

EC1 ECHO

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2022 • N°18 FREE



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Leon Robinson with a late 19th century portrait from J Cruikshank of Newgate Street in the City

Africa unpacked

As Black History Month gets underway the *EC1 Echo* meets Leon Robinson – the UK's foremost archivist of Black artefacts

BY OLIVER BENNETT

Every collector, says Leon Robinson, lives “a life of regret”. As an archivist, educator and keeper of what is probably the largest Black archive in the UK Leon has spent over 30 years building up a collection that spans 2,000 years of the Black presence in Britain – and he recognises that his life’s calling is an inexhaustible task, compelling but impossible to complete.

Already, Leon’s archive has become so vast that it occupies several roomfuls of storage space. The many thousands of items he has found are filed in timeframes – Victorian, Edwardian, 18th century etc – and also sorted by themes: entertainment, military, slavery and so on. A current project – which can be seen at The Peel this month – is Forget Me Not Day: an archive of Black involvement in World War I which Leon has been building for many years, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The project’s name came from a photo in Leon’s collection that he was particularly struck by. “The drive to support the brave, courageous men who took up the call to arms really brought it home to me,” he says. “The community spirit, the oneness

of everyone supporting the cause – it was as if the Forget Me Not Day had become a symbol of hope and caring. In one photo you found out about the children and adults hungry to do their bit, whether knitting scarves and hats for the brave men at the front or writing letters or sending drawings. The picture was like being in a time machine.”

There’s a real, live poignancy to the project, which Leon particularly finds when schoolchildren see people from over 100 years ago that look just like them.

“When I go into schools I’m still amazed to see how inspired young people are,” says Leon. “They say, ‘Wow – I never knew that’. In some schools they tell me of certain young people who are ‘hard to reach’, but when I show them the archive, it comes to them and resonates with them straightaway.” One such pupil was so enthused that he leapt up to show his teacher a picture of some West African soldiers. “It made him really happy,” says Leon. “Then I’m happy because I know he’ll go home and share that experience with his parents.”

The Forget Me Not flower was a precursor to the poppy and Leon says that its use as a memento goes back to Napoleonic times. “During World War I you saw men, women and children all over

the globe raising money for soldiers,” he says. “Children here in Islington would do flag days for the troops, and performers at places like Islington Hippodrome Theatre would sell pictures at the end of their performances to raise money for the soldiers on the front-line.” These went into family albums and many are now in Leon’s archive, along with music sheets, publicity shots, cigarette cards – indeed, any collectable item related to the Black presence in Britain.

Leon, who was born in St Albans of Jamaican parents, says that the great thing about being a collector here is that “the British are the greatest hoarders on this planet”. While he’s from a theatre background himself Leon’s family is steeped in print – his grandfather was a photographer in Jamaica’s famous Morais Studio in Kingston and his father came from Jamaica where he worked at the country’s Jamaica Gleaner newspaper, before coming to work in the newspaper industry here along with Leon’s mother, a nurse. So perhaps it was his calling to collect ephemera.

“It’s true that I’ve been a collector all my life,” says Leon, 59. “Even as a child, I used to go down to Hadleigh Castle, where they had a dump for London rubbish, and pick up clay pipes and

Continued on Page-13

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OCT / NOV 2022

1st Oct

30th Nov

Waxing Crescent

33%/0.54

First Quarter

49%/0.54

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NEWS

Loo to the skip

The dearth of public toilets in central London has been noticed

The charity Age UK London is calling on London councils to provide more toilet facilities as a public health issue.

According to new research carried out by the charity, 81 percent of Londoners say that public toilet provision in their borough is bad, with only three percent of people surveyed reporting that it is good. The survey also reveals that 9 in 10 Londoners sometimes, or always, consider whether there is a public toilet available before leaving home.

The London Loos survey was undertaken by the charity as part of Age UK London’s ‘Out and About’ campaign, which seeks to tackle social isolation and loneliness among older people –

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Help The Peel celebrate its 125th birthday

Next year is a special occasion – the 125th anniversary of The Peel. Since it was founded as the Peel Institute in 1898 by Sir George Masterman Gillett, the MP for Finsbury, in part as a place to have an evening’s enjoyment “without the temptation of the public house”, The Peel has grown into the multifaceted place for all generations that we now enjoy.

There have been ups and downs, most notably the destruction of The Peel’s HQ and other buildings by enemy action in the Blitz, but over the years it has seen generations come and go, with new activities being added all the time. At its heart, the organisation’s mission has not fundamentally changed since 1898 – helping the people of Clerkenwell and its environs to overcome the challenges that prevent them fulfilling their potential by connecting them to each other and providing services that they require.

The Peel remains one of only a handful of community organisations in the country that has had a continuous presence in its locality for over 100 years. The anniversary next year is therefore not just a celebration of an organisation but of the whole Clerkenwell community. The Peel is placing this ethos at the heart of its celebrations next year and is developing an exciting and engaging programme that not only looks back at the past, but also serves as a platform for future community development. This includes the curation and cataloguing of an archive of Clerkenwell and utilising it to develop various archives-based activities such as a Radical Clerkenwell Walk (complete with augmented reality inserts), exhibition and talks on the changing nature of Clerkenwell, a project to improve the green profile of Clerkenwell, and various arts-based and educational activities.

“

New activities are added all the time

”

Please get in touch with us to share your thoughts on and help to shape our ideas for activities, and/or volunteer to be a part of the planning/delivery as a member of our 125th anniversary community panel.

The Peel, 3 Corners Centre, Northampton Road EC1R 0HU
Call 020 7837 6082
Email admin@peelinstitute.org.uk

October/November 2022

NEWS

Culture Mile may become a BID

BY DAVID WILCOX

Businesses in the north-west of the City will contribute cash to projects for greening, easier walking and cycling, and reduction in air pollution, under plans to be put to a ballot in January.

If businesses vote for the Culture Mile Business Improvement District they will pay a levy raising £1,850,000 in the first year.

The cash will also help fund projects to promote business collaboration and attract more visitors as part of the Destination City programme.

More details about the BID are promised on a new website (culturemilebid.co.uk). The proposals will go to the Corporation’s Policy and Resources committee on October 20th.

The Culture Mile BID would be the fifth in the City of London – yet rather different because of the number of residents in an area that includes Barbican and Golden Lane estates, the latter in the EC1 postcode district.

The Culture Mile area includes four major developments: refurbishment of the Barbican Centre, the controversial London Wall West office scheme on the site of the Museum of London, the new site for the Museum in Smithfield, and redevelopment of the Smithfield Market site when traders relocate to a new site in Dagenham.

In July the City’s Culture and Heritage committee heard how the BID would lead to a mixed economy business model for the next phase of Culture Mile, with more external funding, and major staff changes.

Once established the BID would give businesses more say in plans previously the responsibility of the City and its Culture Mile team.

The regeneration consultants

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FEATURE 3

Bollards: underrated street furniture Credit Cathy Ross

Cast iron guarantee

Following her feature in *EC1 Echo II*, ‘Not any old iron’, author Cathy Ross has written a book on the City of London’s bollards. Called *Bollardology: observing the City of London*, it claims to be the first history of these pieces of street furniture and was stimulated by the author’s walks

away you start to see them. They’re really fascinating bits of our heritage hiding in plain sight.”

The City in particular has impressive black cast iron bollards standing with octagonal red star collars – dating from the 1860s and were probably devised by William Haywood, head of the powerful Commissioners of Sewers – with what Cathy calls “lemon-squeezer” tops. Her book brings original research and photography to look at these bollards, and how they have helped manage the city streets.

It is also a call to conservation to take them seriously. According to Cathy, one rare 19th-century bollard has simply disappeared from the streets, while others have been disfigured. The book includes an I-spy guide to 40 of the City’s more distinctive bollards, and Cathy hopes that uncovering their history will encourage the City Corporation to treat its bollards as heritage and tourism assets.

“Walking the empty streets, I was amazed by the extent of the bollard population,” says Cathy, an author, historian and former Director of Collections at the Museum of London. “Pre-lockdown, I hadn’t noticed them much, but once you take the people

“Bollardology”, Quickfry Books £12.99 Visit bit.ly/3fwr4Hv

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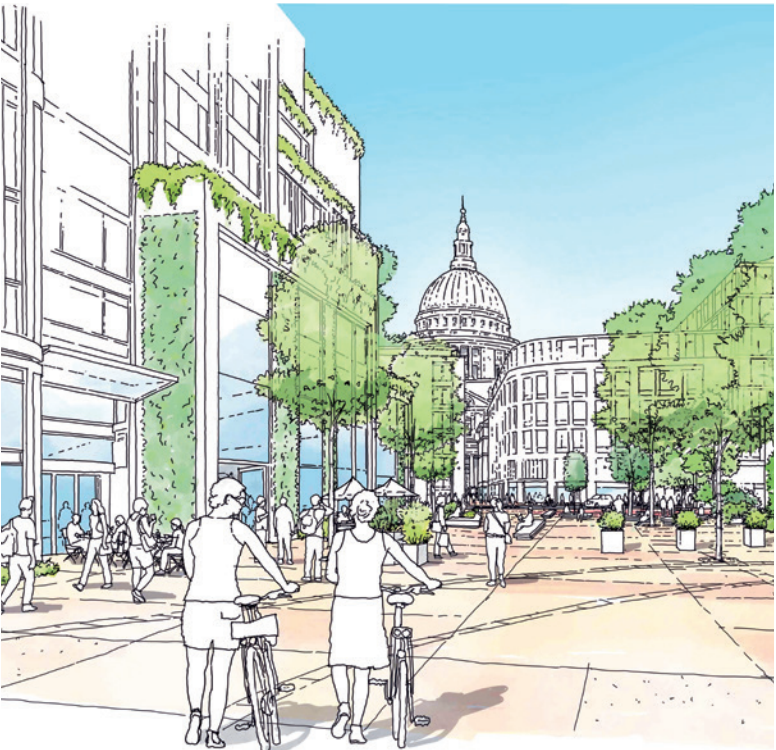
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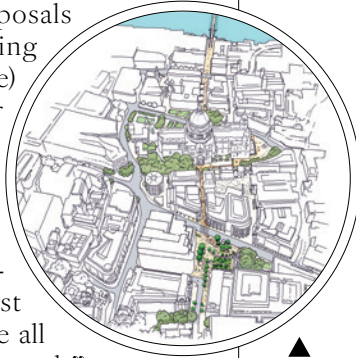


A substantial new square near St Paul's Cathedral is planned

BY DAVID WILCOX

The City could gain a new public square under plans to redesign the road system between the Museum of London and St Paul's Underground station. The square would be created by closing the southern end of King Edward Street as part of a scheme to improve road safety and air quality, provide better cycle routes and two-way streets, and wider pavements. It would also help to create a pedestrian route from Clerkenwell through to the Thames, knitting EC1 to the City and the river. The developers Orion Capital Managers are rebuilding the former BT HQ in Newgate Street to provide 556,000 sq ft of offices, with a gym and swimming pool in the basement, 1200 cycle racks, cafes, a market hall, rooftop restaurant and public viewing gallery. They are discussing a substantial voluntary contribution to the costs of the square, on their doorstep, if it can be linked to the completion and letting of their scheme in 2025. This would be in addition to the obligatory Section 278 Agreement supporting highway and public realm improvements. The St Paul's gyratory re-design is in two parts. The first is around what's now called Panorama St Paul's, and the second

to the north around the Museum of London rotunda. The City's London Wall West scheme, involving demolition of the Museum and rotunda and building 780,000 sq ft of offices, is fiercely opposed by the Barbican Quarter Action campaign (see the last *EC1 Echo*). The first part of the gyratory scheme does not depend on London Wall West going ahead. A paper to the Streets and Walkways sub committee says "phase 1 proposals (including King Edward Square) could deliver major benefits to the southern half of the project area if London Wall West did not secure all its required approvals". Creating the square would require two-way traffic in St Mary le Grand. Over the next six months City officers will consult with a range of local interests on options that include both the square and alternative designs leaving King Edward Street open. Costs range from £16m-£22m. At 2800 square metres King Edward Square would be larger than Aldgate Square, completed in 2018.



The new square would sit between St Paul's Cathedral and the Museum of London
Credit Sketch by Luis Torres

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NEWS

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Order, order

The Museum of the Order of St John is hosting under-3s, says Hannah Agass Ibbotson, who is in charge

Since reopening in June 2021, the Museum of the Order of St John's family programmes have come back with a bang – and we have now launched a new programme for under-3's and their parents and guardians. Through music, movement and making, our youngest visitors are bringing new perspectives to the collections as they uncover the many stories and treasures within the Museum. We will be working in partnership with Artburst, a local not-for-profit company that provides creative educational workshops to improve the lives of children and their parents and



The children's programme at the Museum of the Order of St John

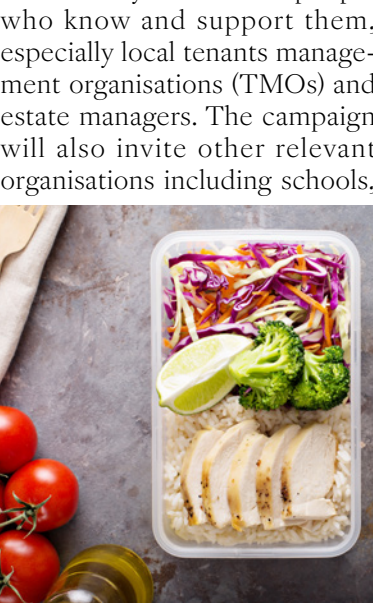
carers. Our free under-3's sessions take place during term time on the second Wednesday of each month and can be booked on the Museum's Eventbrite page. Due to the popularity of these sessions and need for increased support for new parents, we hope to expand this offer next year, welcoming more families and incorporating lifesaving first aid skills.

Join a new food campaign

With the cost of living crisis, basic foodstuffs are becoming harder to afford. In light of this, a new campaign is being launched, aiming to reduce food insecurity in Clerkenwell and to give every resident the opportunity to have good nutritious food every day. The campaign, called Clerkenwell Ready Meals & Food Co-operative will be steered by The Peel and aims to encourage local catering businesses (including organisations that prepare food for their staff) to donate cooked meals to local residents. These meals will be distributed to local residents by identifiable people who know and support them, especially local tenants management organisations (TMOs) and estate managers. The campaign will also invite other relevant organisations including schools,

faith centres and other charitable organisations to help identify residents and assist with the logistics. The campaign is reaching out to local businesses to do one or more of the following things:

- Commit to donating a certain number of meals every day
- Organise collection of local meals from organisations and forward to local distribution points (TMO/estate offices or The Peel).
- Organise fundraising activities and other efforts to support the initiatives.
- Provide information to affected residents to help them reduce their food insecurity and improve their wellbeing.



The Food Co-operative aspect of the campaign will distribute food donated or purchased at discount, and sell it on to local residents with the benefits of that subsidy. All proceeds will be reinvested into the Co-operative, which will identify organisations that can donate or supply subsidised raw food and arrange dates for delivery to a specific distribution point in Clerkenwell. As part of the arrangement they would:

- Sell the food as required to local residents
- Deliver packs of food to identified residents with mobility or accessibility issues

“It is a travesty that in 2022 so many families in Clerkenwell don't know where their next meal will be coming from,” says Arvinda Gohil, Chair of Trustees at The Peel. “It has been an important mission of The Peel since its inception 125 years ago to ensure that we do all we can to eradicate this element of poverty. To this end, we look forward to putting our own resources into this initiative, and also working with other partners to make sure that, starting from this winter, every family in our community has the food they need.”

If you or your organisation would be interested in contributing to this effort, please contact The Peel at admin@peelinstitute.org.uk or on 020 837 6082.

COLUMN



Only connect

BY DAVID WILCOX

I live just south of Smithfield, and enjoy walking through the market buildings into Clerkenwell, via St John's Gateway, St James Churchyard, Spa Fields and Exmouth Market. There are lots of other interesting routes, and I've been experimenting with different sorts of maps, photos and videos to record explorations. That's given me great insights into the shared history of EC1 and it feels a familiar, welcoming neighbourhood. But what's it like for Clerkenwell residents to walk the other way? Is the City as welcoming... or just somewhere to visit for the Museum of London or St Paul's Cathedral? I began thinking about joining up the north and south of EC1. As I've found, reflective walks are the best ways to engage with neighbourhoods. The Footways project, for example, which promotes quiet and interesting routes throughout central London, has charted one from Angel to St Paul's along with other walks through EC1. The City would certainly like to be more welcoming: as reported it's staging a major festival on October 15 to launch its Destination City campaign to attract visitors. The City's Culture Mile – including the Barbican, Barts Square, and Golden Lane – is also due to become a Business Improvement District, and surveys show that businesses like projects for greening, cycling, walking and tackling air pollution. However, while projects provide a better environment, it is people who create welcoming neighbourhoods, and people need places to get to know each other. As I wrote in the last *EC1 Echo*, community drop-in sessions at Barbican Library have highlighted the need for a range of different meeting places and while Clerkenwell is lucky to have The Peel, and Golden Lane estate, their community centre there's currently nothing in south EC1. That may change with the creation of a community room in the Barbican library. One proposal for the BID is a neighbourhood forum – there is one for the Victoria BID in SW1, for example – and an online forum for our area could work. That said, it can be difficult to engage people and facilitate discussion on a new tech platform, while both Barbican and Golden Lane already have their own, not to mention the Next Door app. So my hunch is to now identify the human connectors – whether they have professional roles or personal enthusiasms – and offer ways to meet up, in fun gatherings, both in-person and online. If you agree, get in touch. Visit.connections.commonslondon/category/ec1echo

News from The Peel

The Peel is your local community centre, based in the heart of Clerkenwell since 1898. We offer classes and activities for all ages and assist local people to set-up projects which benefit the whole community including the EC1 Echo

Letter from Olu



There seems to be something in the air: the recent sad passing of HM Queen Elizabeth II at the end of a glorious summer, another change of government, the looming cost-of-living crisis, children returning to school with child poverty and mental health issues on the increase - all of these have contributed to an air of uncertainty and intermittent melancholy. At times like this, the importance of community organisations like The Peel has become clearer and our mission of enhancing the life chances of people by facilitating a better-connected community is more urgent.

We are proud of how we have recently been responding to matters arising in the community - our summer activities have been particularly heart-warming. We are intent on building on these even further, by better engaging with all areas of the community. We need the help of everyone to keep doing this though - please tell us what is needed, what you would like to offer to help, how we can be more impactful. Be you a resident of the community or working in a business in the area, there are ways that we can all work together to make life better for all.

As you will read on the following pages, next year marks our 125th anniversary as an organisation. Despite the prevailing economic and social winds, we must remain optimistic that the next 125 years will be even better for Clerkenwell. We can all make that happen, starting now. We at The Peel look forward to listening to and working with you.

Take care of yourselves and each other.

125 years of The Peel



2023 marks the 125th anniversary of The Peel. Since its foundation in 1898, The Peel has strived to bring people together to enhance their life opportunities. Founded in 1898 by Sir George Masterman Gillett, the organisation has taken on many forms throughout the years. In its infancy, The Peel was a recreational space for young men to escape the stresses of everyday life and socialise in the evenings. In a response to effects of World War 1, The Peel expanded its work, with activities and programmes being geared towards families and children.



In 1977, The Peel began to take on a more familiar shape with the opening of a Day Centre. The centre provided services for children, young people and older members in the form of socialisation. Activities included dancing, arts and crafts and sports. Since then, The Peel has seen different venues, but the core goal of connecting communities remains the same.



Some of our Social Club members have been with The Peel for 30+ years, and have many fond memories of the organisation. "I used to bring my children into The Peel back in King's Cross", one member told us, "It's been a constant in my life".



Now, we look forward to the future. With a new strategy in place, The Peel endeavour to take new strides in providing support, joy and resources to the local community. Over the next few years, we expect to see our projects expanding, more positive collaborations and a rise in community-led activities. The 125th anniversary milestone gives us the opportunity to reflect and celebrate our position in Clerkenwell, our current ethos and our future impact.

Black History Month

The Peel is hosting a multitude of events this October to mark Black History Month 2022. A celebration of people from African and Caribbean backgrounds, the occasion gives us the opportunity to share, appreciate and understand the importance of black heritage and culture. On 21st October, we will be hosting our second Dish n' Jam; a community event that merges food, culture and music. We encourage you to bring a culinary dish of your choice and perform. If you'd prefer not to perform, you're still encouraged to join for the celebrations. Iroko Theatre will be giving a short performance of singing, dancing and chanting, followed by a group drumming session which is interactive with the audience.

On 26th October, The Peel will be hosting a Caribbean intergenerational meal for our Youth and Social Clubs. The Youth Club will cook for, serve and eat with our Over 55's Social Club, with the goal being to bring two generations together through food and conversation. After lunch, Leon Robinson will be visiting The Peel with an engaging mobile archive of primary source material covering black art heritage, history and culture. This will be an engaging intergenerational workshop for people of all ages and backgrounds. Contact j.kidd@peelinstitute.org.uk for more information.

Thursday 27th October - Leon Robinson will be running a community-wide families workshop at a location in the community, the location is tbc at the moment but the workshop will be an opportunity for

people to come along to engage and learn about his archive. There is a potential collaboration with House Of Illustration/ Quentin Blake Centre and Leon on this date but it won't be confirmed until next week.

Social Club Visits Charterhouse



The Social Club visited The Charterhouse, a historical site that was hidden behind closed doors for more than 650 years – but now welcomes the public to come in and discover its unique history. They joined a professional guide to discover the stories behind the remnants of the mediaeval monastery and courtyards. The tour cast new light on well-known stories from British history and introduced our members to the unique heritage of the historic Charterhouse.

Brunswick Fun Day



The Peel celebrated our newfound relationship with Brunswick Close Estate by hosting a Fun Day; a community event with the intention of bringing residents of the estate together. The event included arts & crafts, socialisation corners and children's entertainment. The arts and crafts proved to be a crowd favourite, amongst adults and children alike. We provided free refreshments, cotton candy and pizza for attendees, as well as a picnic area for families to eat together outside with their new friends. We look forward to collaborating with the estate in the future and are excited to host more events.



Baby Item Swap Event



On 10th of September, The Peel hosted its first Children's and Baby Item Swap Event. We were honoured to collaborate with St Luke's Community Centre, a working relationship we hope to pursue in the future. Created in light of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, which is affecting many vulnerable families in Clerkenwell, the event provided a platform for parents and guardians to donate, swap or simply take what they needed. The first event was a success with over 55 attendees and a multitude of generous donations from local residents and businesses. Within the first 2 hours of the event, attendees found useful items for their children which would have otherwise been discarded.

The Peel is looking to host the event quarterly on a regular schedule and the next date is Sunday 2nd of October at St-Luke's Community centre 90 Central Street EC1V 8AJ.

If you are interested in helping support the, please contact s.gregory@peelinstitute.org.uk

Family Arts Club at The Peel

House of Illustration will be helping kick off our regular monthly Family Arts Club at The Peel. The first session will be during the half term break on Thursday 27th October. The Arts Club will be an opportunity for families to try something creative, practical and fun, whilst getting to know their neighbours.

Memories of Her Majesty The Queen



On 8th September 2022, the nation mourned the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. As the longest serving monarch in British history with a reign of 70 years, her passing has left a significant impact on the British public. As the nation engages in a collective mourning, members of the social club were invited to reminisce and write their memories down in a memoriam book.

Certificate of recognition from The Finsbury (Bunhill and Clerkenwell) Ward Partnership

The Finsbury (Bunhill and Clerkenwell) Ward Partnership recognised The Peel staff for our outstanding support of the local community during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are delighted to accept this certificate and continue to support the local community.

The Peel Spotlight – Gurkan Boyaci



Each issue, we interview a member of staff, volunteer or local resident to give readers an insight into life at The Peel. Meet Gurkan Boyaci, our new community organiser.

What's your role at The Peel?

I'm a community organiser, here to help the community, develop projects and ideas, as well as working collectively with The Peel Team. I'd love to continue to bring in a diverse crowd. At my old job, I ran various activities, such as men's groups and food initiatives.

Previous experience before joining The Peel?

Previously, I worked with Manor Garden's Welfare Trust as a monitoring support worker. Along with data collection, I ran activities and projects

for the local community, recruited volunteers and supported the NHS through market research.

What's your best accomplishment at The Peel?

In my first week here, I supported the Brunswick Fun Day. We helped the residents of Brunswick come together and introduced people that didn't previously know each other. For the Baby Item Swap Event, we assisted vulnerable people who are in need by giving them access to clothing that they otherwise might not have had. As well as reducing waste.

At the Fun Day, I handed out slips for residents to write down ideas for running their own projects. Whilst there, I spoke to someone who was interested in running a domestic abuse and mental health support group. It's amazing to be able to support ideas like these.

If you had to describe The Peel to a friendly alien, what 3 words would you use? Supportive, open and diverse.

What do you like about Clerkenwell?

It's a lovely area, from the food markets to the parks. Prior to The Peel, I was working in Islington, so always had close ties to Clerkenwell. Its historical roots are still so present in the community.

Any plans?

Working on a cost-of-living workshop, I've reached out to Islington People's Rights, a local charity who help support people with welfare and debt and a food partnership, with the goals of reducing food insecurity and wastage. I'm incredibly excited about the direction The Peel is heading in within the next few years. Our goal is to always connect new pockets of the community.

Peel Regular Classes

- Youth Club; coding and cooking for children and young people between the ages of 8–18 – contact j.kidd@peelinstitute.org.uk for more information
- Social club; weekly exercise classes; fitness mornings at Brunswick Estate; men's only afternoons - contact k.bottomley@peelinstitute.org.uk for more information.
- Our Parks; free weekly fitness classes on Wednesdays at 5pm in Spa Fields
- Creative workshops and writing sessions – contact admin@peelinstitute.org.uk for more information.

Upcoming Special Events

26th October: The Peel is hosting an Intergenerational Meal where the Youth Club will cook for, serve and eat with our Over 55's Social Club. The objective of this will be to bring two generations together through food and conversation. Contact j.kidd@peelinstitute.org.uk for more information.

27th October: To kick off the Halloween season, our Youth Club will be carving pumpkins together.

Clerkenwell Alliance

The Clerkenwell Alliance is a collective of individuals from across public, private and voluntary sectors, all with the shared goal of pooling together resources to support the local community. The group meets throughout the year to focus on key goals and implement positive change. The number of food bank users in London has increased in recent years, and food insecurity is at an all-time high. There is more stress school faculties and teachers and rises in mental health issues. There is an unprecedented need for donations due to the cost-of-living crisis and its knock-on effects on vulnerable members of the community. The Alliance are seeking any local businesses or organisations that would like to be part of our upcoming initiatives. If you would like to join the Alliance, email admin@peelinstitute.org.uk

Join The Peel Team

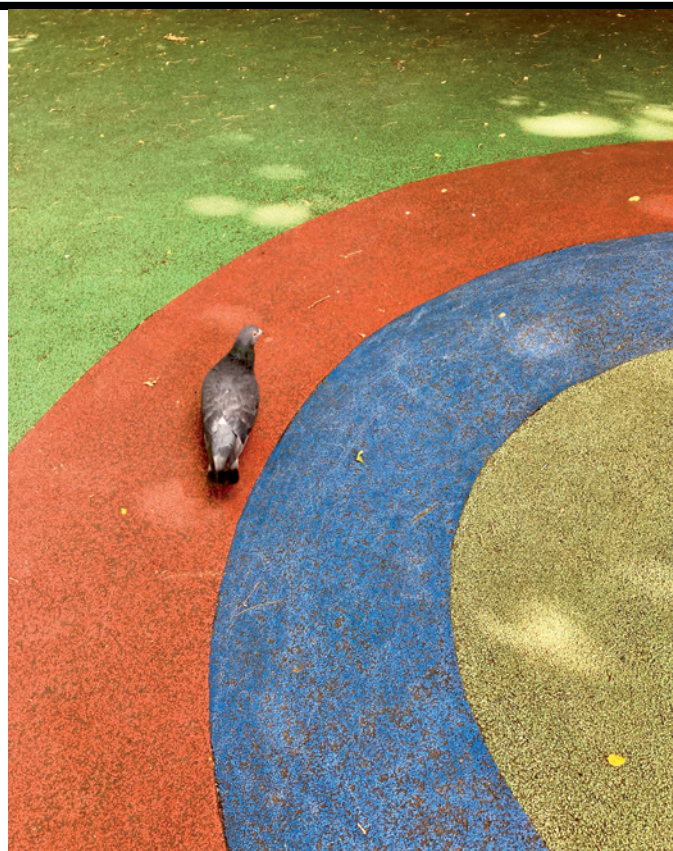
Would you like to volunteer with us?
Would you like to start a class or activity that benefits the local community?

Are you a local business or organisation that would like to support one of our upcoming projects? If your organisation would like to explore how we can work together on community initiatives, please get in touch with us at admin@peelinstitute.org.uk.

We are so grateful for the support that we have been receiving from various local organisations. Recently, we would especially like to acknowledge the support of Brunswick Close Estate, The Clouesley Trust, Tesco, Doughty Street Chambers, Central District Alliance, leap, Dorrington, House of Illustration, Sadlers Wells and Orchard Group.

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Three Corners Park by Indiana Passmore, 'I like seeing the pigeons in my park'



Pear Tree Court by Zipu Zhu. Seen at a distance, unseen by most, working at heights above the Piano Works building amongst the birds



Clerkenwell Bus by Heidi Vanessa Gonzalez Rojas. "One word that comes to me when I think of Clerkenwell or EC1 is 'home'"



St John's Square by Richard Betson Saturday morning chess at the Four Corner Club

“It was more than just a photo competition – it was for local people from all walks of life to come together and share their creative visions of the area”



Tessa Sheridan 'Loss of Connection'. 'When the LSO closes its local community choir after 19 years, founder member Grace (98), tears up her sheet music in protest'



Smithfield Market by Richard Betson



Sekfords Street by Eraldo Strumiello

BY CHRIS WALKER

After the success of last year's inaugural Clerkenwell Community Photography Competition, I am delighted to report that this year's competition attracted even more entries. They were announced at a well-attended exhibition opening in Hatton Garden where all the shortlisted amateur photographers were invited. This year the exhibition was hosted by one of the competition sponsors, Dorrington, at one of its recently refurbished buildings, The Bindery at 51-53 Hatton Garden, which features a light gallery space on the ground floor.

This year's theme was 'My Clerkenwell' and showed how differently people see Clerkenwell and EC1. Over 500 shots were entered

in five different age categories and we seemed to have a bigger variety of ages and images this year. The standard of the under-12s and 12 to 18-year-old groups was especially encouraging, and it was hard to tell them from the older, more experienced entrants.

Once again, the judges found choosing their favourites extremely tricky and the Under 12s section was tied. Fergus McCann-Bottyan showed it always pays to look beyond the normal with his view from Hayne Street. As Fergus put it: "I saw a drain, looked into it, it was Barbican Station and a tube was there!"

Indiana Passmore took a striking graphic shot of a pigeon in Three Corners park while Heidi Vanessa Gonzalez Rojas produced a stunning series of shots. "The word that comes to me when I think of Clerkenwell or EC1 is "home";" she said. "It's where I've

lived since I was one year old, where I've gone to school, swimming lessons and clubs. It's a place I'm proud to call my home."

Sam Ingram dominated the 12-18 age category with some really mature street portraits, but it was his architectural shot of 152 Lever St that impressed the judges.

The 19-34 category was won by another photographer taking a different look at the area, like Fergus in the under-12s. Tugce Karapinar captured this unusual take of Seddon Highwalk near Barbican Station.

One of the most photographed locations this year was Exmouth Market and in the 35-65 age group, it was a very different take on this theme that won. Thomas Casey's 'Exmouth Market in the Rain' was described by one of the judges as "a cross between

Edward Hopper and Bladerunner". And in the over 65s, all of the judges loved this powerful shot by Tessa Sheridan taken outside LSO St Luke's, Old Street. It shows founder member Grace, 98, tearing up her sheet music in protest after the LSO closed its local community choir after 19 years (as reported in the last *EC1 Echo*).

There were quite a few shots of the regular chess games that take place in St John's Square, but it was Richard Betson's shot that took the Peel Prize for 'My Clerkenwell Community'.

The main sponsors, Central District Alliance, provided a special prize for best capturing 'My Clerkenwell at Work'. Here, the judges' favourite was this shot of a roof worker by Zipu Zhu.

In summary, the quality of work has been ridiculously high and we had many superb shots that didn't even make the short-list.

Clerkenwell has always had a reputation for creativity – and it's clearly as strong as ever. As professional photographer and one of the judges, Phil Haynes, said: "I was really impressed by the breadth of quality and creativity through all of the age groups, but what caught my attention the most was the love for the area that I felt at the awards night. The people who entered the competition are proud of where they live and its rich history."

"It was more than just a photo competition – it was for local people from all walks of life to come together and share their creative visions of the area."

The exhibition at The Bindery, 51-53 Hatton Garden, runs until late October. There is also an exhibition at SoapBox on 69-85 Old Street.

For full details, visit: clerkenwellphotography.com

FEATURES

Licensed to grill

London’s finest tooth adornments are being made in Clerkenwell

In the jewellery business, the High Street retail end is suffering. But there’s a few growth areas – including that of ‘grills’. Jewellery for the teeth, grills can be fitted to beautify and also to cover up imperfections, giving a smile that is, literally, dazzling. Deriving from 1980s US hip-hop and R&B culture, and now part of the look favoured by grime and drill stars, they’re moving from being an underground niche to a wider audience.

Icey Illko in Clerkenwell, run by Hussein along with Julius and Joel – who grew up close to London’s jewellery centre, Hatton Garden – is now one of London’s foremost creator of grills.

“Grills are a modern-day passion,” says Hussein from Icey Illko’s studio in Clerkenwell Close. “They can be made out of any any type of material: platinum silver, gold – I’ve got diamonds on my teeth right now.”

Hussein, who is 20, started making grills when he was 16. He did a BTEC in engineering and then went into this, his “passion” industry. As Hussein explains, you need accuracy but you don’t need to have dentistry training. “There’s a thin line between dentistry and making grills,” he says. “But you must remember it’s a fashion product.”

Comfort is key, so when the customer comes in the team is able to make a cast that is then treated and fired in a kiln. “We look at each person and whether they have a brace, any imperfections, chips, anything like that, and do our best to cover them up,” says Hussein. After that they apply wax to the cast and create the grill itself.

Grills can be taken on and off – Hussein demonstrates with his



Hussein at Icey Illko Credit Marzo

own – and indeed, taking them out is highly recommended for eating and sleeping. “But they’re comfortable enough to wear for a whole day,” he says. “I wear mine for about seven hours a time.”

It’s a growing trend. There have been celebrities in Icey Illko but the team can’t discuss them, and the company is now gaining international reach: they’ve done pop-ups in Amsterdam, Sweden and shortly, Paris. “Sweden was amazing,” says Hussein. “It was a big turnout. I was surprised myself.”

Grills take about two to three weeks and prices depend on which metal you choose. The customer’s time takes an hour or two at the studio, including the mould. They then go back to pick their grills and get fitted.

“There might then be a wearing-in period, because new customers feel an object in their mouth and the brain tells them it’s not meant to be there,” says Hussein. But most people become accustomed to them pretty quickly.

And while grills are mostly a youthful accessory, as the fashion grows, that might change. “It’s across wider culture and society now,” says Hussein. “In the UK, we’re now at the place where America was say, seven years ago. Grills could be in many different places in the next five to 10 years.” A storefront would “bring a lot of eyes” and remains a possibility, while artefacts like Taschen’s just-published book *Ice Cold: A Hip-Hop Jewelry History* by Vikki Tobak are helping to create interest in the wider fashion world. They won’t suit everyone, but grills are a going concern.



Jeane at Bunhill Fields

10

The grave whisperer

Local woman Jeane Trend-Hill has become one of our foremost experts on death and cemeteries

To Jeane Trend-Hill, cemeteries are not places of gloom and sadness. Rather, they’re full of life stories and architectural treasures – and she can’t get enough of them.

“I started hanging around cemeteries when I was young,” says Jeane. “My parents went one Sunday a month to visit dead relatives and while they were cleaning the graves and putting out flowers, I’d walk around and look up on the angels, crosses and imposing mausoleums.” As she grew older Jeane began researching and photographing Victorian graves, but she then became a civil servant and moved to Essex.

A series of life events then propelled her back to her grave calling. “I never made a career out of my interest in graves until 2015, when everything changed,” she says. “I was diagnosed with severe pancolitis, and I was in agony. My marriage broke up as my husband became abusive.”

Jeane moved back to Clerkenwell where she had been brought up, regained her health to an extent and started writing about cemetery architecture for funeral trade magazines and becoming an expert in grave heritage. She has recently written a book, *One Designer Clad Foot In The Grave*, about her interests.

“To me, cemeteries are outdoor art galleries,” she says. “One day I unveiled a refurbished grave in Victorian clothes which was covered by the local press. A few weeks later, I was contacted by a film director and asked if I wanted

to be in a film, *The Day My Nan Died*, with Alison Steadman. I said yes, and really enjoyed it.”

From there, Jeane started to do other bits and pieces, including a documentary, gangster movies and playing a mourner in a rap video, as well as making artworks and continuing to take photographs of graves across the world. High points have included winning a photo competition for a picture from the City of London Cemetery and when Jeane used her prize money to visit Vienna’s Zentralfriedhof Cemetery where many great composers are buried. “I once flew to Barcelona for the day just to photograph one grave,” she recalls.

“To me, cemeteries are outdoor art galleries”

As her own father died when she was 14, and her mother when she was 20, Jeane is herself used to organising funerals. But while she did consider a career as an undertaker, and studied Mortuary Science and grief counselling, she didn’t go into the funerary professions, preferring to follow the path of an artist, writer and friend to the dead. For while Jeane’s “not afraid of dying”, she takes death very seriously.

“Because of my Catholic upbringing, if I walk into a church and there’s a funeral taking place, I don’t walk out,” she says and this has led her to attend many funerals for those without friends or family. “Unvisited funerals pull at my heartstrings, especially veterans’ funerals,” she says. For one gen-

tleman who was very fond of tea, she bought a tea bag to put in his grave. “I’ll often take flowers to a cemetery and leave them on the graves of those who don’t appear to have had any visitors.” For these reasons, in 2019 Jeane was nominated as one of the Mayor of London’s Unsung Heroic Women.

As Jeane knows many people in London’s cemeteries she has been allowed to witness a cremation through the viewing hole. What was it like? “Beautiful, really. It changed my mind about cremation.” Does she converse with dead people? “I do talk when I go around cemeteries and sometimes sing to them,” she says, and as to the afterlife, she “keeps an open mind”, adding that she has “seen some things that I couldn’t explain.” On one tour of the catcombs in Brompton cemetery this thin, tall man came in and once the guide had finished, she asked who it was. “He hadn’t seen him, but said it was the image of a gravedigger who had died.”

Is there anything that we should do as a society to come to terms with death? “Just be more open, talk about it more,” she says, citing phenomena like Death Cafes as a greater willingness to face the one inevitability. But there’s something that we should be concerned about, she says, namely that a lot of graves are being reclaimed. “We’re very tight on space now and cemeteries are being repossessed and turned into car parks.” Respect is everything, she says, and that is disappearing.

One Designer Clad Foot In The Grave by Jeane Trend-Hill, £4.99 and Kindle £1.99 via Amazon amazon.co.uk/Jeane-Trend-Hill/e/B09THLTWS4

COLUMN

Build communities

Bunhill councillor Valerie Bossmann-Quarshie argues for a new approach to housing development

No one wants to live near a building site. Obviously, people don’t want noise, chaos, dust, concrete and scaffolding around them. That’s reasonable and it’s why a lot of problems come with developing new homes.

At the same time, it’s really important that we talk about why housing development happens. In my ward, Bunhill, I often hear that we have too much development. I can understand that argument when it comes to speculative luxury housing of the type we see in some parts of London.

But we desperately need adequate social housing and Islington Council, along with other councils, is trying to address this shortage. So the issue I’m trying to address is this: how do we get developers and the Council to build new housing, while also ensuring that residents are not too put out, and even understand the need for it? Particularly as there are 15,000 people on the waiting list, with many children and young people in overcrowded homes, living with elderly family members who desperately need adequate living space.

All housing was new once, and if you go back, people in the past often objected to terraces that are now much-loved. Across Islington in the 19th century, housing covered fields as London spread out from the centre.

So this isn’t a new story by any means, but it has hit a new critical phase, particularly when, at Braithwaite House in Bunhill Row for example, there’s a loss of amenity. It brings on complaints about feeling overcrowded. People are concerned about the impact of new residents on overstretched schools and doctors’ surgeries, and wonder whether they’ll be an additional burden on the area.

They also want to hang onto recreational space.

I get it. I live in Highbury, and I too want to protect our community spaces. But in order to create the housing we need, there also has to be some public acceptance that building needs to take place.

Part of the issue is that central London is not particularly dense when it comes to housing, particularly compared to cities like Paris or central Barcelona where mid-rise housing is the norm. So instead of growing outwards, there’s now a tendency to build up a bit, which isn’t such a bad thing and will have the effect of creating more dwellings on the same footprint. Also, now that the Council is embarking on its own building of social housing, there’s a chance to create much-needed homes up to far more stringent ecological standards. These homes will set the standard for the future. If we have a denser city, then we also need it to be a greener city.

My feeling is that development has got to involve a community approach. For example, part of the problem of the loss of amenity could be resolved by creating new sites for recreation. When I see car parks, for example, I wonder if they might be

resurfaced and turned into recreational space. Plus, existing open spaces such as that which exists in Bunhill Fields could be used more. Planting could help offset the sense and reduce the health inequalities associated with poor living conditions and overcrowded homes.

And as to the problem of living near developments, that could be managed better. With good faith, considerate construction, care taken to limit noise and dust and community consultation, perhaps we can start to get people to concentrate on the positives rather than the negatives.

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FEATURES

Hit the wall

New murals are cropping up in Leather Lane

A crop of new murals can be seen in the Leather Lane area of Clerkenwell – to a mixed response.

The largest is the #GenerationEqualityMural by Alice Pasquini on Johnson Gardens in Leather Lane EC1, made to mark the “first year of implementation of the Generation Equality initiative’s Global Acceleration Plan”, launched during the Generation Equality Forum in Mexico City and Paris last year.

The mural, which was begun in late July, is certainly striking as part of the mixed office and residential complex of Johnson Gardens. But some in the area believe that the mural has no relevance to the area, has not reflected any aspects of its locality and was put up with no



local consultation.

Objectors include long-time Leather Lane market stall holder Richie Rich, who sells fashion garments on the street.

“It’s out of place, and too in your face,” says Richie, who has worked on the street for 37 years. “And the lack of consultation was dreadful. It changes the character of the street for worse.”

Meanwhile, local resident Ann Winchester has drawn the

EC1 Echo’s attention to a crop of new street art pieces, including this one by the Pret a Manger on the corner of Farringdon and Clerkenwell Roads. By artist Someart, who lives and works in Poznań, Poland, they constitute what the artist calls his “street logo”. These smaller and more renegade art forms do not seem to have caused the same consternation as the Johnson Gardens mural.



▲ Top right, the new mural at Johnson Gardens. Above, Someart’s figures in Leather Lane Credit Ann Winchester

A voice from the past

As the improvements to St James’ Church Gardens continue, local resident Mike Franks looks through the telescope from the other end...

My name is Eleanor d’Briset, I come from Viking stock and in the early 9th century my family settled in Northern France. Two centuries later my grandfather came to Britain with King William’s army, scattering the Saxons and settling inside the old Roman City. Our families were rich and in 1144, I persuaded Jordan, my husband, to establish the Priory of St John while I created the Augustinian Nunnery of St Mary.

It was I who built the Well that gave your district its famous name but all too often your historians seem to want to write me out of the story. Now I’m watching the inequality, the mistakes, the interesting changes and manipulations but I’m not allowed to interfere nor yet to ascend into Heaven.



Time without number, my lovely nunnery has been neglected, brutalised or changed out of all recognition. That apostate Henry Tudor stole my land, gave it to his friends and renamed my church, and two centuries later when William the Orangeman took the tax off juniper berries, the poverty stricken residents – the rich having fled to the new West End – found the ground water undrinkable and discovered easy ways to be “drunk for a penny, dead drunk for sixpence”. This so frightened those upstart Hanoverians they made it illegal leaving the new breed of gin makers like Booths to drill deep down into the water-saturated chalk.

A century later the Church of

St James was more or less a ruin but I do like the new one. I was less happy about the neglect of our centuries-old Cloisters and the final tragic chapter came when in 1974 the Council’s ruthless Director of Development allowed bulldozers to destroy all traces of my Cloisters/ Perhaps he learned from Robert Moses’, planning scourge of New York or from the 1944 Abercrombie London Plan that blighted Clerkenwell for 30 years.

Even the current, long overdue works are remedial. So what’s the plan? Supporting an overstretched Parks Department is just the beginning. Friends of the Parks can help and so can and should Clerkenwell Design Week.

I see Mr Franks, founder of the Clerkenwell Workshops who planted the Park’s four large trees on Clerkenwell Close in 1977 intends to present new proposals for my Cloisters. There will be others but history is against them!

If you haven’t yet seen the plans for St James Church Gardens: Visit bit.ly/3rnRu11

The works budget is £438,799 and the landscape design is by landscape architects Ireland Albrecht. Works are due to continue until mid-December.

FEATURES

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Away with the pharoahs

It is a curious fact that one of the most eminent British Egyptologists ever – one Amelia Edwards – came from Clerkenwell. Go to 19 Wharton Street, and you’ll see a plaque commemorating her. Now Edwards’ bestselling 1873 travelogue *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile* is to be republished to mark the 140th anniversary of the Egypt Exploration Society, based in nearby Doughty Mews. “There would be no British Egyptology without Amelia,” says Carl Graves, the Society’s director. “She is the very starting point of it all, instrumental in the history of British Egyptology and known worldwide – our American branch called her the ‘queen of Egyptology’. She was an extraordinary character.” In line with contemporary interpretations of excavation, the book has been designed by Egyptian artist Deena Mohamed, and has a new introduction by Graves and Egyptian scholar Anna Garnett, giving context on the book and her legacy. Edwards grew up in Wharton Street as the only child of elderly parents: her father retired from the army and working for a bank, and homeschooled by her Irish mother. She wanted to become an artist and had a few early successes – George Cruickshank’s Omnibus offered her work. Instead she became an organist in a church in St Michael’s Church

As her bestselling book is republished, it’s time to look anew at Clerkenwell woman Amelia Edwards – the UK’s greatest populariser of ancient Egyptian culture

in Wood Green.

Edwards only went to Egypt at 41 and as Graves says, there was “no real hint that she was passionate about Egyptian heritage until then.” But having warmed to it, she became an expert at a time when Egypt was in rapid growth as an exotic destination, with Thomas Cook taking tourists up the Nile.

Edwards would excavate and record her finds, but as Graves says, she recognised that mass tourism was having a massive

of what people see in the British Museum is there because of Amelia Edwards, although the director at the time, Samuel Birch, didn’t support the founding of the Egypt Exploration Fund.”

So while Edwards had taken antiquities she recognised that what she’d done was wrong. “She wanted to find a solution, perhaps a way of salving her conscience,” says Graves. Her large collection of Egyptian antiquities in her house near Bristol (where she lived in the latter part of her

life), was later donated to UCL and is now the core of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archeology at Malet Place, WCL.

She was an interesting character in other ways, too. Despite having been engaged to a man, Edwards had relationships with women. “She was an LGBT pioneer too,” says Graves. “Within her circle, she

was probably out and was close to poet John Addington Symonds, known for his homosexual relationships.” After that came life as a bestselling Victorian novelist plus bouts of depression, cured by travel including her Egyptian sojourn. *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile* became an instant bestseller and made her famous.

Now, the talk is of restitution and return claims for antiquities and Edwards’ reputation has shifted once again. “In the introduction, we’ve unpacked Amelia’s life and legacy so that people can carefully read the narrative Amelia was given,” says Graves.

“A lot of people say she was ‘of her time’. But we’ve critiqued that approach. Amelia was writing for an audience, and it was her choice to fit the prevailing ideas of the time, which is why it was so important for us to write this introduction.”

Even so, Graves says that she is well-respected in Egypt - and there’s an argument that having ambassadorial objects around the world has encouraged tourism. “Nor were they stolen from Egypt but given by the Egyptian authorities, then French-run,” he says.

As Edwards said of *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile*, “This is the most important of my books, and the one by which I most hope to be remembered – if I may hope to be remembered at all!”

Visit ees.ac.uk

Her large collection of Egyptian antiquities is now at the the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archeology in WCL

REVIEW

Probably a good play

Maybe, *Probably* is a pint-sized production in many ways: from the small black box theatre, to its compact cast of four – even the set looks like an Ikea showroom for tiny homes. With a run-time of 75 minutes this UK premier of a Brooklyn-based play presents the perfect window in which to sip a pint from the Old Red Lion pub below. Following the lives of happy couple Kate and Guy in their late 30s as they debate whether or not to have a baby – “But it’s bad for the environment!” – and subsequently turn their lives upside down, it’s hard to pick a standout star as every performance is heartfelt and hilarious. Writer Eric Sanders has an astute eye for humour in small human moments – namely, just how terrible men are at choosing baby names: “Gill? Roy? Carl?” Kat asks Guy in disbelief. Never quite delivering a rallying cry for stay-home dads (“I have no ambition,” admits the full-time father) it feels like a lost opportunity to bust this old stigma. Similarly, Kate’s relationship with her best-friend-cum-boss doesn’t do working mothers any favours: why is she so adamant Kate works until her due date? But these people aren’t perfect and it’s wonderfully affirming to see every trimester of pregnancy dramatised on stage, from amniocentesis to Doulas and birthplans. It’s an overlooked topic despite being such a universal female experience.



The added risks of an older pregnancy is hardly breaking new ground, as anyone familiar with Sharon Horgan’s comedy series *Catastrophe* knows well. Even Florence and The Machine have written a song about it: “We argue in the kitchen about whether to have children” pretty much sums up this play. While this isn’t a criticism – Sanders clearly has his finger on the pulse – one wonders if the stakes could have been higher and the dad-to-be had, say, a penchant for gambling... there could be a little more drama.

If you are in your 30s and debating kids, this play does not hold the answer. The pros of having kids sounds more like a meme than a convincing argument: “...for 10 minutes of every day they make life completely meaningful. It’s the other 1,400 you’ve got to worry about.” But this play will prompt you to ask the important questions before getting pregnant, namely: How are you going to pay for the baby? Who’s volunteering to stay at home? It also reminds you that evenings at the theatre remain a luxury for the childless.

‘Maybe, Probably’ by Eric Henry Sanders at Old Red Lion Theatre until 15 October 2022, Tuesday to Saturday at 19:45, Saturday matinees at 14:00 Weekday matinees on the 6th & 13th October at 14:00, £19 & £15 (conc.). Visit oldredliontheatre.co.uk/MaybeProbably.html

FEATURES

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Continued from Page-1

old R White’s lemonade bottles. My mum would gripe, ‘What’ve you got now?’ But if you’re a collector, it’s in your blood.” Now Leon trawls second-hand shops, auctions, car boot sales, antique shops and junk shops for items relating to Black Britain. “A lot of dealers know me,” he laughs. Some put relevant artefacts aside for him.

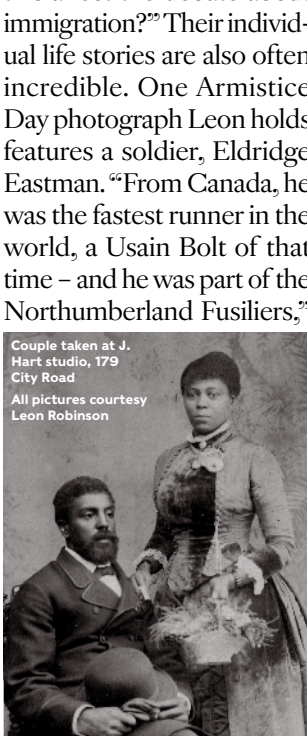
The historical depth of his collection corrects the commonplace assumption that the Black presence in the UK dates largely from the period post-WWII. “Of course those wonderful 20th-century pioneers like Amy Ashwood Garvey and Claudia Jones pushed things forward,” says Leon. “But Black people were here all the way back to the Roman era. I’m interested in the older sources, the 17th and 18th century etchings and engravings – weirdly, it’s often easier to find an item from the Victorian and Edwardian period rather than something from the early 1970s.”

Leon’s collection is itself an education. But he’s also interested in its power as a corrective to a systematic



gap in British media and education. “If you’re not aware of these contributions, that could be because it hasn’t been taught, or has been unreported by the media,” he says. “Otherwise, why are we still having to rely on people like me with my archive to convince people that Black people are a part of British history?”

Hence the reason they come as a surprise to some, including some great pictures shot in Clerkenwell as well as African soldiers dressed for combat. One shows a Black Edwardian couple pose in bonnets and waistcoats for a studio in City Road; another couple pose in a Clerkenwell Road studio. As historical artefacts they create “a real connection over time”, as Leon puts it. “When you see these South Africans on their way to the Somme you think, how does this affect the debate about immigration?” Their individual life stories are also often incredible. One Armistice Day photograph Leon holds features a soldier, Eldridge Eastman. “From Canada, he was the fastest runner in the world, a Usain Bolt of that time – and he was part of the Northumberland Fusiliers,”



says Leon. Others are jarring, such as Leon’s photographs of East and West Africans who by dint of German colonialism, fought for Germany in WWI. “You had brothers and sisters more or less fighting against one another.”

As well as military images Leon has plenty of entertainers, some of whom have strong links to Islington like La Belle Creole (Josephine Laura Fanny Steer) who was born in the borough and whose father and brother were local cab drivers, and George Carlisle of Carlisle and Wellman of Hillmarton



Road N7, all headline acts and well known in London. “These guys were huge,” says Leon. “But remember, there were hundreds of black entertainers working in Britain during WWI.” As an entertainment historian, Leon is thrilled to uncover the publicity pictures, posters and playbills of yore. “I love finding photos highlighting the Black presence in Britain because it gives me a sense of the rich diversity in our history, and helps us recognise that heritage and inheritance are part of the same family. We should be proud – and the raw excitement of fresh discoveries keeps me going.” Leon has shown his

archive at Tate, gallery, where the audience was moved. But it’s important to him that the archive is a living thing that informs the future. “I see the collection as an inter-generational tool available to all,” he says. “A thing that upsets me is when people think history and heritage is academic and only available to a certain class. But it’s for everyone.” As for historians who just spout dates, “that’s the easiest way to get me to fall asleep. As Maya Angelou said, ‘Legacy can only be measured by what survives’”

It also slightly irks Leon that people think the archive is somehow related to modern phenomena like Black Lives Matter. “Wake up,” he says. “If you think finally people are looking at Black British lives now, what were they thinking about before? What about the work of pioneering film director Horace Ove, who did amazing work for decades, or Richie Riley, founder member of Ballets Negres, Britain’s first Black Ballet Company, or Colin Prescod, former BBC commissioning editor, academic and chair of the Institute of Race Relations?”

There have always been such people, working away, and we should acknowledge these people who dared to dream, ask questions and change the narrative.”

Leon’s hope is now that better resources will fall into place for this kind of activity, to embolden future generations. “I want to inspire new archivists and historians and hope that I’ve already inspired lots of young people,” he says. “You’ve got to step up and not be intimidated. It makes it easier for the next person to land. Because if we still stay on the periphery, we’re going to be waiting forever.”

Turn to Page-6 to find out when to meet Leon at The Peel

LITERATURE

14

The Table

A short story by John Foley

THE ARRIVAL OF THE TABLE: THAT’S when it started. At least, that’s when it first became apparent that something might be, could be, wrong.

Until the chime of the doorbell it had been an ordinary Thursday morning. She was in the kitchen peeling beetroot; he was pottering in the shed in the small back garden.

‘David,’ she called, but he was out of earshot.

Rinsing her hands clean of the dark red juice and wiping them dry on a tea towel, she went to the front door and opened it to find a man in brown overalls on the doorstep.

‘Hello?’ she said with a sweet smile.

‘Meadows?’ said the man. Behind him stood another man, also in brown overalls, and in the driveway a large and slightly battered blue van.

‘Mrs Meadows, yes,’ she said. ‘What can I do for you?’ ‘Delivery. Your table.’

‘Table?’ she asked. ‘What table?’

‘From the auction.’

‘Auction?’ she said, puzzled. ‘Are you sure you have the right address?’

‘No doubt about it,’ said the man, thrusting a clipboard at her. She peered at the invoice and the name on it.

‘Oh,’ she said, now even more puzzled. That certainly looked like her husband’s name and signature, but these days you had to be so careful. She was about to say exactly that to the man when he prompted her.

‘So where do you want it? The table.’

‘One moment, if you please. I’ll just fetch my husband,’ she said. Gently but firmly she closed the door on the two men, then hurried through the hall and the kitchen and down the path to the shed.

‘David,’ she said, interrupting his pottering, ‘there’s a man at the door with a table.’

‘Table?’ he repeated.

‘He says you bought it at auction.’

‘Ah, yes. I’d forgotten that was coming today.’ ‘You mean you did buy it?’

‘Certainly. Told you about it weeks ago. Didn’t I?’

‘No, or I’d have remembered,’ she replied, now feeling somewhat flustered. ‘Anyway, they’re waiting so you’d better deal with it.’

‘Righto,’ said her husband. Leaving his pottering he shuffled up the garden path through the kitchen and the hall to the front door to be confronted by two men and a rather old-fashioned reproduction walnut table top together with a collection of detached legs. It was not quite as he remembered.

‘Not quite as I remember it,’ he told the men, ‘but what is? Through here, please,’ and he led the way through the hall and into the dining room.

Ten minutes later the legs were attached, and the table stood in its place just where it should be.

‘Excellent,’ he told the men. He thanked them, saw them out, closed the front door and returned to the dining room. His wife was staring at the table, frowning.

‘So what do you think?’ he asked. She didn’t answer.

‘Something wrong?’

Still no answer.

‘I thought it about time we had something here,’ he continued. ‘So much easier for the puzzles, especially the jumbo ones.’ Since retiring he had joined a jigsaw puzzle club. ‘Good for the little grey cells in the long winter evenings,’ he told himself, and her. Until fairly recently he’d been mastering the puzzles successfully on the old family table, until she decided it was unnecessarily large and sold it. She was probably right of course, but some of the latest puzzles were on a grand scale and needed more than the kitchen table, which was never very convenient anyway.

He looked at her. She was still frowning. ‘Dotty?’ he asked.

‘But,’ she said at last, ‘that’s our table.’ ‘What?’

‘That is our table.’

Her husband stared at her.

‘The one I sent to auction,’ she said, now in a tone of exasperation. ‘Oh, you are a silly. I deliberately sold it because it was far too big for just us two, and now you’ve bought it back. How could you, you silly man.’

‘Granted it looks similar, but it’s actually quite a bit smaller and –’

‘It’s the very same,’ she said firmly. ‘Look, there’s the stain where you spilled red wine one Christmas, and there,’ she continued, moving to the head of the table and jabbing a burn mark on the wood impatiently with her finger. ‘And here, look here: the scratches where the cat used to hang from the edge waiting for you to feed her.’

‘Me?’

‘Well, it certainly wasn’t me,’ she snapped.

At that moment the telephone rang, and glad to get away from him she moved quickly to the hall to answer it. ‘Yes?’

‘Hi, mum,’ said a far-off voice. ‘Just thought I’d ring you about next Sunday.’ ‘Next Sunday?’

‘For me and the kids? And when she didn’t answer: ‘Is this a bad time?’ ‘Who is this?’

‘Susan. Your daughter.’

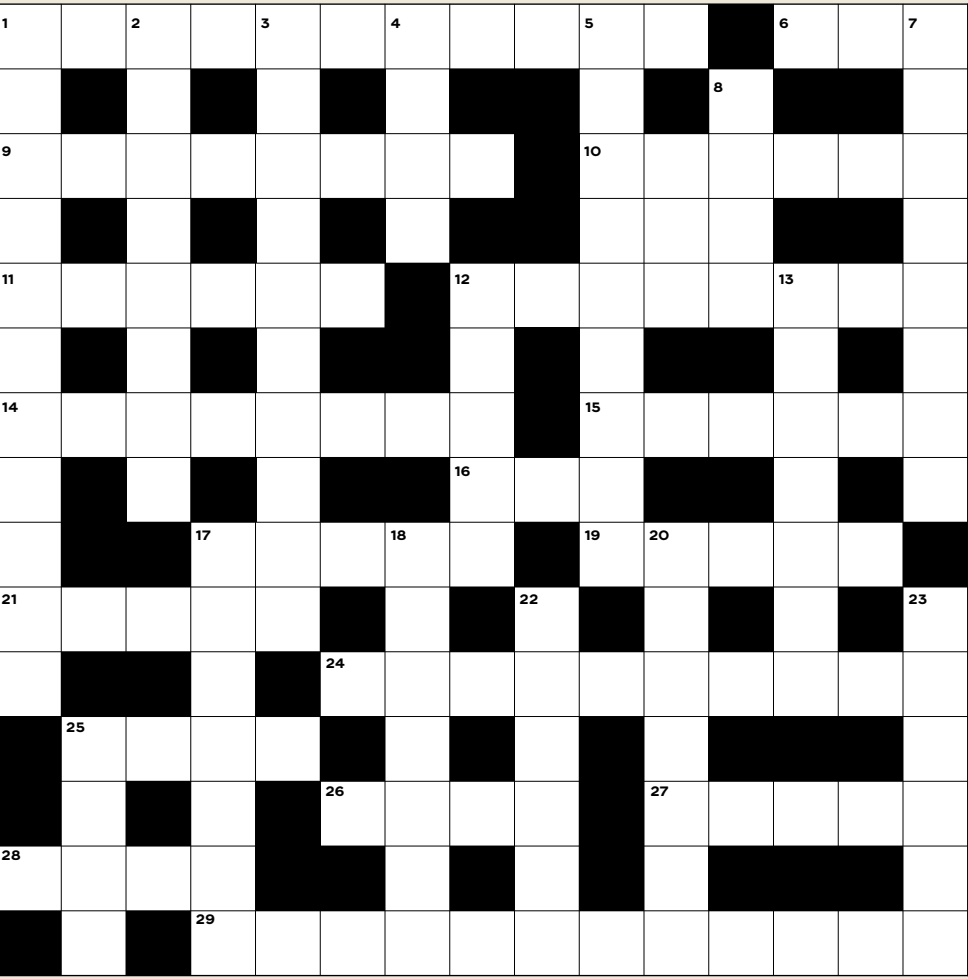
‘Of course. Yes. I’m so glad you phoned. Your father and I are having the most dreadful argument.’

‘No, we’re not,’ he called and with a sigh went back to examining the table. ‘You wouldn’t believe what he’s done,’ said his wife crossly into the phone. Knowing her father’s foibles she laughed. ‘I would, but tell me anyway.’ ‘Remember that table in the dining room, the oval one? Far too big now it’s just the two of us. I sent it off to auction some months ago. And now it’s back.’ ‘Back?’

‘That’s what I’m telling you. The silly man’s gone mad. He bought it. The very same table. He swears it’s a different one, but I’ve just been showing him the stain where he spilled red wine and didn’t wipe it up, and as for the scratches from the cat –’ ‘What cat?’

‘Our cat. The claw marks where the silly thing used to hang from the table during meals when your father was feeding him. Remember? Oh,

Crossword set by Rosie Hore



ACROSS

- 1 Fruit given to Persephone (11)
- 6 Group of whales (3)
- 9 Put at risk (8)
- 10 Disposition (6)
- 11 Inform (6)
- 12 Every other year (8)
- 14 Until this point (8)
- 15 Add flavour (6)
- 16 E.g. 2–2 (3)
- 17 Collection (kept secret?) (5)
- 19 Large bird with talons (5)
- 21 Boots (5)
- 24 Sophocles tragedy (7, 3)
- 25 Jaunty rhythm (4)
- 26 Posthumous write-up (abbrev.) (4)
- 27 1996 film starring Madonna (5)
- 28 Cust (4)
- 29 Fish accompaniment (7, 5)

DOWN

- 1 Unlikely dream (3, 2, 3, 3)
- 2 Think deeply (8)
- 3 Kneels (10)
- 4 Cancelled (4)
- 5 Nashville state (9)
- 7 Home; obsessing unhealthily (8)
- 8 Shock into inaction (4)
- 12 Kiosk (for kissing perhaps?) (5)
- 13 Isolated, inward-looking (7)
- 17 An aid to winter sportspeople (3, 4)
- 18 Fizzing sweet (7)
- 20 Charms (7)
- 22 Go on (and on) (6)
- 23 Breathe out (6)
- 35 Idiot, fond of lager? (4)

The answers will be in the next issue of EC1 Echo, and will be put up in two weeks time on our website www.ec1echo.co.uk

it made me so cross, but he would insist on doing it. The marks are plain as plain can be. There was silence.

‘You still there?’ her mother asked.

Another pause.

‘Mum,’ said the voice at the other end, quietly, ‘you’ve never had a cat. You can’t because of the fur.’

‘Fur? What about it?’

‘It makes you sneeze.’

‘Don’t be silly, darling. There was... oh, what was his name? So many years ago now. When you were much younger. Roger, was it? Yes, Roger.’ ‘That was Dodger, Billy’s dog.’

‘Dog?’

‘A spaniel.’

There was a pause.

‘Mum?’ asked her daughter.

Finally: ‘Are you sure?’ said her mother.

‘There’s a photo of Dodger and Billy on the dresser,’ said her daughter. ‘At least there was the last time I visited. Taken in Bournemouth

the summer before he got run over.’

‘Billy was run over?’

‘No, mum. Dodger, the dog. Don’t you remember?’

She struggled to remember. She didn’t. ‘Why are you telling me this?’ she asked sharply, and without waiting for an answer she put down the phone and walked into the living room. True enough, there on the dresser was a colour photo in a silver frame of a boy in shorts sitting on a wall and beside him a large brown and white spaniel. She picked up the photo, stared at it, and burst into tears.

‘Dotty,’ said her husband, hurrying to her. ‘Dotty, darling. Whatever’s the matter?’

‘I...’ sobbed his wife, staring at the photo, ‘I don’t know who that is.’

EC1 resident John Foley is an audiobook producer, puzzle setter and Common Councillor for Farringdon Within Ward. His latest book ‘In and Out of the Schnoodle Bag’ is a collection of 16 quirky and unpredictable tales in aid of Hospice UK. EC1 Echo has five copies to give away to the first five to email us at ec1echo@peelinstitute.org.uk with an email marked ‘table’.

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