

# Diversity

Stories of a Hackney Generation





*Clockwise from top left: Newton Dunbar, Patricia Charlesworth, Centre 151, Harold Rubin, Anita Jacques, Clair Battaglino*

“*I hope by sharing these stories, people living and working in Hackney are inspired to continue to celebrate the diversity the borough holds...*”



## Introduction

Connect Hackney works to tackle loneliness and isolation amongst people aged 50 and over. The issue of loneliness and isolation is multifaceted, and personal to each person who experiences it. One way we are tackling the issue is by providing more opportunities for older people to play an active role within their community, showcasing the valuable contributions they make.

Hackney is a melting pot of people from a diverse mix of backgrounds, each with their own story of how Hackney became their home. What I've personally enjoyed about the Diversity Project is the unearthing of these stories and hearing how Hackney has changed. But within that, also seeing how much Hackney people celebrate the diversity of the borough, with people from different races, cultures, religions and sexual identities living side-by-side.

These stories, similar to the ones we shared in our *Windrush* publication last year, provide an opportunity for these stories to be heard, both now and for generations to come. The more we understand about each other, the more opportunities we create for people to make new social connections, be valued and respected, and lead more fulfilling lives.

I hope by sharing these stories, people living and working in Hackney are inspired to continue to celebrate the diversity the borough holds, particularly amongst its older residents; ensuring that no matter where you come from, your religious beliefs, who you love, or your age, you feel welcomed, valued and respected for the person you are.

### **Tony Wong**

Programme Director – Connect Hackney  
Hackney CVS



“...it is vital that in *Hackney* we reach out to hear the voices of older residents and let their experiences and wisdom inform our understanding of the world.”

## Foreword from Jennette Arnold OBE AM

Hackney's diversity is its power and strength, allowing us to create a community tapestry that is unique and exciting. For me, there is nothing better than a walk around Ridley Road Market to get a feel for Hackney with all its variety. People of all ages and backgrounds have found their place there.

Hackney is a largely young population, with only 18% of residents aged 55 or over. Older people might be a minority group, but we are full of stories that talk about how Hackney has changed and developed over the decades. Those of us who remember the clamour of the 70s are archives of living, breathing material that can help younger generations find a way through our current tumultuous times.

Unfortunately, older people often get left behind, unable to move our bodies to keep up with our minds. It can be difficult for us to get out of our homes, and when we do, people can sometimes see us as a cause for charity rather than respect.

For this reason, it is vital that in Hackney we reach out to hear the voices of older residents and let their experiences and wisdom inform our understanding of the world.

After all, us elders were in the shebeens and protesting against blatant injustices we faced before the younger generations were even born. We paved the way for those with campaigns to fight their causes today.

# Centre 151

*Ha Nguyen was born in Hai Phong, Vietnam, in 1965. She works as a chef at Centre 151, the Hackney centre for Vietnamese, Lao and Cambodian communities.*

Vietnamese people work very hard. Most people came here looking for a job because the life is very hard back in Vietnam, so they come looking for the future. For other people, it's connected to the politics, but not me.

My company was cutting a lot of jobs and some other firm in my village wanted to go Hong Kong and they asked me to go so I said, "Ok, so let's go!" So, I lived in Hong Kong for six months and I met my husband and we married there and then the UK government supported us to come from Hong Kong to here.

This was in 1990. I was pregnant so all the way I came from the airport I was sick! It was quite hard because at that time I didn't speak English and everything was different to my country. But the people were very concerned for us – very friendly.

It's not too hard to adapt to the life here because at that time we were young. I have now lived in Hackney for 26 years.

When young people come to this country they want to learn English and they connect with communities easily. For older people even when they study English, it's hard for them. I know a lot of people that came here 30 years ago but they still cannot speak English, just some simple words.

At the time that I came to this country, I know that at that time most of them have a job like tailor or working on sewing machines in the factory.

The people that come to Centre 151 are elderly people and they come when their children have grown up and don't live with them anymore. They can cook by themselves but there is only one or two



people at home – you cook a little and spend a lot of time, so they want to come here and enjoy it, talk to their friends and eating Vietnamese food.

I enjoy working here. Sometimes I miss my mum back in my country, so I just want to talk to the elderly here – sometimes I look at them as my mum at home. Sometimes I go back to Vietnam to visit.

Now it's easier back in my country, they are open to overseas, they are open to a lot of people from other countries to come, so the life's easier.

“I also worked there later on a flower stall for a relative – in the early 60s. I couldn’t wait to leave because it was winter and it was dark and it was cold! I can remember waking up one morning and the snow came above my knee!”



## Ridley Road Market past and present

*Vicky Cooper looks back on the changing face of Hackney’s vibrant market from the 50s to the present day*

When I was fourteen, I left school and I got a job in Ridley Market in a big bakers called Coulton’s and I worked there six days a week Monday to Saturday with Thursday afternoons off and I got a pound a week. I think eventually it went up to one pound twenty five shillings. This was 1957.

The shops and stalls were mainly run by Jewish people and English people and I remember I used to go there for my mother to get pickled herrings and other Jewish food that mother liked. It was a very nice, lovely, family sort of market.

And then, if my memory serves me right, it went on to become mainly Caribbean with all sorts of different vegetables

that I’d never seen before – tried them, delicious!

There are still some Jamaican stalls working down there – I still visit it once or twice a week and now it’s a multicultural market with all different nationalities – Eastern Europeans, Asians and it’s a very interesting market with all the goods. The fruit is fresh and the people on the stalls are very kind.

There is one particular stall, run by a lady who speaks French and English, a handbag stall – they are exquisite and very reasonably priced! Value for money – I don’t think you could beat that market.

I also worked there later on a flower stall for a relative in the early 60s. I couldn’t wait to leave because it was winter and it was dark and it was cold! I can remember waking up one morning and the snow came above my knee!

I’m still down there 9 o’clock on a Saturday morning and it’s pretty busy and it closes late. It’s much more busy now than it used to be with all the nationalities going down. If you are Chinese and you want a specific vegetable for what you’re cooking, it’s all down there. Regardless of your nationality – if you want it, you’ll find it down there.



“...then suddenly venues started opening up in Dalston. And all the fun was around here, all the parties, all the kids, all the energy, all the fashion, all the music, it was all going on.”



## Building LGBTQ+ families

*John Nolan was born in Highgate, London, to Irish immigrant parents. He runs The Glory in Haggerston, an East End pub and LGBTQ+ performance venue.*

This is the new Soho. It's gone crazy hasn't it – this is like the centre of queer London!

It never used to be like that. I'm a London boy so I know that you'd never really go up towards Dalston, the centre of queer London before was more Shoreditch and it was the George and Dragon, the Spiral Staircase, the Joiners Arms and then the Nelson's Head. And then suddenly venues started opening up in Dalston. And all the fun was around here, all the parties, all the kids, all the energy, all the fashion, all the music, it was all going on.

Well, I'm 51 now – I came out in the 80s which was a really difficult time. There were so many areas you didn't feel safe – you didn't see the diversity of types of people within the LGBTQ+ community. It was more gay/lesbian with nothing in between, but over years it's got more diverse, it's got more accepting, it's been more accepted. But there's something in the air at the moment – there's a change in the country... it feels more dangerous now.

I used to work in advertising. I left and became a drag queen! I've been doing drag for about 17 years and I've been a

publican for five years. My drag name is John Sizzle.

This pub is slightly different in that it straddles a wide age range of the community from people first coming out, taking their baby steps into the scene and into London, from the ages of 18 right through to... some of our performers are in their 70s. But there is a big gap – most people stop going to bars and clubs in their 50s. But we are proud of the fact that everybody's welcome.

I think when you are LGBTQ+, often you've left home and you've left your family, you don't have the connections with the people you grew up with or your family or extended family, so already you are having to build your own community and because of that when you get older you are obviously more cut off – you lose friends, friends move away... it's up to the LGBTQ+ community to build their own families.



“I trained at Homerton Hospital and I lived in the nurses’ home. I loved it. I met different girls... from the Philippines, from Malaysia – and that was lovely too... One or two of them I still see, and we phone and talk to each other about old times in the nurses’ home.”



## “I’m a Hackney girl... and here is home”

*Anita Ceesay came from Dakar, Senegal, in West Africa to London at the age of 24 and found work, love and a fulfilling new life*

Senegal was beautiful. My Dad was a doctor in the city hospital and he wanted me to do something medical – doctor or nursing, anything medical – but I said, “Dad, no I can’t do it!” Instead I went to teacher training college. I qualified after three years and I taught in St Augustine’s, a boys’ secondary school, for two years.

I was also involved in a little bit of politics – it was called the Congress Party and I was the Secretary. They sent me to Russia for a conference. I stayed for a month and there were some other African delegations – 200 of us. That was in 1969. Russia was cold! When I finished there I came to England. I flew here – if I remember the flight was around £49. I went to Bethnal Green Hospital to visit my cousin who’d had a baby. There I saw the nurses with their uniforms, and I said, “My Dad is right, nursing is for me.”

I was educated in Senegal up to high school. At that time there was no university, so that’s what brought me here. I trained in nursing and after that I specialised in midwifery.

I trained at Homerton Hospital and I lived in the nurses’ home. I loved it. I met different girls, as you can see from the picture – from the Philippines, from

Malaysia – and that was lovely too. We would get together and go out to the cinema or see a show, if you could afford it. One or two of them I still see, and we phone and talk to each other about old times in the nurses’ home.

Hackney was different to today – it’s more diverse, very diverse. Before, you were dying to see a Black person or a Chinese or an Indian. Racism was open then – you go to a restaurant and they say to you, “Oh no, we are closing in one minute” and then they closed because of your colour. You have to bear it if you are brought up decently.

The doctors were not that bad but they preferred the white nurses. But if they know you are able, they come through slowly.

There was a Senegalese restaurant that a cousin of mine opened in Rivington Road, Shoreditch. There were quite a few Senegalese that used to meet there – not many, but a few by the 70s – I met my husband there. We started chatting and we sort of clicked!

We got married in Hackney Town Hall – I’m a Hackney girl! The Senegalese High Commissioner offered us his car with the flag flying and it was wonderful – I



*Anita's nurse's belt*



was laughing! Afterwards we had a party in Brooke Road and it was packed – it was lovely.

I was a Hackney midwife for 26 years. I just loved to do it, with the help of God. I've got a book at home with the names of all the babies – it's a lot, a lot! The worst thing is when you see a still birth. It's very scarce to see that, but that's the worst thing you can see, to see a Mum and Dad expecting a baby to come and there's no baby.

The important thing is that I did it, I loved it and I helped people and I brought babies into this world, so I have achieved

a lot. You have to retire because of your age. I miss it so much.

In more recent years I have been involved with charities. This community has given me something and I think I have to pay back. You don't just sit there. The community in Hackney – they are good, they are helpful. With the age I am now, with my illnesses, I go to the hospitals, physios, St Leonard's and they are so nice and helpful. What more can I ask for?

Hackney is a wonderful place to grow old. I've grown old here and I'm still growing old. I'm British now, I'm a Hackney girl, I'm a city girl and here is home.

“I met my husband and we got married and he says to me, ‘Whatever we’ve got, let’s put together and buy a little place’ and that’s how we ended up in Hackney.”



## State of independence

*Hyacinth Wellington from Jamaica on moving to London in 1974 and memories of life in the garment trade*

The life over here, you’re more independent. In Jamaica you couldn’t get a job – you can get a job but it’s difficult. So, I came over here and I says, “Yes, I like this place.” When I see the smoke coming from the roof of these households, I thought, “There’s a lot of factories here, so there is jobs.” Then I realised these were houses where people lived!

It was difficult to get a flat in London in those days. They don’t want any Black, they don’t want any Irish and they don’t want any dogs. And when you go, they say, “Oh, the place just went!” – and if you go back and phone, it’s vacant.

I met my husband and we got married and he says to me, “Whatever we’ve got, let’s put together and buy a little place” – and that’s how we ended up in Hackney.

We bought a little house and it was alright, because you didn’t have anyone to nosey about your business – you had your own little lock and key!

### **Dressmaking**

When I was in Jamaica and going to school, there was a dressmaker who would show me how to put the material down,

to cut a dress by hand with the scissors. In those days it wasn’t electric machine – it was pedal, Singer pedal.

When I came over here I couldn’t get a job as a machinist because they say I’m not experienced. So, they sent me to a school in Spurstowe Terrace and I learnt to do overlocking, felling, buttoning, button hole.

### **Trade Unions**

The [companies] don’t pay you holiday money, they don’t give you nothing – only the wages what they make an arrangement with you for. The conditions were disgusting – it was terrible.

A man came there and said he was from the trade union and they run him out. He waited outside until we finished work and he said we can join the union and they don’t know. But there were people in that bunch that go back and told the guvnor everything and he said, “Whoever go to that meeting, they don’t have a job.”

I joined the union but nobody know. When I used to work at Littlewoods, they just say to us one day, “We’re going to close” – and they took all the garments, bagged it up and sent it to India. We were out of a job.

“I opened my shop in 1965. I saw an advert in the *Hackney Gazette* – there was a shop in Stoke Newington and the rent was £1.50 a week.”



## A passion for the art of shoemaking

*Andreas Kyriacou was 19 when he came to London. In Nicosia, Cyprus, he had started working in the shoe industry, a career which came to define his working life.*

I started making shoes in Cyprus. The mass production of shoes was just starting there in the 1950s. There were four or five factories in the whole island. The rest were small workshops with five, six people working in them. Where I worked, I delivered the shoes to the customers on my bike. They were made to measure. We were making high-class shoes for the lawyers, the judges, the teachers and all the professionals of the time. I stayed there for two years but [the company] wasn't recognising trade unions. We were working from 6 o'clock in the morning to 8 o'clock in the evening. So I found a job in a small factory that recognised trade unions and I worked there for four years before I came to London.

### London

When I came here I was living in Kentish Town. I found a job in a factory in Tottenham. Later I found work in Hackney and I joined Cordwainers Technical College. The factory was Merrywell and I also worked in Franks & Sons in the same street – Tudor Road. I was going to college in the evening: the main course was shoe design and pattern cutting but I was also doing clicking – learning how to lay the patterns, because the leather has certain ways to stretch.

### High heels

I was again making very high-class shoes. I was working in that big factory in Leyton High Road making shoes for export to Scandinavian countries. Ladies' high heel shoes – you don't realise it – it's all engineering! In the arch here there's a still shank, very strong. It can carry about one and a half tons. So, if you jump off the bus it doesn't break!

### Kinky boots

I opened my shop in 1965. I saw an advert in the *Hackney Gazette* – there was a shop in Stoke Newington and the rent was £1.50 a week. I went and saw it – the old man who ran it was keeping dogs and cats and it was smelling and the floor was rotten. I said, “Okay, I take it!” I removed all the floors, I bought the machines and tools, and started making and repairing shoes. I had all sorts of customers including the kinky girls. The kinky girls was a trend in the 70s. They were wearing high boots and they were holding a basket in one hand and a whip in the other! I made men's shoes as well – made to measure. There were also disabled people who had two different legs – you know, one thinner and I would make special shoes for them. I operated there for 30 years. I still see people who remember me.



*Above, Mr and Mrs Freed (r) in the London Store*

## Freed of London

*Founded by cobbler Frederick Freed in 1929, Freed of London is the leading designer and manufacturer of professional dance shoes. Their pointe shoes are hand-crafted by highly skilled makers in Well Street, Hackney, and have a world class reputation.*



Hackney resident and former shoemaker Andreas Kyriacou spoke to Freed of London's Crown Maker, Ray Rawlings.

**AK:** What do you do here?

**RR:** I make pointe shoes – ballet shoes for dancers.

**AK:** What is a Crown Maker?

**RR:** Crown Maker is my maker mark which is used to identify the shoes which are made by me. All the pointe shoe makers are recognised by their own individual maker marks.

**AK:** This is the only shoe factory that survived in Hackney. Why do you think this is so?

**RR:** Because of the quality of the shoes. Like you say, it's a dying art but there's a lot of dancers out there who want to turn professional and to do so they need shoes which are going to be perfect.

**AK:** How many people are employed here?

**RR:** Easily over 100 people from the Hackney area and surrounding boroughs are employed by Freed of London, working in either our Pointe Shoe Factory or our Ballroom and Theatrical Factory.

**AK:** How did you train to become a shoe maker?

**RR:** They trained me up here. I started here 31 years ago.

**AK:** What do you like most about creating shoes?

**RR:** It's a skilled job and it's something you're making for a dancer yourself – what she's wearing on stage. It's just something you can't really repeat in any other job. You see a dancer go on stage in your pointe shoes and she don't really think about the pointe shoes – she's getting on with the job and performing the show in front of an audience.



**AK:** Where do the materials come from for all the shoes you make here?

**RR:** Different materials are sourced from different places around the UK mostly, but also Europe and most recently South America. All of our materials are wear-tested and put against our existing materials to ensure that nothing changes and our customers remain happy with the quality of our shoes.



*Above left to right, a young Ray Rawlings at work, being interviewed by Andreas Kyriacou*

**AK:** Do you think there is still a future for handmade shoes in London?

**RR:** Yes, I do! The industry has changed a lot but there is still demand for handmade stock and bespoke shoes in England. We hope to be here another 90 years from now!



“For older generations, there are more opportunities in Hackney to learn, to socialise than ever before and to get involved in the community.”



## So many changes, so many opportunities

*Antonia Folivi talks about making a life in a borough filled with diversity*

Last summer (2018) a broadcaster friend Lucia Scazzochio asked me if I would like to contribute to an exhibition about migration for a museum which was going to open in Lambeth. We got together and did the recording.

In June a group of us from Hackney U3A (University of the Third Age) went to the museum and finally I was able to see my contribution and that of many other people from all over the capital.



My story was about when I first came to this country in the 60s as a student to study journalism. I was a reporter back home.

I lived in a hostel called the Methodist International Hostel in Bayswater. It was hard initially to adjust. I was homesick and constantly thinking of home, how I was missing my family. There was a time I wanted to go back. But with the love and support of my

family and my roommate at the hostel – who inspired me – I was able to finish my studies.

My roommate was from Asia. She was studying music and she used to practise her violin all the time. She never showed any sign of missing home. She was very focused, and though she did not speak much English, her determination to accomplish what she came for was evident. I used to watch her practise and practise. Through her, I learnt a bit about classical music. I give Almighty God the praise.

I moved to Hackney when I got married 52 years ago to my husband Lawrence. We were married for 42 years. He died ten years ago this July (“Love you and still think about you all the time...”).

Lawrence lived in Hackney from 1961 and loved it. It was home to him, and still home to me. Two of our three children were born in Hackney and two of the grandchildren were also born here. There have been so many changes since I first came to Hackney – in terms of people, which has become very diverse, and the landscapes.

Hackney has a long history of migration and making people welcome. It is said to be the second most diverse borough in the United Kingdom. According to Hackney council records, people from African

countries started arriving in notable numbers during the 60s and then again in the 80s. Different countries including Nigeria, Ghana, Congo, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Uganda. The records also showed that the newcomers initially settled around the Dalston area. Now it is throughout the borough.

The first generation of settlers had to go through a lot of hardships. They made a lot of sacrifices to survive. Some returned to their home countries and some stayed to make Hackney their home. Now, in Hackney, there are opportunities for upcoming generations to learn about their parents' and grandparents' cultural heritage and enhance their academic chances for a better future. There is also better integration, to mix and meet people from different cultures and backgrounds in Hackney today.

For older generations, there are more opportunities in Hackney to learn, to socialise than ever before and to get involved in the community. Thanks to Connect Hackney older people are becoming digitally savvy. There are quite a number of projects that cater for the elderly.

There are luncheon clubs where people can go to eat, meet friends and make new ones. There are other activities to keep mind and body active and healthy.

Faith has played an important part in all the communities in Hackney. There are many African-led churches. My Christian faith has played an important part in my journey moving from Africa to Great Britain. The intention was to finish studies and go back home but God had another agenda for me. And I am thankful and grateful for His grace.



“We connected with an agent in the West End that most of the bands that was coming from abroad used to go to. They offered us some bands like Ben E. King and Jimmy Ruffin and we had them on the stage...”



## The pioneering Four Aces Club

*Newton Dunbar came from Jamaica in 1956 and became a leading light in Hackney nightlife*

I was born in Jamaica and I arrived in London in 1956. London was completely different to what it is today, unemployment was rife – there was still some of the past ravages of the war – bits that didn’t get rebuilt.

My first job was on the railway – I started work at King’s Cross. It was all adventure time, because I was exploring my own capabilities. It was completely different to what I was used to.

Me and a few friends liked nightlife and explored nightlife. The West End was no man’s land in the sense that it was far away and quite an expensive place. So eventually we found clubs in the suburbs – we found one that was the basement of a guesthouse – a jukebox in a basement and that was it.

A landlord who owned a building in Highbury Grove wanted to rent his basement. Myself and three of my mates decided we take it together. The four of us approached him and we got this basement and turned it into a nightclub. There was a cigarette brand by the name of Four Aces in Jamaica and we decided to call the club The Four Aces.

Over time, one of the partners went to America. Another – his girlfriend didn’t like him running a club. Another just dropped out. And that left me. I like to

finish things that I start so I continued and the club picked up substantially.

I got an offer from a friend that used to visit the club – this guy was well versed in business and was interested in joining me. He spoke to somebody in Dalston who had a building they wanted to lease – hence The Four Aces came to Dalston.

We connected with an agent in the West End that most of the bands that was coming from abroad used to go to. They offered us some bands like Ben E. King and Jimmy Ruffin and we had them on the stage at The Four Aces. Ben E. King pulled a nice crowd – a very sophisticated band. Bands also used to come over from Jamaica – one was the artist Desmond Dekker.



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© Alan Denney

powerful to manage. The police, as they do, have an interest in all entertainment businesses. Even though it gave us a hard time, somehow I managed to survive.

We used to get raided – to our detriment – this is what it was done for, we weren't doing anything.

I remember when the police used to come in, the crowd used to go out and when they left, if there was time, the crowd would filter back in. It was a cat and mouse scenario. Some of it was prejudice because people were black. Hackney of all places was prejudiced – like all places.

We weren't going anywhere and we had to do what we had to do to survive. We kept on venturing and that's how we overcame it.

We booked him and soon after he went in the British charts to number one – the music in question was 'Israelites'. That night that he performed at the club put us on the map and we went on from there.

I had problems with the powers that be. They had fear that we would be too



“*I experienced some pretty awful things as a child, which is unfortunately what one is seeing here now – with attacking people and being abusive and insulting.*”



## Harold – living life to the full

*Harold Rubin, born in 1927 in New York City, lives in Shoreditch and remains an active cook, host, writer and entrepreneur*

### Childhood

My family – my father had been a clothing manufacturer, really successful, although he'd been an immigrant to the States. Unfortunately, in my early childhood his health went and he became an invalid, but fortunately there was enough money to support us.

We lived at the top of the Bronx in an area that wasn't very welcoming to Jews when we first moved in there. I experienced some pretty awful things as a child, which is unfortunately what one is seeing here now – with attacking people and being abusive and insulting.

I was not a very happy child and when I was an infant my parents got a wonderful housekeeper who raised me. I was tied to Margaret's apron strings – she was a black lady from the American South and she was a wonderful cook and she pampered me, so I never ate a hamburger until I was 20 years old! She taught me how to cook and I never stopped.

### Adulthood

I came to London to live in September of 1970. I had left New York two years before to live on the island of Madeira. It did not work out, parted with the lady I lived with and did not wish to return to the States.

I had started working for myself at 17. I have had several careers – as an interior and architectural designer, then an art gallery owner and director, part-time journalist, then back to designer. I am a born entrepreneur. I got fortunately involved in the arts from a very early age. I got to know some very well-known people which was a great step up to doing the work I did. And I probably had more courage than brains in doing exactly what I wanted whenever I wanted. I've also quit when I was bored. I have always done cooking and in London it became a career as a restaurateur and then another art gallery. You can do quite a lot if you start at 17 and reach 92.

### Changes

The changes are incredible and they go on from week to week. This has become such a fashionable trendy neighbourhood, but where have the people gone that used to live here – that used to pay cheap rents? I can imagine since this building has existed for nearly 200 years, what it used to cost to live here compared to what it costs now. Where are those people? Where are they driven to and what are they doing? Think of the enormous number of people who live in London and are homeless.

The big buildings, you wonder if anybody actually lives in them, you never see anybody. Living here and seeing changes in personality – mostly there are young working people, you don't see family life, you don't see children. Most of these buildings aren't even suitable to raise children in.

Smithfield's disappeared. The supermarkets have taken all that away. Thanks to supermarkets all these individuals that used to be so good at

serving people have been driven out of business. Every individual butcher I've used apart from Porterford's near Saint Paul's have just gone and fishmongers went before that.

I have never liked pizza – I think it's an inferior horrible food! I've never eaten in McDonald's, I've never eaten Kentucky Fried Chicken. I admit to being a terrible snob, but I will work very hard, I will spend four hours making a meal, I will spend three days preparing for a party!

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## Rio Cinema –A beloved Hackney institution by Leon Boujo

“*Today the Rio is an integral part of the rich, multicultural Hackney community, showing a wide variety of films, both art house and blockbusters, as well as housing film festivals.*”

The Rio Cinema, a beloved Hackney institution, has a fascinating past. Initially an auctioneer house owned by Clara Ludski, a progressive businesswoman, Ludski soon saw potential to convert it into a picture house. In 1909, the Kingsland Place for Animated Pictures, one of London's first picture houses, was opened. It proved so popular that innovative Ludski decided to expand and six years later the more impressive Kingsland Empire was opened.

Changing ownership in the 1930s (a time which also saw the advent of sound) the Empire underwent an art deco makeover and became a veritable rival to any other fancy London cinema. What was remarkable about this refurbishment was that it was configured in such a way that, through a secret door in the roof, you can still see untouched remnants

of the original 1915 auditorium, allowing you a delightful glimpse into the past.

And it is, in fact, this art deco refurbishment that is the essence of the interior style of the cinema today.

Since 1937, the cinema has gone through various, but less dramatic face-lifts, showing cartoons in the late 50s and 60s, followed by art house films and then, for a racy period in the 70s, adult films and burlesque.

Today the Rio is an integral part of the rich, multicultural Hackney community, showing a wide variety of films, both art house and blockbusters, as well as housing film festivals. Run as a not-for-profit organisation, it relies on the financial support and love of the local community, customers and members for its survival. It is a truly wonderful institution that will, let's hope, continue to remain an important London arts hub for years to come.



“I would love to see the garment industry really flourishing in East London again. It was really sad to see all those garment factories closing down. They were places where I made many friends, love blossomed and lifetime memories were made.”



## Margaret Smith – fond memories of the fashion trade

*Margaret Smith remembers working in East London's thriving fashion trade and welcomes a new revival of the industry*

My mum is from Singapore and when she was in Singapore, she worked in her aunt's shop selling traditional Far Eastern clothes like kebayas, sarongs and cheongsam dresses.

My mum came to the UK in the early 60s. She loved working in the clothing industry and found work very quickly at a garment factory in Finsbury Park as a supervisor. Later she moved to a factory in Dalston, at the corner of Kingsland Road (A10) and Somerfield Grove N16.

When I was 10 years old, my mum took me along to the factory where she worked. I helped out packing garments and received my first wage – it was a really nice feeling to get my first wage packet. However with employment law today, it wouldn't be possible to be employed at such a young age.

All through my school years during my summer holidays and also when I was at university, I found work in garment factories as a cotton cleaner or cotton trimmer.

When I was younger, I would accompany my mum to her workplaces and work there. Later on when I reached 17 years of age, I would apply for my own cotton

trimming jobs. I worked at many factories, two in the Stamford Hill area, at one in Whitechapel and another in Tottenham.

Being a cotton trimmer involves cutting off the loose threads which are on a garment after it has been machine sewn together (and ironed or pressed). The work also involves attaching price tags and size labels to garments and putting plastic bags on finished garments. I can use scissors to trim threads but am also skilled at using a cotton cleaning machine which cuts threads too.

Working hours were often long. It was usually 8am to 6pm weekdays and often we worked overtime on Saturday mornings as well.

My mum would often bring clothes from work home for me and for herself. My mum's bosses would often tell her to choose an item of clothing such as a blouse, skirt or jacket from surplus clothes or from samples that were no longer needed and to take them home for free.

I have very happy memories of my time as a cotton trimmer. It was while I had a summer job at a garment factory in Edmonton North London that love blossomed. I met my fiancé there, I was



studying for my French degree at the time. It was my summer holiday and he was the firm's accountant.

London, especially the East London area was historically a centre of the fashion trade for many years. Garment manufacturing went through a period of decline for many years, really since the 70s.

The factory my mum worked at in Dalston closed down. Her factory was in a building comprising several industrial units, each one a different garment factory. Today on the same site there is a storage company called Safestore.

My mum and I definitely noticed this downturn in the industry as we saw first hand and heard stories about many garment firms closing over the years.

One of the reasons for this decline was outsourcing. It worked out a lot cheaper for companies in the UK to have clothes produced abroad for example in some countries in Asia. For one thing workers salaries are much higher here so with outsourcing there would be a huge saving on labour costs.

Looking forward, what of the future of the fashion industry in East London? Things are starting to pick up.

Many creative fashion designers have set up their studios in Hackney. There has also been substantial investment in Hackney Walk, in Morning Lane E9, where you can buy designer fashion such as Burberry,

Pringle, Nike and Aquascutum at greatly reduced prices.

The Mayor of London has also invested £2.4 million into a new fashion hub or district in East London, aiming to transform the area into a worldwide fashion centre for design and manufacturing and creating 15,000 new jobs.

London College of Fashion (part of the University of the Arts London) is also opening a new campus in Stratford in 2022, bringing together its six centres in London into one place. The project encourages the use of the latest technologies available in the fashion industry like 3D printing, interactive and wearable fashions. The hope is to make East London the "Silicon Valley of fashion".

The fashion district will bring a huge range of benefits to the people in the local area and also to the economy. I would love to see the garment industry really flourishing in East London again. It was really sad to see all those garment factories closing down. They were places where I made many friends, love blossomed and lifetime memories were made.

Since she retired from the garment business in 2007, after a 45 year career, my mum misses her work but still keeps in touch with friends she met during her time in the industry. She would be delighted to see the East End thriving again as a fashion hub.

“Many people felt that nursing was not a job for a man, but I was also told that men were needed, especially in psychiatry.”



## An exchanged life by Alex Ross

*Psychiatric nurse Alex Ross was born in Northampton in 1940. His mother was evacuated to a convent in Braunston to escape the bombing in London. Mother and child returned to Middlesex, and later, the family moved back to Stoke Newington. Alex attended the same primary school as actress Barbara Windsor.*

I have been a bank official, a regular soldier, a musician and a betting shop manager. After a born again spiritual experience in 1981, at the age of 40, I started training as a psychiatric nurse. Only God can do something like that!

Many people felt that nursing was not a job for a man, but I was also told that men were needed, especially in psychiatry. Sometimes a face-to-face encounter with another man can be a more therapeutic experience for some male patients. Also, physical strength can be useful, especially if there is violence on the ward. Both these situations occurred many times over the next 25 years of my career.

One way of coping was to use black humour, seeing the funny side of a traumatic event. It helped to relieve stress.

My main skills were in facilitating group therapy, and in one-to-one counselling. Seeing people gradually becoming more positive in outlook was a very satisfying experience.

I saw a gradual shift from the old attitudes of the ward ‘sister’ who ruled with an iron rod, to a more enlightened approach from the younger nurses. They encouraged and

supported me while I trained for three years.

I qualified as a Mental Health Nurse (RMN) in 1985 and, at first, it was a daunting experience to be in charge of 25 mentally ill people, with only three or four other staff. Psychiatry has always been at the end of the queue for funding. Also, the stigma of mental illness remains as prevalent today as it was 30 years ago.

After qualifying, I left the NHS and worked for a charity at a drug and alcohol clinic in Dorset. After seven years I emigrated to Israel, working in the same field. I returned to the UK in 1995.

In the 1980s there were still men who felt uncomfortable being told what to do by women. However, I always saw us as a team who supported each other, especially in emergencies. My father felt at first that nursing was not a job for a man, but as he saw how it changed my attitude to life, I think he began to think differently.

I retired in 2005, and looking back on it all, it was the most challenging but satisfying job I have had. I thank God I found the courage to make such a radical life change.

“*The first [post-war health centre] in London, the first in the whole of the country to be approved by the Minister of Health, it was the only one to be purpose built.*”



## Exploring the history of healthcare in Hackney

*John Scott Health Centre, Hackney: 1949-2019 – 70 Years Anniversary. Charles Daniel looks back at the distinguished history of the John Scott Health Centre in Woodberry Down.*

My name is Charles Daniel and I was born in Hackney Hospital on 17 November 1949. This was just after the National Health Service Act of 1948 was passed by the Minister of Health, Aneurin Bevan.

It had proved very fortunate for my mother who had my two brothers earlier – Anthony and Alan – as it had been touch and go for her and my brothers to survive as she was put on the blood drip. Unfortunately a third child just before me had died. The Act must have been a significant factor for the survival of most mothers and their newborn children.

The Woodberry Down Centre, as it was originally called, would have made a major contribution to healthcare in the whole area. My experience with this health centre has been very positive – easily accessible, friendly staff and excellent health practitioners and doctors.

I have been a patient of John Scott Health Centre in Hackney for over 20 years, little realising that this Grade II-listed building was so important to the whole of the UK. Just by chance I was talking to a friend, Tom Rubens, who went to Woodberry Down school as a child and knew this area well.

It was pioneered by Dr John Alexander Scott with his far-sighted plans of 1939. He was born in Liverpool and educated at its university. In 1935-45 he was appointed as the principal medical officer at the London County Council to redevelop the public health department so the services would meet the requirements of the NHS Act.

Initially there was fierce opposition to his plans, mainly from other doctors and even the British Medical Association, as they thought they would lose income. But Dr Scott's arduous, excellent work was finally recognised with an OBE in 1941 and his appointment as the Queen's honorary physician (1956-59).

This health centre and nursery school, planned as part of the Woodberry Down Estate, became the first post-war health centre in the whole of the country to be approved by the Ministry of Health, and the only one to be purpose-built. Bevan himself laid the first stone in March 1949, and the building was opened in October 1952.

Originally called the Woodberry Down Centre, after Dr Scott died in 1965 it was renamed the John Scott Health Centre in recognition of the hard work he put into the whole project despite opposition.



## Hackney Chinese Community Services

### **Jennie LOH from Malaysia**

My name is Jenny Law. I'm originally from Malaysia. I'm the second generation born in Malaysia and then I come to London and have my family here and my two daughters are born here – British Born Chinese, what they call BBC.

In this centre we have loads [of activities] – ballroom dancing, mahjong, karaoke, table tennis, lunch club, thai chi, board games, Chinese chess. In this centre we have people from Vietnam, the Vietnamese and the Vietnamese Chinese, we have from the mainland – Chinese, and the Hong Kong Chinese and Malaysian Chinese. Although we are all Chinese, probably our culture is different – the language, the dialect we speak is different too.



### **My name is Wai Yiu LAM**

I came here in 1973. When I first came, I came as a student. I am from Hong Kong. I came in summer and I quite liked the environment, because Hong Kong is all tower block, very overcrowded – so many people and I came to London – sunny, big park. It didn't last long of course, summer followed by autumn, autumn by winter and autumn and winter are cold.

My first impression is that this is a pleasant country and it's a good environment. But I had experience when I went to the park and for no reason a white man came toward me and spit in my face and told me to go home. I have experience on the bus journey of people just call you names.

I must say over the years it has improved a little bit and in general the attitude has improved for the better. But in recent years with the rise of nationalism, this country starts to have behaviour against migrants again.

### **Community**

A lot of our members are predominantly older people. This is a very big change from the so-called traditional family structure. Chinese culture has a very strong sense of family value. It is not unusual to have three, four, five generations under one roof.



But then when we come in this country the social system doesn't support that. The British society encourage children once you reach adult age, you move out and be independent. Our centre is a community home for those with

a common background and common social value where people can share and talk about their children. They see people of similar experience – that makes them feel it's not their own failure of the culture.



“I joined People’s First for people with disabilities in 2013. I became an officer and I became the Secretary. Working together is very important and people with disabilities do need working together.”



## A love of working together and being active

*Anita Jacques is an active member of Hackney’s community groups with a passion for acting*

I suffer autistic from the early 60s.

My parents used to live in Hackney – from 1959 when my mother Carmen was pregnant – I was born 16 September 1960.

I started school from 1965. My Dad takes me to the one in Wenlock Street called Horizons School. I felt shy. I was upset because I just don’t like other pupils to go on tormenting me and bullying me. I was shy to tell my mum what’s wrong and what happened.

### **Albion Road**

When I was seventeen and a half years old I left school. I start as a student in the

workshop – Albion Road training centre, off Stoke Newington Church street. I did the pedal bin liners – count 25 pedal bin liners in one bag and the other students who has learning disabilities sealed them and someone else stuck the labels.

### **Hackney People’s First**

I joined People’s First for people with disabilities in 2013. I became an officer and I became the Secretary. Working together is very important and people with disabilities do need working together.

### **Keeping active**

I joined Shoreditch Walk from 2009 and I find it very interesting. I have joined walks like Shoreditch Park, Haggerston Park, Victoria Park, even the canal. I need to carry on being active – I do the yoga, badminton, gym, archery and even Pilates.

### **Hoxton Hall Artists**

What I really enjoy doing is Access All Areas\* in Hoxton Hall and being an actress. I want to be an artist – to be a diva!

*\* A company of local learning disabled artists*



“We also set up a childminding service within the group so that some of the women could go out and work. We were very lucky as it was impossible to find childcare in the 60s and 70s.”



## Saviour and strength in numbers

*Abigail Omade came from Nigeria to Hackney in the 70s and found a ‘second family’ in her church and other local self-support groups*

I came here to join my husband in 1970. My husband came first – he was here in 1960 and he lived in Peckham.

I worked in Lagos in retail selling clothes and making clothes.

When I first came to London I worked in Aldgate as a machinist. I used different machines to create button holes and also making women’s coats. The problem with this job was that there was no holiday and no lunch break – conditions were hard. There was no trade union looking after us. We could take a week’s Christmas holiday but no pay if you took the time off.

I came to Hackney to stay with my brother in Boverin Road, N16 in 1985. I was working for the BBC at the time and I went to college to study catering. I was working in the BBC staff canteen. I worked my way up after going

to college and was a supervisor. Working for the BBC they were quite racist and would treat you differently.

When I lived in Hackney I joined a women’s club called Ladies Society and we used to go to each other’s houses and support each other. Everyone was Yoruba and from Lagos. We also set up a childminding service within the group so that some of the women could go out and work. We were very lucky as it was impossible to find childcare in the 60s and 70s.

We supported each other thorough a savings scheme so that we could save for a deposit for a house. I do not know how I would have managed without these supportive groups. I also attended a Yoruba church – this is how I was never lonely in Hackney. My church was very important to me, a second family.

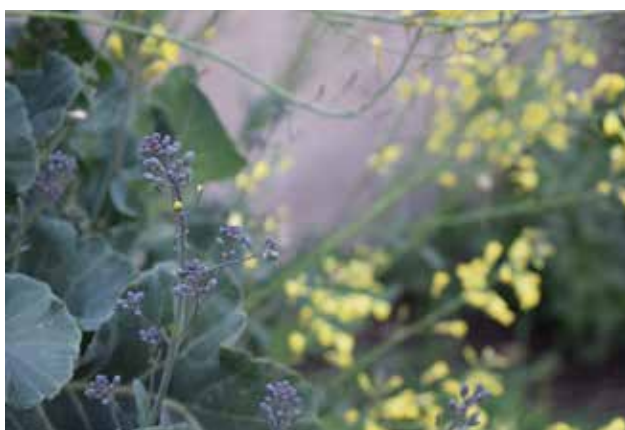
“But I think now Britain has come a long way overcoming prejudice. And Hackney is now transformed – old houses knocked down and new ones built. Hackney has come a long way.”

*Verona Bogle*

“The LGBTQI+ community for a long time has revolved around the club scene and about how you look, so I just thought it would be nice to do something different and to do something outdoors.”

## Growing a rainbow community

*Clair Battaglini from New York City, has lived in Hackney for the last 37 years and built a diverse community around her love of gardening*



I started a project called Rainbow Grow about three years ago. The Mayor of Hackney, Philip Glanville, asked for new initiatives and I was in the process of thinking of giving up full-time teaching. At the end of my career I had gotten very into gardening – it was such a great way to bring the community together around the school – parents, children, grandparents – people just got involved and I thought, “Wouldn’t it be great to have a LGBTQI+ project in Hackney that revolved around gardening and growing food and cooking food, sharing food – a nice healthy activity!”

I think it’s really important to have alternatives to the pub and club scene. I like a glass of wine with my dinner, but I’m not one to sit around a pub, never have been. I think lots of people like to socialise but don’t want drink as the focus. The LGBTQI+ community for a long time has revolved around the club scene and about how you look, so I just thought it would be nice to do something different and to do something outdoors.

I think there’s an issue about loneliness and how to get involved with things and if you no longer are on the club scene – how do you make new friends? And if you don’t have children? A lot of older



generation LGBTQI+ people didn't have children.

I think now it's more commonplace for couples to settle down, have children and maybe integrate into the wider community. But I think for older people especially it's nice to be able to meet other people in a different area. And our group is intergenerational and I think that's important. It's really nice to be mixing with young people too. Some of the people who come to the group don't live near their own family, some are from abroad so it's nice to have this extended family. A couple of us are teachers and

there's a former doctor in the group and it's nice for younger people to see that there are older people who just happen to be LGBTQI+. It gives them a different role model. A lot of my friends have moved to the coast now – Whitstable, Hastings. I'm a city girl and I think there's a lot going on in Hackney. I can walk to the Rio cinema, we have some of the best restaurants in London and I think it's a fabulous place to grow old. Yeah, there's air pollution, there's all sorts of issues, but it is a vibrant place – I have some of the best theatre and cultural things right on my doorstep and I think it's great.

*“When I see people working very hard in the textile sweatshops on very low wages, very long hours and unhealthy conditions, I decided to become a trade unionist and we talked to TNG textile branch. We organised people in Hackney, Harringay, Islington and Walthamstow. More than 1,200 members we had.”*

*Ali Aksoy*

“In London they seem to think that once you’re old, that’s it – you’re finished, they push you to the back. Whereas in Nigeria, as in most African countries, as you get older you are respected more.”

## Gubsie’s story – Nigeria – *Being there for one another*

*After a career in broadcasting in Nigeria, Gubsie Agolia-Aspinall came to Hackney and formed lasting connections with the local community*

### **Early life in Nigeria**

I went to boarding school as a little girl. I didn’t live at home with my parents, so I only saw them during the holidays, so I was really independent. We had a British education system in Nigeria and we had long summer holidays and I begged my father to let me work; he allowed me to during the election – to do the voting and papers and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I felt really like an adult, I felt good and they paid me! I can’t remember how many shillings, but it felt like a fortune!

### **First holiday in London as a child in the 50s**

All I remember is that it was very different to where I came from. I remember the streets in London were very different – quite colourful. I remember going to the market with my sister – it was very neat and tidy! In Nigerian markets things were all over the place, but this one was set. It was quite a joy just to look and enjoy it.

### **From Wales to Radio Rivers**

The first time I came to stay was when I was in university – I did my postgraduate in Cardiff, in journalism studies and

broadcasting. I had my child in Wales and when I finished I came and stayed in London with my child’s father.

I was working here in London when they asked me to come home to Nigeria and open a radio station in my state – Rivers State in the south. I had met one of the big politicians and he sent for me and said come and open a radio station for us. It was called Radio Rivers – it was the first FM station in Nigeria and I am very proud to be associated with it.

Every fisherman, every farmer, every teacher, every little trader – had a radio – not too many people could read but the radio everybody listened to and everybody understood. How did we get them? We broadcast, not in the Queen’s English, but in Pidgin English which everybody spoke. That was the first time, I don’t think anyone had broadcast before in anything but Queen’s English. So, it was very popular and it really went wild – it reached everyone.

### **Hackney 1999**

I didn’t come planning to stay. I came – I was literally flown out – I had emergency medical treatment. My son was in Hackney and when I came out



of hospital I stayed with him for a short time and from there I decided not to go too far away in case I needed him.

I was not feeling too good about Hackney but when I was with my son I found that it wasn't quite as bad as I thought it would be. I must say I was scared at first. Even though I had one or two friends in Hackney it was not a place I had thought I would come and live because of the safety.

But it's all changed now – if you don't have money, don't think about coming to Hackney! Hackney used to be the poor man's village – not any more. There are all these high rise blocks – they just put up one about five years ago behind where I live – it costs a fortune to live in.

### **Connecting with community**

It's important to take part in groups because I feel we should all connect – we should be there for one another – I mean no man is an island. If we work together, we achieve better results, we get more

unity, if we have more unity we have more peace.

The more you sit in the house, either feeling sorry for yourself or feeling hesitant thinking, “Oh, will I fit in? What will they think of me?”, the worse it will get. Just go out, meet people, be yourself, it doesn't matter what people think of you, you know who you are.

### **Ageing**

In London they seem to think that once you're old, that's it – you're finished, they push you to the back. Whereas in Nigeria, as in most African countries, as you get older you are respected more. Here I'm afraid the young ones have no respect for the older people at all, which is a shame.

The thing that's good here for older people is that the government looks after you, whereas in Nigeria you look after yourself or your family look after you. That helps the older people here.

“It says I’m from the west part of Africa. Then I looked up on my phone, which part of Africa does the people from Antigua Barbuda islands come from? And it came up as Ashanti in Ghana... which is very pleasing to me, I was very happy about that.”



## Antiguan born, Hackney life, Ghanaian roots

*Priscilla Murphy came to Hackney from Antigua as a young child. After a short time, she moved with her family to Leicester. Priscilla returned to Hackney in 1985 and discovered her African heritage.*

I decided to find out where I come from. I know I was born in Antigua, but that is not particularly the place that my ancestors originated from.

When I decided to learn computing, because I was very scared of touching the computer and trying to do anything for myself like that, I saw advertising about doing your DNA to find out where you come from. So, I decided to go ahead and get a DNA kit. When it come back I was surprised it says I’m from the west part of Africa. Then I looked up on my phone, which part of Africa does the people from Antigua Barbuda islands come from? And it came up as Ashanti, Ghana – I was very happy about that.

I went to see Antigua a few years ago and when I landed it was, “Oh, it’s alright.” There was no joy, no happiness, I didn’t feel no connection with Antigua when I went there. But then a few years later – in 2001, the church I was in sent us to go and help put a church there in Ghana and to help the pastor. When I landed, as soon as I stepped off the plane my whole body just says “Aaahhhh, I’m home.” And so, I know definitely without anybody telling me, that I’m Ghanaian. And that feeling, that thing, came before

the DNA testing, so it actually backed up what the DNA testing said about me. On the first visit, I felt so happy – the people were so courteous. It’s not like London! Over there, if anybody does anything that looks stressful, somebody will come, a stranger will come and ask about you, if you’re alright, if you need help. And that’s what impressed me – they are kind people.

I am a believer in God. So, it’s like coming to the conclusion. If this is where I originate from, then this is where I will live out my pension life and die. So then I started saying, “Oh could I get some land?” The land that I bought is up a hill – it cost about £250 a plot and I bought four plots. I thought, “That’s enough. I can live and grow my food there, have my animals – maybe goats or sheep.”

In Ghana older people are respected – it’s not like over here. Even when I am saying this, there’s always different people and some people do treat you good. Over here they are trying to do a bit better, but it’s not enough. The whole society is like “they are old people, let them just stay in their house and watch television and don’t have any interaction with the outside world – our opinion don’t matter as such.”



## Support and sharing experiences

*Ali Aksoy was the Founder of the first Turkish-speaking Workers' Association in Hackney in 1979 and the trade union organiser of textile workers in Hackney. He set up Hackney Refugee Forum in 2000.*

I came to London from Turkey at the age of 24. I arrived in England on New Year's Eve in 1976. I came to improve my English. A few years later there was a military coup in Turkey so I couldn't go back as I was politically active. So, I stayed in the UK.

Britain is more developed than Turkey. For the first six months I was thinking "something is missing" and then I find out nothing was going wrong – buses coming on time, people saying hello, smiling. Things were just much more settled here, better organised than Turkey.

The military government dissolved after a few years but until 1992 going back to Turkey was dangerous. In 1992 there was a general amnesty but by this time I had already spent 16 years in the UK and had got married and so I decided to stay here. I first lived in Camden and moved to Hackney in 1979. Hackney has always been a welcoming place. That's why to thank Hackney I organised Hackney Refugee Forum in 2000, to share my experience and knowledge and to make people support each other in partnership.



## Welcome to the freezer

*Verona Bogle came to UK from Jamaica in the early 90s, settling into life off Homerton Road*

I didn't know what to expect, so getting off the plane to Victoria was a wake-up call. Welcome to the freezer I called it! The cold was not what I had experienced before – I had sunshine from January to December, all year round. I cried for two days and I wanted to go back home immediately because I wasn't coping well. We lived in Lower Clapton, off Homerton Road. The first bus I took was no. 38 and we went to Liverpool Street. I was transfixed with those towers at Broadgate and I got a job there – it was a good experience.

The area we move into was dilapidated – the houses were run down and there was a lot of graffiti on the walls – it was a culture shock. People didn't even look at you.

One day I was standing at the traffic lights waiting for the green man and this lady come up beside me and stepped out in the road in the path of a bus. I gently took her hand and pull her out of the road and she didn't even say thank you. She looked at me and her response was, "And fancy, you are black." I just saved her life and her remark was how I looked, not what I just did for her. But I think now Britain has come a long way overcoming prejudice. And Hackney is now transformed – old houses knocked down and new ones built. Hackney has come a long way.

“If I won the lottery today I wouldn’t want to leave Hackney. It’s a balance – it’s not just bad things you see now, you see good things too.”



## All change – Broadway Market and London Fields

*Nedjat Salih grew up in Victoria Park Road and has been a resident of diverse Hackney for 51 years*

Where do I come from? That’s a good one! I always tell people I’m from here – English – even though I wasn’t technically born here, I’ve been here since the age of 3. So, I feel I’m from here. When people ask where my parents are from, I tell them they are from Cyprus. Some people are quite knowledgeable and they know there’s Turkish and Greek Cypriot and they’ll ask which, but the majority of people don’t know because only the Greek part of Cyprus is recognised, and they’ll say “Oh, you’re Greek” and I say “No, no!” and I correct them.

I grew up in Victoria Park Road and went to school there in Lauriston Road – it’s still there, Lauriston Primary School. Then I went to secondary school in South Hackney.

My father would take me to the café with him always on the weekends, to where the Turkish community would go and all I would hear is gossiping. I was a quiet kid, I never spoke, that’s the way my father raised me – elders speak. We were raised to speak Turkish – my father’s rule was that at home you all speak Turkish, outside you can speak whatever you want. We never had those rules with our kids or grandchildren – it was free. I didn’t like to live here and I actually thought

to work my way out of it. I was thinking of retiring to Cyprus or somewhere else, but then I realised that’s not my home. I would just miss the hustle and bustle, the liveliness, the diversity of London – I think once you live in London you don’t want to go anywhere else. So, I came back – Hackney had changed by then. Broadway Market which is on my doorstep started to improve, they brought the street food in and young people started to come.

I see that market – you don’t actually see so much of the old people from my time in Hackney, you don’t see the Asian, the black people. There’s nothing really there for someone who is on benefit or on low wages because it’s like £7 for a small sandwich and £3 for a coffee. So, it’s like a party on your doorstep, but you’re not invited.

Hackney has improved a lot – it’s a lot safer. We wouldn’t walk in London Fields 20 years ago, we’d be afraid of being mugged and you literally would be, but now it very rarely happens if at all.

It’s improved – it’s a lot nicer. If I won the lottery today I wouldn’t want to leave Hackney. It’s a balance – it’s not just bad things you see now, you see good things too.

“The music around here really grew – we had Hackney Downs and yearly music festivals with big up and coming artists.”



## Sounds of the 70s

*Linda Kwarteng's love of music supported her through life's ups and downs*

I was born in the Brixton area. Where I lived with my parents as child – it was opposite a bomb site. There was this sort of difficulty between the races. My mother was Irish – she was from the republic and that wasn't very welcome.

My household was dysfunctional – there were a lot of problems. We the kids got taken and put into various different places. I got fostered by a Jamaican family. My mum and dad died.

Even when I was in school before my father died it was very difficult for me to concentrate. I was very upset and I had to help in the mornings – I had to get everybody up in the mornings – make the tea, I used to get my Daddy out to work and go to school afterwards. I'd end up being very sleepy at school – and they'd sometimes send me at lunchtime to go for a nap in the sick room.

I started work at 14 in Tescos – shelf filling. I didn't last very long – it almost killed me! Then I worked in BHS. I eventually got into nightlife – waitressing and then I became a dancer. The wages weren't as consistent but it was more interesting. I taught myself music and I went to London College of Fashion too.

I started coming to Hackney early in my teens to go to The Four Aces nightclub –

I used to like reggae and soul and I used to go there and they had different sounds playing. This was in the early 70s.

I moved to Hackney in 1976 – I was squatting at the time. It was allowed then, I don't know if is now. The music around here really grew – we had Hackney Downs and yearly music festivals with big up and coming artists. Then there was the marshes, it was a fabulous day or two when they were playing the sounds down there and it was summer

There was a lot of basement clubs as well – they were called shebeens – so there was always something to do. And it came at a time when I wasn't very well at all – I'd lost several children, I was very close to death and I wasn't capable of very much. Having musical places around the corner here and there was quite nice cos you wouldn't have to pay very much money to go out and have an enjoyable night and take your mind away from whatever.

I stayed in Hackney because I felt comfortable. I think it is important to have interests in life – if you don't, you can fall back into that place where you don't know what's going on and how to connect. It's important to stay in touch as best you can.



## In conversation with Janet Nickie and Monica Mattocks

**Janet Nickie (JN):** When did you move to Hackney?

**Monica Mattocks (MM):** I moved to Hackney in January 1971.

**JN:** What was Hackney like at that time?

**MM:** Well, when I first moved to Hackney I was living on the new Holly Street Estate. That was comprised of what they called snake blocks – from Richmond Road right round to Holly Street, goes back around to Middleton Road, come back to Kingsland – it was like in a circle, so they were called snake blocks.

**JN:** Can you remember your neighbours from the time?

**MM:** Oh, yes – vividly. Everybody knows everybody those days. Even people who was not your close friends but you know the face and they would always say hello to you. It was like a community. The kids know one another, they play together. So those days were safe – they were good days, they were great days.

**JN:** So, was Hackney a safe place to live?

**MM:** Very safe, not like today. We

weren't afraid to walk around anywhere.

**JN:** Hackney baths was quite important. Did you used to go?

**MM:** Yes, I knew about these Hackney bath through a friend when I first moved in Hackney. She took me there – you could carry all your washing, and you could get everything – big thing, small things – washed and ironed out. So, it was lovely, it was very convenient because in those days you didn't have a washing machine in your house. It was very important, it was an asset to people.

**JN:** What was the building like?

**MM:** It was quite huge. My main purpose was just to go and wash clothes, but I understand that there was other things going on there – leisure activities – it was a big Victorian building.

**MM:** What did you think of Haggerston Baths?

**JN:** I used to go there to do my washing and I like the atmosphere at the time, because especially when you wash and you have big sheets to fold, anybody who is sit down there waiting for their washing

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would help you fold them without even you asking them to help. And I used to take my kids with me, sometimes they used to go and swim. Sometimes I used to go and use the steamroom and the sauna.

**MM:** Ah, I didn’t use the facilities. My purpose was just to go and wash. When did you use the laundry? Can you remember what the environment was like?

**JN:** It was quiet because people go at certain times, but there would always be someone there. And it used to be hot! Hot and stuffy. You’d be sweating like you’re in the steam room!

**JN:** Did you make any friends that you still have today?

**MM:** Not at the baths, but within Hackney, within Dalston yes. Lots of friends those days. It wasn’t like today, because you knew a lot of people – it was like a community, where people knows one another, you could stand up for one another, it’s not like today where you can’t walk around and say “hello” because they look at you very strange – they don’t know you, “why do you say hello to me?”

But the transformation of Hackney is good – and Hackney gets so upmarket now it’s unbelievable. We got hotels in Hackney now – can you believe that! You’ve got lots of tourists, you see people pulling their cases and they are coming to Dalston! I can’t believe it!

“*I enjoy working here. Sometimes I miss my mum back in my country, so I just want to talk to the elderly here – sometimes I look at them as my mum at home.*”

*Ha Nguyen*

“*Another time that was even worse than that (the Great Depression) was the post war years with the Cold War and all the horrible things of abusing people that were accused of being communist, and being in the arts as I was, I saw a great many of those victims.*”

*Harold Rubin*

“*I’m first generation Irish, I’m very proud. I have a huge family – I have a huge blood family and a huge gay family.*”

*John Nolan*

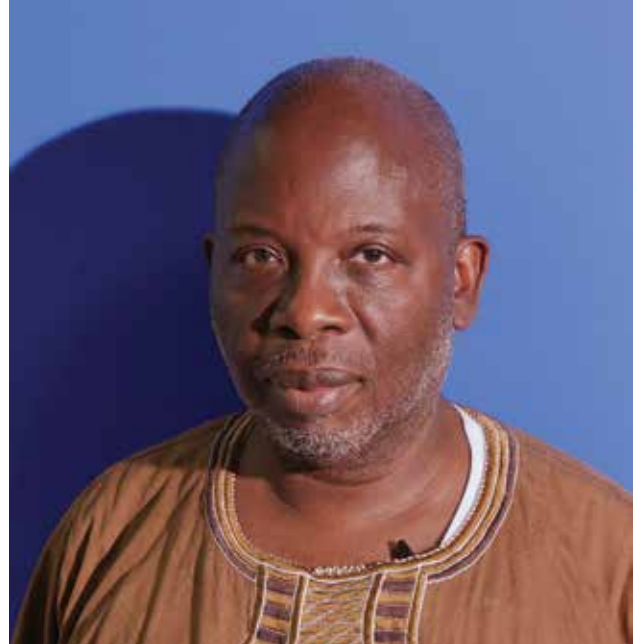
“*Hackney is the East End. It’s given different people a freedom to choose something that was not too intensely artificial such as the West End. Hackney is a real place, whatever is happening here is a genuine venture and adventure.*”

*Newton Dunbar*

# BACK TO MY MOUNTAIN

By Ngoma Bishop

I don't like it what is happening  
I'm implicated against my will  
And though I show sincere resistance  
God knows I am afraid  
So I skulk in dim lit corners  
Petrified of the light  
I should be on top a mountain  
Laughing to an Afrikan sky  
My poetry would be of laughter  
And my soul would cry of love  
But I am forced to write of struggle  
And operate by subtle means  
For the hunter moves with cunning  
To take my soul and steal my sky  
To survive I must be devious  
More devious than the hunter  
Hypocrisy must be my agent  
Or extinction certain fate  
There was a time when I was free  
(I in plural, you understand)  
Now my past has been distorted  
Then my present much perverted  
Yet the future is a mountain  
Stretching up beyond the sky  
And my great, great, great grand children  
Will write of laughter and of love  
So for them all I'll write of struggle  
And carve a pathway to the mountain  
Though on a clear and sunlit morning  
I'll glimpse its peak and write of rainbows



With thanks to everyone who contributed to *Diversity, Stories of a Hackney Generation* – captured in this booklet and a collection of short films. This is our second *Generations* publication, the first in 2018 was *Windrush: Stories of a Hackney Generation*.

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