

# EC1 ECHO

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The London Museum's head, Sharon Ament, outside the West Smithfield site Credit Penny Dampier



## Two stops from Paris

Ahead of its move to West Smithfield, Sharon Ament, director of the London Museum, speaks to *EC1 Echo* about the exciting plans

● BY OLIVER BENNETT ●

**T**he Museum of London has just closed its doors in its old site in London Wall after 45 years, pending its move to West Smithfield where it re-opens in 2026. But far from being nostalgic, director Sharon Ament is delighted to leave it behind.

"It was a terrible building," says

Ament, "compromised internally, hard to find, stuck off a walker-unfriendly roundabout. Basically, we suffered from being impenetrable. But look at it here," she adds, gesturing at the many passers-by around the West Smithfield site, currently shrouded in hoardings and scaffold, but hinting at a splendid future. "Nobody ever fell into the Museum of London at the old site. They will here."

So in two and a half years' time, or

as Ament puts it with nerve-racking accuracy "in 900 days", the London Museum will open. The name has been chosen to be more definitive – "like the British Museum," says Ament – and it'll have a whole new look. In the meantime there's much to do and the change-over will be anything but a holiday. "It already enables us to really concentrate on the Museum of London Docklands Museum, which is great," says Ament.

"But there's another big change. It's not about moving a museum; more about creating an absolutely new kind of museum. How we bring our collections alive digitally is a part of that plan.

"Imagine that you come to the museum and a brick that was in the Fire of London talks to you. The new museum will make sure the objects are more accessible, and in an intuitive and exciting way."

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N° 20

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Waxing Gibbous

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David Floyd

Editor

Oliver Bennett

Designer

Jonathan Duncan

Head of Advertising

Klaudia Kiss

Project Manager

Penny Dampier

Sales Representative

Maia Wolf

Contributors

Penny Dampier, Andy Love, Olu Alake, Barb Jacobson, David Wilcox, Eula Harrison, Hazel Phillips, Amelia Braddick, David Rossi, Rosie Hore, Nick White, Robert Straw

CONTACT

EC1Echo@peelinstitute.org.uk

7-11 Coppermill Lane, E17 7HA

ADVERTISING

07732 000430 Klaudia Kiss

klaudia@socialspider.com

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NEWS

Credit Action Against Food Poverty/Robert Straw

The mobile food bank

Meet Robert Straw, who has devised a new way of engaging with the homeless

Several charities and organisations help to feed London's homeless, and do good work. But with his organisation Action Against Food Poverty (AAFP) Robert Straw believes he has found a new model – taking the food to the homeless on walks. Every Saturday, he and other volunteers start around Holborn station at 10.30am then walk to Covent Garden, Leicester Square, Piccadilly Circus, Soho, Euston Square, and nearer EC1, to Kings Cross, Angel and Chancery Lane, near Lincoln's Inn Fields in Holborn, a traditional place for London's homeless to congregate.

From Colchester, Essex, a while ago Robert moved out of the family home and stayed with friends. "It made me think about people that were homeless on a permanent basis," he says. He began volunteering for Crisis, Street Kitchen and the Big Issue Foundation, becoming a regular participant in the Big Issue Night Walk.

While Robert recognised the work of these charities he wanted

to change the model. "So last March I started AAFP which goes out to give out homemade sandwiches, cakes and other supplies, and we also sit down with them and have a chat if they want to." It's like a mobile food bank, with human contact and AAFP has a programme called Using Food As A Catalyst For Conversation.

The premise of AAFP is not just to offer food and supplies to the homeless, but also single parents, students and those struggling with their mental health. "We want to engage with people by talking to them, sometimes for three quarters of an hour, trying to lift their mood. It's not just about giving food. We're not changing the world or giving advice. It's about going out to give food and spread a bit of positivity." On a good week they engage with about 30 people, on a bad week about 15. AAFP also supports homeless peoples' dogs.

Some people are afraid, says Robert. "Perhaps they've had mental, physical and sexual abuse. Sometimes their mental health problems will not allow them to have any sort of routine so they'll use drink and drugs, and say, 'this is my choice.' You get a lot of people trying to support themselves by begging. We just try to listen."

AAFP is not yet a charity so is currently seeking funding and potential trustees. See website below for details.

Visit [aaffp.uk](http://aaffp.uk)

Throwing shade

Clerkenwell designer Andy Love has asked Islington schoolchildren for their ideas about coping with climate change

The challenge of climate change is often positioned as generational – in that the young will feel its effects more than the old. Which is one of several reasons why Andy Love from Farringdon-based organisation Shade the UK – which addresses how the UK's communities can deal with rising temperatures – is running a design competition with Islington secondary schools about how to cope with rising temperatures.

Council's ambition to be net carbon neutral by 2030. Love is encouraging the retrofitting of green infrastructure such as green roofs, sun-breakers, and canopies and is inviting comment from teachers, tenants organisations and care home managers as well as pupils.

The competition is not just architectural, adds Love. "We invite all creative mediums from apps to art, design and technology; photography, even poetry, music and dance,"

The competition started last month and finishes this June. Love, an architect and sustainability consultant, is looking at how to make existing buildings fit for purpose.

"When it comes to future climate change, the danger zones are care homes, social housing and schools," he says. "We've already seen an increase in stress-related incidents and last summer's heat is likely to be repeated."

Shade The UK's design competition should come up with many ideas on how they think spaces can adapt, bearing in mind Islington

he says. "It's to express what the schoolchildren feel about climate change and getting them to reimagine their spaces."

The competition started on January 31, and between March and April Love will facilitate a workshop with each school followed by a big summer workshop. "We're hoping in the next few weeks that we'll start to get feedback on how children are responding," says Love.

For more information: Visit [shadetheuk.com/shade-islington](http://shadetheuk.com/shade-islington) Visit [islington sustainability.network](http://islington sustainability.network)

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## NEWS

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# The Peel Institute at 125

*Celebrating the past  
and mapping the  
future of Clerkenwell*

BY OLU ALAKE

In 1896, the local MP for Finsbury, Sir George Masterman Gillett, had been meeting with associates of fellow Quaker faith. Their thoughts usually turned to the many young men they saw around the area, battling poverty and other associated social and economic challenges. It was these meetings that culminated in the opening in 1898 of The Peel Institute, primarily as a place “to supply the young men... with a social centre for recreation, open every evening in the week...”

They met in a Friends’ Meeting House that was previously a woodyard that had manufactured a long wooden instrument called a “peel” which was used to place bread in huge ovens. The meeting house was to become known as “The Peel”. The work of The Peel expanded rapidly into a real community centre for all families, providing not just healthy recreation, but also education and vocational training and social connectivity. Sir George was the MP

for Finsbury for 14 years, culminating in his appointment by the Prime Minister in 1936 as Commissioner for Distressed Areas – effectively, the modern-day equivalent of the Levelling Up Minister. This despite his notorious short shrift for what he considered the inertia of his own Labour Party in tackling issues of concern. It is no surprise that The Peel was the achievement he was proudest of.

As one of the few community organisations that has continuously served the same locality for over 100 years, there is clear heritage value in celebrating this 125th anniversary. More pertinent than the admittedly remarkable history of the founder, and the meandering fortunes of the organisation, is the story of the



locality it serves. What is it about Clerkenwell that has made The Peel such a vital social support infrastructure resource for generations of people? What is in the DNA of the area that infuses successive generations of leaders of the organisation with the passion and zeal to tackle social issues and dedicate itself to making the area a more equal society?

This is particularly enthralling when one considers the myriad other radical social characters and organisations that have made Clerkenwell their base through the past 125 years and even long before: The Chartists and Suffragettes met here, Karl Marx trod here, Dickens walked through and wrote about here, Lenin worked here, prisons were stormed, radical presses and bookstores established and LGBTQ



people found sanctuary – all in this area.

Through this 125th anniversary year and beyond, we want to explore these rich seams of local history that have had national significance, and the related socio-economic and cultural themes that have resonated and endured through time. We want to utilise the rich archives of the area and work with local heritage and cultural organisations and individuals to bring this history alive using 21st century technology. If you are interested in joining us for an exploratory consultative meeting at The Peel Centre, Northampton Road on Thursday 9 February from 5.30–7.30pm, please contact me, Olu, at [o.alake@peelinstitute.org.uk](mailto:o.alake@peelinstitute.org.uk) to discuss further or book a place. Maybe we can make history together.

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NEWS

The heat is off

The winter in some of EC1’s social housing estates has been significantly worsened by Islington Council’s decisions to restrict heating

Islington Council’s block heating policy has caused much consternation. Here, one EC1 estate resident, who wishes to remain anonymous, issues a cri de cœur

The housing blocks of EC1 are enduring a cold winter, in part due to Islington Council’s decision to restrict heating in some of its blocks. Some 4,700 of Islington’s 36,000 council homes have communal heating systems.

This includes reducing the hours when the centralised heating systems are in action and starting the season’s heating schedule a month later than usual – and at the Finsbury and King’s Square estates, the Brunswick Close Estate, the Redbrick estate and Stafford Cripps estate, residents’ voices are being raised in protest.

At the Brunswick Close Estate’s ‘warm hub’ in the estate’s community centre, residents told the *EC1 Echo* that they found the situation intolerable. Kathleen Durden said: “I haven’t been able to sleep because it’s so cold.”

In an endeavour to become warm at noon, Ms Durden, 79, filled a hot water bottle and scalded her hand, which she attributes to the freezing conditions in her flat. “The council tells you to use your own heating. But who’s going to pay the costs of an expensive fan heater?”

Her neighbour Pauline Fitzpatrick, 61, said that the heating hours had gone down from 18 a day to 13. “The less it’s on, the longer it then takes for it to heat up – almost an hour.” They residents also said that the thermostat controls inside the flats were inadequate and made little difference.

Sarah Nash of the Finsbury Estate TRA said it was a similar situation in their blocks, adding that the council had stonewalled residents’ complaints and left complaints unanswered.

“There’s completely no consultation,” said Ms Nash, who added that the insulation of the blocks was poor, worsening the heat loss. She said that the TRA was consulting lawyers with a view to taking a case against Islington Council.

As well as the heating issues, residents have been aggrieved that in a consultation exercise immediately prior to the heating season the council only offered residents two choices: to either pay a little more for their heating or pay a lot more and keep the heating as it was. As the prices have risen, the heating has come down. One resident of Brunswick Close said: “I’ve never seen as many people so upset with the council – and it’s not just what they’ve done, but how they’ve done it.”

In response, Islington Council says that the measures have been put in place to

help residents save money in the face of soaring energy costs – and that if there hadn’t been changes to communal heating, residents would have had to pay hundreds of pounds more each year.

“Our residents are living through a cost of living emergency,” said Cllr Una O’Halloran, Islington Council’s executive member for housing and communities. “Global energy prices have soared in the last year, leaving most people in our borough facing much higher heating bills. It’s vital that the council does everything it can to protect them from further financial hardship.

“Energy bills for communal heating on our estates are paid by estate residents, who face big bill increases because of soaring global energy prices. The changes to communal heating hours on some estates in Islington have been solely made to save Islington residents money on their energy bills. The council is spending £1.1m of the heat reserve fund to keep bills lower and soften the blow of vastly increased energy prices.”

The council said that communal heating is on for 13 hours a day during the heating season rather than the previous 18 hours and that was similar or more than the amount of time residents with individual boilers heat their homes.

While residents will be paying an average of £17.40 per week, without the council’s action the average bill would be three times higher, at £52.28 per week. These actions are saving the average resident £34.88 per week off their bill.

The council said that it will be consulting again with residents.

“The heating situation this winter has been a failure by the council. No private landlord would dare attempt it but Islington Council can rest easy, fully aware that the majority of residents on the communal estates are unlikely to be able to afford legal representation.

Last March, Islington Council applied to the Government for permission to charge the maximum legally in council tax. This was months before the cost of living crisis. Then they raised the utility charges – heating, hot water and other services such as estate cleaning – as they do every year in April. The residents on the estates have no choice: they cannot install their own boilers so they have to pay the council for heating and hot water.

The council’s heating season starts in September and ends in May. Residents pay for it all year round although they get six months worth. The council claims it is helping tenants and leaseholders to spread the cost.

This winter, with no warning or consultation, the council cut another six weeks off the heating season. It should have begun on September 15, but on September 13 residents received an undated letter telling them that the heating

would not be coming on for another month. The council ignored all attempts to reach them. Then, for over a month, the hot water was switched off between midnight and 7am, on at least one estate housing around 800 people.

Repeated attempts to talk to the council have been in vain, with urgent emails from TMOs unanswered. Then a letter, authored by a new body set up by IBC, Estate Champions, informed the residents that the utilities charges were going up again, for the second time in six months, by more than double. Heaping insult onto injury, the heating would also be switched off three times daily: in the morning, the afternoon, and at night.

The council claim to aim to cater to “most” of the residents. But on one estate alone, this writer spoke to ailing residents including an 80-year-old woman with cancer and a family of four with a child of 11 and the father in his 40s, both ill. The stressed mother was close to tears as she asked: ‘How can the council keep doing this to us?’

It turns out that the council has been having a lot of problems with its plan. As the boiler systems were not designed to be turned on and off several times daily, many have broken down. The council’s solution was to turn the heating down to its lowest point and still be on. When IBC turns the heating down or off, people who need warm homes get out their fan heaters.

Then GEM Environmental Building Services, the heating and engineering company which has the account with Islington Council, has to attend the estates repeatedly, sometimes taking days to get the heating working again. No compensation is liable until the heating is down for three consecutive days so the system can break down on a Friday and not be fixed until the following Tuesday, but tenants still have to pay on top of the extra cost of warming their homes with alternative sources.

Christmas was a gloomy affair as many couldn’t afford gifts and bills. No wonder the people of EC1 are beside themselves with worry and anger.”

*“The council’s heating season starts in September and ends in May. Residents pay for it all year round”*



Kathleen Durden (right), Carly Fitzpatrick and Pauline Fitzpatrick of the Brunswick Close Estate



FEATURES

5 COLUMN



West Smithfield will become the new London Museum site Credit Penny Dampier

Continued from Page-1

Museums have learned a lot since the Covid era when people couldn't visit in person. "Before then, we imagined that people would want to stand in front of objects, rather than, look at information on a website," says Ament. "But nobody behaved like that. So now we want the objects to speak." In doing this Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality will play their part, but Ament says there'll be no "tricksy stuff that adds nothing. My questions are always: what does it add? How does it help understanding? Does it help an object or story come to life? If it does, we'll consider it but it must be really focused."

There are several other current initiatives for the Museum, including a large addition to its digital Oral History Collection, set to launch in 2024, and to include 5,000 newly public oral histories from around London.

"We've already got a really big oral history collection and for us, the direct voice has always been really important," says Ament. "When you hear people talking about the Blitz the power of somebody talking to you from across the ages is phenomenal. Our oral history has always been about being representative, working with working class communities and individuals whose voices haven't been heard to give as full a picture of London as possible."

Shortly a new report, 'Inequality, Class and the Pandemic' is to be published

by the Museum, drawing on oral histories of those shuttered times, from carers to supermarket workers, cleaners, bartenders and delivery couriers. "In this programme we'll collect and record the lives of young people," says Ament, "It always seems to be adults that appear in oral history."

Another way the London Museum will differ from its predecessor is that parts will be open all night. It's set to include a dedicated 24-hour cafe, the Cocoa Rooms, on the Farringdon Street side. Named after Lockhart's Cocoa Rooms, a chain of alcohol-free bars founded in 1880 – one was located at West Smithfield – it will be part of the Museum's porous approach.

"The area already has a 24-hour feel, with the meat market, Bart's Hospital and the nightlife," says Ament. Indeed, the Museum has linked up with nightclub Fabric, which is set to become what is said to be the 'world's first' nightclub-in-residence at a museum. A big event is planned for 2025 to inaugurate this aspect with music, art, food and events, and the sense of a destination will build, adjacent to its Crossrail hub.

"The location has all the magic ingredients and superb accessibility," says Ament. "The Museum of London will go from being a hidden place that no one can find to being two stops away from Paris – and the area will be connected in ways that no other cultural districts will. Plus, it's a really evocative environment."

Being a museum of its own city,

the London Museum faces few of the difficulties facing other museums, such as the restitution of objects to origin countries and the decolonisation of the collection. But as Ament says, "Museums should be in the centre of public conversation. From my perspective people shouldn't be afraid of objects expressing parts of our history. Understanding the depth and complexity of history, backed by evidence, is part of our desire to help understanding. We're constantly understanding more about London, working with historians, sociologists and teams." And using the resources of Londoners themselves is part of that, for as Ament says, "You might be the world's expert on London's laundrettes, in which case get in touch."

There's another aspect of interest to *ECI Echo* readers – how the London Museum will interact with locals. "We set ourselves a target of engaging with 100,000 Londoners so far, when I last looked, we were up to 45,000," says Ament [details are on the website]. "In terms of our relationship with Clerkenwell, definitely. We're on an intersection with three boroughs, but I've found that people think less of boundaries, more about neighbourhoods. And with a population of 10 million curators in London, we want to be a loved and shared place – in the middle of big ideas and in the middle of London itself."

Visit [museumoflondon.org.uk/museum-london](https://museumoflondon.org.uk/museum-london)

A Museum of the Streets

BY DAVID WILCOX

I'm excited by Sharon Ament's vision for the new London Museum – and also believe we needn't wait three years to engage with the extraordinary heritage on our doorstep in EC1, drawing on the knowledge of residents as well as historians.

In the *ECI Echo* last year City councillor Mathew Bell proposed re-staging Bartholomew Fair to coincide with this year's Barts 900 celebrations for St Bartholomew the Great and Barts Hospital. I added ideas on how digital technology could extend the experience by streaming events, and through augmented reality apps. I now hope that a Bartholomew Fair for 2023 might be supported by the Corporation's new Destination City programme, and the proposed Business Improvement District, if approved by ballot.

In any case, we don't need a Fair to take these ideas forward on the doorstep of the new museum in West Smithfield, and elsewhere.

Back in 2010 the Museum pioneered a Street-Museum app promoted as "a bid to put the collections of the museum where they belonged, on the streets of London." Changes in phone operating systems mean the app is no longer available, but it is now possible to develop something similar using 360 degree photos with embedded images, video, and hotspots.

Anyone using Google Streetview will value how you can stroll, virtually, down a street and click on hotspots where they have added information and photos to Google maps.

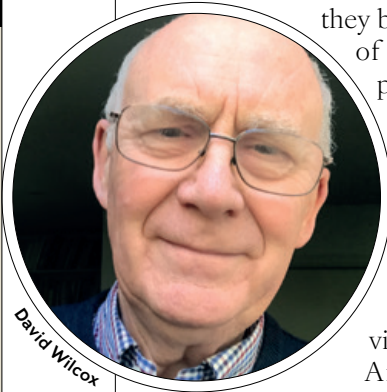
I'm exploring that using a 360 camera and virtual tour software and following through another initiative also featured in last year's *ECI Echo*, by adding additional content to the places highlighted on quiet and interesting routes through Clerkenwell and the City created by the Living Streets Footways project.

With The Peel I am exploring how we can use maps and media to celebrate its 125th anniversary and the radical heritage of Clerkenwell. There will be an event on Thursday 9 February to show some demonstrations – get in touch on my email below if you're interested.

Museums are experts in curating and displaying content, using traditional and new media. City and Islington guides are walking museums of knowledge, and some share that online. I believe we can partner with guides and historians in creating our own museums, enhancing our explorations online and on the ground.

Sharon envisages an innovative, open, social museum. We can start to realise that vision now, building on ideas first featured in *ECI Echo*.

For more visit my blog [connections.commonslondon.org](https://connections.commonslondon.org) or email [david@socialreporter.com](mailto:david@socialreporter.com)



David Wilcox



# NEWS FROM THE PEEL

The Peel is your local community centre, based in Clerkenwell since 1898.

We offer classes, regular events and activities for all ages and assist people to set up projects which benefit the community – including *EC1 Echo*, the community newspaper



## Letter from Olu



Welcome to 2023, a year that promises to be like no other! It has certainly started where last year left off, with everyone seemingly on dreaded tenterhooks waiting for the next crisis to roll on us. The cost of living emergency shows no signs of abating, the government is in a stalemate with unions on how to resolve the issues that have precipitated the increasingly widespread industrial actions, and there are worrying signs of increased levels of mental health and antisocial behaviour amongst our youth.

It is at times like these that organisations like The Peel can really come into their own: as more than a community hub, we are now out in the community asking people how we can help them, what they and their children need to live safer, more fulfilled lives, and then helping them to make those things

happen. We are so grateful for how much the community has embraced us in this approach over the past year. This has seen us develop some really fantastic initiatives both at our base at Three Corners and also in various Clerkenwell community settings. With your help, we are looking to do even more for even more in 2023!

This year marks a significant milestone for us – it is our 125th anniversary! Yes, since 1898, The Peel Institute has had a constant presence in Clerkenwell. While it is sad that the issues we were set up to address by George Masterman Gillett MP in 1898 are broadly still the same as our mandate today, it is very powerful that as an organisation we continue to rise to meet those challenges. There will be a programme of activity through the year, which will be an opportunity not just for us to look back on Clerkenwell over the last 125 years, but to also reimagine the next 125 years and see what we can do together to bring that better society into being. If you have any ideas, please do share with us.

There are other imminent changes at Peel HQ: Our Chair of Trustees, Arvinda Gohil is stepping down after 6 years of dedicated service. We are in the process of recruiting a replacement as you will see in this edition. Please apply yourself or share with your colleagues, friends or neighbours that may be interested.

Please do get in touch to let us know if you have any ideas or thoughts on how we can work together.

I wish you and yours a magnificent, happy, healthy 2023!

## The Peel Archives – 125th anniversary

As The Peel reaches its 125th anniversary, we are reflecting on our continuous presence in Clerkenwell over this period. The Peel has been working alongside local archivist and historian, Leon Robinson of Positive Steps to catalogue and develop our archives. In our first session, we discovered documents dating back to as early as 1896, as well as a wide range of photographs and reports.

If you would like to contribute to a discussion on how we can appropriately mark this anniversary, we will be hosting a community event on 9 February at The Peel Centre.

Please RSVP at [admin@peelinstitute.org.uk](mailto:admin@peelinstitute.org.uk).



Archives at Finsbury Library

## Dedication to Sheila



It is with great sadness that we announce the loss of our dear friend, Sheila Collins. Sheila was a regular member of The Peel's 55+ Social Club for over 20 years. We sat down with some of her close friends, including Maria Mansfield, Josie Hadley, Mary Smith and Vivian Evans, and reminisced about her time with us. Sheila was known as the life of the party. Incredibly outgoing and funny, she had a special interest in creative activities and quizzes. She enjoyed The Peel's day trips to the theatre and seaside. She loved to sing and would regularly join in with karaoke or live performances. As one member wrote: 'Thanks for all the laughter, chats and memories, we will really miss your fun personality and years of experience.' Another noted: 'You made me so welcome when I started at The Peel. Your knowledge at the quizzes was amazing – great times with all the activities we shared.' Rest in peace, Sheila.

## Christmas at The Peel

Christmas at The Peel is always a special time for all of our members and staff. This Christmas, both our Social and Youth clubs celebrated with big parties. We were incredibly proud of what The Peel team has achieved through the year, and it was a joy to engage in the festivities with our members.

We are so grateful to the organisations that generously donated to our Christmas Toy appeal – thanks to you, we gave over 50 presents to local children both at The Peel and at local estates.



Older Person's Activity Coordinator, pictured with local Police Community Support Officers

## Community warm spaces



Keeping Warm Together

The Peel recognises the impact that energy cost rises, increased cost of fuel and the cost of living crisis is having on local residents. We are adapting our services to support those who need it in the form of a warm space. Our warm spaces are open to all members of the community, and hot drinks and soups are provided free of charge. These take place every Thursday from 10am–3pm at The Peel Institute and every Friday 10am–3pm at Brunswick Close Estate's community hall. Our first community warm space was a huge success with 26 people in attendance.

## Community outreach

Our local outreach team was out in full force this month. From delivering ready meals to local

estates and schools, the team also visited Finsbury Library to promote The Peel and ask residents what changes they'd like to see in the local area. If you have an activity or project you'd like help supporting, contact [s.gregory@peelinstitute.org.uk](mailto:s.gregory@peelinstitute.org.uk).

## Youth club revival

On January, we saw the return of our Youth Club social evenings for the first time since 2020. Unlike our coding and cooking classes, these evenings are a chance for our young members to get together and play, without a specific focus or goal – just fun. This is especially important after the Covid pandemic, where many children and young people were unable to socialise with their peers. Unlike many other youth clubs that only offer specialised classes, having this space for appropriately

supervised activity is a great opportunity for children to practise social development in a safe environment. One of the young people said: "This is so much fun – I have even made new friends!" A parent said – "My daughter is usually so shy and withdrawn, but coming here she has been like a different, happier child!"

The Peel's Youth Club Social Evenings are open to children ages 8 to 18, with separate sessions for 8 to 12 year olds at 3.30–6pm and 13 to 18 year olds from 6.30–8.30pm. There are other Youth Club activities on Monday to Thursday. Please contact Jeana on 07919 447074 for more information.



### Otis Lumumba’s Guitar Classes

Otis Lumumba’s African guitar classes have proved to be extremely popular with local residents of all ages. The classes have proved to be wonderfully intergenerational, with a wide group of ages learning together. Classes are free for under 18s and £5 for adults.

### The Peel Spotlight: Nermin Shefik



Each issue, we interview a member of staff, volunteer or local resident to give readers an insight into life at The Peel. Meet Nermin Shefik, our Programmes Assistant and Community Organiser.

**What’s your role at The Peel?**  
I actually have two roles at The Peel – I’m the Social Club Programmes Assistant and also a Community Organiser. I assist the over-55’s Social Club in their day-to-day activities, and with the community organiser side, I go out into the community, see what the general

need is, and help residents set up projects that benefit the community. The key to this is finding out what Clerkenwell needs.

**What’s your best accomplishment at The Peel?**  
Working at The Peel has given me a fraternal feeling – a sense of belonging and community. It may seem like a cliché, but the Peel team really is a big family, and we all want to work together to give back to Clerkenwell residents. Recently, I’m most proud of Dish ‘n’ Jam – a monthly food and music event we started up last year. We were joined by people from all walks of life who otherwise would have never met. We received amazing feedback from the community.

**Describe The Peel in 3 words**  
Welcoming, committed and joyous.

**What do you like about Clerkenwell?**  
There’s such a varied mixture of people in the local area – a melting pot of culture. I especially enjoy the creative side of Clerkenwell. Where I grew up, in Old Street, people aren’t as friendly, but here – in the immediate part of Clerkenwell – people smile and say good morning. There’s a strong sense of community spirit.

## JOIN OUR TEAM

### CHAIR

The Peel Institute is looking for a Chair, to join a group of people passionate and enthusiastic about our work and committed to supporting people in Clerkenwell. In return, you will be part of a team who are impact driven and recognised as a key part of the ecosystem supporting the community.

We cover a range of local people and their needs – our activities include cooking sessions for young people and families, baby items swap shop, food distribution and exercise classes for older people. The area is changing fast, and the Peel is changing with it to respond to local needs.

A strong connection to Clerkenwell is important, and a passion for our work.



**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 Alliance meet to focus on key local issues and implement positive change. There is an unprecedented need for food and other donations due to the cost of living emergency 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 or contribute to our upcoming initiatives. If you would like to join the Alliance, email [admin@peelinstitute.org.uk](mailto:admin@peelinstitute.org.uk)

**Would you like to volunteer with us?**  
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](mailto:admin@peelinstitute.org.uk). We are so grateful for the support that we have been receiving from various local organisations.

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## February at The Peel

SC Social Club    YC Youth Club

Please refer to our website and social media platforms for more details, and our March calendar

<b>Wednesday 1st</b> SC Activites 10am–3pm YC Coding 5–6pm (8 to 16yrs)	<b>Thursday 2nd</b> SC Activites 10am–3pm YC Cooking 4:30–6pm Warm space 10am–3pm – The Peel	<b>Friday 3rd</b> Warm space 10am–3pm – Brunswick Close Estate	<b>Saturday 4th</b>	<b>Sunday 5th</b>	<b>Monday 6th</b> SC Activites 10am–3pm	<b>Tuesday 7th</b> SC Activites 10am–3pm YC Social 3:30–5:30pm (8–12 yrs) & 6–8pm (12+) Otis guitar classes 4–5pm
<b>Wednesday 8th</b> SC Activites 10am–3pm YC Coding 5–6pm (8 to 16yrs)	<b>Thursday 9th</b> SC Activites 10am–3pm YC Cooking 4:30–6pm Warm space 10am–3pm – The Peel	<b>Friday 10th</b> Warm space 10am–3pm – Brunswick Close Estate	<b>Saturday 11th</b>	<b>Sunday 12th</b>	<b>Monday 13th</b> SC Activites 10am–3pm	<b>Tuesday 14th</b> SC Activites 10am–3pm YC Social 3:30–5:30pm (8–12 yrs) & 6–8pm (12+) Otis guitar classes 4–5pm
<b>Wednesday 15th</b> SC Activites 10am–3pm YC Coding 5–6pm (8 to 16yrs)	<b>Thursday 16th</b> SC Activites 10am–3pm YC Cooking 4:30–6pm Warm space 10am–3pm – The Peel	<b>Friday 17th</b> Warm space 10am–3pm – Brunswick Close Estate	<b>Saturday 18th</b>	<b>Sunday 19th</b>	<b>Monday 20th</b> SC Activites 10am–3pm	<b>Tuesday 21st</b> SC Activites 10am–3pm YC Social 3:30–5:30pm (8–12 yrs) & 6–8pm (12+) Otis guitar classes 4–5pm
<b>Wednesday 22nd</b> SC Activites 10am–3pm YC Coding 5–6pm (8 to 16yrs)	<b>Thursday 23rd</b> SC Activites 10am–3pm YC Cooking 4:30–6pm Warm space 10am–3pm – The Peel	<b>Friday 24th</b> Dish n’ Jam: Love is Love 6–9pm Warm space 10am–3pm – Brunswick Close Estate	<b>Saturday 25th</b>	<b>Sunday 26th</b>	<b>Monday 27th</b> SC Activites 10am–3pm	<b>Tuesday 28th</b> SC Activites 10am–3pm YC Social 3:30–5:30pm (8–12 yrs) & 6–8pm (12+) Otis guitar classes 4–5pm





# Poet’s corner

## At almost 98, Peel attendee and poet Eula Harrison has a fierce lyrical gift

One of the most remarkable poets of our time has emerged in Clerkenwell. Eula Harrison, who attends The Peel, has become a rising star, with an expanding portfolio of poems that are as heartfelt and thoughtful as they are punchy and powerful. And she is 98 years old in March.

Eula, who was born in Cuba in 1925 to Jamaican parents, had at a young age the good fortune to have an inspirational teacher in Edna E. Harrison. “I remember it well,” says Eula. “It was hot. We’d come back from lunch break and she would sit on top of a bench and read to us. And I didn’t realise until later that it got me interested in poetry. That is how I started.”

There was another inspirational moment. When Eula’s grandfather died, and she was about 12 years old, she went through his old travelling chest. “Inside, I found this old poetry book by Paul Laurence Dunbar.” An African-American writer, Dunbar was born to enslaved parents, but managed to gain an international reputation. “I took it to school,” says Eula. “I think maybe it spurred me, because I started to read more and funnily enough, even started writing a story about my grandfather.”

Eula moved to London in 1956 and lived in the West End near the BT Tower, which she saw being built. With links in the UK – her brother was in the RAF – she moved to be with her partner. She had three children here, and worked as a seamstress. By the 1980s she retired in the UK and moved back to Jamaica for nine years. “My partner died and I just didn’t want to stay,” she says. “But the Jamaica I’d left was different to the Jamaica it became.” So after a while working there, she returned to London.

This time, with grown-up children, Eula had more time for herself. She saw an advert for a poetry class in Hilldrop Community Centre with poet Tessa Dummett and went along. “She was a good teacher,” says Eula. “She told us to read each other, comment on each other’s work, and taught us poetry forms and other things.” Eula’s work was published in an anthology.

“*Something comes in my head and I just get it down*”

Eula also went to Age UK’s “Older Learners” group in the early 1990s, where she gained a lot of experience. From this, she found herself volunteering in schools and helping young people. In recognition of this work she was invited to Clarence

House where she met the then Prince Charles.

For the last five years or so, Eula has attended All Change Arts in Dingley Place, EC1 and along with The Peel every Monday, she finds both places “very supportive”. Eula still writes – not daily, but a fair amount.

“Something comes in my head and I just get it down,” she says, about her process. “I write in bed and have quite a few pen marks on my bed linen as a result.” A keen self-editor, she also has “a lot of little scribbles. I might do three or four lines then I go back to them, to see if they work or not.” Some are on ancestral themes, while others may be about flowers. She has a huge range.

“When Covid came I wrote about Covid, because someone called to ask me if I’m lonely. That’s when I wrote my poem *Not Lonely or Bored*. It’s what I do to keep myself occupied.” With over 100 poems and many more in parts, Eula has enough for another anthology or two.

Writing has kept her sharp, she says, including through lockdown, and she has become a much-loved regular at The Peel, where CEO Olu Alake has called her work “incredible”. Eula has now come to the attention of editors and publishers. But while her venerable age could be a real marketing platform, the interest in her poems lies in their simplicity and strength of her words – to be seen, for example, in the poem to the right, *Citizens of Empire*.

### Citizens Of Empire

Passengers arriving in this country  
In 1948 on the SS Empire Windrush  
Did not arrive as fateless migrants  
Driven from their homes  
Or dying of hunger and thirst.  
They came invited to work.  
The country needed workers,  
The call came from the Government here in London.

Leaving families behind,  
They arrived, eager to do their part,  
All loyal citizens of the Empire.  
Not entering by a back door,  
But as British citizens,  
Born under the British flag.  
With head held high,  
And a British passport in hand.  
Their Motherland needed help,  
To rebuild a country  
Devastated by war.

From all corners of the Caribbean they came,  
Ready to work  
Filling the gaps left,  
By those who sadly would not be returning.  
Eagerly, they arrived like those before.  
Soldiers and sailors,  
Fearlessly giving their lives,  
In both world wars,  
Defending king, country and Empire.  
The Head of Empire seated here in London,  
Has always been revered by them from afar.

Never did they expect the unfriendly,  
Unfair treatment meted out.  
Given the worst of jobs, lowest of pay,  
Suffering snubs and indignities.  
Willingly they did the work offered,  
Loyally helping the country to recover.  
Still remembering families far away to be provided for,  
While suffering the effects of unfamiliar cold and snow.  
Getting frost-bitten and having heavy chills and colds,  
From bad housing conditions and unsuitable clothing.  
Working long shifts as drivers and conductors on buses,  
Manning the railway and underground,  
Building sites to name a few.  
In time, they were able to make changes  
With better conditions,  
Securing a home,  
Allowing them to be united with families,  
Within this group of labourers on the Empire Windrush  
Were doctors and nurses, manning the hospitals  
across the country,  
Nursing the returned wounded and shell-shocked.

Long before the Windrush came,  
Thousands of our soldiers and sailors, airmen and engineers,  
For army and navy, carpenters, masons.  
How proud we all should be of them who came before,  
Worked so hard for hardly any recognition.  
Forerunners for others who came after,  
They truly are our heroes.  
Now these same workers – Doctors, nurses and others –  
elderly and infirm,  
Are being forced out of the country they worked so hard,  
And fought for  
And helped to rebuild.  
If we, the people of those far-off islands, should complain,  
Of disgraceful and unfair treatment,  
Meted out to these elderly citizens,  
Can we truly be blamed for complaining?



# A love supreme

One of the UK's top jazz musicians, Nikki Yeoh, is Clerkenwell born and bred. Here she talks about why we need more music in our schools – and in our homes

One can see how Nikki Yeoh became one of the UK's pre-eminent jazz improvisers. Words tumble out of her as if she can't contain them, and watching her play is similarly captivating.

Now Nikki, 49, is leading Guildhall School's Music Education Islington team to develop jazz and improvised music for Islington's young people – a role that is, in a sense, giving back. For Nikki grew up in St John's Street, Clerkenwell in a modest household. She's spent most of her subsequent life in the area, lives here still, and thinks EC1 is "one of the most brilliant places in the world". Indeed, with her help it may well become one of the country's music hubs.

While Nikki's story started inauspiciously it shows the benefits of true family support. Her late father was Malaysian while her English mother's antecedents go back into Holborn for generations. She started playing music at three years old

when her grandmother bought her a Fisher Price xylophone which her nan, noticing her talent, soon upgraded. "Exmouth Market was different then, with lots of shops," says Nikki. "In an antique shop my nan found a little blue toy Victorian piano which she gave me when I was about five years old." She took piano lessons and by the time she was seven, "was playing really well." Then her granddad, a black cab driver, took out a loan of £300 ("a lot of money in the 1970s") and bought her a proper upright piano.

A serious breakthrough occurred when Nikki played a key gig – on the hardworking piano in the now-defunct Royal Mail pub on Joseph Trotter Close. "I was outside with crisps and a soft drink, and was encouraged inside to show off my skills," says Nikki. "So I played Edelweiss from *The*

*Sound of Music*. This guy came over to me with a big smile on his face.

"He'd collected loads of money for me in a beer glass. He handed it to me and said, 'Now you're a professional'." Little did the pub-goers know that a few decades hence Nikki would be winning awards as a pianist and composer, and playing everywhere from the Royal Festival Hall to Ronnie Scott's in Soho and the Montreux Jazz Festival.

Nikki went to Hugh Myddleton school and continued playing, with good results, encouraged by her mum who

the whole thing. I was amazed. Then he was whisked off to the East West Centre in Old Street for a macrobiotic lunch."

In the 1990s, a resurgence of British jazz took place with artists like Julian Joseph and Courtney Pine. Nikki found a natural space in this world – and had another fortuitous twist. At a concert at the Jazz Cafe, Courtney Pine needed a pianist and she raised her hand. "I thought, 'I'm not ready yet' and had impostor syndrome," she said. "It bought up stuff about being a woman and working class. I felt awkward." But "an

at the piano and have just been commissioned by the National Youth Jazz Orchestra to write a massive piece which will premiere this year."

With all this going on, Nikki has long been a staunch advocate of music in education. She teaches piano at The Camden School for Girls, runs jazz ensembles for Camden Music and is a mentor for Music for Youth. The Guildhall School initiative adds to that but she's adamant that she's a musician who teaches, rather than a teacher who plays music. "I treat it like a skill that you can

learn. Some people believe in a 'gift' and worry that they won't be good enough. I always tell them: rehearse. It's the best way."

But she's dismayed by the Government's attitude, placing music so low on the curriculum. "Education has become so regimented and music and art are being squeezed out," she says. "There's a distinct hierarchy from subjects like Maths and English at the top, then the sciences and humanities and right down at the bottom is the arts, with drama first, then music and dance.

"Why is that? It's disabling young people's self-expression. I always say, self-expression begets creativity and creativity begets freedom." Also, argues Nikki, "the music industry brings in so much revenue to the country. It's short-sighted as lots of other jobs are attached to it." And it brings pleasure. What could be better?

**Nikki's Music Education Islington course is called 'Jazz, Funk, Fusion, Afrobeat, Experimental and beyond band practice'. Based at Elizabeth Garret Anderson School every Monday term-time from 4.30–6.30pm, it is open to anyone aged 6–18 confident enough to play all 12 notes on their instrument. Discounts are given to those who live or attend school in Islington and bursaries available for those in need of assistance. Visit [gsmd.ac.uk/study-with-guildhall/children-and-young-people/music-education-islington](http://gsmd.ac.uk/study-with-guildhall/children-and-young-people/music-education-islington)**



Let us go then, you and I

*The publishing house Faber moves to Hatton Garden*

The publishing house Faber is moving its premises to The Bindery in Hatton Garden this spring. Previously in London's traditional book publishing centre of Bloomsbury, its new Clerkenwell location will be its fourth home in its history.

Sometimes known by the full title Faber and Faber, the publishing house has long been a poetry specialist. TS Eliot was an editor and director at Faber, and the publishing house has hosted several other Nobel Laureates from Harold Pinter to Samuel Beckett, Derek Walcott, Seamus Heaney to Orhan Pamuk. More recently, Jarvis Cocker has been an editor-at-large and it benefited from royalties brought in by the hugely successful Andrew Lloyd Webber musical *Cats*, based on TS Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* of 1939.

It also hosts The Faber Academy, a school with creative writing courses. Two scholarships are offered each year, with a focus on under-represented groups.

The Bindery, launched last year and hosted the second Clerkenwell Photography Competition, in conjunction with The Peel and *EC1 Echo*. On the site of an old book-binding business, hence its name, The Bindery is close to the City of London's historic churches featured in TS Eliot's epic poem, *The Waste Land*. It has a garden designed by landscape designer Andy Sturgeon, zero-carbon technology and charging points for electric bikes and scooters.



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FEATURES



FEATURES

From Amwell to Australia

Hazel Phillips tells the amazing story of James Blackburn, Clerkenwell’s ‘white collar’ convict



St George's in Hobart by Blackburn  
Credit Annette Teng  
via Wikimedia Commons

Today it’s hard to imagine that Clerkenwell was notorious for crime. Charles Dickens wrote about the terrible conditions he saw in parts of Clerkenwell, particularly in *Oliver Twist*, and before Farringdon Road was built, there were notorious ‘rookeries’ around Saffron and Herbal Hills where conditions were terrible. It was a warren of crime stretching over the Fleet River and Dickens based his character Fagin in *Oliver Twist* on notorious Ikey Solomons – a shopkeeper receiving stolen goods. He avoided an Old Bailey trial when he escaped and travelled to New York, then joined his wife in Tasmania who had been transported there, and ultimately opened a shop and remained there.

Most convicts who were transported did not have such colourful lives as Solomons. Another deportee to Tasmania, convicted for what today we might call ‘white collar crime’, was James Blackburn from the Lloyd Baker Estate.

Blackburn came from a respectable family and his brother John was the Minister at the Congregational

Church in Claremont Square. A surveyor-cum-architect/engineer, he had been involved in developing the sewage system in Finsbury.

Blackburn was involved in building the Lloyd Baker Estate in the 1830s. The system for housing development in those days meant that people would lease land from the landowner, build a house or two on that land and then lease it to a resident for a specified period.

This could be financially precarious if the builder was not able to let the house and recoup the investment. Blackburn experienced this cash flow problem in the winter of 1833. Already living in a house with his family in Lloyd Street with his brother John next door, furniture was taken from his house and he faced losing his home altogether.

The solution he chose that February – 190 years ago this month – resulted in a dramatic and irreversible turn in his life. He forged two signatures on a Bank of England draft to the value of £600 – £36,000 in today’s prices. He was found out and charged.

Blackburn had strong character witnesses at his trial including the solicitor of the Lloyd Baker Estate and several sewage commissioners he had worked with. Despite this, he was sentenced to transportation to Tasmania (then Van Diemen’s Land). His sentence was considered to be harsh as most convicts transported had been convicted more than once.

Thus did the next phase of Blackburn’s life begin in Hobart. Far from leaving his skills behind, they were very useful in developing the town and colony which was little more than 30 years old. On arrival convicts would be assessed for behaviour and skills and allocated either to work for the government or to develop farms and estates. Soon, James was designing and building churches, watch houses, roads and bridges across Tasmania – and a significant landmark in Hobart today is the sandstone tower of the church of St George’s in the neighbourhood of Battery Point to his design.

Not all convicts rehabilitated themselves so well, and most were not educated or skilled as he was, but many had opportunities to improve their lot. But how would Blackburn have integrated into aspirational Hobart society? It seems that people were accepted into the middle classes as long as they didn’t display their conviction. This is likely to have happened to Blackburn, and certainly his descendants didn’t know he had been a convict.

After a free pardon in 1841, Blackburn headed to Melbourne with his wife and now larger family – a route chosen by many in Tasmania attracted by the benefits of the gold rush. With four businessmen, he formed a water company to supply the first piped water in the city at a cheaper price, then became Melbourne’s City Surveyor. He died in his 50s in Melbourne with many achievements under his belt. But what might Blackburn have done had he not been transported? London was expanding fast in Islington and elsewhere. Possibly, he may have been involved in sanitation projects to combat diseases like cholera – first making an appearance in the 1830s – cleaned up the nearby Fleet River or worked with other champions of public health like Edwin Chadwick.

We can only speculate. But Blackburn certainly left his mark in Tasmania and Melbourne, some visible today. How’s that for a convict’s legacy?



Going underground

The tube is 160 years old this year – and Farringdon can claim to be one of its birthplaces

The London Underground – the oldest underground railway in the world – celebrates its 160-year anniversary this year – and EC1 is a vital node in that timeline. For it was in January 1863 that the Metropolitan Railway took its first ride from Paddington and Farringdon.

It was as the picture (above) attests, a forgotten world of top hats and open carriages. As these cars were drawn by steam trains, belching smoke into the air, huge chimneys had to be constructed. They can still be seen in a few places including Britannia Street in King’s Cross – big brick shafts about three or four metres wide. This segment of the Underground system is one of the shallowest in London, due to the ‘cut-and-cover’ tunnels, and there’s a sense of it above the street too.

The London Underground was a technological marvel as well as being a world first. But the pollution levels would not pass muster in our own age. The smoke from the trains affected the drivers and staff, who companied of sulphurous fumes causing what they called ‘choke-damp’. The gas lighting didn’t help. And there were incidents, too, like on 2 April 1863, a few months after opening, when an indignant letter in *The Times* brought attention to an antisocial incident, where a ‘powerful man entered, and after pushing and showing by gestures he wished for my seat... if I did not like to move he should sit on my knee which he accordingly did’. The trains braked a lot, making for a traumatic ride, and in 1897 it was reported that an entrepreneurial pharmacist had created a ‘Metropolitan Mixture’ to ease the respiratory trauma of a tube ride.

It’s a long way from Farringdon’s whispering latest innovation, Crossrail and the Elizabeth Line. But it testifies to a sense of innovation and as well as a special 160 year roundel, called Love the Tube, there’s a programme of activities throughout 2023.

Further details of the Underground anniversary celebrations can be found here: [tfl.gov.uk/Tube160](https://tfl.gov.uk/Tube160)

These pictures of Farringdon Underground courtesy of London Metropolitan Archives. This image is available to view on the London Picture Archive website along with 250,000 historical images and maps of the capital [www.londonpicturearchive.org.uk](http://www.londonpicturearchive.org.uk). Located in Clerkenwell, LMA is London’s historical archive, providing free access to millions of documents, maps, films and images from 1067 to the present day. The current exhibition, Magnificent Maps of London is open normal hours and will also open on Sat 11 Feb and Sat 11 March.



ARTS & CULTURE

London always dressed in black for royal death. It could not be said that Prince Albert, the husband of Queen Victoria, was a universally popular figure, but with his death on 14 December 1861, *The Times* did its best. ‘Never in our remembrance,’ the newspaper remarked, ‘has there been such universal sorrow at the death of an individual’. On the cold days that succeeded, the more dedicated mourners attended churches in order to hear sermons in memory of the dead prince. Church bells tolled and the London shops were shut. Black crepe was everywhere.

A London correspondent for *The Bury Times* in Lancashire reported that he had found a ‘dense mass of mourning’ in the capital, with people shuttering their homes and standing around gloomily in black. He added that ‘they made such an effort on their outfits it was difficult to tell the rich from the poor... The signs of mourning are almost universal here...’

After her husband’s death the queen retreated altogether from public life, and swathed herself in mourning as if she were the chrysalis for a black butterfly. That black vesture reappeared among the people with the death of Victoria herself. On 21 January 1901, she seemed confused and on the following day she took to her bed in Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. Her death came as a profound shock

Colours of London

*London is often described as ‘grey’, particularly at this time of year. It’s far more colourful than that, of course, but in Peter Ackroyd’s new book, Colours of London, he paints a vivid description of London’s royal funerals, and the stately use of black*



A colourised photograph showing porters at Smithfield Market reading a newspaper announcement of the death of George V, 1937. Credit: George Rinhart/Corbis/Getty Images/Dynamichrome/Joshua Barrett. Peter Ackroyd’s book ‘Colours of London’ is published by Frances Lincoln (£25)

to many, if only because the thread of history had been broken. The newspapers, bordered in black, revelled in a frenzy of headlines from the relatively simple ‘DEATH OF THE QUEEN’ to the more ponderous ‘THE VICTORIAN ERA HAS ENDED’. On the morning of Friday, the first day of February, the coffin was carried from Osborne House, placed on a gun-carriage and drawn with a military escort to Trinity Pier, East Cowes, all the royal mourners following on foot.

*The Times* reported ‘the sky was cloudless and blue; the Solent looked like the Mediterranean itself’. The royal yacht started its short journey to Gosport, steaming slowly between forty British warships, a flotilla that stretched 16 kilometres (10 miles) across the Solent. The mourners, dressed in black, followed in their yachts.

The night was passed at Portsmouth, and early on the morning of Saturday, the queen’s body was landed and taken by special train to Victoria station in London. On arrival at Victoria it was placed on a gun-carriage and drawn through what contemporary reports described as ‘dense and silent throngs of mourners’ past Buckingham Palace, up Constitution Hill, and through Hyde Park to Paddington station, and thence by train to her destination, Windsor. The cinematic portrayal, by Pathé News, was naturally in black and white.

Advertisement

ST LUKE'S  
COMMUNITY  
CENTRE

Family Valentine Party

Tuesday 14th February 11am-4pm

PHOTO BOOTH

TABLE TENNIS

CARD MAKING

KIDS DISCO

FREE LUNCH

GROUP DANCE

SPECIAL GUEST LIVE PERFORMANCE AT 2PM

BOOKING REQUIRED: This is a FREE half term event with limited places.

St Luke's Community Centre, 90 Central Street, EC1V 8AJ  
info@slpt.org.uk | 020 7549 8181 | www.slpt.org.uk  
@StLukesTrust | @StLukesCommCentre  
@st\_lukes\_community\_centre Charity number: 207497

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International Women's Day

#EmbraceEquity

International Women's Day Celebration

Wednesday 8th March, 11-3pm

St Luke's Multi-Cultural Women's Group is inviting you to celebrate International Women's Day.

Limited places for members.

Enjoy print making, crafts, photobooth along with lunch followed by live music with the Poor Billionaires.

Please wear traditional clothing if you can.

St Luke's Community Centre, 90 Central Street, EC1V 8AJ  
info@slpt.org.uk | 020 7549 8181 | www.slpt.org.uk  
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# FEATURES

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## Past participants

### A book about the borough of Finsbury is flying off the shelf

Back in 2020, St Luke's Community History Group made a film about its members' lives and memories. It was so well received, with many views on national television and YouTube, that the group has now created a book called *Finsbury Stories*, written and edited by Derek Smith. Already the book has proved so popular that it has already been reprinted and been requested

by bookseller Waterstones. "It came out of 15 years of working together and listening to each other's stories," says Polly Mann of the group. "During that time, we've listened to each other's stories, collected stories from community members and built up an archive of stories that we were really keen to share, both with older local residents and future generations." The film had encouraged the

group to make the book so that current members could share it with their family and friends, as a printed legacy. With 80 pages and lots of pictures Polly says that it is "very accessible", with a scrapbook feel that comes from the extensive use of family photography. It shows a life in Finsbury in the round – from work to war, school to society at large. There are depictions and descriptions of work, leisure, homes, air-raid shelters, pubs, demolition and construction – and some of the area's traumas including the Blitz of WWII and the awful experience when the Wenlock Brewery was bombed, causing many fatalities. Established in 2006, the Community History Group was meant to encourage people who otherwise may not have visited libraries and museums to build their own archive. Since then it has grown to become an important archive and it is also a crucial link to the old borough of Finsbury, which was absorbed into Islington in 1965 and no

longer exists except vestigially in the names of Finsbury Health Centre and Finsbury Town Hall. "It's very much an aim of the book to raise awareness of Finsbury because many younger people and newer residents haven't got a clue that it was a borough in its own right," says Polly. "This is important because it was such an innovative place in terms of things like healthcare and housing, especially in the 1930s and 40s. We're trying to raise awareness of that." It is also important to The Right Hon Lord Smith of Finsbury, Chris Smith, a former MP for Islington South – he has provided an afterword to the book – and to group member, David Hyams: "Finsbury was the second most densely populated borough in London. There were 12,000 people living here and only 200 had baths in the 1920s." Many of the group members are now in their 80s. But the book is not solely a look back at a disappearing world. "It's a celebration of a corner of London that did very well for its people and was



Irene Francis with her daughter Lorraine in 1947



The new book has emerged from the history group  
Credit St Luke's Community History Group

so significant and ahead of the game," says Polly. "We've got very good working relationships with local schools and our members have made presentations." What is apparent is that the mix of the commercial and the domestic has long existed in the area, with old factories and workshops now replaced with residential lofts and high-tech businesses. One aspect of the book is that many of the 19th Century terraces depicted have gone. "It's a huge loss, and imagine the area now if they'd stayed," says Polly. "But we have tried to be positive. There's a sense of pride and acceptance about the changes. Finsbury was innovative in the 20th Century and now we've got new innovations – look at aspects like Silicon Roundabout. The area has constantly reinvented itself and jobs have always been on people's doorsteps."

**More information about the 'Finsbury Stories' (£9.99) and the St Luke's Community History Group can be found at the Facebook page Finsbury Stories and via [polly.mann@wickaward.co.uk](mailto:polly.mann@wickaward.co.uk)**  
**The Group also runs events**  
**St John's Gate Museum.**  
Thursday 2 February 2 at 11am Museum of the Order of St John St John's Gate, London, EC1. Meet at museum door for a guided tour of the museum.  
**Monday 6 February at 6.30pm, Arsenal**  
Workshop with Samir in Islington Museum, St John Street EC1.

## Losing its chains

### The Marx Memorial Library celebrates its 90th birthday this year and is reaching out to new audiences

With the works on Clerkenwell Green beginning this month – see P13 – it's a happy coincidence that the Marx Memorial Library and Workers School (MML) is 90 years this year. The MML, housed in an historic building on the Green dating from 1738 with an imposing portico, was established in 1933 by trade unionists, socialists and communists to commemorate the anniversary of Marx's death in 1883. Last year, the MML gained a National Lottery Heritage Fund award of £93,710 to develop a campaign called 'Marx Memorial Library at 90: Enduring and

Engaging' – and in the course of this anniversary year, it is set to branch out and engage with local schools, voluntary organisations, community groups and visitors to the Green. "The library is a treasure trove of rich history, and we're delighted to expand our work into the local community," said Meirian Jump, MML manager and archivist. "The work on Clerkenwell Green will expand knowledge of the historic area and its links with radical traditions, from the Peasant's Revolt to the Mayday celebrations." Items and objects that can be seen at the MML include a 200-strong ceramic collection

with pieces from the Peterloo Massacre in 1819 and the 1984–5 Miners' Strike, as well as William Morris artefacts and Karl Marx's cigar case. At present the MML attracts a steady stream of interested visitors. With the new works to Clerkenwell Green, and the MML's own push, it hopes to gain new audiences. "There are many more things

here than people expect," says Jump. "We want the Library to emerge from this initial project more well-known, but also more resilient, with a business plan and a dynamic engagement plan." To help with its visibility, the MML has a new logo by Steve Smith, the result of a design competition. The statue of Sylvia Pankhurst by Ian Walters for Clerkenwell Green, which was

The Marx Memorial Library



Credit MML

on the back burner, is now likely to be built and, as Jump says, "is likely to point towards the MML." A maquette or model of the statue is in the MML's reading room. Jump adds that the MML is "really excited" about the plan to revive Clerkenwell Green. "This is a pivotal point for us," she says. "While people have always been attracted to the library, it will be a real opportunity to increase footfall and attract more. "We also look forward to becoming part of a cluster of local organisations that have historical and research depth, from the Museum of London to the London Metropolitan Archives and The Peel." This summer residents in Islington will be invited to weekend workshops on radical Clerkenwell, including on May 20. For further details and the rest of the programme for the year, see the MML's website, below.

**To find out more:**  
Visit [marx-memorial-library.org.uk](http://marx-memorial-library.org.uk)



Islington Council has announced plans for major changes to Clerkenwell Green, one of London’s oldest and most historic public spaces. This transformation is part of the council’s mission to create a cleaner, greener and healthier environment for all residents and visitors to enjoy.

The council is proceeding with changes including planting new trees and resurfacing pavements with Yorkstone paving and granite setts. To make it easier for people to walk and cycle, Clerkenwell Road and Clerkenwell Green junction will be closed to motor vehicles. Additionally, 43 parking spaces and one motorcycle stand will be removed and four new benches will be introduced for people to sit and enjoy the green.

However, some local businesses are worried about the impact of the parking. Scotti’s Snack Bar, a 55-year-old family-run cafe located at 38 Clerkenwell Green, relies heavily on cabbies, window cleaners and builders for business. The owners are worried that their customers will not have enough time during their breaks to park their vehicles and walk half a mile to the cafe.

An Islington Council spokesperson said: “Clerkenwell Green is one of the borough’s most historic public spaces, and the



Credit Penny Dampier

# Green washing

## The council’s plans for Clerkenwell Green don’t suit everybody, writes Amelia Braddick

improvements we’re proposing will help make it a more attractive space for local residents and the many people that use it every day, as well as boosting air quality and biodiversity.

“We consulted on proposals to improve the Green in 2017, and the scheme was supported by 82 percent of people who

responded. The proposals include planting seven trees, creating more public space, and making it quieter, easier and safer to walk, cycle and use buggies and wheelchairs.

“Our local economy team visited Scotti’s last week to discuss their concerns.”

Additional plans involve implementing a statue of feminist and socialist Sylvia

Pankhurst by Ian Walters. The Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee (SPMC) wishes to raise awareness about the “forgotten” Pankhurst and has been campaigning for a statue dedicated to her for decades.

However, Ann Pembroke from the Clerkenwell Green Preservation Society, states the inclusion of the Sylvia Pankhurst statue was “rejected by Islington Council, following meetings of public consultation in 2017 on the grounds that she had no connection with Clerkenwell Green.” Pembroke added, “Sylvia’s social work in the East End for mothers and babies, where she did speak, should not be denied her statue where there is ample space.” The Pankhurst statue is subject to a planning application by the SPMC, which Islington Council will have to review.

A map showing the proposed improvements to Clerkenwell Green Credit Islington Council



To keep up with Clerkenwell Green’s latest news and developments, visit the Islington Council website. Responses to the proposed Traffic Management Order can be made in writing by emailing [publicrealm@islington.gov.uk](mailto:publicrealm@islington.gov.uk), or sending via post to Public Realm, 1 Cottage Road N7 8TP

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