking rule also did a lot of damage. “We are in the business of making social contact and it’s the antithesis of everything the government is telling you do,” said Belben. “I personally feel that there’s no solution. Things will have to change and it won’t be much fun”. Looking at a future where grant funding has dried up and social distancing measures mean venues are running at less than 50 per cent capacity is, he says, “really scary”.

Solutions could come, says Michael Sagar, owner of Fare restaurant on Old Street, with realistic “distancing measures the same across different industries –ie,

the same in restaurants as in the supermarket”. On the survival of EC1’s drinking and dining culture he says, “I think the most important for businesses in our neighbourhood are turnover-based rents for the next 12 months which would allow businesses to survive”. Even with the lifting of a lockdown this period of isolation has changed the way we interact with one another. Technology, says Belben, has already driven a wedge between people. As a business owner, he has noticed the way that people are becoming more reclusive, sitting in groups with their phones out, avoiding each other’s eyes. In this way Covid-19 could be a tipping point that sends a population into deeper seclusion. Despite the difficulties the industry is facing, Gulliver is still optimistic. “We’ve been through a few ups and downs over the years so there’s some resolve and some patience,” he says. “The restaurant has been happily busy – subject to the restrictions – when we are open with lots of regular faces. We all miss the bar

which is now part of the extended restaurant but the kitchen is in fine form and meanwhile, at least lots of folk have been buying our wines online during lockdowns, which is a happy thing.”

Plenty of other restaurants and bars are also finding innovative ways to make money by selling their products online, including Tayer+Elementry which is selling bottled cocktails through their remote “Off Licence”.

But turning a profit through sales is not the main motivation of the industry. As Belben says, “We put our heart and soul into making an atmosphere, creating delicious food and drinks and it’s very difficult to know what’s going to happen”.

If that atmosphere is tightly monitored there will be little space for those unpredictable moments that are the life force of the city – particularly here in EC1, an area that thrives on its busy street markets, pubs, restaurants and entertainment venues.

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Continued from Page-1

Parts of Bleak House were set here. Fagin plied his trade in Saffron Hill and the Bleeding Heart Yard – where I have coffee sometimes. Of course, the Dickens House Museum isn’t far [Doughty Street, WC1]. You can really feel the history in the cobbled streets and in squares that still have their old gas lamps. William Wallace was horribly executed here. Huge plague pits were constructed. I love walking in the three little parks close to my home, although it saddens me that recently the Council seems to have become more hostile to dog owners.

“I have used Clerkenwell as a location in quite a few of my novels including Moriarty, my second Sherlock Holmes adventure. I had hoped to go underneath Smithfield to research it: there’s a network of passages and cold rooms that stretch all way through to Snow Hill, the site of a forgotten underground station. Unfortunately, I was refused entry on health and safety grounds. I featured Clerkenwell in the fifth book of my Power of Five series: Oblivion. Atticus Pünd, the detective in my new novel, *Moonflower Murders*, lives just round the corner from me.

*“Clerkenwell is on the cusp of great change”*

“I’m aware that Clerkenwell is on the cusp of great change. We have the arrival of Crossrail and the loss of Smithfield Market, which will be moving out soon. I have mixed thoughts about that. I love its throwback feel but at the same time, I accept that it’s difficult to keep a market like this going in the centre of a big city. I’ll miss it and worry that Smithfield might turn into another Covent Garden. Clerkenwell has never really been a retail area. Does London really need another one?

“I actually live on Cowcross Street, where cows really did cross before they were sold. Sometimes I go for walks at one or two o’clock in the morning and see all the work going on, the lorries arriving, the butchers in their white coats, the carcasses hanging on hooks; it’s amazing to watch. Although it’s an anomaly in this day and age, I’ll miss it.

“I have the same feeling about many of the buildings. The Farmiloe Building in St John’s Street was a true survivor and it was used for many films from Batman to Sherlock Holmes. Now it’s been turned into flats.

“Covid has wreaked its damage too. I am sad when local businesses close and particularly miss what was my favourite restaurant, Foxlow. But I have to look on the bright side. If all these changes mean that Clerkenwell becomes more residential again, a 19th-century village inside a modern city, then not all will have been lost.”

Anthony Horowitz’s latest book ‘Moonflower Murders’ is out now (Penguin Random House)

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Katie Clare

# Constructive criticism

Local filmmaker Graeme Weston has made a film about Katie Clare who, faced with breast cancer surgery for took the decision to ‘go flat’

Clerkenwell photographer and filmmaker Graeme Weston has made a short film – and it’s been the highlight of a British film festival. Going Flat is the story of Katie Clare, who at 37 learned she had a BRCA gene mutation, which gave her a significant probability that she would develop breast cancer, as her mother had before her. Although a tough decision, Katie opted to have a prophylactic double-mastectomy without breast reconstruction, deciding to go ‘flat’ – hence the title of Graeme’s film. It seems a reasonable choice to make, but Katie found herself pitted against the advice of her early medical team. “Although breast reconstruction involves more work, I found that it’s actually quite hard to go flat,” says nutritionist Katie, now 41. “Most medics assume you want reconstruction and the system is set up for it. It has become a staple, and although the operation is shorter without reconstruction, it’s much easier to say ‘yes’”

Although Katie was adamant this was the option she wanted, she found that early in the process she had to change surgeons to one more sympathetic to her preferred option, which goes by the name of ‘aesthetic flat closure’. Having been through the procedure, Katie says it she made the right choice, and she has no regrets. “After research and lots of thinking about it I decided I didn’t want silicon implants,” she explains. “Not only are implants foreign bodies, but they need replacing every ten years or so and that means

further surgery.” While some kinds of reconstruction can be done by taking tissue from the patient’s own body, this too carries risks, and Katie came to her decision with few reservations. While feedback from friends and colleagues was supportive, it is often presented that the procedure might detract from her feeling of “femininity”. But Katie didn’t recognise that at all: “I know that I’m a woman, mastectomy or not.” Also, as she has always been slender, her silhouette didn’t change that much, or her need to change her wardrobe. “And

if I want to wear a prosthesis, I can – and sometimes do.” While the initial medical tide ran against her choice, Katie found support groups online that understood and respected her decision. “These groups confirmed to me that going flat was a legitimate and logical path to take,” says Katie, who celebrated the end of surgery in a ‘farewell to my breast’ party with a few close friends at a favourite restaurant – part of a moving sequence in the film. Graeme, who knew Katie from a local meditation group, was compelled to tell her story. With fellow filmmaker Julian Civiero he shot the short film, which follows Katie’s journey from before the surgery to afterwards – following her progress right through hospital, where she received excellent care. “It was a remarkable story and I was impressed at how matter-of-fact Katie was about the decision,” says Graeme. “I hope the film stands as a testament to her power and sense of purpose.”



A scene from ‘Going Flat’

‘Going Flat’ debuted at the Derby Film Festival in November and is now seeking a showing in EC1

## With exercise Dora Thornton

Walk through Spa Fields, just off Exmouth Market, in the early morning and you are likely to see Vicky with her group of five middle-aged locals exercising together – often accompanied by Berry, Vicky’s black Labrador. The group has been training together for five years now – me and my husband are the newcomers – and it meets in all conditions, throughout the year. It is of course Covid-compliant and socially distanced and always meets outdoors. During lockdown, classes continue on Zoom. But meeting outside (when regulations allow) is a big thing for everyone. “Being out of doors is good for your immune system,” says Vicky. “It’s good for your mental health and it is very grounding. We all feel a little smug for being outside in all weathers. We are with nature for at least an hour, doing something which is good for us and it’s a special time for each

## one of the few things we’re allowed to do outside, talks to Clerkenwell personal trainer Vicky Neal



of us and for the group.” Vicky says that regular exercise outdoors keeps you attuned to nature and the changing seasons and bird song. The group often meets before dawn, so you notice the light and the changing skies and foliage – particularly valuable during the current pandemic. Turning up regularly makes the group tick. “You come because you want to spend an hour with your friends,” she says. “It is much more motivating than exercising alone. Everyone has a bit of a laugh, a chat and we have coffee together afterwards in Exmouth Market.” Vicky started working as a personal trainer with an advanced qualification in weight loss six years ago. She came to it gradually, having started as an aerialist, doing double trapeze acts as a circus artist. Then she had her three children, Ford, Paola and Max. As a single mother, she could only start going to the gym once they were at primary school. She qualified in holistic massage and reflexology before qualifying as a personal trainer. She is also a dedicated sports climber, appreciating

climbing’s meditative quality: “You’re in the moment, working out how to do the moves.” What she would most like to do now, as a qualified Pilates instructor, is to develop a local Pilates class of around ten people, and she hopes to find the right kind of indoor space. For now she will keep training in Spa Green. “It is the perfect community park,” she says. “People who are not coming here and using it are missing out.” Vicky is, however, the only personal trainer who keeps going throughout the winter. Not everyone likes exercising in the rain and the cold, but Vicky is clear about what they are missing: “If you flick the switch it is a joy to feel the rain on your face and you feel you have lived a bit; you’ve put yourself out in a tiny way and you’ve challenged yourself. You have made a choice to embrace the weather and the conditions and the training. There is a joy to that, and a feeling of accomplishment. Outdoor exercise brings reality to our lives.”

Please check the latest government advice on group exercise. If you'd like to make up an exercise group or join a group, or do Pilates one-to-one or with a few friends, please contact Vicky, 07944 543643



George Baddeley

## Dark fantastic

Local resident and tour guide George Baddeley weighs in against the light polluters

We really are living through dark times, aren’t we? Well, metaphorically perhaps, but certainly not literally. When Genesis quotes God as saying, “Let there be light, and there was light”, I very much doubt it was divinely determined that local residents should be exposed to intensive LED light pollution throughout the night. If you strolled down Old Street 100 years ago on a winter’s evening, you’d have seen street lights merely glowing in the dark, and unlit shops and commercial buildings. Today, light pollution is endemic, from street lamps to office blocks and modern housing developments. Our local housing estate is currently in dispute with Islington Council over new intensely bright lighting that’s been installed. The idea is that extremely powerful LED lights will deter “ne’er-do-wells”, keeping us all safe and sound. If security is their objective, all that’s missing is a barbed wire fence, watch towers and Alsatian-wielding prison guards to ensure we never escape. In fact, there’s no clear scientific evidence to prove that increased outdoor lighting deters crime. A 2015 study by the “Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health” covering 62 local authorities found that lighting had no effect on either crime or traffic accidents, even when completely turned off. An apocryphal legend here is that a local drug dealer used to regularly park his BMW directly under an old bright orange light on the estate. Presumably it was easier to conduct business. There’s another reason to dim the lights. New white LED lights create a very broad spectrum light, like sunlight, and have a bad effect on the natural environment. Bird and insect life cycles become confused, and trees and plants flower earlier in spring. Bright lighting may be perfect for an evening’s football at my football club, as it helps to know where the ball is, but more sympathetic lighting saves money and decreases electricity emissions. Let’s try and dim the lights. George Baddeley can be found at: [islingtonguidedwalks.com](http://islingtonguidedwalks.com)

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# SUSPENDED



St. John Bread and Wine *Light from above*

22" x 16"

“It’s a real joy painting Londoners and their interactions”



Clerkenwell *Summer Morning II*

16" x 18"



Exmouth Market *Summer Nights*

20" x 24"

Angel-based artist Nick Botting has long had a love affair with Clerkenwell, as can be detected in these recent paintings of the area. “I’ve been coming to these places a long time to watch the world go by,” says Nick, who has regular exhibitions at the Portland Gallery in St James’s. “I love to paint nightfall in particular – and the pubs and restaurants of ECI are so atmospheric, particularly at that point where day becomes night. It’s very special and as people begin to socialise, it looks every bit as romantic as Paris.”

For these paintings, Nick set up his easel on Exmouth Market and Clerkenwell Green, painting the Church of the Holy Redeemer, Moro, the Crown pub and St John. In each of those, he sketched while people went about their business and, he says, hardly noticed him. His method is to paint *en plein air* which has seen him set up his easel from Australia to South Africa, Norfolk to London. Alongside many portraits he has painted other London institutions from Lord’s Cricket Museum to Chelsea Football Club – all with the same sense of spontaneity, movement and life as it occurs. His picture of Moro, for example, was painted on the street looking through the window of the famous restaurant, and while he sketched the customers “barely noticed me”. This sense of quiet observation suits Nick well, for as he says, “The best moments reveal themselves at the time.”

At this point, the area’s hospitality industry is under renewed grave threat from the pandemic, giving these paintings an elegiac air. “I’m certain it will recover but it’s very sad and difficult for them,” says Nick. “They are somehow in suspension.” For now, we can at least enjoy their normal bustling ambience in Nick’s vivacious paintings.

# ANIMATION

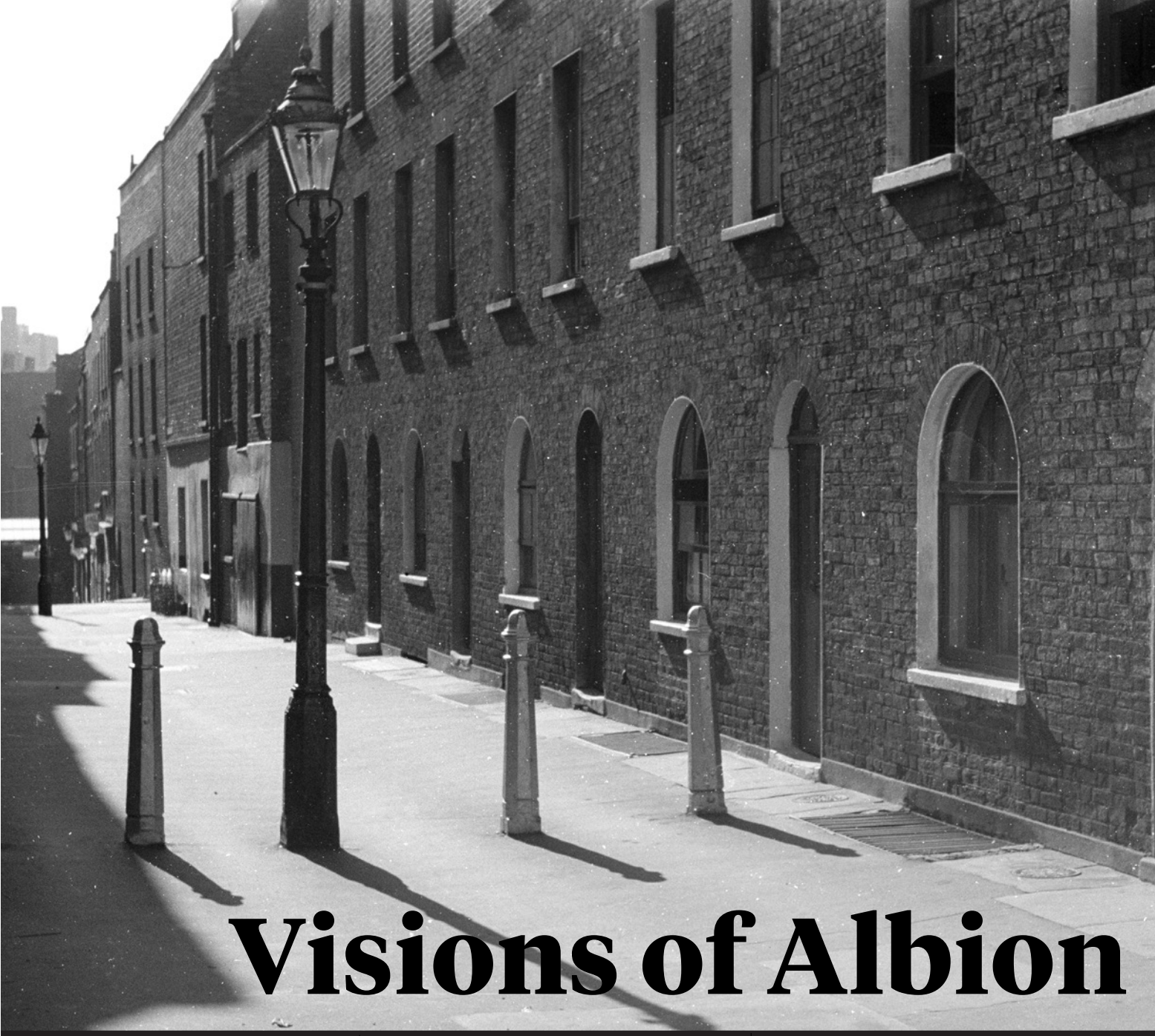


The Apple Tree *Winter sunset*

20" x 18"



# HISTORY



## Visions of Albion

The author of the feted history blog A London Inheritance, visits the site of Albion Place – subject of a photograph taken by his father – and uncovers a walk through layers of Clerkenwell history

Walk up St John Street, turn up St John’s Lane towards St John’s Gate, and on the left you will find Albion Place. My father’s 1947 photo shows a pedestrianised street with a row of terrace houses. In the distance the street descends rapidly towards Farringdon Station.

The name Albion Place was in my father’s notes to the strip of negatives that included this photo. I was concerned whether this was indeed the right location. All the buildings seen in 1947 have since been demolished. Albion Place is no longer pedestrianised, and the street today looks wider than it appeared in 1947. I have been able to confirm this is Albion Place through a single visual clue – a building that juts out and narrows Benjamin Street towards the junction with Turnmill Street, the same building

as one seen at the very end of the 1947 photo. I also checked the 1894 Ordinance Survey map, and in Albion Place, there is a row of terrace houses in exactly the right place. The London Metropolitan Archives’ Collage Collection has a single photo of Albion Place dated 1956 that includes a view of the same terrace. The houses look the same, with steps to the doors – exactly the same as in my father’s photo.

Albion Place has a long history. The land was originally part of the outer precinct of the Hospitallers’ Priory of St John of Jerusalem, which extended down to Cowcross Street with Turnmill Street to the west and St John Street to the east. The street seems to have been built in the late 17th century, part of the gradual growth of the City northwards, as housing and industrial premises were built over the Priory’s lands. When built, the

# 10

“These few streets reveal their part in the long history of Clerkenwell”



street was originally called George’s Court, and changed name to Albion Place by 1822 when the court had been rebuilt to the form seen in my father’s photo – presumably from when the terrace of houses date.

The growth of Clerkenwell was linked to industries such as watch and clock making. Albion Place was home to Christopher Pinchbeck, who invented an alloy of copper and zinc which closely resembled gold, and would reduce the price of ornate 18th century clocks. Gold was originally sold as 18-carat standard, and was therefore expensive when used as the casing for a clock or watch. The name “Pinchbeck” was given to this new alloy, widely used for the cases of clocks and watches up until the mid-19th century when the sale of lower carat gold was legalised.

On the corner of Albion Place and Britton Street is now a rather interesting building: the Grade-II listed 44 Britton Street originally built for Janet Street-Porter and designed by Piers Gough, and on the opposite corner of Albion Place and Britton Street there is the Goldsmiths Centre, founded by the Goldsmiths Company, one of the twelve great livery companies of the City of London, as a charity for the professional training of goldsmiths.

In the 19th century years ago the area around Albion Place was densely populated and criminality was rife. The location for a new school was chosen by the London School Board for this very reason, as education was

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seen as one of the means to improve the prospects of the residents. When the school was being built in 1873 and 1874, the workmen and the location needed a police guard to protect them and the building materials for the school from the lawless elements of the local population.

The school backs onto Albion Place, and the following news item from April 1906 provides another example of the crime in the area, probably heightened by the presence of precious metals in the workshops:

*DESPERATE BURGLARS – SCHOOL CARETAKER ATTACKED WITH JEMMY. The caretaker of the London County Council School at Albion Place, Clerkenwell, was found lying in a pool of blood with his head severely cut on Saturday night under mysterious circumstances.*

The increasing level of workshops and industry in the area resulted in the reduction of family homes and the number of children resulting in the closure of the school in 1918. For the rest of the 20th century, the old school buildings hosted a wide range of educational functions including Cordwainers’ Technical College, the LCC Smithfield Institute and Smithfield College of Food Technology, the College of Distributive Trades, and following a merger with the London College of Printing, the old school buildings became the London Institute. The current use of the building as the Goldsmiths Centre continues this long educational tradition.

In this article I have walked just a few short streets, down Albion Place, along Benjamin Street, then back up to St John’s Lane via Eagle Court, but these few streets reveal their part in the long history of Clerkenwell. From the Priory of St John of Jerusalem, through the industrialisation of the 18th and 19th centuries when the area was home to watch, clock and metal working, to an area of dense population with high levels of crime and finally to the glossier Clerkenwell of today.

The terrace shown in my father’s photo survived until the late 1960s. If the terrace had been renovated, and if Albion Place had stayed a pedestrianised street, with bollards and cast iron lamps, this could now be a lovely street. That said, we should always be careful when looking back at the past, and remember the lessons of Christopher Pinchbeck’s alloy – that all that glisters is not gold.

# HISTORY

## Pull the other one...

*The Christmas Cracker invented in Goswell Road? It’s true, writes Chris Walker*



Clerkenwell is, and has been for centuries, a hotbed of creativity. In the late 1800s Clerkenwell was described as ‘the greenhouse of invention’. The machine gun, Marconi’s electric telegraph, dynamos, speedometers and torpedo engines. All invented here.

But did you know that the Christmas Cracker was invented in Goswell Road, EC1?

In 1847 Tom Smith, a baker and confectionery seller in Goswell Road, travelled to Paris to seek inspiration and brought back the French idea of the bon-bon, a sugar-almond wrapped in paper with a twist at both ends. He added love mottos and rhymes and later enlarged the packaging when he replaced the bon-bon with a small gift. Smith was then inspired, allegedly, by the cracking of a log on his fire and so added silver fulminate ‘snap’ (which had been around for decades) to create his ‘Cosaque’. The name supposedly arose because the crack they made when pulled sounded like the cracking whips of Russian Cossack horsemen. Before long they were known as the cracker.

Tom’s son, Walter, continued the business and added little hats, made of fancy paper, and sourced more elaborate novelties and gifts from Europe, America and Japan. The success of the cracker enabled the business to grow and move to larger premises in Finsbury

Square, employing 2,000 people by the 1890s, many of whom were female workers.

In an article in *The Strand* magazine, from 1891, a journalist was taken around the immense factory in Finsbury by Walter Smith. He reported: ‘The literary work is no small item, and a man who can write good verse can earn good money... Ladies seem to be the most adept at this sort of thing which is paid for at so much a set of verses. This one is a gem:

*“Half hidden ‘neath the spreading leaves,  
A purple violet bent its head;  
Yet all around the moss-grown path  
In love its fragrance softly shed.  
My living violet, whisper low,  
That o’er my life your fragrance sweet  
Will make a garden of my life,  
Where love its counterpart may meet!”  
The poet asked five shillings for this,  
and offered to supply them in unlimited quantities at the same price.”*

Slightly more sophisticated than some of today’s ‘jokes’. Q: Who hides in the bakery at Christmas? A: A mince spy.

The company remained in Finsbury Square until the 1950s, by which time they were making 30,000 crackers a week. Today you can find a rather underwhelming memorial fountain to the family in the square’s south-east corner.

Although no longer in Finsbury Square, and no longer owned by the Smith family, the Tom Smith brand has survived, and continues to produce crackers for every pocket, from luxurious to fun-sized, including special crackers for the Royal Household.

Possibly not one the world’s most important inventions, but certainly one of the most fun. And a little festive frivolity might be just the thing to bring a little seasonal cheer.

So thank you Tom Smith, our creative EC1 confectioner, and have a cracking Clerkenwell Christmas.

**Based on Fact 92 of ‘101 Moderately Interesting Facts about Clerkenwell’, by Chris Walker. Available from Space on Exmouth market and I just Popped In on St John Street. Lockdown permitting.**



Age UK has some creative ideas to help cope with isolation



Coming into winter, with its longer nights and colder days, many of us are less inclined to venture out and so see fewer people. Social isolation is a real issue for many at the best of times, and Covid-19 has undoubtedly made it more difficult. Age UK Islington has been hearing from “many Islington residents who are isolated, and missing friends and family, but worried about going out”. How do we all keep the colour draining out of our days? We need creativity and connections with people to keep some sparkle in life. There are many who would in more normal times, be attending regular exercise classes, playing bingo, making music, or simply meeting up for tea. As a step towards keeping creative and helping to bring people together at this time, Age UK Islington has developed a series of online events, hosted with its partners. Over the past few months, people have realised that it’s perhaps not as difficult as they might have first thought, to join. With a bit of tuition from family and friends, or Age UK Islington’s Digital Volunteers, many have been able to join others via phones and tablets. They’ve come together to write stories, cook, appreciate music, reminisce and just simply chat. Katie Skea of Age UK Islington says, “I didn’t know what an art journal was before lockdown. Now I know that it’s a wonderful creative piece that you can produce, using anything that comes

to hand around the house – fabric, magazines, cardboard, anything to add texture. Sounds simple, but the creative process can do wonders to alleviate the stress and strain of being at home, particularly if you’re not able to go out.” Daisy and Georgina are two clients who didn’t know each other, but who took part in the same series of Age UK Islington’s “Creative Writing during Lockdown” classes. There is a theme of friendship that runs through the stories that each of them wrote. Daisy’s story “Magda and Anne” is a dark comedy about two friends, and Georgina’s story, “Angel”, starts with an observation by the main character as to “Where is everybody?” Daisy is from the north of the borough, and has found both contentment and frustrations in lockdown, “making some wonderful soups, and domestic life”, but also not being able to exercise as usual, to help with mobility. Georgina was born in Clerkenwell, and has lived in the area all her life. During lockdown, she has enjoyed the novelty of taking a variety of classes online – with Age UK Islington, Claremont, The Peel Institute and Holborn Community Centre. Attending what is now the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School as a child, she reflected on the changes in Chapel Market, near the school. She used to bump into people that she knew and chat to them in the market, go to a pie and mash shop there at lunchtime, and ice-cream shops on the corners of the street after school. She remembers Exmouth Market, which used to be “butchers, greengrocers, pet shops and second-hand stalls”, rather than “the trendy bars and posh restaurants that there are now”. Georgina was saying that so many people she knows are “Desperate for lockdown to be over”. Let’s hope that if it isn’t already, then it will be very soon. And that we all get to see our friends and family over the Christmas holiday.

To read the stories by Daisy and Georgina, and see some of the ways Age UK Islington clients have kept creative during lockdown, please see [www.ageukislington.org.uk](http://www.ageukislington.org.uk), and follow the link to ‘Keeping Creative’.



Distant comfort and joy

Whatever the virus brings, the St Luke’s Centre is still making Christmas plans

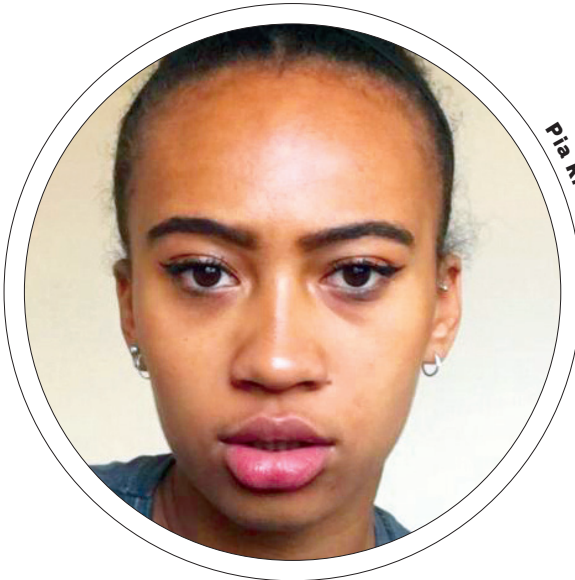
Amid the uncertainty of 2020 one thing is certain – Christmas will be different at St Luke’s this year. What we are able to provide for our local community may have temporarily changed, but our commitment to providing some festive cheer to locals hasn’t. Our older members’ Christmas Party and our Christmas Day Party are the benchmarks of the festive season at our Centre, which usually kicks off in early December with our Christmas Fayre when the Centre comes to life with decorations, people and festive food. Obviously there’s no Christmas Fayre this year but we will still be decorating the Centre and blasting out Christmas tunes. Plans are already being made for the members’ Christmas Party, which will take place over three consecutive days so everyone gets a chance to celebrate at a safe social distance. If we cannot have people at the Centre

by mid-December, we will be delivering meals and presents to members locally. We know Christmas Day will be different for everyone, but how far different probably won’t be clear until a week or two before. We are already planning meals for 70-plus local residents, and if people cannot be at the Centre, with the help of our wonderful volunteers we will be delivering a meal and a present to those who



are staying at home. So if you see Father Christmas and the elves around south Islington on Christmas Day please give them a wave. For now we are offering a daily lunch service for our members which can be collected or delivered to those who cannot leave their house. There is also our telephone befriending service, contacting people regularly to check they are coping. We are also looking at expanding our remote events and activities. Our employment hub offered two remote workshops in November for those in Islington seeking work. Full details on all these services are available on our website ([www.slpt.org.uk](http://www.slpt.org.uk)) and our social media channels.

We are running a Christmas Giving Campaign for anyone wanting to support our activities over the Christmas period and bring a smile to the faces of people in south Islington on our JustGiving page: [Visit justgiving.com/campaign/StLukes-Christmas-Giving-Campaign-2020](https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/StLukes-Christmas-Giving-Campaign-2020)



Arts emergency

This year has been tough for the arts, but Clerkenwell community organiser Pia Richards argues that there may be positive results from the crisis

Following a second national lockdown and almost a year under Covid-19 conditions, the arts are looking at an ever-growing fight for survival with the government often only offering bailout packages after numerous petitions. While the negative effects on the arts by the pandemic are seemingly endless I want to consider some positive outcomes of the ‘new normal’ – even if they’re things we should have seen in this industry before the coronavirus hit. **Accessibility:** In order for many arts organisations to survive they’ve been forced to digitise the work they would normally be sharing in real life. This means that you no longer need to be able to get to their buildings, and has made it easier for disabled people to access art as one no longer has to worry about disabled spaces being booked up. Some arts organisations have shared work for free, offering theatre and gallery shows online at no cost. While these were sometimes old shows it meant people who don’t have money to spend on cultural activities could access art for the first time. **Grants/Funding:** There has been a significant change among funding organisations which usually only offer a small number of grants over any given period, with grantmakers including the Arts Council providing significant additional funding to support artists during the pandemic. Many artists have lost their commissions or have not had commissions renewed, and there is no guarantee that work will be shown when the pandemic is over as it may no longer be mutually beneficial to both the artist and organization. However, the availability of additional funding has been massively positive, meaning artists no longer have to worry about extremely competitive processes of applying for grants – or self-limiting thoughts that their art isn’t good enough.” **My experience:** As a young theatre maker I have seen loads of shows online at no cost. Pre-pandemic I couldn’t afford to watch many new works. I believe this cost factor perpetuates the idea that art is only for the middle classes. Since the lockdown I have received a lot of support from theatres, who now see helping young artists as part of their duty in order to not lose a generation to the pandemic. In fact, I have had more conversations with industry professionals offering their advice than when I worked in an arts organization, and I think this is because we are finally seeing that we are all in this together. Let’s hope that some of these factors help us to renew the arts, post-pandemic.

Submit your listing We can include low-cost community events taking place in EC1. For the next issue, email the details of your event to [info@EC1Echo.com](mailto:info@EC1Echo.com)

Because of possible Covid-19 restrictions, dates and times might change, so please check with the venue first.

FESTIVE

**Walking Tour: A Victorian Christmas in Islington**  
Sat 12 Dec, 2–3.45pm  
Angel Underground EC1V 1NE

Join Footprints of London guide Rob Smith to discover how Christmas was celebrated by the Victorians. Also available as a virtual tour on Mon 21 Dec at 8pm.

**£9–£12**  
**Visit** [footprintsoflondon.com/walks](http://footprintsoflondon.com/walks)

**London Mozart Players: A Christmas Carol**  
Fri 18 Dec: 6.30–9.30pm & Sat 19 Dec: 11.30–2.30pm & 6.30–9.30pm  
Fidelio Orchestra Café, 91–95 Clerkenwell Rd EC1R 5BX

A dramatic retelling of Dickens’ festive tale accompanied by the London Mozart Players. The ticket price includes the concert, a three-course meal and a glass of prosecco.

**£100**  
**Visit** [fideliorchestracafe.com](http://fideliorchestracafe.com)

**Christmas services**  
Sun 13 and Sun 20 Dec, 11am  
Inspire Saint James Clerkenwell, Clerkenwell Green EC1R 0EA

All Christmas services at Inspire St James will also be live-streamed on the church’s website.

**Free**  
**Call** 020 7251 1190  
**Visit** [inspiresaintjames.org](http://inspiresaintjames.org)

**A Choral Christmas**  
Sun 13 Dec, 7–8pm  
Online

A chance to celebrate Christmas and sing along with the LSO – including seasonal favourites and gospel songs.

**Free**  
**Visit** [youtube.com/c/LondonSymphonyOrchestra](http://youtube.com/c/LondonSymphonyOrchestra)

CULTURE

**The Covid Letters: A Vital Update**  
Until Thurs 7 Jan  
The Foundling Museum, 40 Brunswick Square WC1N 1AZ

Back in March, designer Jonny Banger invited kids across the UK to customise Boris Johnson’s ‘lockdown letter’ – here are over 200 on display, and the chance to create your own.

**£7.50–£10.50**  
**(free for under 21s)**  
**Call** 020 7841 3600  
**Visit** [foundlingmuseum.org.uk](http://foundlingmuseum.org.uk)

**Technicolour Dickens: The Living Image of Charles Dickens**  
Until Sun 25 April  
Charles Dickens Museum, 48–49 Doughty St WC1N 2LX



To mark the 150th anniversary of Dickens’ death, this exhibition goes beyond the beard to show how the writer’s image has been used in popular culture.

**£7.50–£9.50**  
**Call** 020 7405 2127  
**Visit** [dickensmuseum.com](http://dickensmuseum.com)

ARTS

**ZELDA Presents: Rebecca Allen**  
Until Sat 12 Dec  
ARCADE, 87 Lever Street EC1V 3RA

An extended run for the exhibition by digital pioneer Rebecca Allen in the ‘shop window’ of ARCADE on Lever Street.

**Free**  
**Call** 020 7683 2999  
**Visit** [thisisarcade.art](http://thisisarcade.art)

MUSIC

**Clerkenwell Singalong**  
Tues 1 and Tues 15 Dec, 6pm  
Online

Unlock your vocal chords with professional singer and pianist Gisela online on Zoom.

**Visit** [facebook.com/groups/clerkenwellsingalong](https://facebook.com/groups/clerkenwellsingalong)

**Friday Lunchtime Concerts**  
Fri 8 Jan, 12.30pm  
LSO St Luke’s, 161 Old Street EC1V 9NG

Make the most of your lunch break and enjoy a free, 45-minute informal concert at LSO St Luke’s.

**Free**  
**Call** 020 7638 8891  
**Visit** [lso.co.uk](http://lso.co.uk)

**Space... but not as we know it**  
Until Mon 15 Feb  
Online

Find out what happens when an orchestra has to keep its distance! Suitable for ages 7–12 and families.

**Free**  
**Visit** [youtube.com/c/LondonSymphonyOrchestra](http://youtube.com/c/LondonSymphonyOrchestra)

BSL

**Tours of the Postal Museum**  
Various dates, 3–5pm  
The Postal Museum, 15–20 Phoenix Place WC1X 0DA

Join Deaf guide John Wilson for a BSL tour of The Postal Museum and Mail Rail and discover the surprising stories of the world’s first social network.

**£3.50**  
**Call** 0300 0300 700  
**Visit** [postalmuseum.org](http://postalmuseum.org)

DANCE

**Breakin’ Convention Social DisDancing**  
Fri 11 Dec, 7.30pm & Sat 12 Dec, 2.30pm and 7.30pm  
Sadlers Wells, Rosebery Avenue EC1R 4TN

The powerhouse company returns for its first live event since lockdown started, presenting the best in hip hop dance.

**£15–£40**  
**Call** 020 7863 8198  
**Visit** [sadlerswells.com](http://sadlerswells.com)

**Michael Clark: Cosmic Dancer**  
Until Sat 3 Jan  
Barbican Centre EC2Y 8DS



The first major exhibition of dancer and choreographer Michael Clark, establishing his radical presence in British cultural history.

**£11–£17**  
**Call** 020 7638 4141  
**Visit** [barbican.org.uk](http://barbican.org.uk)

V-TOURS

**Radical Islington**  
1 Dec 2020, 2–3pm  
Online

Clerkenwell has been the hotbed of radical ideas for centuries – discover how thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine and John Howard came to Islington to develop their views.

**£6**  
**Visit** [footprintsoflondon.com/walks](http://footprintsoflondon.com/walks)

**Listings compiled by Rosie Hore**



# CULTURE MILE



Fusion Prize winners Ayo Fagbemi and Nate Agbetu  
Credit Danika Magdalena

## Imagine a better community with Culture Mile

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. The new normal we find ourselves in has prompted Culture Mile to reevaluate how they engage with and support residents, organisations and communities in the surrounding area. IMAGINE is a community-led season of programmes, events and activities that seeks to work closely with and respond to the challenges of the local

area: at home, throughout the community, on the streets, and across businesses. These four strands incorporate existing initiatives as well as exciting

new collaborations that expands Culture Mile’s contribution to our local community. The success of Culture Mile’s Play Packs which helped local families get creative at home, and will continue with a special festive edition, has led to the development of Imagine Packs. Designed with isolated older adults in mind, these packs will help them tell their stories and connect with others through the difficult winter period. Another initiative that responds to the needs of local residents is the Imagine Fund. Ten successful applicants have now been awarded



LSO First Violinist Maxine Kwok performing as part of the PLAY film series  
Credit Odera Okoye

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micro-grants to develop ideas for their communities. These include ‘Share and Learn’ sessions for unpaid carers, local history projects, a community choir, public art and greening, a repurposing clothing venture and a mass balcony sing-a-long on Golden Lane Estate. You can find out more about the successful projects at the Culture Mile website. Launched at the end of 2019 in partnership with Foundation for Future London, the Fusion Prize was designed to develop the creative, communication, organisational and thinking skills of London’s young people. The winner of the £50,000 prize is The Pattern, who were awarded the prize as part of a virtual ceremony on 29 October. Founded by Nate Agbetu and Ayo Fagbemi, The Pattern is an alternative curriculum for young people, over the age of 18 and no longer in full-time education, to help them access the creative and cultural industries. The programme is created by and for traditionally excluded communities and aims to give people across various intersections of life a seat at the table and empower the next generation of cultural producers. In collaboration with the Lord Mayor’s Global UK initiative and the City of London Corporation, Culture Mile have formed the Culture & Commerce Taskforce. Bringing together senior leaders from the creative, commercial and civic sectors, the taskforce will examine how the commercial sector can support the regrowth of London’s cultural and creative industries and look at what role culture can play in strengthening the City as a place to do business. Alongside Brookfield Properties and the LSO, Culture Mile have co-commissioned a series of short films, titled PLAY, directed by emerging filmmakers and inspired by place and space. Each film features a performance from an LSO musician playing a brand new composition and will be available to view from the end of November.

CULTURE  
**mile**  
SPONSORED CONTENT

To explore what’s happening in and around Culture Mile and find out more about Culture Mile’s IMAGINE season, simply visit [www.culturemile.london](http://www.culturemile.london) or follow @CultureMileLDN on social media.

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## 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 opposite and once you’ve decided what package you would like, visit [EC1Echo.co.uk/join](http://EC1Echo.co.uk/join)

## Individual rewards

- £3 per month upwards:**  
Name in print and online, pin badge
- £5 per month upwards:**  
Name in print and online, pin badge, tote bag, paper posted to you every month

## Organisational rewards

- £10 per month:**  
Name in print and online, 10% discount on advertising
- £20 per month:**  
Name and logo in print and online, 20% discount on advertising
- £50 per month:**  
Name and logo in print and online, 40% discount, six free small adverts per year

**We would like to say thank you to our members:**  
CDJ Wilcox, Daniel Winn, Laurence Colchester, Diana Alsobrook, Sarah Falconer, David Chapman, Tania Cohen, Brian Jones



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for every step...

# Season's Greetings...

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