

Deptford is Changing

Anita Strasser


PEPYS ESTATE
PEPYS RESOURCE CENTRE
PEPYS PARK
PEPYS ESTATE
LONGSHORE
JOHN EVELYN COMMUNITY GARDEN
2000 COMMUNITY ACTION CENTRE
CONVOYS WHARF
THE LENS PROJECT
LOWER ROAD
PLOUGH WAY
DEPTFORD PARK SCHOOL
OXESTALLS ROAD
THE TIMBERYARD DEVELOPMENT
EVELYN STREET
SAYES COURT PARK
BUSHWOOD STREET
BUSH ROAD
TRUNDLEYS ROAD
SIR FRANCIS DRAKE PRIMARY SCHOOL
SCAWEN ROAD
DEPTFORD PARK
EVELYN 190 CENTRE / ST LUKES CHURCH
PRINSTEAD ROAD
2ND DEPTFORD
CLYDE NURSERY
ROUGH READY
MILLWALL F.C.
CHILDERS STREET
ANTHOLOGY DEPTFORD FOUNDRY
GRINLING GIBBONS SCHOOL
SURREY CANAL ROAD
FOLKESTONE GARDENS
EVELYN ESTATE
EVELYN COMMUNITY CENTRE
NEW CROSS TYRES
ARKLOW ROAD
THE LORD CLYDE
DEPTFORD GREEN SCHOOL
MOON SHOT
MARGARET M'MILLAN PARK
FORDHAM PARK
CLIFTON RISE
ACHILLES STREET
NEW CROSS ROAD
BESSON STREET DEVELOPMENT SITE
CLIFTON RISE SHOPS
NEW CROSS
NEW CROSS ROAD SHOPS
NEW CROSS GATE
NEW CROSS ROAD
NEW CROSS ROAD
DEPTFORD TOWN HALL
GOLDSMITHS

Deptford is Changing

a creative exploration of the impact of gentrification

Anita Strasser

Front cover

Banner at the Birds Nest pub seen during a solidarity gig organised by local campaigners - November 2017

Back cover

Message written in chalk by a local teenager outside Tidemill Garden - August 2018

Inside covers, front and back

Deptford Map hand-drawn by Adam Ramejkis and used during workshops

Photos: Anita Strasser

Deptford is Changing
produced and edited by Anita Strasser

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Every effort has also been made to verify information shared with me.
At the time of writing, the information was, as far as I know, accurate.

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GEMINI PRINT

Introduction

This book is both a celebration of some of Deptford's longstanding community networks, creative talents and campaigns to fight for a fairer society, and an account of the pain that is inflicted on these communities through an aggressive housing market, the gentrification of the area and austerity politics, and a lack of understanding for people who bear the brunt of these policies. For those not familiar with this inner-city area in south-east London and the drive to redevelop it, the personal stories and critical accounts of life in Deptford in this book will reveal some of its complex histories, its urban and social make up and the extent and impact of recent regeneration programmes and other governmental policies. In many ways, Deptford is a microcosm through which to understand the general processes and effects of capital-led gentrification and austerity politics in post-industrial working-class areas in inner-city London. However, in many other ways 'Deptford is unique', as many locals will say, and many accounts highlight what living in Deptford means to many local working-class residents. This book is a testimony to a particular experience of life in Deptford that speaks of disadvantage, hardship and inequality, but also of belonging, solidarity, community and resistance. The nature and significance of this experience is in the details of these accounts, which have largely been left to speak for themselves. My own analysis of this experience can be found in some of the texts I have written for this book, particularly in the last article entitled 'Fighting for fairer change'.

The book is the outcome of a 2-year collaborative and creative research project (October 2017-October 2019) that is part of my PhD studies on gentrification at Goldsmiths. During this time, I worked in dialogue with over 160 people who have first-hand experience of living, working and/or going to school in Deptford and the area of New Cross closest to Deptford.[1] The aim of the research was to try to understand the impact aggressive housing and welfare policies have on residents who cannot afford or do not want to participate in the reconfiguration of Deptford (or London). Naturally, the choice of participants for this project was focused on a particular demographic – those that are and/or feel excluded from the current vision of future Deptford, financially, socially and/or culturally. Never have I heard the phrase 'This is not for us' so many times as in recent years. This is not to say that this 'us' is a homogenous group. Deptford is a superdiverse, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, predominantly working-class area, whose residents have varied histories and practices of belonging. Any reference to Deptford's population automatically implies this. What unites the people in this book is a shared feeling of 'Somethin' don't feel right'[2] about the way Deptford is changing and that they have no real control or ownership over the changes taking place. Participants in this project tell of their humble backgrounds, live on council estates (either as council tenants, homeowners through Right-To-Buy or private renters), work a few jobs to make ends meet and work to serve the community in one way or another. Some run shops on premises with lower rents. Some have incomes that allow them to manage well as long as nothing changes, others are already struggling as it is. Some have 'secure' homes but suffer disadvantages that do not enable them to participate in the new urban (private) spaces, others are facing potential eviction and a life of precarity. Some live in conditions unimaginable to others (e.g. damp, overcrowding, etc.), who themselves feel hard done by in this political climate of 'survival only of the fittest'. Others are in more secure positions but are concerned about what is happening to their fellow Deptfordians. Some of the participants have been or are experiencing homelessness, food poverty and mental health issues, others are faced with the prospect of the same fate. Many are involved in local campaigns to fight against funding cuts for local community groups, the closure of community centres, the lack of respect for local history and heritage, the demolition of council homes,

[1] With Deptford Town Hall being in that part of New Cross and the fact that Deptford used to be its own borough that included this area, for ease of reference, I'm including this area in Deptford as well.
[2] This is a reference to Rachel Bennett's song on p.69.

and gentrification. This is often misunderstood as being against change and the arrival of new people and establishments. In my experience, this isn't the case. What people are against is the consequences current forms of gentrification – urban real estate driven by global finance – brings with it: the fact that housing wealthier populations and catering for their tastes and desires dispossesses and ignores the less well-off, often pricing them out of the area as they cannot afford the increased prices – another consequence of gentrification. What people want is a more socially just urban politics that recognises and includes all people in processes of change so that all have the opportunity to participate fully in civic life and the benefits of regeneration. "Deptford has always welcomed people from all walks of life, this is what makes the area special", a local resident tells me. "But now we, the poor, the uneducated, the disabled, the working-class, are not welcome anymore and are being pushed out."[3]

The aim of collaborating with the people in this book is to give a platform to their voices, their varied histories, their artistic talents, their concerns and campaigns. While some already have a voice, putting all these voices together into one platform makes it harder to ignore them. The responses and contributions gathered through this research and which shape the content of this book have previously been published in digital form on the Wordpress blog *Deptford is Changing* and other social media platforms. This was to help local campaigns gain greater visibility and help residents tell their stories and experiences of gentrification and austerity politics to a large online audience at critical moments to gain support for their causes. After consulting with participants, it was agreed to put the material into a book with the same title to provide a physical, wider-reaching and longer-lasting platform that keeps these stories alive. Given the number of people living in Deptford, 160 participants might not seem to be a large number. There are so many voices missing, not because they were excluded or didn't want to take part but because they were prevented from participating for various reasons. Had all those people I invited taken part, this book would be a lot thicker and reflect Deptford's diverse population even more. Some couldn't take part because of time issues; after all many people are too busy with 2-3 jobs, caring responsibilities, managing disabilities and illnesses, volunteering to help others and other pressing issues. Some were too shy or worried about speaking out publicly. Others initially participated but then had a change of heart or life circumstances and withdrew. Others didn't respond to my many and varied attempts at contacting them. So, if you notice an omission, there might be a good reason for this. However, some voices are missing simply because it was impossible to invite everyone whose voice should be heard. As with any research project, there is limited scope and as I was managing this project on my own, I had to draw a line somewhere. The blog is still running and so the missing voices might still be heard one day.

This book does not include the voices, communities and creative talents of those who accept and even embrace the reconfiguration of Deptford in its current form, and those attracted by the lifestyle this offers. It also does not include the opinions and justifications from local and national authorities who implement policies and pave the way for regeneration schemes. This is not to ignore the complexities of regeneration processes and of people's lives, or to say that there is a clear line between those that benefit from gentrification and those that do not. However, the voices of those that seem convinced that gentrification is desirable, an economic necessity and/or that there are no alternatives to the current status quo are already represented on multiple platforms: redevelopment proposals, developers' marketing material, hoardings, estate agents, magazines, newspapers and other media intent on selling

[3] The borough of Lewisham has the highest proportion of children in economic deprivation in England (Voluntary Action Lewisham) but the number of children eligible for and claiming free school meals has noticably declined between 2008 and 2018, indicating that poor families are being moved out of the area (Data Store of London Government). This is unsurprising considering that 82% of London's homeless households in temporary accommodation contain children (Trust for London Population Data) and that 71% of temporary accommodation for Lewisham homeless families is out of the borough (Council meeting report from 2015). This goes hand in hand with an increased number of households registered as homeless and increased lengths of stay in temporary accommodation (Trust for London). These figures do not include families that have moved out to avoid being registered as homeless but whose living arrangements are just as precarious.

a particular vision of Deptford to a particular audience. They are powerful platforms that drown out the voices of the less powerful. An interesting aspect on these platforms is the visual aesthetic of gentrified Deptford (e.g. luxury flats, boutique shops) and the discourse around the arts. Although Deptford has a large artistic community that has been around for decades, and a long and much ignored history of community arts and activism using music, theatre, performance and visual arts, the recent celebration of Deptford's art scene and new creative quarters with an aesthetic that speaks to the tastes of wealthier populations excludes a large proportion of local artists, financially and symbolically. Perhaps the new visual aesthetic is the best indicator of who gentrification is intended for and who it excludes. Most people in this book do not recognise themselves, their communities, their tastes, their lifestyles or their experiences of Deptford in the imagery and rhetoric that is used to show visitors and future residents what living in Deptford is about and who lives here. This is not to put all newcomers to Deptford (or indeed long-time residents) into one boat; there are plenty of newcomers who won't identify with this aesthetic, whose rental agreements will be far from desirable and for whom Deptford will have been the only affordable option to live or set up shop in Zone 2. Some of their stories also feature in this book. It would be interesting to research how those who have recently chosen to live in Deptford and/or are enticed by the new trendy and creative (and expensive) lifestyles understand the area, gentrification and austerity politics, but that would make for another research project altogether. I'll leave that to somebody else. Including them here would defeat the whole point of this project – to hear the voices of those that experience the negative effects of governmental policies and gentrification processes the most. Hence this book. This project sought to create a counter-narrative to the powerful voices, a narrative the participants in this book can identify with and where their voices, their experiences and artistic practices are recognised and given currency. With this in mind, this book was designed with a visual aesthetic that celebrates local community arts and activism and reflects Deptford and some of its existing communities in a way that is recognisable to the people who participated.

The people within this book are not anti-regeneration and they certainly aren't against change. Through this project and previous projects over the last decade, I have gathered that people in Deptford do not oppose Deptford getting a facelift, building new homes, new people moving in or new establishments like coffee shops, vegan eateries or galleries. In fact, many participants in this book welcome some of these changes and participate, if they can, in the new urban spaces. I have also always found that Deptford people are incredibly welcoming and willing to embrace new things and people. But if possibilities to do so are foreclosed through financial, symbolic and sometimes physical barriers (e.g. gated communities), and if existing residents and spaces are not recognised as having the same level of worth as others and suffer negative consequences as a result of change, an us-and-them mindset develops. This can be very divisive. People simply want regeneration that strikes a healthy balance between the old and the new: regeneration that recognises all people, cultural and creative practices as valuable; regeneration that really houses the homeless, enables people to stay in their existing homes and provides decent living conditions for all; regeneration that finds long-term sustainable solutions to enable those on lower incomes to find opportunities and fulfilment too; regeneration that nurtures existing communities while welcoming the new; regeneration that considers and includes existing residents in more than just box-ticking consultation processes; regeneration that finds socially just ways so that people of different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds can truly co-exist and live together in harmony. Above all, people who have lived in and actively contributed to the area, be it through the arts, voluntary work, community work or otherwise despite the ongoing struggles to survive, and who have in large part made the area what it is today, simply want to be recognised and included in future visions of Deptford. This book pays tribute to these people by acknowledging their presence, their views and their struggles, their creative talents, their unsung voluntary and community work, and their efforts to fight for a fairer society.

This book consists of essays, stories, interviews, reports and comments, as well as artworks and imagery of all kinds. The material has been produced by participants themselves or myself in dialogue with participants. Contributors could work independently, with or without my assistance/guidance (as requested), or join workshops, focus groups, one-to-one meetings and interviews, walks and events, which were organised and tailor-made together with participants to cater for their needs and interests. This means people had a choice in how to participate – depending on their preferences, skills, needs and time schedules. They could also participate anonymously and without being photographed, an option not many chose. Not all material was produced specifically for the project. Sometimes I found finished works that fitted the project and contacted the author to ask for permission to reproduce them here. So many people are busy with jobs and other responsibilities and asking them to produce something similar but new seemed pointless. Because of time issues and other reasons, most people requested that I write up conversations, take photographs and write and publish articles for their causes. This is why I started the blog – to have an immediate publishing platform and make the project useful for participants. Of course I would have preferred it if more people had produced their own contributions, but insisting on participant-generated material, potentially causing stress and anxiety for would-be participants, would have excluded a lot of stories from this book, significantly reduced the number of articles and variety of voices, and as a result, decreased the potential benefits of this project. It also would have meant denying many people a voice. Having said that, all 'my' contributions were negotiated with the people involved. Images were composed in conversation with participants and subsequently shared, discussed and chosen with them, with the option of retaking them if requested. Texts were cross-checked, co-edited and approved by the people concerned. Printed copies of images and texts were given to participants and permission to publish was only sought once everything had been agreed. Participants had the option to edit or withdraw their contribution until the book was prepared for printing. Proof copies of this book were shown to and discussed with participants, who approved the current design. Overall, the intention was for people to take ownership of the process and have shared control over how this project evolved and what it was being used for. As mentioned earlier, the material has been shared with, and used for, local campaign groups and initiatives in digital form to increase their visibility and help them tell their stories. This book is the culmination of all the material produced in this collaboration between me, local campaigners, activists and residents to keep their stories alive and fight for fairer change.

This book is only part of the story. There are so many more stories to tell but I hope that this snapshot will give you, the reader, a good idea of aspects of Deptford that are generally not acknowledged in the gentrification literature of up-and-coming Deptford. There is no contents page or synopsis. The order of the contributions may seem random but there is a geographical order in that places follow on from each other. The intention is to take you on an immersive journey through Deptford and get a sense of its urban and social fabric, and its multi-faceted histories. Perhaps it will entice some of you to physically walk the order of the stories and have a more embodied engagement with the content of this book. You may even discover things not mentioned in this book. Having said that, you may also find that some things in this book don't exist anymore. With many places and communities under threat, by the time you read this book, they may have disappeared and been replaced with something else. And with redevelopment proposals constantly being modified, information might be out of date. Although I am researching the present, many a time it feels like I am writing history because as soon as I have written an article, it needs updating almost immediately. As such, although every effort has been made to verify information and keep the stories up to date, I cannot guarantee that the information in this book is still accurate by the time you read it. Deptford is changing.

Anita Strasser, January 2020



Deptford Flea Market on a Wednesday afternoon in spring 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser

Contributors and participants

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Sylvia Green

Teyfik Taghan

Tidemill Garden community members

Various photographers supplying individual images

Winston (Tidemill Garden)

Culture and Gentrification in Deptford

This text was written in January 2018 by Franck Magennis, co-founder of Deptford Cinema, Deptford Debates, HAGL (Housing Action Greenwich & Lewisham), the London Learning Co-operative and board member of the Deptford People Project.



I remember once visiting a squat with a wonderful, if slightly bourgeois, friend of mine. The new occupants were busy transforming the place into what would become the short-lived "Elephant & Castle Social Centre." My friend seemed only to notice the dirt and the chaos. But it was the chaos that captivated me.

Deptford shares some of that chaos. You don't know what to expect on Deptford High Street. You don't know who you will run into. Beyond the Tesco, the Asda, and the other odd representative of multinational corporate brands, the shops are mostly a mix of surprising and eclectic small businesses. Deptford is unique.

More than anything else, gentrification is about rents and house prices. Some people oppose it by focussing on the emergence of expensive coffee shops and hipster hairdressers. The brick thrown through the window of the Cereal Killer café in Shoreditch is a case in point. But a bit of diversity on the high street – of tastes and of prices – wouldn't pose such a problem if only local people who've lived here for years could still afford their rent.

Volunteers getting Deptford Cinema ready for its opening in 2014

Photos: Deptford Cinema / Adriana Kytkova

Real estate capital is globalised and unaccountable. It is an incredibly powerful force that hovers over communities, sometimes without us fully realising it. It controls a massive amount of land, labour and capital. It is plutocratic, not democratic, concerned not with people themselves but with profiting from our houses.

Local Authorities are supposed to act as the people's check on the private power of those property development companies. Like a dam holding back the flood of unaccountable real estate capital. Many, including Lewisham's Labour Council, do a very poor job. They are systematically failing to push back against the profit margins of the development companies. The dam is leaking.



Six years ago I moved to Deptford and helped to found Deptford Cinema. I feel both proud and conflicted about its impact on the local neighbourhood. Being involved with setting up a cultural institution has given me a lot of ideas about culture and its relationship to gentrification.

The Cinema is run entirely by volunteers. Public meetings happen every Sunday at 11am. In theory anyone can get involved, and even start organising their own events. The building that houses the Cinema we renovated from a derelict shop. In many ways, it is an incredible example of a crumbling asset revived by community-led regeneration.

And yet I feel uneasy. Cultural institutions are often seen as a thermometer measuring the temperature of gentrification and its associated conflicts. What kind of films are being shown? Are they attracting diverse crowds that reflect Deptford's multiracial and working class households? Is the price of a ticket, or a beer, too high for some people? These are important questions, the answers to which shape an institution over time.



Gentrification causes conflicts over resources. There is no permanent solution to this tension. To create a community institution is to create the possibility that it will be lost to higher prices and middle class tastes. All that we can do is to keep asking the right questions, and try to act on the answers. The Cinema, the Council, the developers – are they here to serve the local community, or to gentrify and displace them? Are ticket prices, rents, profits too high? Who belongs in Deptford, and who feels unwelcome?

For six years before moving to Deptford I lived in Camberwell. There most of my friends were from geographically dispersed communities from across London. But it was moving to Deptford and founding the Cinema that first helped me get to know many of the people and community institutions with whom I now organise. For the first time I felt a sense of belonging to the place where I lived.

In many ways the Cinema simply gave me a pretext to reach out to people. It started conversations. I headed the outreach working group, and we would flyer the local housing estates. Sometimes we would run a stall in Deptford Market selling second hand books and telling people about what films we were showing that month.

At Deptford Cinema

Photos: Deptford Cinema / Adriana Kytkova

I made one such overture to the Deptford People Project (DPP) after hearing about their community kitchen on Facebook. They explained that they had started as an attempt to create a space where Deptford's new, middle class residents could integrate with the existing community. But it quickly became clear that there was a large homeless community who desperately needed the support DPP were providing.



I felt very strongly that DPP should feel welcome in Deptford Cinema. We co-hosted a fundraiser in the Cinema that proved very successful. The crowd that night looked and sounded like Deptford in a way I hadn't seen in the Cinema before. Rowdiness and energy and warmth. A Cinema volunteer later complained the guests had been too rowdy. The complaint got back to the organisers of the event, and relations between DPP and the Cinema grew distant.

The event that night, and how different people perceived it, neatly encapsulated the tensions at work in Deptford. Different communities living in the same place, sharing the same venues, trying to learn to live together and forge a sense of society despite their differences. All this against the pressing question of who can and can't afford to continue living there.

Of all the local groups and struggles in which I have participated, the campaign to save the Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden stands out. Some years ago I came into contact with Owen and Andy and the other organisers after I attended a meeting in the Dog and Bell pub. They were trying to ensure the Garden was preserved as a community asset, and so we co-organised a film screening in Deptford Cinema to raise awareness. From there I became more and more involved with the campaign, and until the eviction found myself in the garden several times a month.

Lewisham Council's decision to pursue that eviction was, I think, a big mistake. At a time when environmental degradation is reaching crisis proportions, the local Labour Party have decided to defy community concerns and demolish a cherished community space. Councillors' claim to care about homes rings hollow in a borough so marked by evidence of the housing crisis over which they have presided. They seem not to understand the genuine grief and pain they are causing.

Communities change. We must not fear that process. I understand that Lewisham Council is caught between the local community and the overwhelming power of international real estate finance. But we must fight to preserve people's right to stay in the communities they created. To date, Lewisham Labour's role in that fight has been utterly shameful.

It can be difficult to analyse what is causing gentrification in our neighbourhoods. Emotional thinking is a natural response to being forced out of our homes. But in our struggle to halt the flood of money rushing in to displace people in Deptford, we must remain clear-sighted. More than anything, gentrification is about people not being able to continue living in their communities. If together we can fix housing, the rest is sure to follow.



Photo: Deptford Cinema / Adriana Kytkova

The Save Reginald! Save Tidemill! Campaign

Text written by Anita Strasser in July 2019



SAVE REGINALD!!
SAVE TIDEMILL!!

Lewisham Council are planning to demolish Reginald House and Tidemill Wildlife Garden. If their plans go ahead, the residents will lose their homes and a unique community wildlife garden will be destroyed.

We want the plans to be redesigned in partnership with the community. The plans CAN be redrawn to build the same number or more social homes but keep Reginald House and Tidemill Garden.

OUR COMMUNITY DEMANDS:

REFURBISH REGINALD HOUSE
GIVE RESIDENTS A BALLOT!!

Reginald House residents have good homes, but the Council has refused to listen to them or to consider a plan which lets them keeps their flats. Instead the residents have been lied to and harassed by council officers, and their homes run down. Lewisham Council should respect its residents' needs and wishes and not break up communities. As in other developments, residents must be given a ballot on regeneration plans.

KEEP TIDEMILL WILDLIFE GARDEN
A COMMUNITY GARDEN FOR ALL

Any redevelopment must include, not bulldoze, the thriving garden which was created in the 1990s by parents, teachers and children from Tidemill School. An alternative architectural plan shows how the garden and Reginald House CAN be kept by building on the playground and developing the old school buildings. This area has some of the highest pollution levels in London, which will only get worse if the garden is lost. ALL the green space on the site should be kept public, not transformed into private gardens as current plans propose.

PUBLIC LAND + PUBLIC MONEY SHOULD BE USED
100% FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE COMMUNITY

Lewisham Council want to sell this land, meaning a valuable public asset will be lost forever. Millions of pounds of public money is being spent to subsidise this development behind a cloak of secrecy due to the 'confidentiality clauses' of the Council's partners. This land should be redeveloped in partnership with the community – to build as many social homes as possible but keep our current homes and community garden.

SRST: NOVEMBER 2018

www.facebook.com/savetidemill
Save Reginald Save Tidemill @oldtidemillgrdn



DEPTFORD
DESERVES BETTER!!

DEPTFORD NEEDS HOMES

We need homes at rents we can actually afford and our homes must be safe. We need long term Council homes (NOT London Affordable Rent or London Living Rent housing) where we can bring up our kids and grandkids, which are not demolished or sold off for fast cash, but kept for generations to come.

DEPTFORD NEEDS GREEN SPACES

Deptford is dense with homes and buildings, with dangerously unsafe levels of air pollution. We need parks, gardens and woodland for our health and wellbeing. We need redevelopment to improve, not worsen, pollution.

DEPTFORD NEEDS SPACE TO GROW

We need places which don't cost anything to use, where people can come together, where our kids can play and learn safely, and where we can try new ideas, learn new skills, and meet new people.

DEPTFORD NEEDS COMMUNITY

Not for our communities to be ripped apart by demolition or rents people can't afford, or evicted from spaces they've built for themselves.

DEPTFORD IS CHANGING!!

And not always in the ways we need. The Council is selling off people's homes and land behind closed doors. For years they haven't listened, they don't value our local communities.

Redevelopment doesn't have to mean gentrification, consultation doesn't have to be a con. There are other ways.

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA FOR UPCOMING EVENTS
www.facebook.com/savetidemill
Save Reginald Save Tidemill @oldtidemillgrdn

Save Reginald! Save Tidemill! Flyer 2018
Design: Sue Lawes

In autumn 2017 I got involved with the Save Reginald! Save Tidemill! Campaign.[1] It was during Bonfire Night in the garden and I was immediately intrigued by this eclectic mix of people who had one thing in common: they wanted to save the Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden and Reginald House (a council block with 16 flats) from destruction. They had grown to love the garden so much as a space for arts, culture, cleaner air and friendships, and Reginald House has decades of residents' memories ingrained in its bricks and mortar. Losing either would not only erase those physical manifestations of memories and relations built over the years but would also cut through the intricate social web these people are part of. But it isn't just about the garden and Reginald House, it is about what is happening in Deptford, New Cross and London as a whole: the destruction of council homes, affordable artist studios, vital community spaces and green spaces, the reduction of funding for, and subsequent closure of, community and advice centres, and

[1] I also got involved in the Achilles Stop and Listen Campaign on the same occasion as the campaigns work closely together. More information about Achilles Street can be found on p.194-195.









Clockwise from top left

Campaigners and supporters in Tidemill Garden during Deptford X - September 2018

Campaigners chatting in Tidemill Garden in spring 2018

Deptford Debates in Tidemill Garden, chaired by Franck Magennis in summer 2018

Locals chatting around a fire in Tidemill Garden - April 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser

the displacement and breaking up of whole communities – all created by the aggressive housing market, austerity measures and other governmental policies. Tidemill Garden became an important space for community assembling and organising to find ways of fighting for a fairer and better society that caters for all.

I want to tell the story of one of the first big meetings I attended. It took place mid-April 2018, a couple of weeks before a large community event including a hustings with a local councillor in the garden on 29 April 2018. People were brainstorming a thousand and one things that needed doing: fixing the toilet, preparing a cinema and a series of films in the shed, a tea and coffee stand, a food stand, chairs, rain cover, microphones, a coconut shy and many other things. I offered to make a Memory Board where people could record their garden memories, which I installed the week after. To this day, I cannot recall anybody offering to take on the various jobs; nobody seemed to be in charge. At the end of the meeting I remember thinking 'How is this going to work?' On the day of the event, I came early as I expected last minute chaos but when I arrived, I couldn't believe what I was seeing: cleared paths, cut grass, campaign films made by local residents playing on a loop in the cinema (shed) with benches and cushions, the amphitheatre set up with tables, chairs, microphones and rain cover, there were information boards about the proposed development plans and alternative plans put forward by the group, a tea and coffee stall, a food stall, bunting and other little details. It was magical. It was at that point I realised how this group operates and what democratic community organising looks like: people take note of what needs to be done, pool their skills and resources and get on with it. No need for power trips, hierarchical order or delegation. Other organisations could learn a lot from this group.

Top

Michele Petit-Jean painting the treehouse - October 2018

Bottom

Tidemill Garden and treehouse being prepared for a community event - April 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser





The event saw people from all around the area gather together to celebrate this much-loved community space that has been here since the 1990s but was now under threat. Cared for by dedicated volunteers who maintained the garden, opened it up whenever possible to visitors in search of company, tranquillity or contact with nature, engaged children in activities that enabled them to interact with plants and wildlife, and who organised music and arts events to bring the community together, this space was open to everyone. Tidemill Wildlife Garden was one of those inclusive social spaces where you weren't judged on what you look like or where you come from, and where you could be all day without having to spend a penny. Time and again I have heard local people say they feel more and more excluded from public spaces and participation in public life as the reconfiguration of Deptford is not intended for them and their cultural practices. Even if they are not physically barred from some of the new urban spaces, they are financially, socially and culturally (symbolically) excluded – so poignantly expressed with the phrase 'It's not for us'. And with 'their' spaces

Top

Tidemill Garden in autumn 2017

Bottom

Memory Board made by Anita Strasser and Adam Ramejkis in spring 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser





eliminated from Deptford, so are their opportunities to participate.

Tidemill Garden was an inclusive space that invited active participation. Where else could a group of people organise a community event in two weeks without venue or equipment hire and other complicated red tape? Where else could you organise accordion lessons for free for the next day? Where else would a local resident have the opportunity to organise a Jamaican Independence Day Festival without experience as an events organiser? Where else could a group of people get together and organise a Bonfire Night party in just a couple of days? Where else could the homeless or people with mental health issues get some peace without being chased along? Where else could you go and spend time without the noise of traffic? Where else could kids climb trees and learn about nature and wildlife? Which other place was so conducive to forming new friendships and community among strangers? Where else could local, skint artists do drawing workshops, make carnival masks



Tidemill Garden in autumn 2017
Photo: Anita Strasser

and make music without having to organise a venue first? And which group of people could make a garden into a venue for *Deptford X*, London's longest running contemporary arts festival, while retaining their radical agenda for their art? Who could make sheds, trees, an outdoor stage and fence into exhibition spaces? The community artists and activists of Deptford. Destroying Tidemill Garden meant erasing opportunities for this group of people to participate in public life on their own terms and have their talents and skills publicly recognised.

I recently read a comment by a former resident of Robin Hood Gardens in an exhibition organised by Nick Thoburn with photographs by Kois Miah. This is what he said about the green space around the estate: "Areas of undetermined use are what makes a community." I immediately thought of Tidemill Garden. Many people complained that there was no-one there when they came to the garden, subsequently claiming it wasn't being used. This was also used as justification to have it destroyed. People also questioned the notion of community, saying it was only a handful of people interested in the garden because they never saw more than a few people in the garden at one time. This demonstrates a complete misunderstanding of how this space operated and what community is. I went there many times with no-one there and had I left again immediately, I wouldn't have met anyone either. All it required was to remain 5, 10 minutes and the encounters slowly began to unfold. I can't remember how many times I went to the garden 'for a bit' and came home hours later simply because of the constant coming and going of different people. As one garden user commented: "I came for the trees and stayed for the people". During that year, when I visited the garden regularly, I met more people and made more friends than I have during previous years (and I know a lot of people) and experienced more impromptu events than ever: BBQs, bonfires, art workshops and other social gatherings. But you had to be there, willing to wait and see what would happen. Popping your head round to see if anyone was there was hardly going to work. Community isn't something fixed with a set group of people meeting at set times and set locations. Community is a practice of fluid, undetermined social engagements, providing us with a visceral experience that gives us a sense of belonging and membership. The informal social bonds created over time with a number of people during repeated encounters form an

intricate and fragile social web that isn't necessarily visible. It is also not necessarily always conflict-free; community as a perfectly harmonious entity is a myth. Decisions on how to achieve a shared vision often have to be negotiated, but agreement is often reached through democratic dialogue that allows different voices to have a say. These dialogues took place with a variety of people, whoever happened to be there and wanted to join in. It was the undetermined use of the space and the undetermined social encounters within it that made Tidemill Garden such a vital space for local people. It was part of Deptford's social infrastructure: a space 'that hosted friends and gently pushed strangers together'[2], and enabled people to participate, be recognised and heard. Compared with most urban spaces now, which are designed for particular uses and to make people behave in particular ways, Tidemill Garden represented freedom in many ways. The council seem unable to understand this – how a garden that does not look like Kew Gardens (Cllr Bell on BBC News) could be valued so much, or why the replacement of the garden with landscaped walkways (probably with straight paths to pass through – not hang out, fixed benches with divided seats to prevent people from lying down, and skinny trees that don't provide much shade) would never make up for the loss of this space.

The hustings was frustrating as none of the campaigners' questions and concerns were adequately dealt with by the local councillor. It just seemed like people were given the same answers over and over again without being fully listened to, adding to the feeling of exclusion from visions of future Deptford. However, the frustration quickly gave way to enjoying the rest of the day with a brilliantly organised event that attracted at least 200 visitors. People enjoyed the campaign films in the 'cinema', read and looked at the information boards and photographs to learn about the history of the garden, campaigners informed visitors about the council's regeneration plans and showed them alternative plans that would halt demolition and destruction, people looked at the memory board with photographs from the 1990s till now and wrote some comments. Kids went over to the coconut shy, there was face painting and toy-making for kids, The Deptford People Project – a locally-run grassroots initiative to feed the hungry and homeless – provided free delicious vegan food for all, and there was a stall for tea, coffee and biscuits. We heard the amazing voices of the Strawberry Thieves Socialist Choir (conductor: John Hamilton), protest songs by The Four Fathers, hard-hitting spoken word by Agnam Gora, and more music by Ukadelix, Commie Faggots and others. These were all local people who agreed to help out and be part of this event. Nothing was lacking. To me this day exemplified what this community is about: hope, solidarity, inclusivity, creativity and care.

This event was the beginning of a series of events that took place over the course of 2018 – until Tidemill Garden was boarded up on 29 October 2018. The last time I went to the garden during daytime was on 18 October 2018. I was actually meant to work all day but I felt this strong urge to bask in the green and tranquil light of the Tidemill canopy. I kind of knew it would be the last time. In between chatting to the people that were there, I absorbed the light as much as I could and I still carry it with me today. It is my final memory of Tidemill Garden.

To keep the garden's story and the attempt to save it alive, the following articles about the campaign are published here as they were at the time. The fight continues.

[2] Aditya Chakrabortty, 'Britain's infrastructure is breaking down. And here's why no one's fixing it' in *The Guardian*, 14 August 2019.



Tidemill Garden spring awakening 2018
Photo: Anita Strasser


POND
POLYTUNNEL

“Tidemill Garden is part of the cohesiveness of Deptford”

This text was co-written by Anita Strasser and Heather Gilmore in October 2018. Extracts from this text were published in *Time Out Magazine* 22 October 2018.



Banner made by campaigners covering the fence of Tidemill Garden, signalling the occupation of the space - September 2018
Photo: Anita Strasser

Performer, musician, community development worker, local activist, volunteer and campaigner Heather Gilmore has lived in Deptford for 24 years. Together with other campaigners she is resisting the demolition of the currently occupied Tidemill Wildlife Garden and the 16 council flats of Reginald House on Reginald Road, which are to be replaced with 209 flats. The campaign group have worked tirelessly to save these community assets by using their artistic skills and local knowledge to organise events, create promotional materials, demonstrate, protest and draw up alternative plans, and by occupying the garden. There have been art workshops, gigs, festivals and performances throughout the summer. Their campaign activities were also incorporated into *Deptford X* 2018 under the heading *Deptford Aint Avinnit*, featuring David Aylward’s silent procession *Hands Off*, Sue Lawes’ *74 Trees*, Caroline Jupp’s









Clockwise from top left

Campaigner Heather Gilmore in Tidemill Garden - October 2018

Sign made by local children in Tidemill Garden - October 2018

Caroline Jupp's Buddleia Bulletin in the Reading Room as part of Deptford X - September 2018

Sophia Kosmaoglou's Art and Gentrification Walk as part of Deptford X - September 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser

Buddleia Bulletin in the Reading Room (a shed made with recycled materials by campaigners), and Sophia Kosmaoglou's *Art and Gentrification Walk and Debate* (as well as an impromptu sound/walk performance by APT Gallery).

I wanted to write about the positive energy, creativity, and dedication campaigners have displayed, all based on the fundamental belief that we should be living in a fairer society that caters for all. I have huge admiration for those 'sacrificing' their free time to fight for a more sustainable future. Despite what campaigners are up against, there has always been a sense of calm hope in the air and the use of any artistic talent, be it photography, drawing, music, performance art or theatre has contributed to keeping up motivation and keeping the campaign fun. I spoke to Heather about her personal motivations for being a local activist and what living in Deptford means to her. Here is what she told me.

"I moved to Deptford in 1994. When the opportunity came up, I grabbed the chance because I'd grown to love Deptford when I lived here in the 80s. At that time, I was working on arts projects at the Albany and I'd never lived in such a cohesive community before. It was very artistic, very underground and very community focussed. It housed predominantly working-class people with and without further


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Above

Tents in occupied Tidemill Garden - September 2018

Tidemill Garden occupier Winston outside the self-made kitchen unit - September 2018

Left

Treehouse and shed made solely out of recycled materials by garden occupiers - September 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser

education experiences who worked together using their artistic talent for the benefit of the community. I have always felt a pull towards community work combined with the arts, and Deptford inspired me.

In 2006, when my daughter was older and I had more time available for community engagement, I became part of *Deptford Stories*, a play about the history of the Albany. It was the first theatre piece I had been involved in for years. Just after that a group of us locals helped the Albany with a community event and as a result of that established A Madcap Coalition[1], a community arts project to bring Deptford people together on their estates and engender respect for each other's cultures through the arts. We secured premises on the Pepys Estate and managed to fundraise for tents, materials and artists. We travelled from estate to estate, made various fair-ground games, and in 7 years we'd organised about 50 events! The response was so positive, with one young woman who was studying Community Cohesion saying 'This is it! This is exactly what we need!'

Unfortunately, after 7 years I burnt out. We had no paid staff to manage the project and I wanted to balance my life with some creative expression. I'm an actress and musician and as organising these events took up all my time, I felt trapped in a managerial position. The final straw for me was when we failed to secure a funding bid to Deptford Challenge Trust[2], which was for projects needing to take the next step in their development. We had done so much including becoming a registered charity. I was so devastated that a local trust which supports local projects would not fund us, I simply burnt out and couldn't carry on. Before I left in 2013, we were asked to do an event in Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden and I fell in love with it the moment I walked in. The garden was beautifully designed by a landscape architect and planted 20 years ago by the teachers, parents and pupils of Tidemill School. This garden is magical and has become incredibly important to me. I'm registered blind – I have a degenerative condition and my eyesight has got worse over the years. I now have 5% of blurred vision and I may go completely blind one day. But

[1] Madcap Coalition were forced to leave their hired storage space in June 2019 due to redevelopment plans and rent increases they could not afford. The days of Madcap are probably numbered.
[2] Deptford Challenge Trust (DCT) was borne out of Deptford City Challenge Programme in the mid-90s and awards grants to local initiatives that benefit residents in the DCT area (see their website).





Left

Campaigner Heather Gilmore getting ready for a protest - October 2018

Right

Procession through Deptford to demonstrate against the demolition of Tidemill Garden and Reginald House - October 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser

when I come in here, my eyes are bathed in green light and it helps me relax and imagine I am in the country. I have to rely on others to help me get out of London, but the garden is close to my flat, and the bird song and the many trees thrill me and I feel at peace when I'm here.

I got involved in the campaign to save the garden and Reginald House flats in 2014 – as soon as I heard they were under threat. When we found out that Reginald House tenants had been campaigning against the demolition of Reginald House for 6 years, we linked up and concentrated on developing planning objections to the proposals together. The numbers for social housing were appalling at the time and formed part of our objections. We presented alternative outline plans drawn up by an architect member of the group, but the council's line is that they are unworkable because they are not detailed drawings. They were never meant to be submitted as a planning application but used as an example of what could be done. We purely tried to show that the council could get the same amount of units with bedroom numbers equivalent to the council's plans. We also presented photographs, a list of events, and the fact that our group opened the garden up to the whole community (previously it was only open to the Tidemill School community). But the main argument was pollution. Data collected by Citizen Sense, a Goldsmiths University study, has shown that the garden mitigates pollution by half in an area six times over World Health Organisation limits.

To our surprise, we won a deferment and made good use of this extra time to campaign for alternatives. We arranged meetings and worked tirelessly to persuade the council and developer to meaningfully engage with us, at every opportunity and in every way possible but no representative of the future social landlord ever came to our meetings. Ironically, in August 2017 the garden featured as a Case Study for children at play for the Greener City Fund from the GLA. Only a month after, planning permission was granted to build on it.

Lewisham Council's developers now have planning permission to build 209 flats here – 49% will be for new social tenants at 'London Affordable Rent' which is 63%





Michele Petit-Jean performing the Magic Puppet Theatre to local school children at Tidemill Garden - October 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser

higher than present Lewisham Council rents.[3] We want the social housing but not the destruction of current community assets. It will just take a bit of imagination. To that end we have requested that the developer go back to the drawing board to come up with a community-led design that will spare the garden and Reginald House. Our request has been dismissed out of hand. We have been treated contemptuously by our elected representatives and their back office workers. When we were instructed to leave the site by 29th August 2018, we decided to occupy it. We also applied for a judicial review. A judge then ruled that the council's possession order, which they served despite the pending application, has to be deferred until seven days after our application was assessed on 17th October to decide whether to go to full hearing. This was no small victory, but our application was refused and we are expecting the bailiffs on Wednesday 24th October. However, we are applying for an appeal at the High Court and will not give in until we have exhausted all possibilities.

Among us garden users are some amazing creative and resourceful activists who have used their ingenuity in the building of sheds, tree houses, a functioning kitchen area, a store room along with creating artworks, placards and banners. We have organised many events and through them and our campaigning, thousands of people have visited and local people have come together to enjoy the garden and resist its annihilation. I have developed beautiful friendships here and organising events for the campaign has made me feel valued, capable and confident that despite my disability I can still contribute to community life. This garden is part of the cohesiveness of Deptford. It has so much potential to provide working-class people, young and old, who may not want to or cannot fully participate in the culture of gentrification, with a creative, healthy and affordable space to be. It can offer motivation and hope too.

In Deptford it currently feels like we're being assaulted by concrete, glass and metal, as well as noise and air pollution. With the constant hum of digging, the increased heavy vehicle traffic and all the monstrous luxury developments, this garden is

[3] Lewisham Council stresses the fact that it's 54% social housing. However, this figure does not take into account that 10 households from Reginald House need to be rehoused. Therefore, it is 49% social homes for **new** tenants.





Left

Banner made by Tidemill campaigners in summer 2018

Right

Tidemill supporter Sylvia Green (who sadly passed away in November 2019) trying out her newly created campaign vest on a fellow campaigner - September 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser

becoming more and more necessary – it's priceless. I live on the Crossfields Estate which faces another 4 developments (No.1, 2 and 3 Creekside and Sun Wharf)[4], and this together with the Tideway Tunnel and all the development on the Greenwich side of the Creek is causing more and more pollution. I'm concerned for my health and that of the community, and I feel stressed with all that is yet to come. Coming into the garden de-stresses me, and I know of others who come in here 'to sort my head out' – as one ex-veteran neighbour suffering from PTSD said.

I fear that with all the development in this small area, the cohesiveness of Deptford will fall apart. These developments are not for people born and those already living in this local community, and have devastating effects on working-class families. Most of the children of the people of Deptford will not be able to live here when they're older, diminishing the goodwill of young people who would like to contribute to their area. Deptford will be full of high-rise developments – behind Laban they are building one 30-storey and one 27-storey block – owned by private investors often sitting on empty flats. And I am not convinced that newcomers who can afford to pay £600k for a flat will understand the impact this will have on local working-class people or have the will to support them through their increasing vulnerability to becoming homeless. There are an estimated three million people in this country who are one pay packet or benefit payment away from ending up on the streets. This is not to put all newcomers into the same box – many get where we're coming from when I explain the reasons behind our campaign. It is after all also in their interest to live in a peaceful and healthy community. The problem is that many people are not aware of the impacts of gentrification as they are sold a particular version of life that does not include us.

It is the first time in 24 years that it occurred to me that I might want to get out of here… but then again, I have little choice and I couldn't leave anyway because Deptford is my spiritual home. That's why I will continue to resist its destruction."

[4] There is also the recently completed Faircharm development and Kent Wharf.

“The planned demolition of your home has so many repercussions”

Text written by Anita Strasser in September 2018



Banner made by Save Tidemill! Save Reginald! campaigners, hanging from Diann’s windows on Reginald House - September 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Diann Gerson has lived in Reginald House for over 30 years. She moved in when her daughter Kerry was just a baby, and a few years after she had her son Brian. Now, Diann is a triple grandmother with two more grandkids on the way. In 2009, Diann won first prize of the Glam Gran Award. She is in full-time employment.

Diann grew up in the countryside of Bedfordshire and first came to London when she was 17. She lived in various boroughs, lived in Hazelwood House in Deptford for a while, and when she was expecting Kerry, friends living on the Pepys Estate (Lanyard House) put her up as she was waiting to be housed. “This was the time when people with babies were given council properties”, Diann remembers, so when Kerry was born, Diann was offered this flat in Reginald House where she has lived ever since. “When I came to Deptford I knew this was my place to live. Everybody gave it such a bad name, but everybody was so friendly. I immediately became a customer at Johnny Price’s and I still shop there today. It was him and his family who first got displaced from Reginald Road after the war. I actually went into labour in







Clockwise

Diann's fairy collection

Diann in her favourite chair in the lounge

Diann in front of her new walk-in wardrobe, which cost her £1,000 and which she would lose if she had to move out

Photos: Anita Strasser

Johnny Price's shop – I'd just done some shopping. I absolutely love Deptford, it's so multicultural, everyone mingles, it's one place and we're all in it together."

Diann was very poor when she came to Deptford and remembers sleeping on a mattress in the living room when she first moved into Reginald House. There was no heating at that time and as the only gas fire was in the living room it was convenient to sleep there. "During the first nights in winter, me and my daughter had to go to bed in full gear – fully clothed from top to bottom it was so cold. There was inch-thick ice inside the windows." But what has always been special about living at Reginald House for Diann is the relationship with neighbours and the strong community they have built up. Diann narrates some of her memories:

"Everybody here was so friendly when we moved in. In No.18, there was was a lady called Dolly, and next door were Jim and Sue, and we all got along. Dolly was a very old lady and struggled up the stairs. We all looked out for her. When we hadn't seen her for a while, we knocked a few times but she always said 'I'm alright'. She







Jamaican Independence Day Festival organised by Diann Gerson - 4 August 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser

was one of the old-fashioned ones who don't want to admit they need help. One day, we just knew she wasn't alright so we kicked down the door and found her lying on the floor. We called the ambulance… she never came home again. Dolly was the first to go. Then there was Stephanie, and we're still in two minds whether she was murdered or not. The police did investigate because things didn't add up, but nothing came from it. The funeral was weird too – the husband refused to do anything and me and Sonia organised the wake in Reginald House. Then there was Mummy Comfort – that's what we used to call her as she was the oldest in the block. She was an elderly lady from Africa and couldn't read so she used to bring me letters to read out to her. One particular summer, we hadn't seen her for a while, so we went to her flat and knocked and knocked and knocked. I then opened the letterbox to see what's going on and the smell coming from there knocked me sick, I threw up straight away! Obviously she had passed. We had to wait for special police to kick open the door. I was in touch with Mummy Comfort's daughter in Canada and we retrieved everything worth saving before the council would throw everything away. We were invited to the funeral as special guests and we had to wear all the tribal gear. The funeral was conducted in a different language but when they were talking about us all we heard was 'good neighbour', 'good neighbour'."

Diann comments on the fact that through these experiences of death it can be seen just how much the community here support each other. "We all look out for each other, we are like family here!", she says, and remembers when Jim from No.20 saved her ex-husband's life. He had cut a main artery on his arm after punching a window, and Jim put his fingers on the cut to stop the bleeding until the ambulance came. And of course, there are a lot of happy memories of living in Reginald House. Diann remembers the good old days when they all used to sit outside with a glass of wine and some food, kids playing outside, celebrating all the kids' birthdays together. "They were also the days when you washed down your balcony and took pride in your place", Diann reminisces.

Despite some people having died or moved out, the remaining community is still very strong, also with people that moved in years after Diann arrived. Diann and Sonia have become very close friends and been through a lot together. "People always used to call us *Bench an Batty* because we were always together". Diann and Sonia are friends with each other's families, their kids are the same age and so are their grandkids. "We've done a lot of growing up together. I don't know what I would have done without Sonia. Her living here has made my life much better, otherwise I might have felt lonely and cut off. Especially with this indecision about the demolition – this

has been going on for 10 years! It's emotionally very difficult and we understand each other because we are going through the same. If it weren't for her, I would have fallen into a depression. I actually developed agoraphobia – I'm so tense because we don't know, is it another 6 months, 9 months, a few years? The planned demolition of your home has so many repercussions. For instance, I have accumulated so much stuff over the years and I know it's sentimental but I'll have to make decisions of what I can keep or not. Losing my home will turn my life and kids' lives upside down; this is my and their family home. I do try my hardest not to think about it because I just want to go to the council and shout at them. They don't understand how it tears you up! What we've had to go through! Do I decorate? No, it's not worth it. Do I get this? No, I'd better wait, you don't know what's going to happen. The council keep changing ideas and make promises they shouldn't be making in something called 'consultation'. They want this and that from us – at one point they wanted our birth certificates – and we just don't know what's going on or what to do."

According to Diann, she was first offered a like-for-like arrangement which, in her case, would mean a 2-bedroom flat. "Then they came round to assess my housing needs, which would probably mean a 1-bedroom flat, considering my children are grown up." Now it seems residents are being offered like-for-like again, but will that really be the case? Same size? Same rates? Same conditions? Nobody really knows and nothing's been put in writing that is legally binding. As one councillor put it during a meeting with residents which I attended: 'We can't put it in writing because that means you could hold us accountable.' How do you respond to a comment like that? Needless to say, anxiety levels have not decreased.





Top

Diann with daughter Kerry and dog and a neighbour's kid on the balcony of Reginald House in the 1990s

Bottom

Diann's son Brian with Tidemill School T-shirt - ca. 2000

Photos: Courtesy of Diann Gerson, with the kind permission to reproduce them here

Diann also loves Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden and has often taken her grandkids there. For people living in the area, especially those living in flats, Diann says, the garden is perfect, as it gets the kids out of the house. Recently, she had a BBQ in the garden with family and friends and as there were some extra people around, she fed them too. Diann's kids went to the original Tidemill School and Diann shows me a picture of her son Brian wearing the school T-shirt at that time. "Brian recently went to the garden to have his bike fixed and he became all nostalgic; he'll be sorry to see it go." For Diann, going into the garden is like "stepping off the city madness; it's a little oasis for people living in flats". It is her extended community. At the beginning of August 2018, Diann, with friends and garden volunteers, organised an amazing Jamaican Independence Day Festival, which was a huge success with people asking whether Diann would repeat it the year after.

When I ask Diann how she would define community, she associates it with one word only: family. "My community is my neighbours, and my extended community is with people in the garden. My immediate community are people I can depend and rely on at all costs, no matter what it is, what time of the day it is. There is a sense of trust in each other, that we've got each other's backs. It is this underlying thing that you can't put your finger on. For example, I haven't seen Marcel, one of our neighbours, for ages because he's busy but if I ring him today to say that I need help, he'll find time to help me straight away. Marcel has been an absolute star over the years – he's fixed electrics, plumbing and things like that. He also put in the cooker in my daughter's flat in Forest Hill – he's seen them grow up so we're like family."

Diann has been an active campaigner in the Save Reginald! Save Tidemill! Campaign and has spoken publicly about the impact losing her home would have on her.

She started campaigning to save Reginald House and Tidemill Garden when she first heard about the demolition plans 10 years ago. “At first, the plans included 2 blocks on Giffin Street and we sent petition after petition, which the council never responded to. When it was decided that Giffin Street would remain, we again sent petitions regarding Reginald House with recorded delivery. We put a lot of effort into it the first few years and then we hit a brick wall, we hit despondency because you start asking yourself ‘What am I doing this for?’ It was like sitting down and waiting for the inevitable.” This was the time when Diann developed agoraphobia, insomnia and nearly hit depression. She would just sit on the sofa on her days off and dwell on things, toss and turn every night, unable to sleep. “I might not have shown it outwardly, but inwardly, I was a mess. It does take its toll on you.”

Then Pauline, another Reginald House resident, came to see Diann in June 2018, when the final decision to demolish Reginald House and Tidemill Garden was made and objections rejected by the GLA. Pauline informed Diann of this and persuaded her to come down to the garden and join the campaign again. Diann hasn’t looked back since. “I’ve gone from one extreme to the next. It’s given me purpose – I doubt we’ll win but I will try my best and at least I won’t have left it untried. It’s given me hope, although many other neighbours are not so full of hope. Some are really beaten down. Campaigning has rejuvenated me because I’m not resigned now. I feel stronger because there are so many other people fighting with us. This is my family home. Reginald House is in need of repair, but there is no need to demolish it.” Diann loves the building and her flat; it is the place where her life and her kids’ and grandkids’ lives have unfolded; it is the place where their memories live, where everything reminds them of the events that have occurred in their lives.

Diann’s granddaughter (left) and Jahsiah, a local kid (right), at the Jamaican Independence Day Festival - 4 August 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser





Modelling the impact of regeneration

Text written by Anita Strasser in October 2018

In summer 2018, me and Adam Ramejkis, a licenced Lego® Serious Play® workshop facilitator, ran a Lego® workshop in Tidemill Garden with local residents, campaigners and supporters of the Save Reginald! Save Tidemill! Campaign. Participants were asked to build models in response to questions regarding the regeneration in Deptford and then explain their thoughts through their models. Lego® Serious Play® is a useful and creative way of engaging with difficult issues, and talking through the built models can draw out views and perspectives that might otherwise remain hidden. The time spent on building also allows thinking time before having to speak and it can sometimes help shy and/or visual people articulate their ideas better. The discussions in this workshop really brought to light how the participants understand and experience the regeneration of Deptford, and how it affects them emotionally.



Ian's model of Tidemill Garden and the separation of social groups outside of the garden

Photo: Anita Strasser

The first question asked how individuals see Deptford. Ian, who lives right opposite the garden and gives a helping hand with whatever needs doing (fixing the path and fence, preparing for events, etc.), explains that Deptford is a place of different communities that do not mix. He explains his model that clearly shows the separation of groups: "We live here together but sort of bypass and not really see each other. This doesn't apply to all of course but generally people do their own thing. We're mixing but we're not blending or bonding. I recognise my immediate neighbours but at the same time we are literally blind to one another, until something serious happens. The church helps to bring people together and green space is another way to connect, like Tidemill Garden – it's like a magnet for people to meet. When you come here, you've got more time to take in your surroundings and that can lead to wonderful encounters. A common space, a green space, is the magical ingredient when it comes to community."

Luciana agrees, saying that the garden is an important meeting place. "The notion of a communal space to make culture, create community, and build up this relationship of unity, of togetherness, is really important. As Paulo Freire used to say, all culture is born from the wish to share time and space."

Jacquie's model is a representation of the streets and buildings of historic times mixed with those from the 60s and 70s, and how well they all fit together. "The lay-out is very higgledy-piggledy, it's not clinical, it's not shiny, but it's been built up over time. And the communities living within these buildings have also evolved over time. We know how to navigate these spaces and we move around them well, but at the moment my feelings are that the council want to get rid of anything that isn't shiny or neat; they seem to want to erase the higgledy-piggledy-ness, to cleanse existing communities so that the area will become a shiny and neat version, looking the same as everywhere else. Obviously, things can be improved, we need investment,



Participants at the 'Modelling the impact of regeneration' workshop in Tidemill Garden - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

but we don't need erasing which is what I feel Lewisham Council want to do to working-class communities in Deptford."

Harriet's model also shows the higgledy-piggledy-ness of Deptford, with different colours and shapes representing the different community groups in Deptford. "This yellow bit in the middle could be The Birds Nest, which is quite cool and creative, and this here could be some of the market traders. There is lots going on, with different bits connected up; it's all quite mixed, dynamic and compact. But then there is the new Deptford, which is quite uniform and blue, cos it's a Tory colour and the council think that this is so much better than the other Deptford because it's more uniform. It feels very disconnected from the rest of Deptford."

Finally, Heather and Matt's models represent the river, as both feel that the connection to the river is being lost for most of Deptford's working-class residents. Heather says: "I don't think there is a policy to get rid of all the poor people, it's just the chasing of the dollar that is getting rid of working-class people and all the things that are valuable to them. And I know not all of it was good in the past but that's how I see Deptford changing – from a class perspective."

The next model was about how participants see regeneration, either how it's happening or how they think it should be done. For Luciana, regeneration should be about remaking something by including the old. "Regeneration is not destroying the old and creating something new. Like here in Reginald Road, destroying existing housing and green space is not regeneration. It is really important to see how a community develops, and regeneration should allow communities to have this old and familiar together with the new."

Ian agrees, saying these new blocks are all funky and nice, "but they seem to forget to mix the old and the new, and we, the people already living here, are left to our own devices. It's up to us to mix and blend with the new. Regeneration today doesn't actually solve the problem of the community, of being together and of social housing." Matt explains this as a process of disregarding certain realities and thinks developers should see an area as a patchwork of land and communities that should grow together.

Heather and Harriet feel that fortresses are being erected with gentrified areas being





Harriet and Heather's models of towers, fortresses and gated estates symbolising gentrification

Photos: Anita Strasser

built inside walls that keep the working-classes out. "It's obvious", Heather says, "some of these developments are just private and have walls and gates around them so we don't feel welcome. It's not just literal walls but also financial walls – we cannot afford living in these fortresses, even if we wanted to… not that we do."

Fred's model is a reference to the Pepys Estate, that "for all its faults represents to me that you can have high-density buildings and still have a sense of space around them, which is missing from all the new developments. So, good regeneration retains that sense of space; developments should feel more open rather than somewhere like Lewisham Gateway for example, where all blocks are up against one another."

Jacquie's model represents regeneration as violence. "It's like developers, councillors and regeneration officers coming in pretending to be like cute rabbits but they're not. It's not about a community's voice, it's about the council being dominant and squashing us. It feels claustrophobic, we've got no say in this process."

When asked to take the elements of individual models to build a shared model of regeneration, the group agree on having all the new fortresses surrounding Deptford communities and Tidemill Garden, with cranes hanging over the green space and local communities from Ian's model, putting a shadow over the existing, historical parts of Deptford. Luciana explains the model:

"Regeneration is the gentrification of people without a voice. Ideally, there should be green spaces between blocks where people could mix. However, this is being overshadowed by the construction industries, by power, by the system, the Babylon system. Gentrification separates communities; the new communities live in fortresses, which are surrounded by walls and which have no real social mix, no integration; the local, existing communities are forgotten, they have no voice. It's so sad."

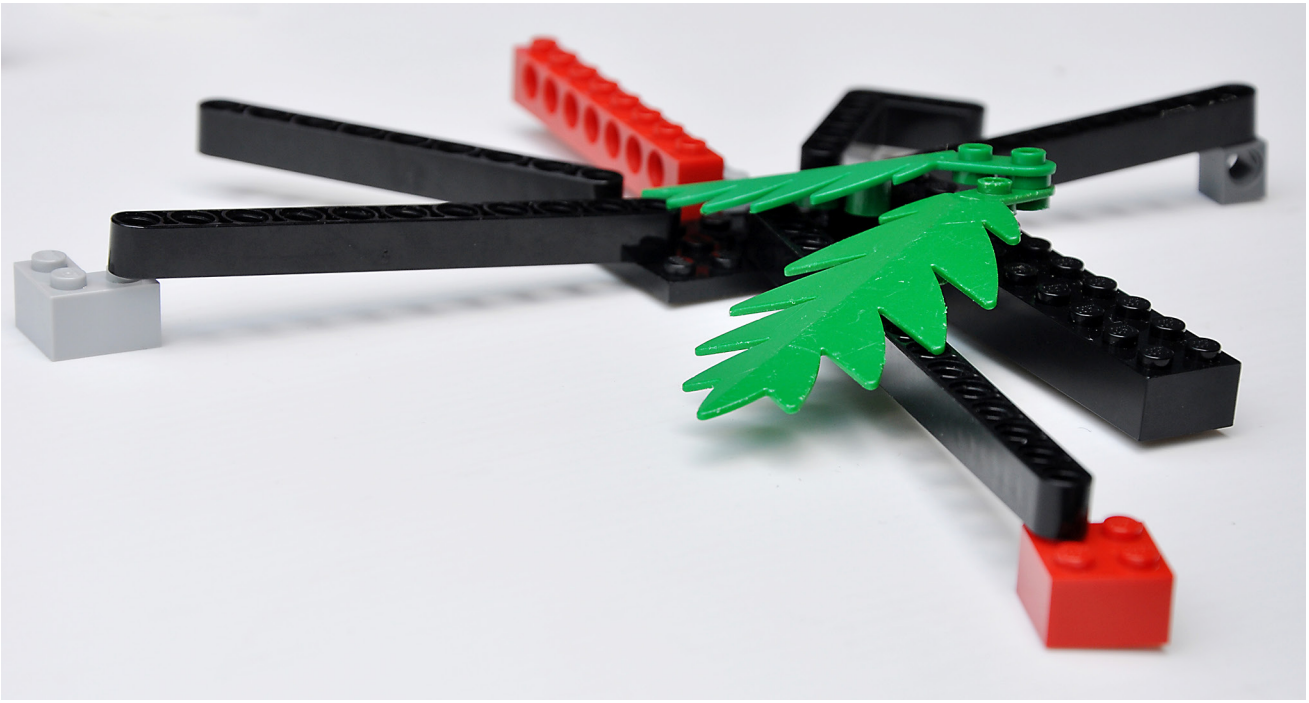
Harriet emphasises that older estates have socially-mixed communities where individuals are really interconnected. "These estates all have a nice social mix and lots of green space around them. They are nice places to live. Then we've got the council oppressing and squishing the community into THEIR idea of regeneration, which is just those boring fortress developments by private developers, which don't want any of us to come in."

The next task was to build a model of the personal impact the regeneration and gentrification of Deptford is having on local people. Matt and Epo (Epo joined later) explain their model as a rising mountain, signifying the potential impact an ever-increasing number of people might have. "It's like gears, like one thing affecting another, one gear inputting on another, leading to more and more harm. But this harm is hidden from others, people are being crushed but others don't see this, they are too busy with their own problems. Everybody is struggling so you don't have time to take care of others."

Luciana says that people who have no voice and no choice become invisible. "What the council is doing here is not giving people a choice, a ballot for example for Reginald House, and so it is putting these people in the situation of invisibility.

There is all that talk about equal opportunity but really it's not about equality but about quality. If you are wealthy you are seen to have a good quality of life, and if the people living in Reginald House were wealthy people, their voices would be heard, they would be visible, but since they are not wealthy and their lives are seen to be lacking in quality, they do not get equal opportunity."

Jacquie elaborates on the notion of violence that regeneration brings when your home is under threat, and her model is perhaps the most harrowing example of impact. The green leaves in the middle represent Jacquie's heart and the black slabs represent the various regeneration schemes in the area that pierce her heart. "This violence of regeneration has an impact on your whole being, your health, family, your neighbours, the community, your friends… it's oppressive and it affects all the things you hold dear – your memories, your home… It's massive! And the councillors and developers just don't understand this, for them it's just housing, not homes. If they really understood, they wouldn't be able to sleep at night."



Jacquie's model of the violence of gentrification
Photo: Anita Strasser

Harriet also refers to gentrification as incredibly violent, symbolised in her model of a hairbrush and an axe, with the former demonstrating how local artists, especially musicians, are linked up and the latter signifying the attempts to break up these connections. "The hair brush was the closest thing I could find to link music and the arts, and the axe here demonstrates that there have already been victims of music communities being broken up. This gentrification is violent and does kill people through lack of housing, stress, segregation, and higher pollution levels."

Ian looks into the future and sees more and more separation that will have a psychological effect on people. "Suddenly a new block is being built and a green space, like Tidemill Garden, which everybody could use becomes a lot smaller. At the same time, with the new blocks there is green space gated off as if to say 'For the tenants only'. And psychologically this separates the community, causing a them-and-us mindset whereas before we were together."

Heather also comments on the benefits of open green space: “Tidemill Garden for example has a big heart and welcomes everybody in and this makes me feel I want to be the same – loving, welcoming and wanting to share it with everyone. And all around are all these towers – they take away all my light, they create wind tunnels which feel uncomfortable.”



One of Fred’s models, which he explained as representing “Tidemill Garden and a local councillor standing on top of Reginald House waving their destructive sticks”

Photo: Anita Strasser

Fred also feels that the high-density and bad design of the new tower blocks all around impact on his well-being as it feels to him like a conveyor belt with more and more towers coming into the area. “We are a nation of designers and we are surrounded by all this bad design, particularly with what’s around the buildings.”

Once again, participants are asked to put all their models together into a shared model of impact, and Jacquie explains the model: “We’ve got the positive symbols in the middle which is the garden and the library at Pepys, which represent the resistance going on. Here, around the middle, we’ve got all the new buildings which are not well-built, not well-designed, look ugly and the building of them represents a sort of conveyor belt, and over there we’ve got the personal impacts, how the constant construction of these blocks affect communities. What will happen is that all the spaces where we can come together are getting smaller and more segregated, so there’s borders being built up in between communities, so the new private builds are becoming dominant.”

What I find interesting is that at the centre of this model there is hope and resistance. So, I ask: “Looking at the spark of hope in the middle, how can we resist and how can we make this impact on our lives visible?” Luciana is clear that there needs to be a dialogue between the council and communities, one that acknowledges the council’s constraints but also the wishes and needs of the community. “The council is acting like they don’t see us; they don’t hear what we say. They are ignorant of their own faults in their mission to work with developers and housing associations rather than with communities. There is no real dialogue about what we wish as members of the community. As campaigners we want to make our voices heard and tell them that it’s time for us to sit at a round table to have a dialogue and find compromises on both sides.”

Jacquie agrees: “If we didn’t scrutinise all their plans and schemes, the council would just do what they want. At least our resistance has had some impact with the amount of social housing slightly improved. That wouldn’t have happened without campaigners. We’re supposed to accept everything while they push through what they want to see. We have less and less control over our own lives because the council just don’t listen!”

To conclude, Heather sums up what is really needed in the area and London as a whole: “We need the maintenance of existing council homes and green spaces, and for new-builds to be social housing rather than private because that’s where the crisis lies. The council need to be more community-minded when they are building those places and build truly affordable homes. And they need to really tackle pollution. Private gardens and a glorified walkway that no-one will care about are not the solution.”

A Tribute to the Tidemill Garden Community

Text written by Anita Strasser in November 2018



Tidemill Eviction - 29 October 2018
Photo: Anita Strasser

On Monday, 29th October 2018, the occupiers of Tidemill Garden were evicted by heavy-handed bailiffs and security guards ordered by Lewisham Council. At 6am, a total of 120 bailiffs and security guards with balaclavas, as well as local police officers to 'prevent a breach of the peace', arrived and without any warning or attempts at dialogue the handful of occupiers in the garden were forcefully evicted. Save Reginald! Save Tidemill! activist Damien Hughes, one of the 4 occupiers left in the garden, narrates:

"It all happened so quickly. They came like a swat team, and in huge numbers. It was shocking to see so many uniformed security personnel in a wildlife park in London at that hour of the morning and acting with such aggression. There were about 50 pretty evenly spaced security guards lined up around the outer circle of the garden in yellow vests, plus some bailiffs in blue vests dotted here and there. Others were moving and standing in different formations in the back car park and the basketball court. The perimeter path outside of the garden also had a line of security men and women. Lights were flashing everywhere throughout the garden and the whole site, plus a bugle was sounding constantly by one of us, intermingled with the sounds of people shouting for help clearly being roughed up by the security/police. The sheer ferocity





Tidemill Eviction - 29 October 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser

of the invading forces was quite violent and brutal, which managed to clear the garden quite quickly. So those 50 security guards in the garden alone at 6.10am were for us 4 folks."

Shortly after, one young woman who managed to climb the garden gates was dragged down by 6 men, putting her at risk of serious injury. Another young woman managed to climb to the top of a large tree and remained there for at least 7 hours despite attempts to get her down too. As the day unfolded, more police arrived, surrounding the garden with a solid line of police officers, security guards and bailiffs to keep protesters out, allowing the bailiffs in the garden to destroy all the lovingly-built structures such as sheds, tree houses, the school board and other things. A few youngsters who were brave enough to try and get into the garden to stop its destruction were pushed to the floor. The nail in the coffin came when a 7' bailiff pushed Diann Gerson, who already had a fractured shoulder and an arm in a visible sling, to the floor. Bruised and in pain, she ended up in A&E to check whether her shoulder had been damaged more in the assault. Ironically, she was advised to report the assault to the police. But they had been there and did nothing![1] Although many police officers seemed uneasy about their role in this whole fiasco (many didn't actually know what it was all about, and when protesters told them the whole story, many officers seemed sympathetic to the protesters' cause and intentions), the police's failure to interfere with these assaults, justified by 'I'm just doing what we've been told to do', is not going to help in restoring faith in the idea that the police are there to protect citizens. Even all the media reports which I have seen (whether in support of the campaign or not), have expressed shock at such heavy and aggressive handling of people who were simply trying to save a much-loved community wildlife garden.

As usually happens after such events that inconvenience the authorities, the narrative afterwards is one of vilifying protesters and campaigners, portraying them as the aggressors and those breaching the peace. The article written by Ruby Radburn on the hierarchy of violence in this book (p.54-58) describes in detail how those in power are able to inscribe such narratives. This article brings the focus back onto the campaign because there are no reports of the amazing community spirit so typical of Deptford on that day, with people of all ages, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds coming together to try and save this beautiful space. There is no mention of the unknown fiddle-player and drummer David Aylward, who kept the girl in the tree motivated to stay up there for so long; there is no mention of Captain Rizz's moving speech to police officers about what the garden means to him; there is no mention of Karen playing the saxophone, Luciana dancing, Anne looking after young protestors and Andy and various others giving speeches; there is no mention of all the locals who popped by to bring food and drink and show support; of the two elderly ladies standing there for 8 hours crying their eyes out having to watch their much-loved green space being closed down in front of their eyes; of residents in the townhouses opposite allowing campaigners to use their front porches and toilets; of former

[1] Her case was thrown out in April 2019 on the grounds of insufficient evidence (despite there being videos that show the assault) and the fact that the main witness is a good friend of Diann's. Needless to say, Diann has appealed this decision. At the time of writing, she was still waiting to hear back.





Top

Captain Rizz giving an emotional speech about what the garden means to him on the day of the eviction

Bottom

Karen getting ready to play the saxophone (next to the unknown fiddle payer) on the day of the eviction

Photos: Anita Strasser

strangers joining up to fight for common beliefs; of the hugs and support people provided for each other. There is no mention of the fact that this day was only the culmination of a 4-year peaceful and considered campaign NOT against the building of social housing but merely FOR sparing a small community garden and existing council block in the process of building social homes. Councillors say the eviction needn't have happened if occupiers had left the garden when instructed to do so. However, the occupation needn't have happened had the local council really listened to and worked with the campaigners. To repeat: campaigners have never opposed the building of social homes or the development of the site. They have only ever opposed the destruction of valuable community assets that mean so much to them. If this had been taken into consideration in the planning application from the beginning, neither the occupation nor the eviction would have needed to happen. Apparently, 80% of the lost green space will be replaced, but if anyone thinks that private gardens, a pocket park on one of the most polluted streets in SE London and a public walkway tackle pollution and make up for the loss of Tidemill Garden, how can one even begin a dialogue about the value of undetermined space, cultural democracy and community. What I witnessed on the day of the eviction is what I have witnessed throughout the campaign: compassion, creativity, hope, friendship and a belief in a fairer society; community spirit like I have never witnessed anywhere else.

As mentioned previously, earlier in the year, I, with Adam's help, created a Memory Board whose contents were thankfully saved by a campaigner the night before the eviction (the structure it was attached to was destroyed by bailiffs). It invited comments by garden users, who noted down some memorable stories and their feelings for the garden. I am including these here to pay tribute to what Tidemill Wildlife Garden meant to people (see p.38-40).

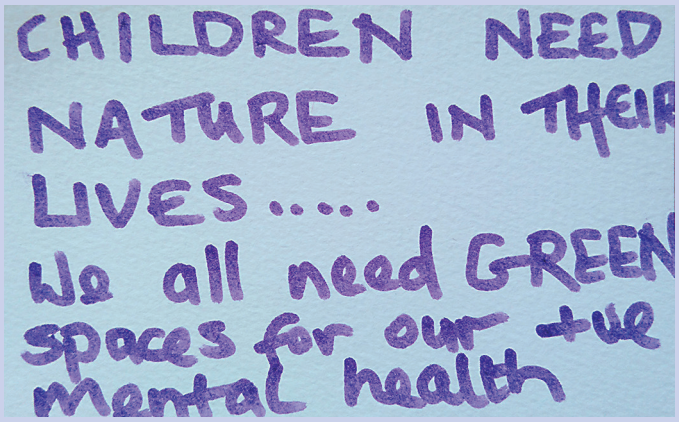


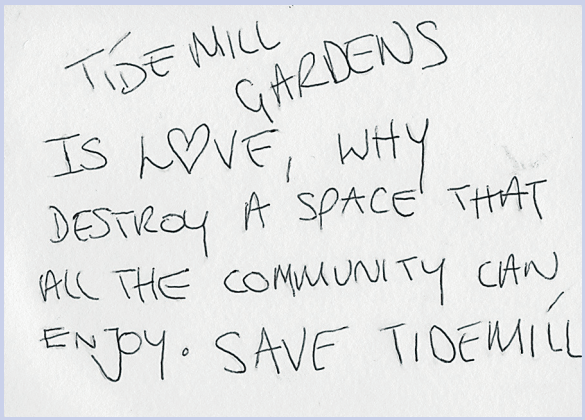
Memory Board in Tidemill Garden made by Anita Strasser and Adam Ramejkis in spring 2018

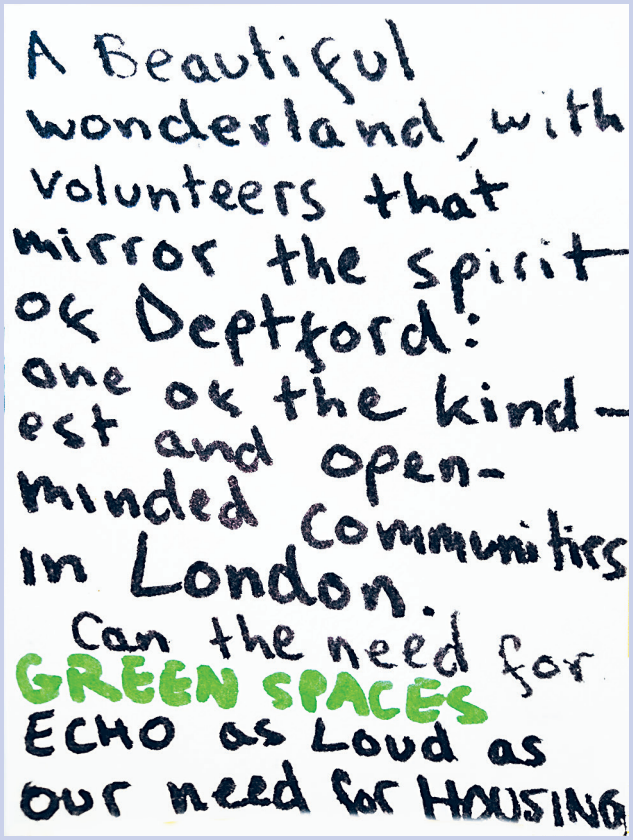
Photo: Anita Strasser

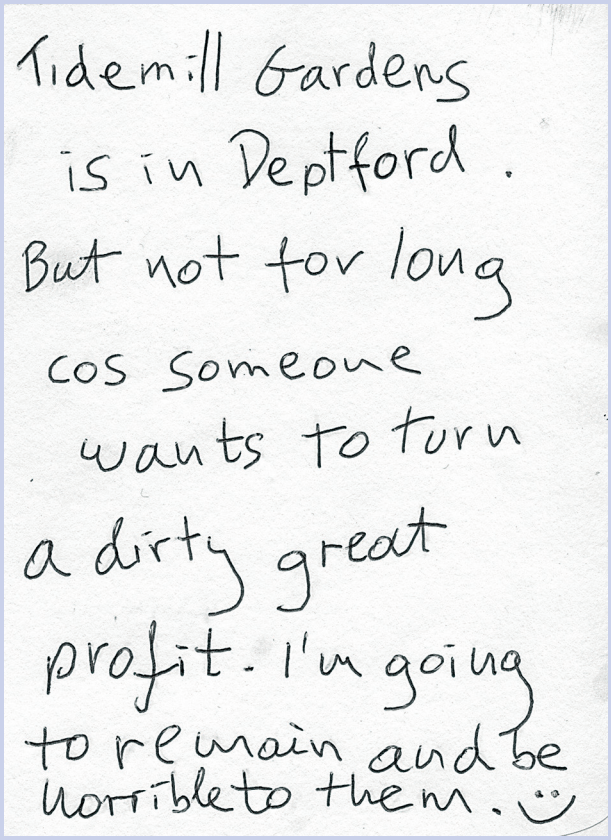
Community contributions to the Tidemill Garden Memory Board made in spring and summer 2018

A beautiful garden for building memories & making explorers out of kids.
Very Special.

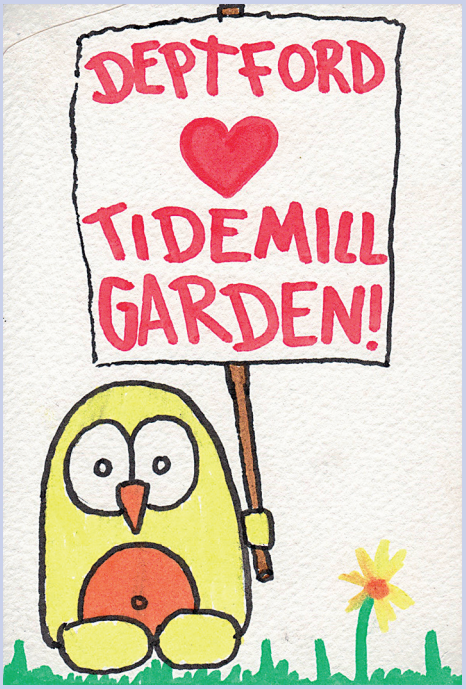






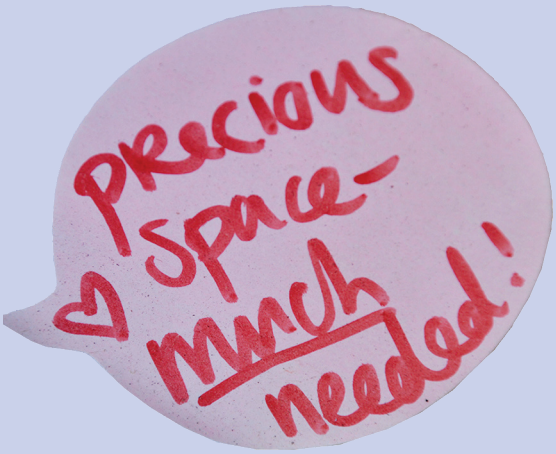


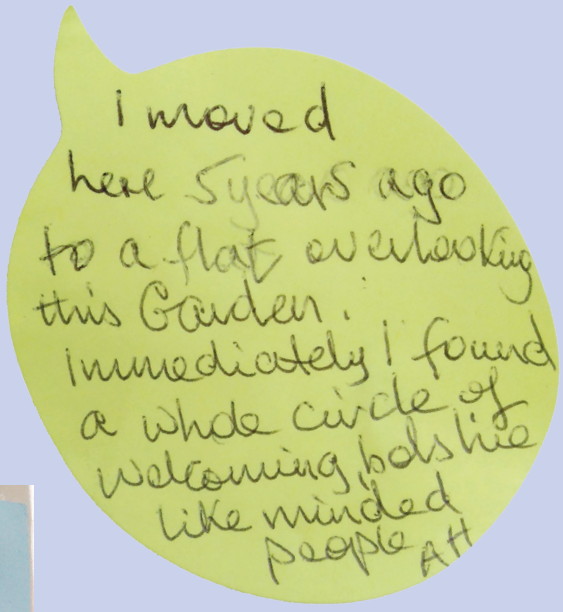




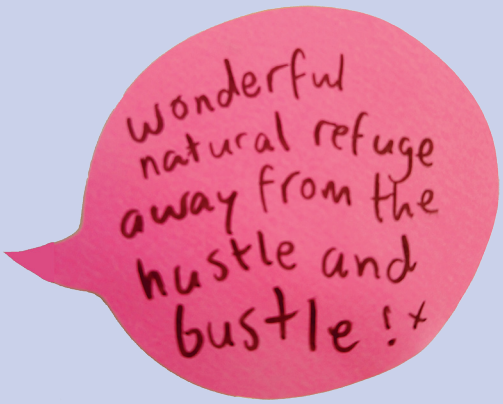
3 YEARS AGO WAS THE FIRST TIME WE CAME TO TIDEMILL GARDENS. I WAS VERY INTRIGUED TO VISIT IT, AND WANTED TO FIND OUT WHAT IT WAS ABOUT. THERE WAS A FESTIVAL IN DEPTFORD AND TIDEMILL WAS ONE OF THE VENUES. ME AND MY DEAR FRIEND BAMBOS WERE ENTRANCED BY THE NATURE, AND EVEN THOUGH WE WERE PRETTY HUNGOVER (IT WAS A SUNDAY) WE ENDED UP IN THE GARDEN FOR THE REST OF THE DAY, CARVED OUR OWN SPOONS AND SAT ON THE TREE HOUSE. WE BOTH DEARLY CHERISH THAT MEMORY TILL THIS DAY. ALEX + BAMBOS

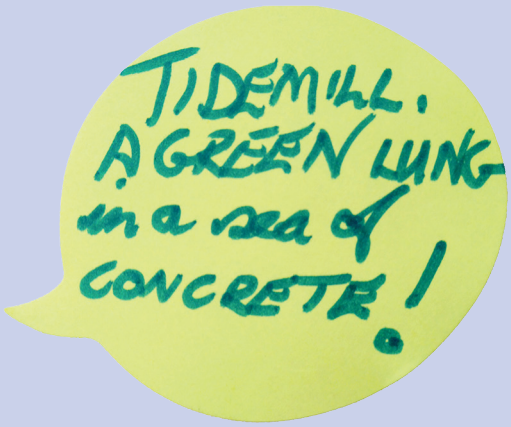
Community contributions to the Tidemill Garden Memory Board made in spring and summer 2018











“I dance in sites/landscapes to raise awareness of issues”

This text was written by Manuela Benini in July 2019



Manuela Benini’s Red Dress Performance during the Tidemill Eviction - 29 October 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

My name is Manuela Benini and I have lived in south London for more than 24 years, so I consider myself a Londoner who was born in Brazil.

I have a life-long performance art project called *The Red Dress Project*. As part of this ongoing series of outdoor interventions all over the world, I dance in sites/landscapes to raise awareness of issues that I believe are important to myself and communities in the places I live and perform.

I have lived in Lewisham for 8 years and have many friends who live in Deptford. I’m currently an MFA[1] student that studies in Deptford at Trinity Laban. When I found out about the Save Reginald! Save Tidemill! Campaign I felt not only the sadness of the idea of losing Tidemill Garden – what I considered a gem of a place in the middle of the city, an oasis of wildlife, different people and a place where I could just be – but I also felt I wanted to support the campaign in whatever way I could. So I danced.

I feel the loss of a true community garden was a massive oversight by Lewisham authorities in the name of affordable housing, that we all know is only affordable for those who are in secure well-paid contracts, which is not the reality for a vast number of us Londoners. This is affordable housing for whom?

[1] Master of Fine Arts



Manuela Benini's Red Dress Performance during the Tidemill Eviction - 29 October 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser

So my question is: How can the loss of a public space like Tidemill Garden, where a truly mixed Deptford crowd was represented, where trees and wildlife thrived, where the air was cleaner in a very polluted area, be justified for "affordable housing"? Who are the winners in this terrible loss of public green space?

We can't change the fact that London is a growing city and affordable housing is a serious issue that many of us Londoners face. So the development of Deptford is a welcome initiative in my opinion, as long as it is developing opportunities for the community as a whole: building new schools, places where young people feel they belong to, activities for the elderly and people with different learning and physical abilities where they can thrive AND keeping green public areas. Pollution is a big challenge this city is facing and the loss of green spaces in the light of a climate emergency should NOT be allowed under any circumstance.






Tidemill Garden: a creative tribute

This is a collection of creative responses to the destruction of Tidemill Garden. It consists of comments and artworks created by local residents, artists and campaigners to express their feelings about the loss of this green oasis in the heart of Deptford. These contributions were made and published in summer and autumn 2018.



Defend Green Spaces: a painting made in and for Tidemill Garden by a campaign supporter who prefers to remain anonymous; it has most probably been destroyed by now

Photo: The anonymous painter









Old Tidemill Garden: a song written by Mark Sampson, a local resident who has spent happy times in the garden and is angered by its destruction. The song, with Gordon Robertson on guitar, can be listened to on: deptfordischanging.wordpress.com (type in 'creative tribute' in the search function and scroll down to Mark's contribution)

Old Tidemill Garden

Take me down to Old Tidemill Garden
The birds in the trees
The flowers and the bees
And the things that creep and crawl
The worst things that creep and crawl
Are the councillors in the town hall

Elected to power and voted in
It turns out now that was a sin
As they sell off public land
Developers profit off our back
Community under attack
This gentrification planned

They say that there's nowhere else they can
And that is why this is their plan
But that simply is not true
There's other space they can build upon
Despite their vain attempts to con
And Labour red turns blue

Take me down to Old Tidemill Garden
The birds in the trees
The flowers and the bees
And the things that creep and crawl
The worst things that creep and crawl
Are the councillors in the town hall

So fine old trees will be coming down
There's not enough in Deptford town
Apartments will take their place
A block of flats that's structurally sound
Will soon be falling to the ground
And that will be a disgrace

Elected to power and voted in
It turns out now that was a sin
As they sell off public land
Developers profit off our back
Community under attack
This gentrification planned

Take me down to Old Tidemill Garden
The birds in the trees
The flowers and the bees
And the things that creep and crawl
The worst things that creep and crawl
Are the councillors in the town hall

Take me down to Old Tidemill Garden
A community space
A peaceful place
So quiet and so serene
Enclosed around
By the traffic sound
An oasis of green

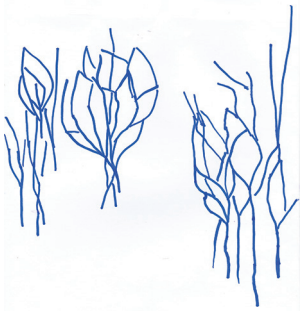


Photos: Anita Strasser

Sculptures and comment by Glenn ‘Fitzy’ Fitzpatrick:

As an artist/war veteran, I have spent many a time in Tidemill garden finding peace, airspace, calmness and tranquility. I found this calms me in difficult times as I suffer PTSD, it is the one place amongst trees I feel safe in. This place is divine, I love it. The trees cover your head and connect you to nature. It is amazing to sit in a pocket that allows you to experience a wood in a built-up area. By way of saying thank you to Tidemill and its people I have donated my sculptures which are repurposed nitrous oxide canisters which have been locally sourced. This place has inspired me and in return I hope others can turn up; see some art, nature and engage with its creative clarity. Long live Tidemill, it is more than a plot of land, it is a pocket of creative paradise which is there for us to love and share…. COMMUNITY. To take this away is to take away nature and freedom. This is heart breaking. Please share this as it is from the heart.



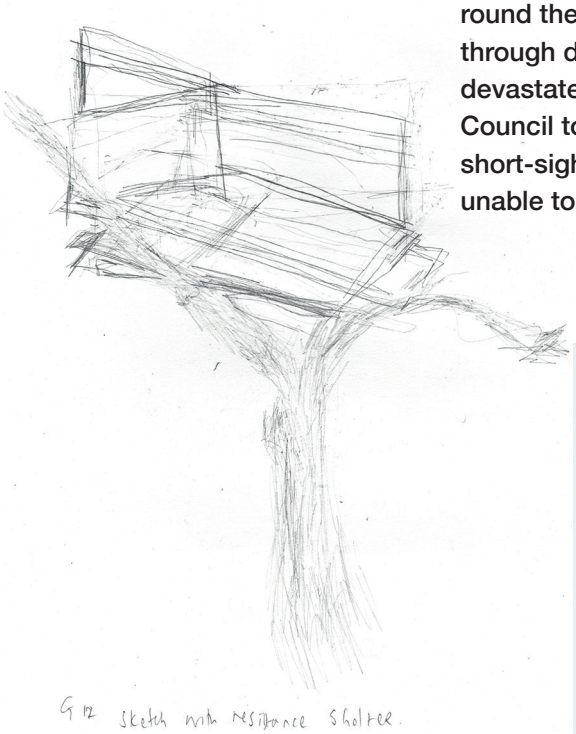


Drawings and comment by Jacqueline Utley

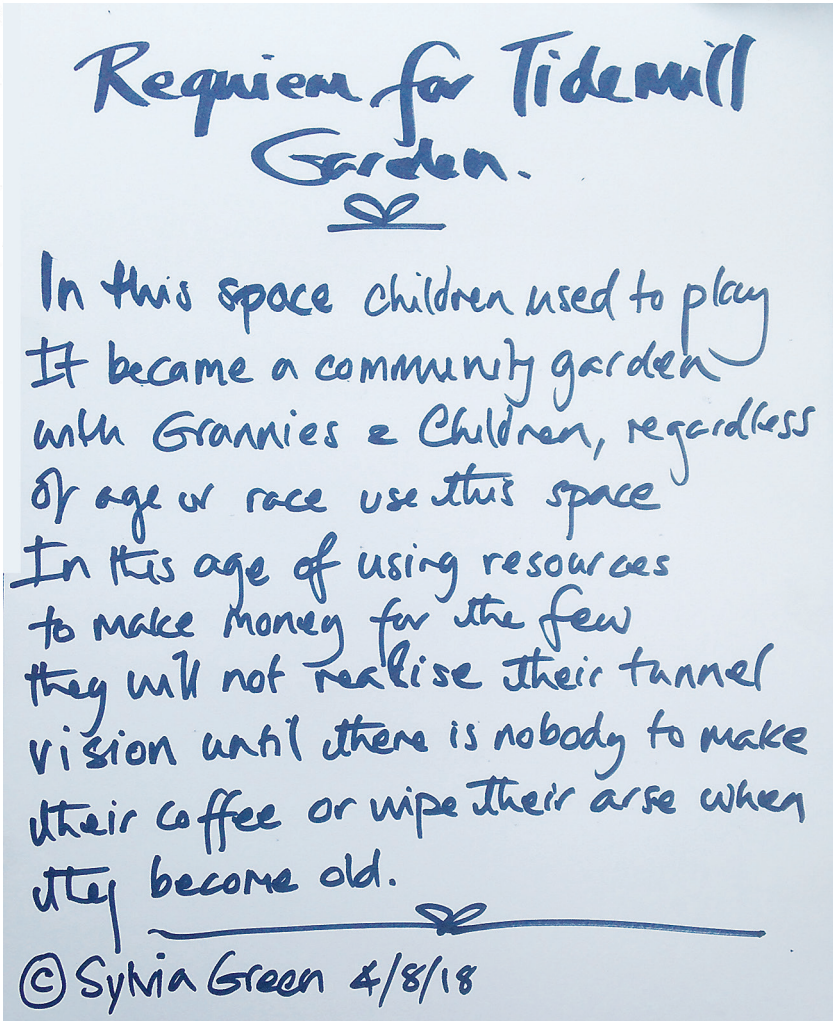
My connection with the garden is layered; my children went to Tidemill in the 90s. It really was a long collaborative process between pupils, parents/careers, staff, the landscape designer and the wider community to make the garden happen. Now over 20 years later it has matured into a beautiful, inclusive community garden just how everyone imagined. This year during the summer 2018 as part of the campaign's programme of events in the garden we facilitated some open to all drawing workshops where we meandered round the garden to look at the garden and trees through drawing. Like many in our community, I am devastated by the brutality shown by Lewisham Council to the community and dismay at such short-sighted, unimaginative Lewisham Council unable to see the garden's benefits.



24 LEAVE OUR TREES ALONE



G12 sketch with resistance shelter.



Requiem for Tidemill Garden.

In this space children used to play
It became a community garden
with Grannies & Children, regardless
of age or race use this space
In this age of using resources
to make money for the few
they will not realise their tunnel
vision until there is nobody to make
their coffee or wipe their arse when
they become old.

© Sylvia Green 4/8/18

Requiem for Tidemill Garden: poem by Sylvia Green, Tidemill Garden user and supporter, local activist, poet and artist, who sadly passed away in November 2019



Tidemill Mutterings: a poem written by Michele Petit-Jean, a local artist, musician, puppet-show performer and supporter of the Tidemill Campaign. She is also a painter and made the painting above of the treehouse in Tidemill Garden

Tidemill Mutterings

On market day the Stalwart sisters
hand out leaflets and get petitions signed.
Everybody wants to save the trees.
Tidemill garden. Love and Peace.
Behind their screens the journo teams
hound Lewisham with points of law.
Emails fly and Facebook draws more
cyber soldiers to the cause.
The fight to save this patch of green,
its Laurel groves and Indian bean,
this summers idyll, this music scene
this urban Eden.
So
The Cavalry move in.
Battle-hardened activists arrive
and occupy, prepared for confrontation.
Tents and cabins multiply and
tree-house look-out stations.

The sun shines on the righteous heads
gathered round the pumpkin beds,
planning more and more events
to halt the council's bad intents.
The enemy shape-shifts and changes,
but still the threat remains.

The BBC have been and gone,
democracy drowns in the pond.
The carnival is over, and Stalwarts bicker
as drunks arrive and leave their litter.
The compost toilets both are full,
ready for the bailiffs' call.













Hands Off
David Aylward's (RUR) silent procession through Deptford ending at Tidemill Garden as part of Deptford X 2018 Fringe: Deptford Aint Avinnit

Photos: Anita Strasser

	NAME	HEIGHT	AGE	LIFE SPAN	CONDITION	CATEGORY
28	**Common Alder** Alnus glutinosa	8m	Young	20-40 yrs	Good	Good
29	**Prunus** Prunus unknown	8m	Young	20-40 yrs	Fair	Low
30	**Common or Black Elder** Sambucas nigra	9m	Mature	10-20 yrs	Poor	Low
31	**Robinia** Robinia pseudoacacia	13m	Semi-mature	20-40 yrs	Fair	Good
G1a	**Silver Birch** Betula pendula	14m	Semi-mature	20-40 yrs	Good	Good
G1b	**Silver Birch** Betula pendula					
G1c	**Silver Birch** Betula pendula					
G1d	**Silver Birch** Betula pendula					
G1e	**Silver Birch** Betula pendula					
G2	Various (said to be Prunus & Poplar) x 9					
G3	**Rhododendron** Rhododendron unknown x 7					
G4	Various (said to be Prunus & Poplar*) x 9					
G5	Various (said to be Prunus & Poplar) x 7					
42	**Norway Maple** Acer platanoides RETAINED					

REGINALD HOUSE GARDEN + DISUSED CA

38	**Common Alder** Alnus glutinosa
39	**Common Alder** Alnus glutinosa
40	**Common Alder** Alnus glutinosa
41	**Norway Maple** Acer platanoides
43	**Wild Cherry** Prunus avium
G8a	**Wild Cherry** Prunus avium
G8b	**Norway Maple** Acer platanoides
G8c	**Norway Maple** Acer platanoides
G9	**Prunus** Prunus unknown
H1	Hedgerow (Sorbus & maple) x 4
H2	**Buckthorn** Rhamnus unknown x 9+

	NAME	HEIGHT	AGE	LIFE SPAN	CONDITION	CATEGORY
1	**Prunus** Prunus unknown	8m	Semi-mature	20-40 yrs	Fair	Low
2	**Common Hazel** Corylus avellana	4m	Semi-mature	20-40 yrs	Fair	Low
3	**Prunus** Prunus unknown	5m	Young	20-40 yrs	Fair	Low
4	**Prunus** Prunus unknown	12m	Semi-mat			
5	**Common Alder** Alnus glutinosa	7m	Young			
6	**Common Alder** Alnus glutinosa	7m	Young			
7	**Apple** Malus unknown	4m	Semi-mat			
8	**Lombardy Poplar** Populus nigra 'Italica'	16m	Young			
9	**Common Alder** Alnus glutinosa	7m	Young			
10	**Robinia** Robinia pseudoacacia	9m	Young			
11	**Robinia** Robinia pseudoacacia	17m	Semi-mat			
12	**Grey Poplar** Populus canescens	14m	Semi-mat			
13	**Grey Poplar** Populus canescens	10m	Young			
14	**Grey Poplar** Populus canescens	10m	Young			
15	**Grey Poplar** Populus canescens	7m	Young			
16	**Indian Bean Tree** Catalpa bignonioides	13m	Mature			
17	**Indian Bean Tree** Catalpa bignonioides	13m	Semi-mat			
18	**Common Hornbeam** Carpinus betulus	4m	Young			
19	**Common Hornbeam** Carpinus betulus	4m	Semi-mat			
20	**Common Hornbeam** Carpinus betulus	4m	Young			
21	**Common Hornbeam** Carpinus betulus	5m	Young			
22	**Prunus** Prunus unknown	5m	Young			
23	**Prunus** Prunus unknown	6m	Semi-mat			
24	**Leyland Cypress** X Cupressocyparis leylandii	5m	Young			
25	**Common Ash** Fraxinus excelsior	8m	Young			
26	**Poplar** Poplar unknown	14m	Semi-mat			
27	**Cherry Laurel** Prunus laurocerasus	5m	Semi-mat			

74 TREES

'FELL TREE TO GROUND LEVEL; REMOVE STUMP'

TREE DEMOLITION SCHEDULE

Compiled from reports prepared by Green Shoots Ecology
for Sherrygreen Ltd & Family Mosaic Home Ownership Ltd
20 November 2014

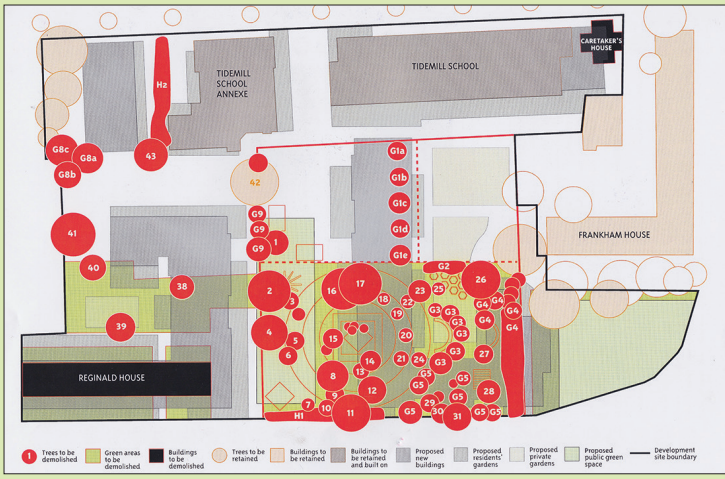
DEPTFORD X

SUE LAWES © 2018
DEPTFORD X FRINGE 2018

74 Trees:
Tree Demolition Schedule
Sue Lawes' installation in Tidemill Garden as part of Deptford X 2018 Fringe: Deptford Aint Avinnit

Photo: Anita Strasser







Tidemill Hotel: Bees Against Bailiffs: bee house made by Winston, who lived in Tidemill Garden during the occupation - September 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Dealing with the effects of the Tidemill eviction

This text was co-written by Anita Strasser, Diann Gerson and Ruby Radburn in December 2018.



24-hour security at Tidemill Garden in winter 2018
Photo: Ruby Radburn

Life hasn't been the same on Reginald Road since the violent eviction of Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden on 29th October 2018. Not only has bearing witness to the heavy-handed eviction and the subsequent boarding up of the much-loved community garden left scars on this quiet street, the 24-hour presence of at times unpleasant security guards and the constant noise from nocturnal chatter, barking from security dogs, vans and chainsaws since then, has left some residents unable to sleep, experiencing stress and anxiety attacks. One such resident is Diann Gerson, who was pushed to the ground when she was trying to go home on the day of the eviction. She has been prescribed sleeping pills to help her cope with the stress.

Diann tells me how she feels living on Reginald Road after all that's happened in the last month. "Seeing all that police and being manhandled at the time created an effect. The first day I went back to work after that horrid day, I was having panic attacks all the way to the station, and it's been like that every day since. I'm also having nightmares with people coming through my door without warning. I'm not sleeping, which makes me hear the dogs barking even more. I don't know what

kind of thugs they hired because proper security dogs don't bark unless there's an immediate threat. Basically, it got to a stage where I had to approach a doctor, and she prescribed sleeping pills. I'm seeing her again next week to deal with the panic attacks and the stress of this situation. The panic attacks have become a bit less now, I'm okay when I go to work, but when I'm coming home and hit this road, I start feeling anxious."

Diann has avoided going in the direction of the garden as she can't face the security guards and the boarded-up garden. Recently though, she had to walk past it as she was coming from a different direction. She noticed that the pavement has been halved with the fence, forcing you to walk past the guards really closely. She finds this intimidating and uncomfortable. She also remembers the day the diggers came at the weekend of the 10th and 11th of November – Remembrance weekend. When she and her granddaughter looked through the fence to see what was going on, "a guard came up right behind us and just stood there. I said 'why are you so close, can you move from behind me and my granddaughter, I'm uncomfortable', but he didn't move." What Diann observed through the fence was the dismantling of the treehouse and sheds in the garden and the crushing of all the wood. "They might as well have made toothpicks out of it all. The most annoying thing is that it feels like a lot of this is done on purpose: smashing everything in the garden, cutting off half the path, badly-trained dogs, cutting the trees – anything to inconvenience and annoy. To me it seems like it it's all just to create a reaction, and all that while the judicial review is pending. Maybe they want to destroy everything so even if we win the case it'll be too late. But complaining to the council is useless, it never gets you anywhere and in the end it's blamed on something daft like miscommunication."



View of boarded up Tidemill Garden from Diann's flat - November 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Diann and her neighbours have also noticed new markings on the stairs of Reginald House. Residents can only explain these markings and the poor attempts to plaster over them as being to do with knocking down their block. "It seems like someone is sneakily taking measurements for one reason or another and then trying to hide this from the residents. And the worst thing is not knowing what is being done behind your back. There's this constant feeling of threat and aggression in the air."

What annoys Diann as well is the money that is suddenly being spent on repairs in Reginald House. "I know these repairs are for our comfort for the next two years but it's such a waste if everything will be knocked down. If they had spent the money on repairs much earlier, rather than running the block to the ground, and money on redrawing the plans to save this block and the garden, they wouldn't have to waste all this money now. They could also have saved the ridiculous amounts of money they are now spending on security.[1] From day one, now 10 years ago, all the residents were involved with petitions against the demolitions of our block, but we were ignored. To think how much money and time could have been saved if they had listened. But they didn't. It feels like we can't win, no matter what we do!"

[1] The costs of the eviction and security amount to £1.4 Million (Lewisham Council meeting notes from 27 February 2019).

Another person who has suffered immensely is Ruby Radburn, who lives right opposite the garden and was woken by the raid at 6am. She had always been in support of the campaign so when, on 29th October, she heard cries of 'Help, help!' and looked out of the window, she knew straight away what was happening. But she still could not believe the scale and force of the operation. "There were dozens of bailiffs already at the gate and loads more coming down the street. They were really hyped up, shouting, 'Go, go, go.'" Over the course of that day, as the crowd in the street grew and a cordon of police surrounded the bailiffs, tensions rose, not helped by the behaviour of many of the bailiffs and private security. "It seemed quite obvious that they were mocking us and laughing at people from behind police protection, it felt really horrible," she says. "At one point even the police had to tell them to keep back because they were being really heavy-handed. But the cops weren't much better, manhandling protestors to stop them entering the garden."

Seeing all this unfold, Ruby says, has made it even harder to live with security guards from the same company lined up opposite her house, round-the-clock for the last six weeks. "I recognise some of them from the eviction," she says. "They recognise me too. They're facing my house the whole time and see me come and go every day. The noise from guards talking and the dogs barking has really affected me. I went out once in the middle of the night to complain, and one of the guards filmed me on his personal phone. That felt really horrible and intimidating. The same guy always stares right at me as I go by. I hate it. Even when I'm inside, I can feel their presence all the time." Ruby was shocked that no information was provided to residents about the ongoing security. "For the first month, there were at least 40 guards standing round the place, it was like some kind of military occupation."



24-hour security at Tidemill Garden in winter 2018

Photo: Ruby Radburn

About a week in, after another night of broken sleep, Ruby set up a Twitter account to document what was happening (@under_seige_SE8). She also started contacting local councillors – those in charge – to complain about what residents were going through and get answers as to when it was going to end. Unfortunately, she had to chase them for weeks just to get replies and very little changed. "Mostly, they were very dismissive. It's been really frustrating, and exhausting."

Ruby tells me that security presence has now been reduced to around 10 guards around the perimeter, and on Friday 7th December, Paul Bell announced on Twitter that he would be removing County Enforcement, the security firm, from the garden, replacing them with another company. On 10th December some dogs were removed. "But when are the council going to take responsibility for what they've put people through?" Ruby asks. "It's good they are getting rid of County because I've seen how aggressive they can be. But it doesn't change the fact that the council made the decision to evict the garden in that really heavy-handed way in the first place. It seems they didn't even think about how it would affect people, and they need to be held accountable for that."

Whose Garden? Tidemill and the Hierarchy of Violence

This text was written in January 2019 by Ruby Radburn, resident of Reginald Road and member of the Save Reginald! Save Tidemill! Campaign.

> *Premise Four: Civilisation is based on a clearly defined and widely accepted yet often unarticulated hierarchy. Violence done by those higher on the hierarchy to those lower is nearly always invisible, that is, unnoticed. When it is noticed, it is fully rationalized. Violence done by those lower on the hierarchy to those higher is unthinkable, and when it does occur is regarded with shock, horror and the fetishization of the victims.*
> ***Derrick Jensen, Endgame***[1]

Ever since the eviction of Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden on 29th October 2018, I've been forced to darkly contemplate the *Hierarchy of Violence*. For ten weeks now, private security guards from County Enforcement have been standing directly opposite my flat at all times, and there are dogs inside the garden that bark intermittently throughout the day. The garden is floodlit at night, shining through my bedroom blind, and the generator that powers these lights rumbles away continuously. The guards are the last thing I hear, laughing and talking, before I go to sleep, and the first thing I become aware of when I wake up. Even though their numbers have been reduced in recent weeks, any noise they make, or any time I see them from my windows (which must be hundreds of times a day), or when I leave the house and a guard's eyes follow me down the street, I am reminded of my place in this hierarchy.

The Council, of course, justifies their presence (and the huge cost of the operation, estimated now to be well over £1million) by saying that they are "securing the site". So far, so well rationalised. On social media and in the many emails I've exchanged with Councillors over this ongoing occupation, I've repeatedly heard that their presence is *necessary*. Sometimes, this necessity is described as *unfortunate*, and limp apologies are offered for the "disturbance" or "upset" caused to local residents such as myself. Similarly, the eviction itself, in which Lewisham Council sent in 130 bailiffs and security to drag a handful of peaceful protestors from their beds just before dawn, is also presented as an unfortunate necessity. The inherent force and violence in this action is not mentioned, but instead the focus is on the actions of the protestors. If they had just left when they were asked, none of this would have happened. Which is another way of saying, they made us do it.

In order to accept and internalise this logic, you first have to accept that the garden (sometimes euphemistically referred to as "public land") belongs to the Council.

[1] Jensen, D. (2006) *Endgame Volumes I and II*. New York: Seven Stories Press.

On what do we base the assertion that the Council owns the land? Well, there is probably a piece of paper or an electronic document somewhere in the Council's archives that says they do, and in the supposedly consensual social system we live in, this document would prove that *legally* the council do indeed own the land.

But the garden is not just an empty parcel of land. It is home to many living things: trees, plants, flowers, algae and newts in the pond, birds who feed and roost and nest there, hedgehogs who hibernate in the undergrowth, butterflies, bees, caterpillars, worms in the ground, and an uncountable number of other living things. Apparently, these living things cannot claim ownership of the land that sustains them and that they give back to, in an intricately connected ecosystem. Not *legally*, anyway.



Girl in a tree during the Tidemill Eviction - 29 October 2018

Photo: Ruby Radburn

Nor do the children and teachers who planted the garden many years ago own it. The community groups and individuals who have used the garden, who knew it intimately, who connected to it and found beauty and peace and friendship in it, who nurtured it, played and learned and laughed within it – they do not own it. The campaigners who have given considerable amounts of their time and passion in the last three years to try and convince the Council to change the plans and save the garden, while still building the same number of homes (which anyone with half a brain should be able to understand is possible, and always has been, when you consider that the new so-called "green spaces" that are part of the development comprise 83% of the area of the current garden) – they do not own it either. The protestors who occupied the garden last summer to protect it and all the living things inside it, who ate and sang and slept there, and one of whom climbed to the very top of a tree when the bailiffs came, valiantly clinging on for 8 hours while the crowd in the street cheered her – no, none of these people can claim ownership (or even custodianship) of the garden.

When it comes to land, it doesn't matter if it is your home (especially if you are not human, but the same applies to humans – just ask the residents of Reginald House or read any history book). It doesn't matter whether you helped create it, nurtured it, or fought to protect it. And ultimately, it doesn't matter whether you have a piece of paper that says you own it, either. The only thing that matters is who has the means to enforce their claim of ownership.

This is where the idea that we live in a consensual social system cracks apart. The Council's rationale that County Enforcement are there to "secure the site" obscures the truth of the power hierarchy and renders invisible the violence that maintains it. It suggests that the protestors are the aggressors, that the garden must be guarded from attack, that County Enforcement are the ones "defending" the Council's land. But the only way the Council can enforce their claim of ownership when faced with resistance – with a refusal to *consent* – is through a forceful eviction and guard dogs. This is sanctioned by the larger political and social system, and of course backed up by the police. In fact, it is the Council who are the aggressors. They are the ones who have attacked the garden, and who are intent on destroying it.

In the hierarchy of power, we are not supposed to notice the violence done to trees, or to newts. And if we do notice, we are supposed to accept the rationalisations

of those in power that it is *unfortunate* but *necessary* to cut down 74 mature trees and destroy an entire habitat for many animals and insects, not to mention a vital community space and pollution barrier in a highly built-up urban environment. We are not supposed to resist this reckless destruction and when we do, we are to blame for the *unfortunate* but *necessary* violence done to us. And we need to be reminded that any further resistance will be met with violence, hence the guards standing outside my window 24/7.

Ever since the eviction, local Councillors have relished any opportunity to demonise and vilify protestors, while completely refusing to see the eviction, occupation by security and destruction of the garden as acts of violence perpetrated by Lewisham Council. Cllr Joe Dromey wrote on Twitter (20th December 2018): "I condemn any unnecessary or excessive use of force, and any assault, whether it be by the security staff, or by masked protesters trying to provoke violence." Notice the use of the words *unnecessary* and *excessive*, and the attempt to equate the assaults of these private security guards, who are paid and authorised by the Council and fully backed up by the police, with the actions of those who dare to resist. Furthermore, is it not a provocation to send a gang of private security (many of them masked) to drag people out of bed at 6am and forcibly seize a place the local community loves, in order to destroy it?

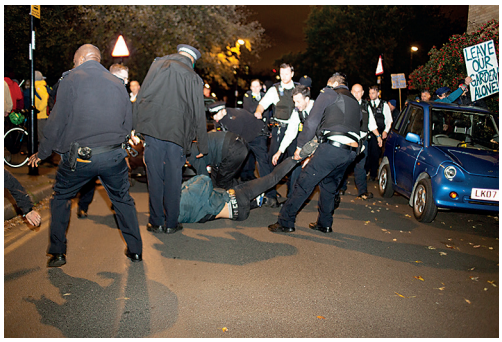


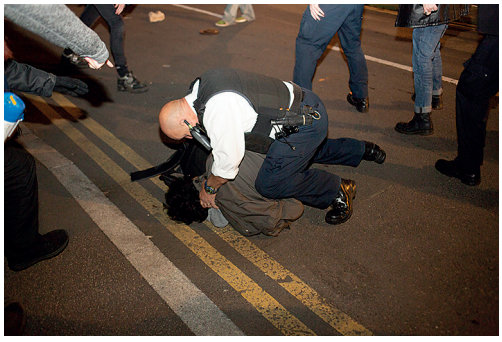
Offensively masked bailiff at Tidemill Eviction - 29 October 2018

Photo: Ruby Radburn

Cllr Paul Maslin's comments on protestors whose resistance and expression of anger continued outside the Birds Nest Pub on the evening of the eviction is another example of this demonisation (3rd November 2018 on Twitter): "shouty, masked people who live we know not where, who act with violence, block roads and jump on people's cars after getting lagered up in the pub". Shock, horror! How outrageous! But where is his outrage over the shouty masked people who live we know not where (i.e. County Enforcement), who pushed a granny to the ground and blocked the gates to a community garden while they smashed down a children's treehouse in front of the people who built it? Where is his outrage for the animals and insects whose habitat the Council plans to destroy?

After a protest at the New Cross Assembly on 6th November 2018, Joe Dromey posted in the I Love Deptford Facebook group (8th November 2018) that there were "a group of around 40 protesters – most of them masked" and then said: "they attacked me and a council officer". The implication that he had been attacked by 40 masked people was quickly challenged by members of the public, some of whom had been there, and he then clarified that he actually meant 3 or 4 people. But the original wording exaggerated and distorted the facts and demonised protestors. I wasn't there after the Assembly and I haven't seen any evidence to prove or disprove Dromey's claims of being physically attacked. A Council spokesperson said in the News Shopper (8th November 2018) that "police intervened to protect them and ensure everyone got home safely". Just one arrest was made, by the way, for a public order offence – not for assault.





Clashes between protestors and police outside the Mulberry Centre, with one protestor being held down by a police officer - 6 November 2018

Photos: Patty Gambini

In emotive language never used by Councillors to describe the violence of the eviction or the destruction of the garden, Cllr Brenda Dacres said in reply to Dromey's Facebook post that it was a "shocking and disgraceful scene" while over on Twitter (6th November 2018) Cllr Paul Bell was "very saddened by the events". Mayor Damien Egan's response in the News Shopper (8th November 2018) went even further: "The Mayor condemns, in the strongest possible terms, any abuse, intimidation and violence directed at council staff, councillors and members of the public." Wait, let's just read that again: "The Mayor condemns… *any* abuse, intimidation and violence", including towards "members of the public". To me, this is obviously a ridiculous statement because it means that he should also be condemning the eviction he authorised, the private security firm and police who pushed people and threw them to the ground in order to "ensure everyone got home safely". As a friend of the young man who was arrested astutely commented, along with clear photo evidence of a policeman kneeling on his back, gripping his neck and shoving his face into the concrete, "This is what being attacked looks like" (see images on the left).

The violence of those higher on the hierarchy to those lower is supposed to go unnoticed, and if it is noticed, it is rationalised as the natural order of things. But a read-through of the hundreds of angry comments on Dromey's Facebook post shows that, thankfully, people are really not that stupid. As the popular local refrain goes, 'Deptford ain't 'avin it.'

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From my kitchen window, I can see the guards slouching against the newly-painted white fence, now with corporate blue strips at the top and bottom. I can see the raw stumps of branches that were needlessly hacked from the overhanging trees and hedgerows in November. A couple of pigeons peck at the few remaining red berries, their usual winter store having been "fed" to a wood-chipper. The guard dogs are let out for one of their daily runs, and they race across the flattened mud, scaring the birds away, for now at least.

I think about the garden before the eviction, all that life inside it, now fenced, guarded, and earmarked for destruction. This is the state of things, not just in Deptford, but in the world. We are on the brink of a climate catastrophe and we all know it, even if we try not to think about it. Global warming, deforestation, rapid species extinction, the collapse of insect populations. Tidemill Garden is only a tiny, tiny speck in the much larger picture of relentless destruction of the earth by those in power. They claim ownership of the planet we all live on, and it is fenced, guarded and earmarked for destruction. They enforce their claim to ownership through violence, and we are supposed to just roll over and take it. But the world hasn't been (completely) destroyed yet, and neither has the garden. The trees are still standing, and every day I think about what will happen when Lewisham Council come to cut them down, if and when the final legal route – an appeal for a Judicial

Review – is exhausted. Already, the men in suits are coming to eye it up, walking around it with a proprietary air. Watching from my window, at times I feel complete despair, occasionally hope, but mostly just rage, which fuels a healthy defiance.

Despite the fence and the guards and the dogs and the ever-present threat of violence, I refuse to accept that the garden belongs to the Council and I refuse to accept that they have the right to destroy it. The amazing campaigners and activists I have met since the eviction (and in case it isn't already clear, I now proudly count myself as one of them), sum up that spirit of defiance in another popular refrain, chanted loudly at every protest and during every procession from Reginald Road, and down the High Street: "Whose garden?… *Our* garden! Whose garden?… *Our* garden!"

When something belongs to you, in the real sense that you have helped to create it, nurture it and protect it, you have to keep trying to save it. It's *our* garden, and this fight isn't over yet.



A protestor confronting police and bailiffs during the Tidemill Eviction - 29 October 2018

Screenshot from video by Ruby Radburn

Violent and Unforgivable: The Destruction of the Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden in Deptford



Andy Worthington giving a speech on the day of the Tidemill Eviction - 29 October 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

This text was written on 28 February 2019 by Andy Worthington, an investigative journalist, author, campaigner, commentator and public speaker who has been involved in local housing campaigns for several years. He has written numerous articles on the Save Reginald! Save Tidemill! Campaign and also on London-wide housing issues. He has organised local fund-raising and solidarity gigs and performed with his band The Four Fathers, singing protest songs. This article and many others relating to Tidemill have been published on his website.

Today is my birthday, and I find myself in a reflective place, looking, at one side, on death and destruction, and, on the other, at life and love and solidarity.

Perhaps this is appropriate at the age of 56, when I am neither young nor truly old — and, believe me, I reflect on aging, and mortality, and what it means, with some regularity, as my restless brain refuses to settle, endlessly asking questions and seeking new perspectives and insights into the human condition. But that is not why I'm in this reflective place today.

Yesterday, in the hallucinatory light and heat of one of the hottest February days in London's history, I stood on a small triangle of grass by the horrendously polluted Deptford Church Street in south east London, and watched as a small group of tree-killers tore down almost all the trees in a beautiful community garden, the Old Tidemill Garden, whose tree canopy, which would imminently have returned as spring arrives, had, over 20 years, become an increasingly efficient absorber of that horrendous pollution.

As the heat waned and night fell, Lewisham Council held a meeting at which councillors — the same councillors responsible for the destruction of the garden — declared, with no trace of irony, a 'climate emergency', which involved calling on the Mayor and Cabinet to "pledge to do everything within their power to make Lewisham carbon neutral by 2030."[1] As the Lib Dems later tweeted, "you know going (net) zero carbon means you'll need to store up more carbon in soil & trees? What you're doing at Tidemill Garden isn't really compatible with that."[2]

I cite this as just one example of the abundant contradictions involved in the destruction of Tidemill Garden — and the proposed destruction of the structurally sound council flats of Reginald House next door, whose residents, by an

[1] Lewisham Council Meeting Notes 27 February 2019

[2] LewishamLibDems on Twitter 27 February 2019





Tidemill Garden during the occupation - September 2018
Photos: Andy Worthington

overwhelming majority, don't want to have their homes destroyed, but haven't been asked their wishes by the council.

For ten years, local people have fought to get the council to change their plans regarding a proposed housing development on the site of the Tidemill primary school, the garden (created by pupils, parents and teachers in 1998), and Reginald House, but to no avail. The school moved out in 2012, and guardians then moved into the vacant Victorian school, opening up the garden as part of their social and artistic activities. When they were evicted, the community was given 'meanwhile use' of the garden until the development plans were finalised. However, when the council asked for the keys back, on August 29 last year, the community had built up such support for the garden as a genuinely autonomous space for the people of Deptford, and as a precious environmental asset — and the council had shown such a persistent refusal to listen to why the garden was too precious, too genuinely invaluable to be sacrificed on the altar of profit — that we occupied it instead.

Two months later, on October 29, the council evicted us, using the union-busting bailiffs of County Enforcement, with the support of the police. When the council hired a tree services company to begin cutting down the trees in November, we persuaded them to very publicly withdraw from their contract, and the resulting impasse lasted until yesterday, when, in just a few hours, most of the trees were felled by chainsaws and a huge digger, and the entire garden turned into what looked like a war zone.

This is an apt metaphor, because, in a constant search for easy and excessive profits in the broken economy that crawled out of the Western establishment's self-inflicted global crash of 2008 — when money-making financiers who claimed to have come up with an endlessly self-fulfilling economic miracle were revealed as the criminals they are, and the politicians who had all gone along with it lost their credibility — those in charge have now embraced a kind of cannibalistic capitalism, in which wars are waged on poorer British people by their own leaders.

Driving all this is, of course, the open-ended and seemingly endless 'age of austerity' that was cynically declared by David Cameron and George Osborne when the Tories got back into power in 2010. This was — and still is — a naked onslaught on the state provision of almost all services essential for civil society and for anything resembling a society that can regard itself as fair and just. The cuts, which are both ongoing and increasingly savage, hacked away at the funding available to councils and to those providing social housing, pushing both towards a harsh new political and economic reality that, to be honest, both parties have generally taken to with largely undisguised zeal.

Councils, pleading impotence — but, in general, secretly happy to not have to actually do anything themselves — have been hooking up with developers in order

to build new housing, in deals that are contemptuous of those displaced by these arrangements — in general, the poorer members of these communities, those who, in Labour boroughs, actually vote for those dispossessing them, but who, in the post-Blair Labour Party, are seemingly of no concern to the party's aspirational, middle class bureaucrats, who appear only interested in gentrifying anything that smacks of poverty or the working class.

And these unholy deals involve two routes to the current disaster in which we find ourselves. The first involves private companies awash with international investors' cash, who acquire the land for a pittance so they can throw up the almost uncountable number of priapic towers that have risen across the capital in recent years for largely gullible foreign buyers. As this speculative housing market has started to lose its sheen, and the negative effects on international investor confidence of the self-inflicted madness of Brexit, a different kind of housing market has emerged, via housing associations, who, traditionally, provided genuinely affordable, long-term social housing — and who, since Margaret Thatcher began her destruction of council housing through 'Right to Buy', have also been given control of an increasing number of former council properties.



Tidemill campaigner getting ready for a protest - October 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

In recent years, the larger housing associations, who have come together under an organisational mega-umbrella, the G15, which is worryingly large, seem to have lost touch with their role as social housing providers, becoming an unhealthy public/private Frankenstein's Monster, knocking down estates or finding other huge empty sites to build a mix of housing for sale, shared ownership, or for rent, with genuinely affordable social rents being devoured by a new regime of allegedly "affordable" rents that are not actually affordable at all.

At Tidemill, the main developer is Peabody, which still trades on its history as a philanthropic Victorian provider of housing for the poor, even though it is now completely unrecognisable, even from what it was ten years ago. We realised this when, in October 2018, we went to their head offices to protest about their involvement in the project, and were fobbed off.

To give just one example of how Peabody are now very fundamentally a part of the problem rather than any sort of solution, the former social housing provider recently signed an £8bn deal — yes, you read that correctly — with the Australian-based international property developer Lendlease to raze to the ground the whole of the Thamesmead estate in the far reaches of south east London over the coming years, in what will undoubtedly be — if it goes ahead — the biggest clearance programme to date in the wholesale gentrification of London[3] (Lendlease, in case anyone doesn't know, play a major role in the redevelopment of Southwark's Heygate Estate, in the Timberyard in Deptford, Lewisham, right next to the vulnerable Pepys Estate, and in Haringey if redevelopment goes ahead).

In this destruction — which can, and should, very genuinely, be described as an epidemic of social cleansing as politicians fail to genuinely stand up for the working class people of London, whether they are white British or part of the capital's extraordinary melting pot of cultures and ethnicities — both Labour and Conservative councils are complicit.

And so, yesterday, on the eve of my birthday, as I stood on a small triangle of grass by Deptford Church Street, in that hallucinatory light and heat that, if you lost your focus for a moment, gave you the sensation that it was the height of summer, I watched what I can genuinely describe as a war on the ordinary people of Deptford — and, by extension working class people of all backgrounds and ethnicities across the whole of the UK — by the councillors who claim to be members of a caring Labour Party, the highly-paid executives of Peabody, endlessly delivering their narratives about being a charity that provides social housing, the tree-killers, and various other parties waiting in the wings, salivating over their potential cut of the £100m that, in total, the Tidemill site will deliver to all of those involved in its development as a dull collection of tiny identikit units punctuated by pockets of supremely unimaginative landscaping, including the inevitable 'private' gated garden for those with the most money.

In conclusion, then — and to offset all this terrible news — where is my hope on this ill-timed birthday?

Well, that, of course, lies with the community that I have grown to be part of over the last year and a half — the local people, the artists, the musicians, the shopkeepers, the market traders, social tenants, private tenants, sympathetic owner-occupiers, the residents of Reginald House, the homeless, the inspiring, hard-working squatters from across the UK and the EU, the environmental activists, visionaries and dreamers who have come together to defend an extraordinarily beautiful community space and green oasis, and who will continue to work together to resist the gentrification plans of Lewisham Council, Peabody and other developers.

The battle for Tidemill, of course, is still not over, as Reginald House still stands, and the building work has yet to begin, but other battles await elsewhere — primarily, in New Cross, where the council intends to destroy the Achilles Street estate, and a number of shops attached to it, as part of its intended re-making of the whole of the centre of New Cross, and in Catford, where the council intends to destroy the town centre — the 1970s shopping centre and Milford Towers, a council estate above it.

[3] For more information, please read article 'Peabody picks Lendlease for £8bn Thamesmead regeneration' in *Inside Housing,* 15 February 2019.

In both cases it would make much more sense for Achilles Street and the Catford shopping centre and Milford Towers to be refurbished rather than destroyed and re-created, in developments worth hundreds of millions pounds to developers and other profiteers, but that will do nothing for local people, except to exile many former social tenants, to create empty glass towers of over-priced flats that no local people can afford, and to wipe out all existing local businesses, replacing them with empty shops of drearily ubiquitous corporate chains.

Please join us in whichever way you can. The Tidemill garden gave birth to a very powerful notion of what an autonomous space can be, and what an autonomous community can be, as, from the ground up, we dealt with Deptford as it is, not Deptford as its gentrifiers want it to be — providing a safe space for homeless people, providing a green space for children to play in, and for grown-ups to reflect and relax and escape the pressures of the outside world, providing opportunities for gardening, providing opportunities for anyone who wanted to put on arts events and musical events for free to do so, creating a venue for the internationally renowned Deptford X arts festival, and providing a space in which, genuinely, societal change seemed possible — via, for example, the structures that some of the occupiers built using scavenged materials, which could have been replicated to provide homes for the homeless, but which were, instead, smashed up by bailiffs within hours of the garden's eviction four months ago.

Candle-lit vigil in Tidemill Garden shortly before the eviction - October 2018
Photo: Anita Strasser





Spring 2019: Crosses hung on hoardings of No.1 Creekside, where trees will be destroyed to make way for a property development, which advises residents to keep windows shut due to high pollution levels in the area. These crosses were made by Tidemill campaigners to commemorate the lost tress in Tidemill Garden and were first installed on the green next to the garden, opposite No.1 Creekside

Photo: Anita Strasser


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Tidemill Protest Camp

After Tidemill Garden was boarded up on 29th October 2018, the Save Reginald! Save Tidemill! Campaign took over the green in front of Frankham House next to the garden. It was used as a protest camp until May 2019, providing a space for community organising, campaign meetings and a temporary home for homeless people. Especially after the destruction of the garden on 27th February 2019, the green became a focal point with campaigners celebrating the garden community, planting trees, creating installations to commemorate the lost trees and community space, and highlighting the council's destructive plans. As the green is part of the development plans (for a pocket park right next to one of the most polluted roads), Lewisham Council tried to evict the group, including a series of legal challenges. Despite small victories for the campaign group, in the end they withdrew from the camp to avoid court costs. Subsequently, everything from the green was removed and it was boarded up in July 2019, with the whole site secured for development.



Tidemill Protest Camp next to boarded up Tidemill Garden at night time in spring 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser

Tidemill Protest Camp next to boarded up Tidemill Garden in spring 2019

Photos: Anita Strasser







“Somethin’ don’t feel right”

Rachel Bennett has been running the band Raiemusic for over a decade.[1] The band (which has evolved to some degree) have performed in London venues including: The Forge in Camden, Hammersmith Apollo, The Albany Theatre in Deptford, Ronnie Scotts, Club Floridita in Soho, Cafe Concerto in Leicester Square, Map Cafe in Kentish Town, The Pheasantry in Chelsea, Cottons in Angel and lots of pubs in and around London. They have recently produced an 11-song album with renowned engineer and producer Wes Maebe. The music is Country with a hint of blues/soul and the songs are mostly narrative and protest based.



Rachel Bennett

Photo: Alexandra Waespi, with the kind permission to reproduce it here

Rachel has written two songs in response to Deptford’s regeneration. She explains their meaning and why she wrote them:

Roughside

“I wrote this some years ago when it began to be apparent that it was ‘trendy’ to hang out in Deptford so we’d get news articles about how Deptford was this edgy place where you could hear live music in the bars. We got the Greenwich ‘well to do’s’ often appearing at gigs and also in the slightly less rough bars. Of course they were entitled to come but we always felt they didn’t fit in. The Albany was our stomping ground and when some theatre companies came to put on what we felt were ‘not our scene’ projects and workshops, we were a little less than celebratory … new employees coming from across town who had no experience of Deptford and who brought their ‘friends’ to do work there. We were very mistrusting.”

Somethin’ don’t feel right

“This is a comment on the hype and nightlife in Deptford and how the new faces and high-rise buildings don’t fit with the way we live. We feel we are being encroached upon and that our community ideals are put last on the list – when in fact they are the actual triumphs of a working-class area that has strived to do well for its youth. The youth clubs are gone, where those YPs who don’t want to dance or act could go and hang out. The Tidemill Garden saga is a total disgrace and we are all deeply saddened and affected by this. We are also heading for buildings with two entrances – one for the buyers and one for the council tenants … so the line … *somethin’ don’t feel right* … is about the above. The rest of the song describes our street life.”

Rachel Bennett and her band Raiemusic

Photo: Courtesy of Rachel Bennett, with the kind permission to reproduce it here



Please see song lyrics on the next page. To listen to the songs, please visit www.deptfordischanging.wordpress.com and put ‘Rachel Bennett’ in the search function.

[1] Rachel also runs the famous *Meet Me Choir* at the Albany.

Rough Side

I seen people shine out a dark place babe
Tin roof over a hole in the ground
So don't slide it over in ma face babe
Hopin' that you'll be found
Your glossy outside might blind some eyes
Unable to penetrate your disguise
But don't illuminate yourself too much babe
It'll be their discovery, your demise

As you fence we sense slightly uncomfortable
Your extra high heels feel a little tight and unstable
You been seen

Chorus

Rubbin' with the rough side
That's a place you cant hide (rushed up on the low tide… ch 2)
'Xcuse me while we all fall down
Tripped up in the wrong part'a town
Comin' where ya don't belong
You better quit, before ya get hit
Rubbin with the rough side
Rubbin with the rough side

Ya back scratchin; into company babe
I can see you
Weavin' gainst the nap just to impress
I said round here you need identity babe
Nothin' to do with the fibre in your dress
You'd better know if you fabricate real
That's the kinda' shit people can feel
You'll wind up stitched up in a custom made
No exposé – no deal

In the end we avenge your dishonesty
Sink you down outta' town with your vanity
Yeah we're so mean

Chorus

Outro – I said who do you think you are – you're not a super star … etc …

©Bennett/Cochrane 2004

Engineered and produced by Nixon Rosembert at Studio 101A
Guitar Dan Cochrane | Lead and background vocals Rachel Bennett

Somethin' don't feel right

Summer's hot
Sweat the T-shirt off your back
Showin' off your spiritual ta-tooh!
Girls struttin'
Hip in their high heels
Been waitin' on the sun to wear brand new

Hollerin out like a wolf against the sky
Makin' noise so you gotta look as they pass by
Like a fire waitin' to ignite

But somethin' don't feel right
But somethin' don't feel right

Sirens scream
In the neighbor hood
Youth cussin and wont simmer down
Causin' disturbance
An' I know what you thinkin'
But I feel I'm on sacred ground

Bass beats playin' from passin' cars ….. in the night
Restless people gettin' high if they ain't gettin' tight
Like a fire …… waitin' to ignite

An' somethin' don't feel right
An' somethin' don't feel right

See I cut my teeth here
An' this is my home
Became a woman pretty quick
Brought up my child alone
Paid those bills
Survived cold to the bone
Then I gotta watch you
Take up my street
An' call it your own

That don't feel right
That don't feel right
You got no right
You got no right

©Bennett/Brown 2018

Guitar Jordan Brown | Lead Vocals Rachel Bennett | Background Vocals Abdul Shyllon

Corporate Conspiracy



Mat Kennedy in the living room of his boat in 2018
Photo: Anita Strasser

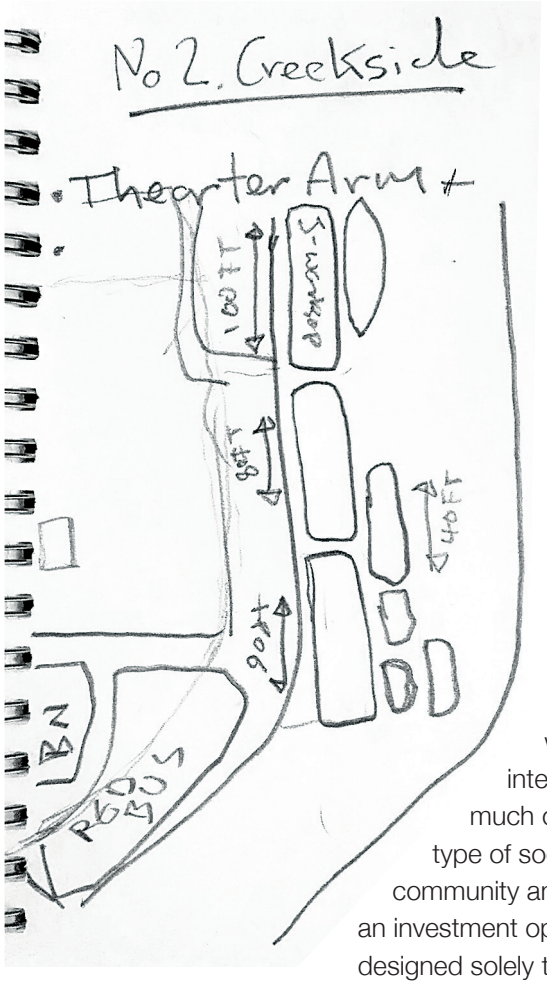
This text was written in December 2018 by Mat Kennedy, boat builder, member of Deptford's residential boating community and board member of Friends of Deptford Creek.

I moved onto a boat in Deptford Creek around 2012. Like many Londoners, there are areas of the city I have never seen and will probably never see. In 2012, Deptford was one of these areas for me. I grew up in Harlesden, which in many ways is Deptford's reflection on the other side of the river, and maybe that goes some way to explaining why the area fits so well for me. But the thing that struck me so completely was the sense of community in Deptford, something many areas of London including Harlesden have lost. There are very few places as tolerant of differences as Deptford. I feel like the sense of dignity extended on the street to even the most difficult or marginal characters is a testament to an area whose cultural identity is rooted in worldliness. There is genuinely a feeling of inclusiveness that somehow celebrates the imperfect, and in a world obsessed with aspiration and quite frankly mentally deranged because of it, this sort of attitude is of value and worth protecting. The market is, in my opinion, the thing that holds this together; its rhythm pulling everyone back out into the street three times a week and reminding people again and again that we are all alright and your neighbours are mostly nice people and the world is fun and all that shit in the news a false reality.



Detail in the kitchen on Mat Kennedy's boat in 2018
Photo: Anita Strasser

Today Deptford is at a crossroads; as a post-industrial area, there are large tracts of land earmarked for development. In addition to this, there is a vast reserve of publicly owned housing stock, schools, hospitals, social care buildings and other municipal service centers being directly sold off to plug funding gaps or bargained for 'affordable' new build housing. Central government is starving local councils and instructing them to extract revenue from existing assets while simultaneously setting new build targets. This lack of funding in combination with a target driven housing agenda means the classification of what constitutes affordable has been willfully stretched to the point of absurdity. The housing crisis is being constantly referred to as a supply issue while tens of thousands of so-called luxury flats sit empty, bought as investments or simply as a way to park vast sums of wealth. Luxury investments are touted on a global marketplace while often substandard 'affordable' housing is sold at inflated prices to a captive market of young buyers trapped by the terms of the help-to-buy scheme. Developers and government sell the idea that the new apartments will act as a stepping stone towards a life of rising investment value, security and wealth. But this is a lie, and not only a lie that threatens to ruin the lives of so many individuals in the coming



Mat's drawing of Theatre Arm in Deptford Creek

years, but a lie that threatens the very fabric of London as an unghettoised metropolis. Nowhere is this more evident than in areas like Deptford. In order to facilitate the allusion of an investment on the rise, Deptford has needed to undergo change. This is not the sort of natural change that areas undergo through socio-economic shifts. From the outset this has been a coordinated and shameless corporate campaign waged by developers and wealthy investors, supported by major press publication through lazy repetition and encouraged by a government lacking in imagination to see when it is being completely shafted.

Some development companies have been heard to 'only fund art projects aimed at drawing well-heeled punters to the area' (anonymous source), while openly touting 'off plan' developments to far eastern investors as a rising opportunity in an artistic area. The name Deptford Market Yard has culturally appropriated the name of Deptford Market on Google so that it appears as if it is Deptford Market (a street market that has existed for over a hundred years). The Old Tidemill Garden, flanked by around 60 bailiffs at the time of writing, holding off the community while they decimate a public garden that could easily have been integrated into plans for more apartments. The list is very long and much of it seems of an insidious nature; it's the drip drip effect of a weird type of social conspiracy that aims to sanitise, manipulate and divide a community and ultimately supplant it with a vision of something that looks like an investment opportunity. These actions are seriously damaging trust and are designed solely to sell flats, but by creating this narrative, a new reality forms on the street, a strange world of invisible dividing lines and resentments.



Boats moored in Theatre Arm of Deptford Creek in summer 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

It's impossible to describe the anger felt in London as a whole and more acutely in areas like Deptford towards the strategies deployed by councils and developers and the narratives they spin; from building site awnings adorned in fake graffiti and local cultural referencing designed to somehow camouflage the unattainable price tag to the fundamental premise of a housing crisis based on supply propagated as both a profitable piece of bullshit for the developers and an ideological feedback loop for a state. Almost anyone I speak to can see something deeply unhealthy about the way this is being done and no matter what side of the political spectrum you sit on, it is clear that the state has an obligation to protect people from corporate conspiracy – a role which it negates because it is complicit.

“I don’t want to move. It’s home!”

Text written by Anita Strasser in April 2019



Julian sitting in his self-made lounge under an image of his boat Sabine in the early 20th century - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Julian Kingston has lived on his boat Sabine in the Theatre Arm of Deptford Creek since 1987. His wife Jeannie Seymour joined him in 1996. Julian has been a wood craftsman and boat builder for over 35 years and was involved in restoring Massey-Shaw, London’s oldest fire-boat, and in conservation works on HMS Warrior in Portsmouth. Julian is also involved in the Lenox Project, which proposes ‘to build a replica of the Restoration warship Lenox in the dockyard where she was originally built – King Henry VIII’s Royal Dockyard’.[1] This is not only to respect Deptford’s history as a shipbuilding area but also to create jobs, training and apprenticeship opportunities for local young people. It was a response to the development proposals at Convoys Wharf by Hong Kong based Hutchison Whampoa that totally ignored Deptford’s local communities and its heritage.

When Julian moved to Deptford, the plan was to restore Sabine, an 1895 German one time steamer in Deptford Creek, and go travelling again, but Deptford got into Julian’s blood and he stayed. When I ask him why he stayed, he laughs: “It’s Deptford, innit? It’s got something about it. I think there are enough people here who don’t like being pushed around and that makes it interesting. I also like the creative element in Deptford but not the one that’s marketed by developers but the creativity that comes from the people themselves.” Anyone who knows Deptford well will understand what Julian means.

Julian and Jeannie enjoy living on their boat. They also have two other boats, a dinghy and a Thames Lighter that had been used as a fireboat in the Millennium River of Fire, which houses their workshops and garden (Jeannie is a dressmaker). They also have bees and together they produce Creekside Honey – sometimes for sale at Creekside Discovery Centre in years when the harvest is good. In her beautifully written piece about their life on the Creek, Jeannie describes it as idyllic and wonderful, at least until all the trouble started with nearby construction works.

> *It was absolutely magical. Julian’s boat was the only boat in this arm of the Creek. We had the whole place to ourselves in the evenings and at weekends. There was no DLR, no one in the college, no one in Mumford’s Mill, no flats at the end of the Creek either. We could even star watch because we had no light pollution and we could sit out on the deck watching the water undisturbed.*
> **(Jeannie Seymour on the Friends of Deptford Creek website)**

[1] Please see website: buildthelenox.org



Sabine moored in Theatre Arm of Deptford Creek, surrounded by water pepperwort and rubble - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Ever since the DLR was constructed in the late 1990s, their lives have been anything but peaceful as they have had to keep fighting for their right to remain on the Creek and with that their right to remain boat dwellers. I spoke to Julian in summer 2018.

“The first major disruption was the construction of the railway (DLR). Up until that point, the land was actually owned by a partnership of my kid-brother and two other guys. They owned a film catering company, which took them to film locations all around the world. I built and repaired their kitchen trucks and eventually became their transport manager. As they expanded, I suggested that they buy the land I was squatting on, where they could keep their fleet of trucks and where I could have my workshop and use a bit of the yard for my work. They bought it with the peppercorn arrangement that I am moored here, use their access and occupy a bit of the land with my workshop and that in return I also got paid as their transport manager and looked after their fleet of trucks and containerised kitchens. It was a really good deal… until the railway came along. It started with the bailiffs coming round about once a week in their Mercedes and smart suits telling us that we had to evacuate the site by a certain date. My brother and his lot were offered a paltry compulsory purchase which came to half the amount they had originally paid for the site, and an eviction notice from the council. I got so fed up with these characters coming round, I went to the planning office to see if there was anything on file that would put them off. I found all sorts of historical facts about the site but also an interesting letter which actually resulted in a very favourable deal for my brother’s company. They received just over a million and an agreement that they would continue to own the site and get it handed back after construction finished. They were nevertheless forced to re-locate outside London to keep going.

Unfortunately, this deal didn’t account for the fact that Jeannie and I were living on this site. We suddenly had the railway company breathing down our necks,

demanding that we vacate the site immediately. To them we were just (quote) "water gypsies" and they thought they could just get rid of us like that. But this was our residence, so we went into a legal battle to get moved to another secure mooring while the railway was being built, and to make sure that we would be able to move back once construction was complete. We had to move during construction because our boat was directly under the proposed railway and they had to put a batter slope against the sea wall (e.g. crushed concrete and brick rubble) to reinforce it during construction. The agreement was that this would be removed upon completion and that our berth would be recreated. We won in the end but it was a 4-year battle that turned me grey and nearly bankrupted us.

They then put us on the mooring over in the main basin – under Mumford's Mill in Deptford College. The trouble was, Sabine is a vintage vessel and needs proper mooring so I gave them exact drawings to make a suitable berth. The railway company hired a contractor to prepare and make a suitable berth but the berth was made 8 foot too short. As the tide went out Sabine very gradually tipped over and there was the imminent danger of breaking the back of the ship. I was furious. The keel could have snapped! I rang the company, but they didn't seem to want to know. We spent the next tide furiously trying to dig out the keel and get her to sit upright again. We were absolutely knackered and went to bed only to wake up to the sound of running water under the floor. A huge piece of flint left in the berth by the contractors had punched a hole the size of a 50-pence piece into the bottom of the ship and we now had a leak in the most inaccessible place. We needed to get to dock and got our insurance company on the case to inspect the berth. After endless discussions, during which the railway company refused to be in the same room as me (the second time this happened was with Hutchison Whampoa at Convoys Wharf), the insurance company, the railway and their contractor settled on a satisfactory deal, with the rail company paying for an over-plating of both sides of the keel for the entire length of the ship, which was brilliant. So, we did alright in the end but boy it was a fight.

But the trouble just went on. When we came out of dock, we couldn't get back in the Creek because they hadn't removed the batter slope. They had allegedly run out of money, so instead of removing the rubble, they spread it all across the Creek. This meant the water was one metre shallower so there was no way of getting to the berth to moor our boat. Once again, I had to threaten legal action to get the railway company to understand that we couldn't return to such shallow waters and that they had to create a berth where our boat could sit. I even contacted the Port of London Authority (PLA), who are responsible for navigation issues, but they claimed this wasn't their waters. Anyway, the rail company very begrudgingly agreed to create a berth by lifting out tonnes of spoil. They cleared just enough for us to get in the channel. The rest of the rubble was left in the Creek. In a way, it's turned into a rather nice environment now – especially in the summer you can see these great bushes of water pepperwort growing – grubbing in the rubble that's left. It's turned into a diverse environment rather than just gloopy mud. I quite like the finished railway and living under its sculptural curves but it is a mixed blessing in that it is the prime instrument that has attracted the feeding frenzy of developers to Deptford, but it's also the reason that we do not already have some vast 'luxury tower' right next to us. It's all rather funny!



Julian and Jeannie's garden on one of their boats - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

And then the current owner and landlord turned up and bought the site off my brother and his business partners. We'd only just got back to our residence and wanted to complete an agreed deal that me and Jeannie would buy the site off my brother's lot for £200,000. I wanted to turn the site into mainly green space with a boatbuilding area but then suddenly there's this chap offering £260,000 and wanting a vacant possession. Obviously, we weren't just going to leave and so my own brother and his partners tried to get us out by taking us to court! I didn't speak to him for about 10 years after that. Luckily the judge found in our favour and the guy had to buy the land with us as sitting tenants and the peppercorn arrangement still in situ, which allowed me to rent a small piece of land for my workshop and vehicles.

After that, more boaters arrived and we grew into a nice little community. The landlord didn't really care much for the site and my lease agreement never changed. Seven years later, the landlord teamed up with venture capitalists The Artworks Creekside, who came along with their redevelopment proposals in 2017. They were planning to construct shipping containers 3 storeys high at the yard for small businesses and studios, with 'luxury' moorings, shops and cafes. Artworks had bought a controlling share in the site and now wanted to collect fees for mooring licences, which would make them a lot of money and pay money to the PLA as well, something the PLA had had no interest in previously. We all objected to their plans and demands, not just us boaters but also people from all around. In the end, they backed down and amended their application to containers at ground level only, which seems to work well, albeit the planning consent is only for two years so what happens after that is not hard to guess!"

Despite this small victory, Julian's vision of a peaceful life is still a long way to go. The boaters at Creekside No.2 have formed a co-operative and, after getting a surveyor to value the land, made Artworks an offer of £380,000 for a long-ish lease on the waterfront. "We wanted to secure enough space for our boats and a small linear path, garden and service area that would even double as a public path in daylight. As far as we can see, this doesn't clash with any of their planning. But they're probably waiting for much more lucrative offers than that. It's just like in other areas of Deptford, it's social cleansing, just on water rather than land. It's wrong to suddenly expect a whole community of people to radically change their lifestyles in order to feed the rental desires of some investors. Actually, I don't really enjoy doing all this fighting, I'd much rather have a peaceful life but as far as I'm concerned, I've been here over 30 years and that gives Jeannie and I certain rights."

One-storey shipping containers at No.2 Creekside - spring 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser



Since our conversation, colourful one-storey containers that seem to house little workshops appeared in the yard in spring 2019. Since then, it has been peaceful for the boaters, who actually appreciate some of the improvements made to the yard. However, it is uncertain what Artworks are planning to do with the site and the boaters in the future, and there are rumours that the space by Lewisham College, which is just opposite Julian's and the other boats, will eventually see tower blocks constructed. This would mean a dramatic removal of Julian and Jeannie's

daylight, so dramatic it would be subject to compensation in planning terms and relocation during construction. This would leave only two options: not build or completely relocate the whole community to an equivalent mooring. The chances of finding this are pretty remote. I ask Julian what having to move would mean to him. He says: “It would be a real challenge – we’d have to downsize dramatically. I think the only option would be either a marina somewhere on the Medway or possibly find another mooring somewhere nearby but that’s very unlikely. It’s funny isn’t it? From a practical level, the Creek is not great: air pollution is terrible because of the close proximity of Deptford Church Street and the almost constant slow-moving traffic due to the Tideway Tunnel and all the other construction sites steadily canyonising the creek, so there is the constant threat of something happening. But I’ve grown so fond of the place, I don’t want to move. It’s home, and besides, I’m passionate about seeing the Lenox Project through.”

Once again, I think of Jeannie’s piece, where she says towards the end:

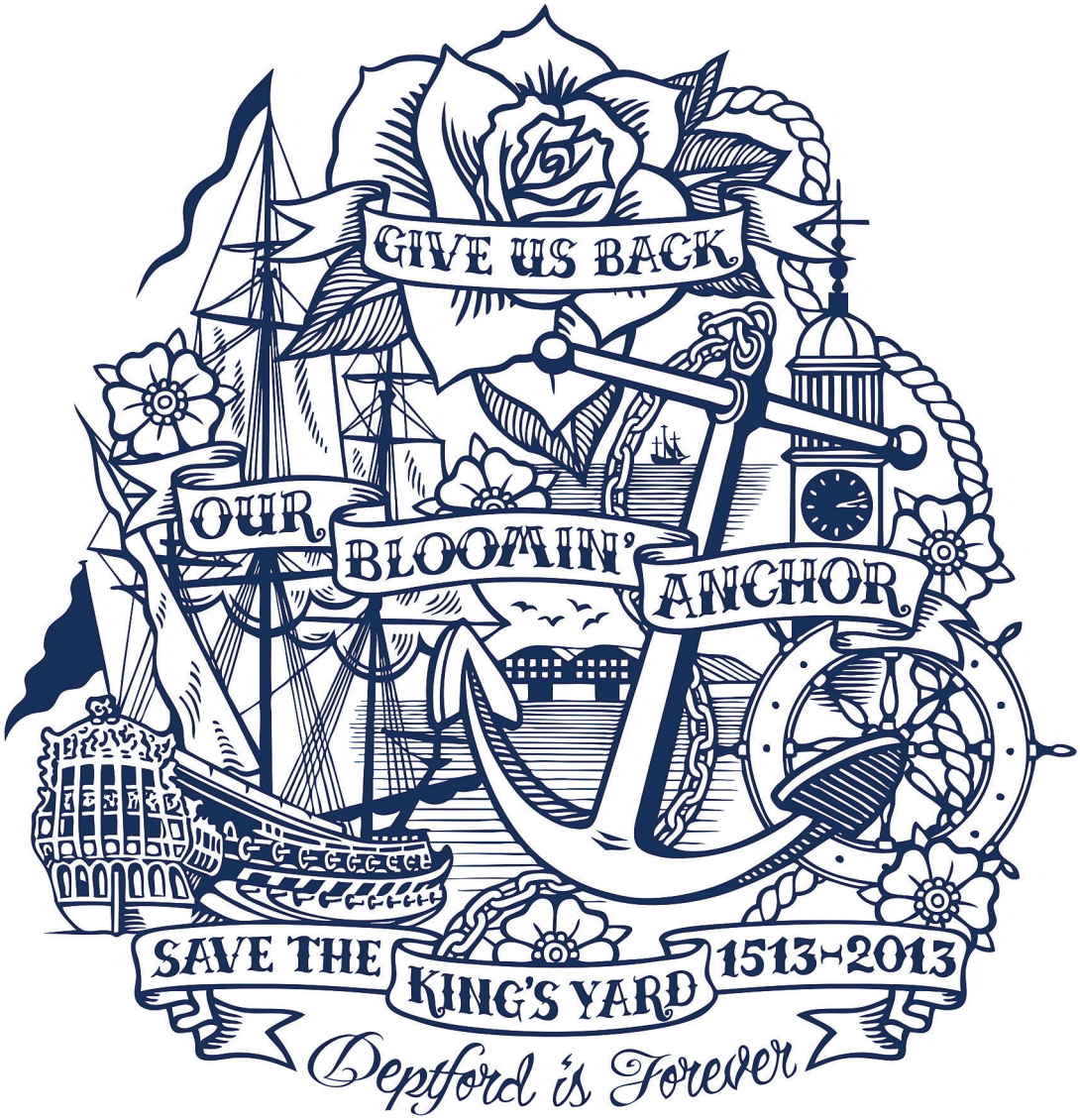
> *Landlubbers might think we are strange but actually we are no different from them. Our boat has a TV, a bath, central heating and we pay Council Tax too. The only difference with us is we go up and down on the tide twice a day… which takes some getting used to.*
> **(Jeannie Seymour on the Friends of Deptford Creek website)**

Julian in his workshop on a former Thames Lighter on Deptford Creek - July 2018
Photo: Anita Strasser



The ‘Give Us Back Our Bloomin’ Anchor’ Campaign

This text was written in April 2018 by Anita Strasser in collaboration with Sue Lawes – local resident, artist and designer, writer and campaigner.



Campaign logo by Deptford Is Forever
Design: Sue Lawes

On the 3rd of February 2018 the anchor was re-installed in its original location on the south end of Deptford High Street, from where it was removed in 2013 as part of regeneration works. Anybody new coming into Deptford won’t be able to guess the story and battles fought over the newly polished anchor sitting on a new piece of contrasting paving; to a newcomer it might appear just like any other maritime monument symbolising some distant sea-faring history; they may not even notice it’s there. But to locals, and particularly those dedicated to preserving the much-neglected maritime history of Deptford, the anchor’s return not only symbolises Deptford’s heritage but also the struggle with the council to have it reinstated.









Clockwise from top left

Celebrating the anchor's return with members of Deptford Is Forever - 3 February 2018

Photo: Deptford Is Forever

The anchor after being reinstalled on the High Street - February 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Anchor tattoo by Kids Love Ink in 2013

Photo: Deptford Is Forever

Anchor procession with giant cardboard anchor built by local artist Laura X Carlé in 2013

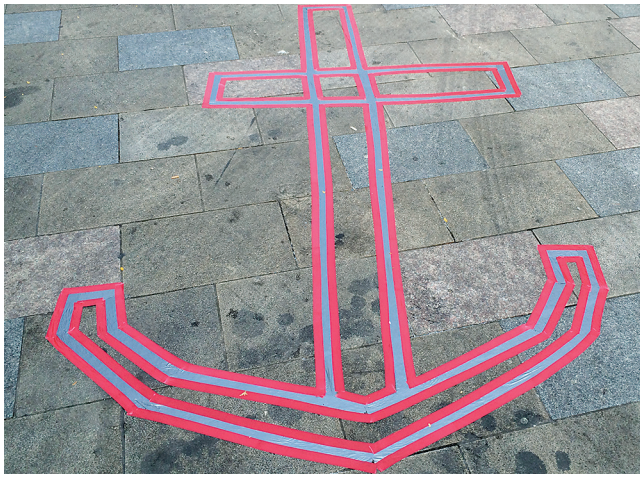
Photo: Laura X Carlé

It took 4 years of persistent campaigning by Deptford Is Forever, which is run by the most dedicated local activists/artists (or bloody-minded and tenacious as the Deptford Dame would have it) such as Sue Lawes, David Aylward and members of Deptford Society to have the anchor re-installed. Seeing it back in its original location, albeit without the plinth, must feel like a huge victory of people power, particularly in times when battle after battle is fought to save Deptford from further partnerships between councils and property developers which tend to paper over Deptford's heritage and its local residents. And the joy is visible in the photos and videos made when celebrating the anchor's return, which included a procession along the High Street with music, baptising the anchor with rum and the singing of the sea shanty written by Liam Geary-Baulch and the Deptford Shanty Crew.

I've been in contact with Fred Aylward, David's brother, who was involved in helping with the Give Us Back Our Bloomin' Anchor campaign and led the procession in top hat and tails, which some spectators thought alluded to Brunel the famous ship builder, and Sue Lawes, who documented Deptford Is Forever's work and is incredibly clued up on local issues and writes for the local Crossfields Blog. They tell me that Deptford Is Forever was borne out of Deptford Is, a campaign group that ran workshops to help local residents object to the redevelopment plans for Convoys Wharf (formerly Deptford Royal Dockyard), which features 3,500 mostly luxury homes without a single one for social rent. Ironically, the anchor was stored on that site throughout the four years of the campaign. Deptford Is also came up with alternative









Clockwise from top left

Shop using paper bag with anchor design by Deptford Is Forever in 2013

Grocer using paper bags with anchor design by Deptford Is Forever in 2013

Anchor intervention on the High Street by David Aylward and Deptford Is Forever in 2018

Red tape anchor on the High Street in 2015

Photos: Sue Lawes / Deptford Is Forever

For more images and info, see: deptfordisforever.net

proposals to preserve the legacy of the site's heritage in the form of the Lenox Project and the Sayes Court Garden Project.

At the start of the anchor campaign in 2013, little graffitied anchors had already appeared on the high street anonymously and then the newly formed Deptford Is Forever carried a giant cardboard anchor built by local artist Laura X Carlé down the High Street during a noisy procession. 1000 paper bags with the campaign logo were given to market traders and shop keepers to use for their customers' purchases, and free anchor tattoos were offered by Kids Love Ink. Anchors made using red tape and chalk began appearing in the high street in 2016 while a petition initiated by Deptford Society gathered over 4000 signatures. The supportive comments made on the petition were plastered all over the High Street by Deptford Is Forever. For anyone regularly walking down the High Street, it would have been impossible not to notice the campaign's interventions, and the images and videos on the dedicated website are testimony to the fun, positive and creative side of the campaign.

"This DIY approach comes out of a generation of punks which we were part of in the 1980s", Fred tells me. "We used to run club and pub nights, and we also used to put on comedy nights and music events at the Albany. The Albany provided the venue and we provided the audience, so we were helping each other out. Now, the Albany hires out the venue, but the ethos of DIY came out of the punk thing. And this is still happening today – rather than waiting for someone to approve an action, we do things ourselves using the skills we have. And David always incorporates music into his campaigns."

Eventually the council commissioned a feasibility study to evaluate how and where the anchor could be re-instated, but, as Sue Lawes writes, the battle was far from over, battles over who would fund the reinstatement and over where the anchor would be placed. With campaigners persisting, demanding the anchor be reinstated at its original location, not hidden behind rubbish bins, the anchor is now again the iconic landmark it once was.

Fred says that "winning a campaign like this restores hope that some things can be achieved". When I ask Fred why the anchor is so important, there is no hesitation in his response. "It's a symbol of Deptford's maritime history, and we need to preserve that history. History is important because it gives you roots, it connects you to the past to help you understand where we are now. It's another big achievement that the Lenox Project and Sayes Court are now part and parcel of the Convoys Wharf development because otherwise all the significant history of the Royal Dockyard would just be ignored. All the archaeology under the concrete, the timber beams from the old dockyard, and they even found evidence of the Romans in Deptford under the dockyard! Ship building can be traced back to the Romans; this is 2,000-year-old history, it's fascinating! But all this will be built on because the buildings need deep foundations. But at least John Evelyn's Sayes Court Garden will now extend into the yard, the Olympia building is protected, and there'll be a place for shipbuilding once again. It's interesting because the National Trust grew out of Deptford. In Victorian times a descendant of Sir John Evelyn together with Octavia Hill tried to raise the money to preserve the Manor House that once stood on the site where John Evelyn had lived. Unfortunately, it was too late to preserve it but it inspired them to create the National Trust. The Mulberry Tree in the garden is the only remainder of the garden's history."

Fred thinks there should really be a museum of Deptford that houses all the artefacts that speak of Deptford's (maritime) history,[1] including the clock-tower that once stood at the yard but is now in Thamesmead shopping centre. "The anchor", Fred says, "and all the other projects mark the beginnings of preserving Deptford's heritage." Speaking to Fred it becomes clear that the anchor isn't just about the anchor, it's about the history of Deptford in general and about not allowing councils and money-greedy corporations to do as they please.



Red tape anchor on the High Street in 2015

Photo: Deptford Is Forever

[1] At the time of preparing this book, the Lenox Project was fundraising to open a Deptford dockyard & Lenox visitor centre. The Mayor of London contributed a major pledge to the project.

How do some of Deptford's elderly experience the regeneration of Deptford?

Text written by Anita Strasser in January 2019



Members of Meet Me at the Albany heading off to Tidemill Garden as part of a photography walk - July 2018
Photo: Anita Strasser

In spring and summer 2018 I was working with members of *Meet Me at the Albany*, an all-day arts club for the over 60s who meet every Tuesday to talk, sing, dance, eat and create art works together. *Meet Me at the Albany* is co-produced by the *Albany* and *Entelechy Arts*, whose artistic director David Slater says that the idea behind *Meet Me* is "to re-imagine possibilities for frail and vulnerable elderly people and create circumstances in which they can flourish" (in an interview with David Slater in 2018). Indeed, one member of *Meet Me*, Jacquie, who started writing poetry in this arts club, commented: "Here you don't get fobbed off as an elderly like in other places, and they bring out your creativity you didn't know you had". The *Meet Me* Choir and their performances, as well as the *21st Century Tea Dance* and the travelling installation *Bed* have become legendary events, and it seems that once a person has joined *Meet Me at the Albany*, they cannot imagine life without it anymore. All the people I have spoken to say the same thing: "Every week I look forward to coming here on Tuesday. This gets me out of the house. *Meet Me* gives me purpose." For many members it is the only day of the week where they are outside their own homes and among people.

As my research focuses on the changing face of Deptford, I spoke mostly to members and volunteers who have lived in Deptford either all their lives or for many years. Their comments regarding the changes are very similar: they like that "better and nicer looking shops" are coming back into the area because they don't like the

fact that “there are too many shops of the same kind on the High Street.” According to my participants, in the past Deptford was full of good shops such as Marks & Spencer’s, Woolworths’ and individual specialist shops, and the market was much better and bigger. Even if they don’t go into the new shops under the railway arches (Deptford Market Yard) for example, they like the look of them, and overall, they feel that Deptford is looking better now than a few years ago. What they don’t like are the very tall buildings that take away much-needed sunlight, the new apartments that are too expensive for them and their families to live in (some of their children have had to move to other areas because they could not find affordable homes in Deptford where they grew up) and the fact that there are very few green spaces left. People are concerned about air pollution and the lack of green spaces for children to play.

Some were born and bred in Deptford, like Ron Savill for example, who loves Deptford’s maritime history and misses elements of ‘the old Deptford’, the times when there was a pub on almost every corner and when ‘the old Deptford boys’ and the street callers were still around. However, Ron also says that “many of the old people of Deptford are still the same”, and that “the people in Deptford are very down to earth, they are the salt of the earth.” As he says this, he points over to other *Meet Me* members who are sitting in the café singing. “Where else do you get that? Where do people just sing and feel happy in the middle of a café?” he asks with smiling eyes.

Fred Aylward, local artist, activist and volunteer at *Meet Me*, is fairly positive about the changes in Deptford and likes the cafés, art spaces and the art and music scene in the area. “Some years back you couldn’t get a good cup up coffee or a nice meal anywhere, but now it’s great. And you still have other places like Café Bianca and others where people can get cheaper food. We now have 6-8 art spaces, that’s more than in Peckham, that’s great!” But what Fred doesn’t like is that the new developments are sold on the back of the arts which have been around for a long time. He is particularly concerned about the music scene. “Our local music scene is dying out – we’ve just lost the Montague Arms and with the development opposite the Birds Nest Pub, people are bound to complain about the music coming from the pub after moving in.” Another problem, Fred says, is that local artists are being pushed out of the area. His brother David, for example, has had to move from music studios in cheap rented warehouses six times in the last 20 years because of increasing rent prices, and in order to be able to afford a space, 20 musicians have now formed a co-op and share a music studio called Silo Studio in one of the arches in Resolution Way.[1] Finally, Fred talks about the lack of affordability, amenities and green spaces, as well as facilities for young people. “There aren’t enough schools, doctor’s surgeries, and youth clubs. They are all over-stretched already and they’re not building enough to deal with the rising population. The whole regeneration process seems very short-sighted.”

Jacquie, who has lived on the Crossfields Estate for many years, is not very positive about the changes. She feels totally closed in on Creekside with all the new tower blocks that are too tall for her liking, and she’s glad that the Sue Godfrey Nature Reserve is there to give her a bit of space to breathe. She explained that this reserve was previously common land that would certainly be built on today if it weren’t for Sue Godfrey, a woman who tended the land and always looked after others. When Sue was killed by a lorry, Jacquie looked after the land a bit, picking up rubbish and

[1] With Network Rail seemingly intent on selling off many premises under railway arches to investors, they might have to move on again some time in the future (see website of *Guardians of the Arches)*.

doing other things. Jacquie knew Sue quite well and misses people like her. She feels the council is more interested in the new and wealthier people moving in than looking after existing communities and the elderly.

Another person who feels closed in by the tall tower blocks is Rose, a volunteer at *Meet Me* and involved in many other clubs and groups. She suffers from claustrophobia and all these tall blocks that surround her house on Arklow Road and make her feel closed in are part of the reasons why she is so active. “I can’t stay indoors much, I need to get out as I don’t feel well otherwise and too closed in. That’s why I’m so active and part of many clubs. The new apartments are also not affordable”, she says.

Finally, I speak to Carmen, a lady with walking issues and who is concerned for her safety. She likes the look of the new buildings at the train station but says she could never live there. “I am disabled and usually, when there is a fire, the lift doesn’t work.[2] I need to live on the ground floor. Anyway, these new buildings cost too much for me to enjoy”, she says. Carmen is also concerned about cyclists, particularly those that cycle on pavements and through the market. “I walk with a stick and struggle with balance and when cyclists come past me either too quickly or too close – it throws me off balance and could knock me to the ground. They should not be allowed to cycle through the market.” The same goes for cars parked on pavements, leaving little space for pedestrians to navigate their way through. Bumping into a car could make Carmen fall to the ground.



The route for the photography walk planned with members of Meet Me at the Albany - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

After these conversations, which took place over a few weeks, allowing me to get to know these *Meet Me* members better, we decided to go on a photography walk around Deptford to photograph and discuss some of the changes. Members would take photographs with or without my assistance and a week later we would sit down, look at the photographs and discuss issues the images would trigger. Together we planned a route, taking into consideration that we had 1.5 hrs and that there would have to be enough stops to sit down and rest. The group decided they wanted to walk down Deptford Market Yard, down the High Street to Deptford Lounge, through to Tidemill Garden and back via Reginald Road.

One day in the summer of 2018, Ron, Rose, Fred, Jacquie, Maureen, Dahlia and me prepared to go on our walk. Armed with 3 digital cameras and 2 phone cameras, as well as walking sticks and a wheelchair, we set off to Deptford Market Yard. Some participants were already very skilled photographers, able to handle digital cameras and phones, but for Dahlia, a 93-year old lady, it was her first ever digital image (with my help to keep her hands steady) and she was thrilled when she saw the fantastic image she’d taken of Deptford Market Yard.

Dahlia’s first ever digital photograph (Deptford Market Yard) - July 2018

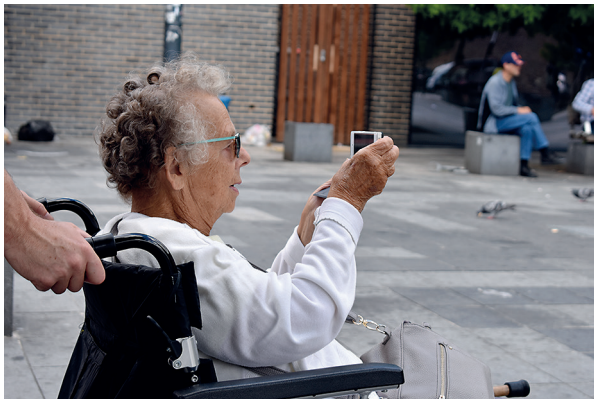
Photo: Dahlia Logan



Ron then pointed out the Shelter Sign at the beginning of the Yard, explaining that these are remnants of WWII and scattered across south-east London, indicating where bomb shelters used to be. In his view, the history of a place should be preserved and commemorated to remind people what once was.

[2] Here she does not mean the lift in this particular building but lifts in high-rises generally.

After admiring and photographing Deptford Market Yard, we made our way down the High Street, with participants photographing Terry's Shop and Our Lady of the Assumption RC Church that Fred's mum and aunt used to attend in the 1930s. Participants photographed aspects of the High Street that have historic meaning and/or are important to them and to Deptford's identity.





Top left

Maureen on Giffin Square taking her first ever digital photograph - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Top right

Deptford Lounge: Maureen's first ever digital image

Photo: Maureen Catchpole

When arriving at Deptford Lounge, we took a short break, sitting down, chatting about Deptford and taking photographs. Here it was Maureen's turn to take her first ever digital image. With my and Fred's assistance, she took an excellent shot of Deptford Lounge – a symbol for many of Deptford's regeneration.

We continued to Tidemill Garden, a space some of the participants had never been to. The reactions when entering the garden was one of the most beautiful moments during this project. Wide-eyed and mouth open, the participants were awe-struck by its beauty. They couldn't believe what they were seeing – a green space full of plants and wildlife in the heart of Deptford. Upon hearing that it was going to be demolished, they expressed disbelief and sadness. Concerned about increased pollution and the loss of green spaces at the same time, they expressed how important green spaces such as Tidemill Garden are and that we must keep them.

Bottom left

His and Hers Mural by Artmongers on Giffin Square

Photo: Ron Savill

Bottom right

The group resting and taking photographs on Giffin Square - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Rose, Ron and Fred went off to the centre of the garden to meet musicians that were having an accordion lesson and to take photos all around the place. Unfortunately, Maureen and Jacquie were unable to navigate the garden but together they enjoyed their chat under the green canopy at the gate. Dahlia, however, asked me to lead her around the garden, eager to lay eyes onto every corner of it. Taking my arm with one hand and holding on tightly to her walking stick with the other she followed me around the garden. When I suggested the flatter path, she pulled me up the uneven mounds saying: "I want to walk. You see, my dear, this is the only day I'm out of the





house… and when I go to church on Sundays, but for the rest of the week I'm at home, indoors. I want to walk in this beautiful space." With more strength than I expected, she pulled herself up every mound, excited about each new perspective of the space. When we stood by the pond, Dahlia asked me: "Can you please pick one of these leaves for me? You see, my dear, I'm 93 and my memory is not what it used to be. This leaf will help me remember this beautiful day."

It was getting late and we had to head back for members to catch their transport. A week later, I brought in the printed images participants had taken, and I asked them to write captions for images of their choice, bearing in mind that their responses should relate to the changing face of Deptford. See below and next pages for their responses.

At the end, participants commented on how much they enjoyed this series of workshops, particularly the walk and taking photographs, and that they would like to repeat this some time if possible. I also asked Dahlia if she still had the leaf from Tidemill Garden to which she replied: "Oh yes! It's on my window sill. It was so beautiful in this garden." And when I spoke to Jacquie about the garden months later she said "it was a magical space."



Why Kill Souch a beautiful place. To fill it with more housing - This is the real space where the can bring up their Children, where the disturbed and the elderly find healing peace You will be desemating peoples lives now and to come, with no place to calm down the built up areas will fight amongst themselves and it will build up to what ? Riots come to my mind

Tidemill Garden - July 2018

Photo: Rose (Rozalee Mayes)

Comment: Jacquie Channing-Hamon

The underpass between Deptford Market and Deptford Market Yard - July 2018

Photo: Ron Savill

Comment: Jacquie Channing-Hamon



For design I give it a nil.

Deptford Train Station - July 2018

Photo: Ron Savill

Comment: Fred Aylward



A HUGE IMPROVEMENT ON THIS STATION AND MARKET YARD. THE STATION WAS AWFUL UNTIL RECENTLY. THIS CARBUNCLE RAMP IS THE ONLY ONE LEFT.

FRED



Frankham Street - July 2018

Photo and Comment:
Jacquie Channing-Hamon

An Oasis in the middle of a busy town
All it needs is a few benches.



Accordion Lesson in Tidemill Garden - July 2018

Photo and Comment:
Fred Aylward

THIS PHOTO REPRESENTS HOW PEOPLE ENJOY AND USE TIDEMILL GARDEN AND HOW SAD IT WILL BE WHEN THE COUNCIL DESTROYS THIS BEAUTIFUL GARDEN

Some weeks after the workshop, Gwyneth Herbert created a song about Deptford with *Meet Me at the Albany* participants as part of Gwyneth's *Letters I haven't Written* project. Gwyneth kindly gave me permission to publish the song here. The song is called *Meet Me* (© Gwyneth Herbert, October 2018).

Meet Me

Meet me at the bus stop
Meet me on the train
Come and meet me at the Albany
Where we're sure to meet again

Take a wander down the market
Where every plate's got soul
Even cheaper after 4pm
Bag a bargain in a bowl

Whatcha after Auntie?
They always know your name
And though every face is different
They treat us all the same, for –

No matter where we come from
No matter where we roam
Every stranger is familiar
And that's what we call home

No matter where we come from
No matter where we roam
Every stranger is familiar
In the place that we call home

Squirrels in the branches
And foxes in the bins
The chiming of the clocktower
As the traffic hum begins

Laughter in the playground
And drunkards in the street
Then a load of bleedin' sirens
And the sound of running feet

Ackee, bread and saltfish,
Dumplings, rice and peas
You can travel all around the world
On the spicy Deptford breeze – for

No matter where we come from
No matter where we roam
Every stranger is familiar
And that's what we call home

No matter where we come from
No matter where we roam
Every stranger is familiar
In the place that we call home

The years run by in Deptford town
New shop doors open, pubs close down
No ha'penny bits, no coster calls
No buses rattling the market stalls

So much has come and gone and changed
But still our hearts are singing out the same…

No matter where we come from
No matter where we roam
Every stranger is familiar
And that's what we call home

No matter where we come from
No matter where we roam
Every stranger is familiar
In the place that we call home

No matter where we come from
No matter where we roam
Every stranger is familiar
In the place that we
The place that we
This place that we
Call home

A conversation in Deptford Lounge

Text written by Anita Strasser in October 2018

In light of the recently proposed library cuts in Lewisham, it seems a timely moment to publish an extract from a series of conversations I recorded in Deptford Lounge over a period between October 2017 and March 2018, which, among other things, highlights the importance of local libraries as social spaces. I had been meeting with Marion, Michael, John and Peter[1] to talk about their views on Deptford. They meet regularly at Deptford Lounge, the one and only social space where they feel welcome to spend their afternoons together and chat. Over the years, the group has grown and together they engage in lively discussions about history, Deptford and life in general. I spend most of the time talking to Marion and Michael, and John, a local chap who loves Deptford market and record shops, occasionally joins the conversation. Marion is a 'true Deptfordite' – born and bred in the borough of Deptford. Michael is a mixed-race Lewisham man with a degree in Sociology who comes to Deptford most days. Together they engage in a fascinating discussion about life in Deptford, covering everything from growing up here in the 50s to being compulsory purchased in the 70s, the racism of the 70s and 80s, the regeneration of the 90s, and feeling isolated and left behind in the 21st century. They provide an insightful analysis of how different people's experiences can be of the same area.



Marion, Michael, John and Peter in Deptford Lounge - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Marion: I grew up in Deptford in the 50s and I remember all the shops from that time. There was a pet shop and a shop called Peery's just up the High Street, where my mum would buy all the sheets, towels, pillow cases and other household goods. Then under the bridge used to be Fanto's, which did the same thing but had more higher-class things to sell, and there used to be a tailor's under the bridge who would make suits to measure. My nan opened up a second-hand shop on 19 Tanner's Hill, where my mum was born, and she also bought the house next door for my aunt so as children we could walk through the two houses. Although there was already quite a few second-hand shops, my grandmother was noted for mending, washing and ironing the clothes, and she didn't distinguish between the people from Carrington House and others.[2] Even if they didn't have pennies to pay her, she would hand them their clothes because they were poor. My grandmother always

[1] Peter sadly passed away in spring 2019.
[2] Carrington House was a Lodging House for poor, single working men.

used to look out for the poor. She remembered all the poor people queuing up outside the Deptford Mission on Creek Road without shoes on and never forgot that the poor people were treated so badly. They were given one jug of soup and, depending on how many were in a family, between one and two loaves of bread. Even my father used to go to school without shoes because his mother couldn't afford them, and he would get beaten by the school master because he got to school with dirty feet. How terrible when you think that they can do that to a child when it's not even their fault. There was also a murder in a shop in Deptford High Street, the first case where they used fingerprints to capture the murderer. Well, my mother knew the people in the shop and the buggers that did it, and it was only because they were so poor that they killed those people because they believed these people had money. They were cruel times.



Marion's nan holding her daughter (Marion's aunt) in her arm outside her shop at No.19 Tanner's Hill, shortly after the turn of the century

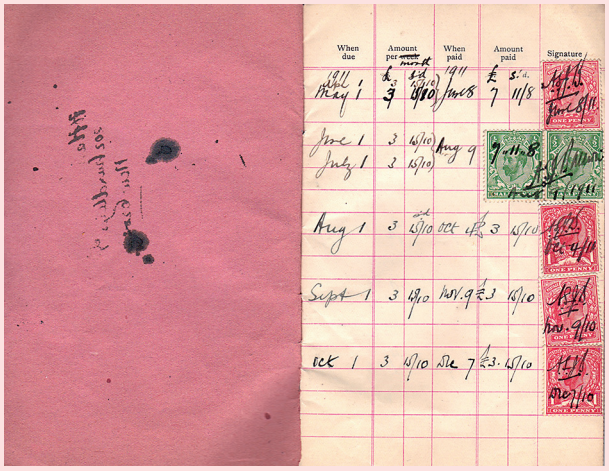
Photo: Courtesy of Marion Dickson, with the kind permission to reproduce it here

My grandmother always used to say 'You don't wanna live over the tramline'. Now the tramlines went all the way from New Cross to Blackheath and over the tramlines, the Tanner's Hill end, that was the better class of people, working-class but they were a better class, whereas it was perceived that if you lived across the other side of the tramline, you were not good, that people would steal and do terrible things. You could almost tell where the person came from by looking at the way they were dressed. A lot of the women were very poorly dressed, whereas the women up Tanner's Hill may have had a pinny over them and were much more affluent than these poor women on the other side. My grandmother always felt sorry for them and she often used to do up some clothes and send them to the Mission for them to give out.

In the top half of the High Street, the Tanner's Hill side of the tramline, we had everything we needed. There was Finchey's which did everything from hair shampoo down to ice cream to children's dummies, we also had a baker's that baked its own bread, we had Clark's Butchers with one shop on top and another on the bottom of Tanner's Hill. Mr Clark's daughter actually married Charlie Chaplin. We also had a fish shop, a greengrocer's, two doors from my nan's there was a cycle shop called Wickham's, and next to my nan's was a gentleman called Cupboards who repaired saddles, handbags, belts, and other things. Opposite my nan's, where there's now a record shop, there used to be a pickle factory. They did pickled onions and gherkins and the smell in the summer was horrendous. The smell of vinegar put me off for life, but it was a part of Deptford and you knew where to go if you wanted your pickles for Christmas.

In the 60s, I remember, there was a fish stall that stood just on the corner of the High Street [where the Lounge stands] and he would have live eels and people would come up and ask him for the eels in a jar. As children we could take empty jam jars to him and he would pay us a penny. And then there was more pubs in Deptford than there was anything else, and we had 2 cinemas where my mum worked as an

usherette and where she met my father. One of them was a significant building with plush seats and a chandelier. How they came to pull it down I'll never know.



The first page of Marion's nan's old rent book

Image: Courtesy of Marion Dickson, with the kind permission to reproduce it here

In the 70s you could see Deptford changing. My mother's house was compulsory purchased and basically, they pulled down whole rows of houses that really didn't need pulling down; they just needed doing up to the standard that people expected. They were firm houses, all quite large 3, 4, 5-bedroom houses, some Georgian, some Edwardian, some Victorian, but they pulled so many of them down and nobody asked what people thought about this. The council made all the decisions – they compulsory purchased you and only offered you the basic value of the property, regardless of the work you'd done inside, and you had to take it. They built an estate on the land, which is wonderful in one way but people enclosed in their own area don't really talk to anybody outside their estate. They brought in people from other areas, such as Dagenham and East London, and it was difficult to get to know them. This was all very upsetting because a lot of the people whose houses were pulled moved out of the area. My mum and a few others were the only ones that stayed, either in Strickland Street, Baildon Street, Lucas Street and Little Gloucester because them houses hadn't been pulled down then. But the house that I'd been born in was pulled down, and I also get upset about my nan's shop; it's actually a listed building but the people that bought it have altered the front.

Michael: So, when you look back and then come forward, how do see yourself as a Deptford person, how do you see yourself currently then?

Marion: Very isolated because the number of people I knew, all the older generation, they are all dying off now, and their children, like mine, can't afford to live in Deptford so they've had to move out. They would love to come back but they just can't afford the properties around here. I understand they have regenerated the area and that investors want to make money but they're making so much of a profit at times – it's absolutely astronomical. I mean they've made the place tidier but they've not made it a community because they put up flats which tend to be very isolating. People tend to go in, shut the door and don't talk to anybody, I know that from the flats that surround me. I never expected Deptford to change so vastly

Michael: So, do you see yourself as the last bastion of what you would call a true Deptford person?

Marion: Oh yeah, I'm one of the last surviving ones. Years ago I could walk out of my mum's front door, and no sooner would I walk down the road it was 'Hello Mrs So and So, Hello Sir,…' It's quite strange that I remember being able to talk to so many people but now they're all different faces, there's nobody to whom you can say 'Oh I remember you from like when I was a child', and that is very upsetting. The new people that move in always seem to be on the way to somewhere, drawn into Deptford perhaps because of all the transport links. Sure some of them talk to us but it's not the same as seeing somebody that you know. I do hope that people who move in will start to come together and be a community, learn Deptford's history although they'll never know the little nitty bits that shape the essence of Deptford.

Deptford is my home, right from birth it's always been my home. I'm hoping that the council and developers will remember that us older people will need somewhere too. I mean we're lucky we've got this library because where else would we go?

Anita: So would it make a difference if the people coming in would engage more with local people and places, and if there were more social spaces for local people?





Marion and Michael occupying their favourite space in Deptford Lounge - July 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser

Marion: Yeah, absolutely! I hope that the community will come together eventually and be much more open like years ago and not so transient

Michael: Deptford has created a problem for itself because how can we now address this divide and how can we grow so Deptford is for everybody? Deptford was for many years crying out for regeneration but it's about the balance between keeping some of its old character and uniqueness, and progress, and this is very difficult. The Lounge is the greatest input compared to any other borough. There were times where coming to Deptford wasn't very conducive, in fact it was very dangerous. I know Deptford was very unique for working-class families like Marion's, but I know more about the wider aspects and understand more about it from a more critical perspective. Being mixed-race and coming here from Catford with my mates many years ago we also experienced the 'you're not from here' attitude. I know history is important, but it's also important to understand change and how things need to change. In the 1970s, change was perceived in a negative way, politically, such as how Marion described it. Deptford was a place whose history changed dramatically when you think of the National Front (NF) coming in at the time. It was when the white working-class people felt marginalised and stamped on with all the new people coming in – this is exactly where Marion's perspective is coming from – they felt threatened and couldn't adapt to the new situation. These feelings were very strong in Deptford.

1977 and the Battle of Lewisham was the turning point for the borough of Lewisham because of what was happening socially. Between 1970 and 1977 Lewisham was not at ease with itself, but I can only tell you the narrative my older siblings told me as I was too young to experience this. They would have been between 17 and 22, young, evolving and looking at aspects of how society was shaping. The racism at that time… you could be in the wrong place at the wrong time… lots of pubs used to be full of racists and you could be subject to racism just by walking past. My siblings faced a lot of verbal abuse. The National Front had walks here, they thought they could take over Lewisham, believed they had lots of in-road in Lewisham. They wanted a seat in the government and set up stalls to sell their paraphernalia. Up until that point, people weren't addressing what was going on which is why the NF was so successful. But after 1977 and the Battle of Lewisham, black people for the first time felt they had a voice – 'this is where we live, we live here too'. We experienced a tremendous hope for tomorrow and that we can be perceived as having a perspective and a voice without fear. It made the government look at all aspects. I was growing up then – you could go out, you didn't feel threatened, that's why I

feel passionate about my borough which is very different from my siblings. We could be expressive, there was hope, I was allowed to come to Deptford. Where would we be without the Battle of Lewisham? That's why I went to the unveiling of the plaque in summer 2017.

Deptford is working-class in every sense of the word: socially, economically, people's habits. Deptford's always been viby and edgy due to the working-class. In the 90s, Deptford was searching for a new soul, the old was gone and there was a clash with the new. This was at the start how I saw Deptford, but again I'm coming from a perspective from outside looking in. In my view, it couldn't remain as it was, it had to grow, but how do you grow from within? Whatever designs the council had – ways of creating finances – were close to how East London was seen financially. But it's about trying something without losing its identity; there will always be winners and losers but how do you merge the history of the real Deptfordites, people born and bred here, with the younger generation? We can't keep it romanticised like Marion's version, we have to change this kind of mindset to incorporate all people. It's about trying to find a balance so that we can be part of something and proud to be from Deptford at the same time. It's very important that Deptford keeps its working-class roots, but I believe working-class people are going to be squeezed to such an extent that I don't know how they view Deptford's legacy.

I can see why developers have chosen Deptford – it's got the river and there are lots of opportunities to generate money. It has an investment agenda, but investment for whom? It will not incorporate everyone. I see the enterprise, the very nice, well-planned financial investment in certain areas, like the railway arches. Are they technically saying this is for everyone? That type of business, in a brutal and psychological way, keeps people in a financial war because people are asking: 'Where are places for me? Does this investment include me? Am I comfortable here?' It's not good to have this us and them mentality but the new shops in the area create this because they are, I hate to say it but it's true, not for us. I can't think of anyone who'd go there. It's perhaps not people's intentions but these kinds of establishments create a divide, psychologically and mentally. This is a working-class area and I'm wondering what tomorrow's Deptford is. How is it there for everyone? Why don't they [developers, councils] liaise with people and allow them to express their views rather than decide what's right for them. I mean, we need to ask 'What do you really want for Deptford?' People don't want that much, just something that is theirs and something they can identify with. Identification is really important, and they can't identify with what's out there. If you're pushed out because of your class, and Deptford is now more middle-class, then it's about cleaning away the past. These are testing times for Deptford, and we don't know what's gonna happen, we don't even know what Lewisham is up to and it leaves ordinary people wondering where they fit into the picture, what their place is in this place and society.

Yes, Deptford has to adapt but I don't see regeneration for local people. What I see is investment for a financial bracket of people. We need everyone's view of how the Deptford of tomorrow has to be reconstructed as it will affect everybody. I can see a segregation mindset developing if they're not careful, and this is happening with the help of the borough and they need to start taking responsibility. We have seen this in other parts of London with a Labour council, I'm a Socialist and I don't like what this Labour council is doing. They are adding to this dilemma of no place for

the working-classes, the poor, and I find it increasingly harder to understand what Labour councils are doing. I'm feeling more and more disillusioned! Deptford is the most important part of Lewisham, no other area has what Deptford has but this kind of regeneration creates individual problems: mental health issues, housing issues, the welfare system, alcohol, drugs, marginalisation. All these aspects need looking at with these changes.

We also need to think about the importance of family life. If the children of local people can't afford to live here, it fragments family life, as in Marion's example. Where do local people go? Are young people going to be pushed out completely? I see more and more young people living with their parents and this can lead to mental health problems. There clearly is a shortage of houses, we know that, but if people see all this new housing developed for other people, it will lead to mental health problems.

I can't stipulate enough how important the Lounge is, it has basically become a focal point for people, it's a community, our social space. The staff here are very aware of that and have become open to that aspect of how the library is being used. They allow all kinds of people in – drinkers, the homeless, people with mental health issues, and some come from way beyond to socialise here – like us. Where else would we go? You can have your hot drink, you're not harassed or sent away, there are comfortable chairs. Many are unemployed or earn just a little, and the funding has changed – many people can't access help anymore. Where do you get comfort from if you can't see anyone for your weekly routine? Where you can have a cup of tea and an outlet to talk about issues. So this space has wider implications; take it away and you will have more social problems and mental health issues. And we also need to find links between the generations to allow parties to engage. These engagements I believe will be even more important in the future because the facilities won't be there anymore. There are all these cut-backs for all of us and at the same time all this new stuff for new people."

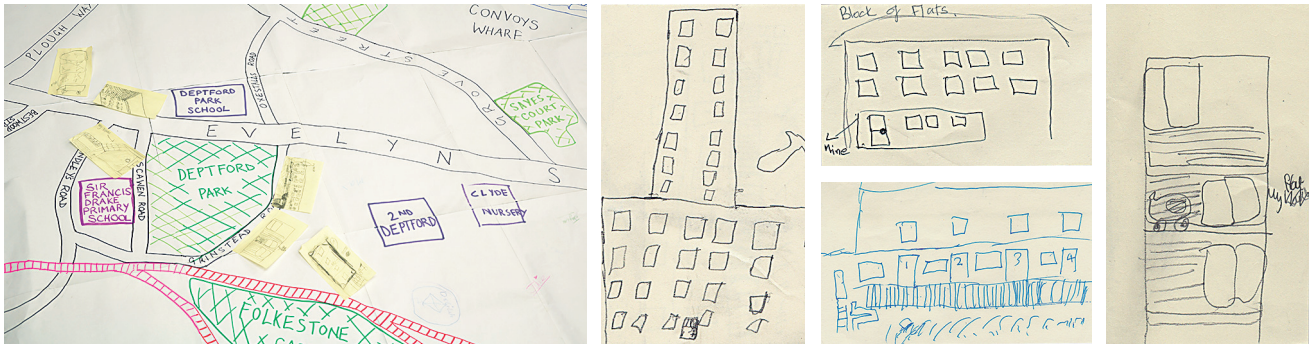
Deptford Lounge - July 2018
Photo: Anita Strasser



How do 11-year-olds understand the regeneration of Deptford?

Text written by Anita Strasser in July 2019

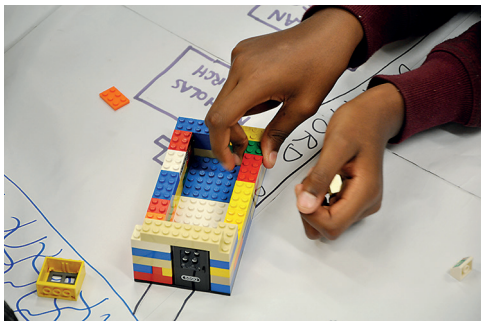
In summer 2018 I did workshops with Year 6 pupils from Sir Francis Drake Primary School and Grinling Gibbons Primary School. Both workshops were held at and organised with the help of the wonderful team at Deptford Lounge. Pupils had already discussed the idea of regeneration with their teachers in school and were therefore prepared for this workshop that would go into more detail.



Deptford map (left; hand-drawn by Adam Ramejkis), where the children placed their drawings of the buildings they live in (right)

Photo: Anita Strasser

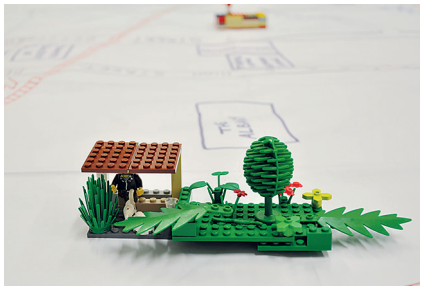
The first workshop involved 12 pupils from Sir Francis Drake Primary School, and the first question I asked them was what they could tell me about the regeneration of Deptford. Their responses were that Deptford is changing with more and more blocks of flats being built and with more and more people coming to Deptford. I then asked pupils to draw the buildings they live in, place the drawings on a giant map of Deptford and talk about what they liked and disliked about living there. It emerged that most pupils from that group live in flats and that they appreciate having space, a park or green space nearby and living close to friends. What reduces their sense of well-being were not having space for themselves, all kinds of noise they can't escape, particularly at night, rubbish lying around and strangers hanging around near their homes. There was one child in particular, whose housing situation was so bad with terrible overcrowding, leaks, noise, ill health and crime, that they could not think of anything positive to say. Another child, who was in temporary accommodation outside of Deptford, commented that the long commute to school with 2-3 buses made them feel exhausted and that they would love to be able to live nearer the school.

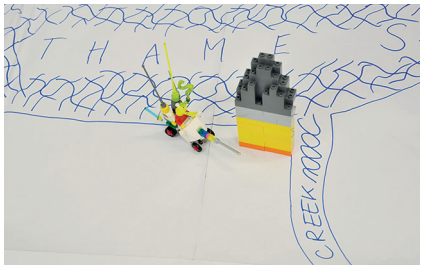


A pupil building a Lego® model of how they see the regeneration of Deptford

Photo: Anita Strasser

The second task was to build a Lego® model that reflects the changing face of Deptford. I deliberately gave them a vague brief to see what they would come up with. Some may have built predictable models (e.g. a police station) or models of things they'd like to have for personal reasons (e.g. a skatepark), but the after-discussions showed some interesting insights into how the pupils perceive what is happening. See next page for some of the things they came up with:



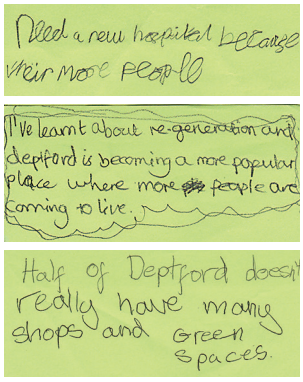


Models of a green space (top) and a hospital by the Thames for the new residents living by the river (bottom), built by pupils of Sir Francis Drake Primary School - July 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser

Play areas and green spaces: they commented that there aren't enough green spaces in Deptford where children can get away from the noise of the streets. They also thought that Deptford needs more trees to absorb the pollution, which they say is a problem. One child also commented that more "animal play areas" are needed. "There are more people now and they might want more pets, but lots of parks have 'no dogs allowed' unless they're guide dogs so there are not enough places where dogs can run around and get fresh air."

A bank, an IKEA and a hospital: this is to address the amount of new people coming into the area who need to put their money somewhere, need to buy furniture to furnish their new homes, and will also need a hospital some time. I found these comments interesting as children were basically saying that there aren't enough facilities in the area to cater for all the people moving in. Flats are being built, people are lured into the area but there isn't enough infrastructure and amenities to cope with the increase in population. Finally, one child wanted a corner shop on Grove Street as there was nowhere in that area to get any sweets. I then asked them what they'd learnt from this workshop, and here are some of their comments:



Comments made by pupils of Sir Francis Drake Primary School about what they learnt from the workshop, and placing them on a wall

Photo: Anita Strasser





Year 6 pupils of Grinling Gibbons Primary School building models of the regeneration of Deptford

Photo: Anita Strasser

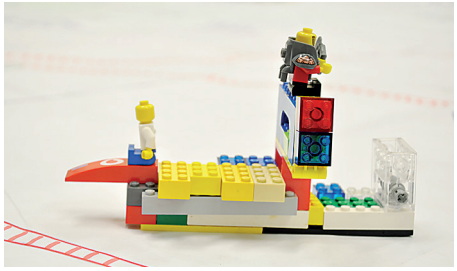
The second workshop involved 9 pupils from Grinling Gibbons Primary School, and I also asked them first what they could tell me about Deptford's regeneration. They responded with similar things such as Deptford's growing population, more traffic and pollution, the modernisation of old buildings and the construction of a lot of new buildings, the loss of green spaces, posher and bigger shops. However, an interesting discussion ensued. Whereas one girl felt that Deptford was becoming safer with fewer crimes committed, another child, who'd recently had to witness a stabbing outside his house, said that too many young people have knives and commit crimes, and that he feels scared when coming home from school. It saddened me to hear a young child talking about this.

I asked the children to mark on the map where they live and it turned out that most live near their school. I asked them whether they thought a lot has changed in the area. One child commented: "Convoys Wharf is going to bring a lot of change. They are building new flats everywhere and they are increasing the population, but they end up killing the trees because I heard from my friend that they were gonna build flats near this park [Sayes Court Park]."

I then asked them to build models that reflect the changing face of Deptford and place them on the map. Interestingly, most models were placed by the river and close to the Pepys Estate. Here are some of the models they built and their explanations:

“I built a park inside Fordham Park to say ‘don’t build on it anymore’.”

“I put the police and a group of people on the Pepys Estate to try and reduce the amount of stabbings and killings.”



A model of a noisy truck on Evelyn Street, built by a pupil of Grinling Gibbons Primary School - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

“I put a car and a truck on Evelyn Street, close to the Pepys Estate. This was to show that there is too much traffic and too much noise from all the cars and trucks in that area.”

Because of these negative responses, I asked them to build another model of something that would make Deptford a better place. Once again, the models expressed continued concern about crime, safety and pollution, with more models representing police and green spaces. The most sophisticated model, in terms of physical and metaphorical parts, was the joint model made by two girls who explained it like this: “We think there should be more police around to put everything harmful down, so here is the police (back left) and in this part (front right), the people put their weapons down and become friends right there. And here (front left), there is a person who is friendly to a person who doesn’t look like them. And over here (back centre), this is to show there should be more green spaces.” They called their model ‘The Harmony Model’.

I was very moved by that model and explanation by two young local girls who demonstrated acute awareness of the issues facing society. Their model was very much about the need for peace and harmony, and looking after the environment.



The Harmony Model built by two pupils of Grinling Gibbons Primary School during a workshop in Deptford Lounge - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

“You need to nurture communities, not just benefit from them!”

Text written by Anita Strasser in June 2019



Jade, Jayden (back), Matthew and Thanh (front) in Deptford Lounge - May 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser

In May 2019 I met with my friend and former work colleague Jade Le, her mum Thanh, her brother Jayden, and her partner Matthew in Deptford Lounge to talk about how they are experiencing the changes happening in Deptford. Each of them created their own timelines, writing about their experiences in and of the area.

Thanh came to Deptford in 1985, so she has been living here for 34 years. She first came to Scunthorpe from a Hong Kong refugee camp with her first-born and then had Jade. They then moved around a lot and when they were living in Peckham, a friend, who was living in Deptford told Thanh that Deptford was a nice area to live, so she moved to Deptford and has stayed ever since. “The community at the time was great and soon I knew everybody on the High Street and in my block. All my kids – 7 altogether – went to Tidemill School and they all made friends there.”



Jade (front left) with her family in the late 1980s

Photo: Courtesy of Thi Thanh Le, with the kind permission to reproduce it here

Jade remembers this time well when she went to Tidemill School (then to Deptford Green and then Lewisham College) and when all the kids used to play outdoors until they were called in for dinner in the evenings. “Your friends would always come out and knock for you and say ‘let’s go out to play!’ It’s not that we didn’t have consoles, but we preferred to be outside. And it was safer then because so much of people’s lives was spent outdoors, meaning you knew the whole community who would be looking out for you. People would know you and your parents, and if they saw you and knew you’d done something wrong, they could tell you off. But nowadays it’s a lot different because most of my mum’s neighbours have gone now, and I find that there’s no sense of community anymore. So for example, a while ago, some kids bashed stones against my mum’s window and I went out to tell the parents but they weren’t interested and pretended it had nothing to do with them. I find that really disrespectful. I’m not saying we should stick our noses into other people’s lives, but now everybody keeps themselves to themselves and it just doesn’t feel as safe, and I think kids spend too much time indoors not only because of technology but because they don’t always feel safe and don’t have places to go.”

Indeed, Jayden, Jade’s 12-year-old brother, echoes her worries. “There aren’t many open spaces where you can see who’s there and feel safe. All those buildings create

long and narrow streets and you can't escape if you meet a shady person. And with all those buildings and streets and no open spaces for children to play, you don't really know what to do! Some younger people are carrying knives and end up making bad moves because of our surroundings – there's so many buildings, just buildings and you don't really know what to do. Some time ago, somebody was following me after school, a very angry man so I ran back to the school because I felt threatened. If there'd been a playground nearby, I could've run there because then I wouldn't have been alone and people would have seen me, which would have made me feel safer. But there are only streets and buildings."

Losing Tidemill Garden was a major loss for Jayden, as he used to go there a lot with his friends. "There were always many friendly people there, so you were never by yourself and you could always do something there. Sometimes we helped the people cutting the weeds or planting things. There was loads of wildlife and there was also a great treehouse and loads of kids would go up. It's all dead now." Jayden understands that there is a need to house the homeless but says: "I think we already have enough buildings with empty rooms, which homeless people could occupy. And the new buildings they are building are not for the homeless because they can't afford those places."

According to Jayden, there is a need to have more spaces for children, so they are not just stuck in the high-rises or get involved in crime. And there need to be free places, because, as Jayden points out: "Some kids are not as fortunate as others, and their parents don't have enough money to send them to places where they have to pay. Tidemill Garden was free and anyone could go there, and it was so nice being there. I miss it. It would have been better if the council had taken down the old school building and built more flats for people who don't have much money there and preserved Tidemill Garden to have a safe place for kids to play."



Jade (centre) dancing as part of the Indo-Vietnamese Dance Group in the 1990s

Photo: Courtesy of Thi Thanh Le, with the kind permission to reproduce it here

Luckily, there's McMillan Park, where Jayden and his friends go, and the Adventure Playground, named after Richard MacVicar, who played a very important role in the family's life. "Mac, as we used to call him, was a really great part of my childhood", Jade says. "We always used to go to the Adventure Playground which he built up from scratch, and he always used to help us write formal letters, complete forms, get our passports; we really used to look up to him and I would say he was one of my mentors. He helped me, my sister, my cousin get funding to become part of this new Mulan Youth Theatre. There was an Indo-Vietnamese Community Centre near the Adventure Playground, and they had funding to hire a dance teacher, so we were part of this Indo-Vietnamese Dance group, and we actually held some shows in the Albany Theatre. And so through the Mulan Youth Theatre, an oriental-Asian drama club funded by the National Lottery, we were able to open up a wider network and do shows across London, which was great. I went there from when I was 14 until I was 16; then the funding just ended abruptly and they had to shut down, which was such a big shame because we really enjoyed it and otherwise we just hung out on the streets being naughty. Being part of that project made us see that you can actually do something with yourself. I was also involved in this project called The Greenwich and Lewisham Young People's Theatre Project – also funded – as a teaching assistant, so I was helping

young children learn drama and make puppets and things. They were based in the community centre near Pepys. And there was also another project, a photography project, Mac got us involved in, which was in Co-oPepys on the Pepys Estate. So at the age of 14 I learnt how to take pictures with a camera and the skills of how to work in a darkroom with different filters, and things like that. I really enjoyed it. Richard MacVicar always managed to get funding for us local children and to keep the Playground open. He'd get us involved in projects and take us on trips to Macaroni Woods, which is a place where you learnt how to camp, ride a horse or go cave exploring. I would never have learnt how to do these things without him."

Many of Jade's happy childhood memories are basically connected to funded community projects she was involved in – a memory Jayden won't ever have as there is no more funding for such projects. "There were loads of things to do back then, but now there's nothing or you have to pay for it", Jade says. "Nowadays, children are walking around with knives! Why not have more projects in the community for these young children to have something to do? Support the people doing voluntary community work like those in Co-oPepys so they can give back to the community! You need to nurture communities, not just benefit from them!" But Jade is aware just how hard it is these days to get funding! "So many hoops to jump through to just get one project going!"

When I ask Jayden whether he can imagine his future within Deptford, he's not sure. "If they keep putting up these buildings, I won't want to live here because it's too compact and cramped with too many opportunities to get robbed or knifed. I don't want to put my life and my children's lives at risk. If they start building more playgrounds, parks and open spaces where children are safe and where we can see them, then I might stay here. I want Deptford to be a good place, it's my only home and if I can, I'd like to stay."

Thanh, his mum, is definitely going to stay in Deptford forever. She's been here so long, she doesn't want to move. And she actually likes the new look of Deptford. "Deptford itself looks better now – it has nicer buildings, better shops and it's more lively." But she also says that Deptford is more for students and young people now. Many of the people she once knew have either moved away or died. From all the old shopkeepers, only a few are left and there isn't the same kind of social engagement or strong sense of community with new shopkeepers, she says. According to her, they seem less interested in getting to know and chat to her, and shopping is merely transactional. She misses the friendly chats she always used to have in the shops. It is through these social engagements that she learnt to speak English and built friendships. When she first arrived, she only spoke Vietnamese and shopkeepers like Terry helped her learn English vocabulary and feel part of the community. Despite knowing fewer people now, Thanh is very well known in and connected to the remaining community and her shopping trips down the High Street and through the market are still full of social encounters.

In the end, I ask Matthew, Jade's other half, to tell me how he views the changes of Deptford. He first came to Deptford in 2003, when he found work as a film editor in the Albany. He's a North-Londoner and admits south-east London was still a bit of a mystery to him when he first came. However, he quickly developed a love and understanding for Deptford and got to know its intricate social networks

Right
Thanh and Jade's timelines

THI THANH LE - TIMELINE

1985 - I come to Deptford.
- First impression is great as there was a great sense of community.
- I learnt basic English by myself and with the help of some of the community.
- Old Deptford had less people, less buildings, less places and more land.
- New Deptford has more shops and interesting developments which I like to see.

1990 - I never saw any markets until the 90's when they started having stalls.
- I have 7 children and 5 grandchildren.
- In the Deptford area, I know the dry cleaners, Terry's, Kims newsagents and my neighbours. Terry in particular helped me with my English.

2000 - I helped doing volunteer work at my friends restaurants and Vietnamese shops.
- I prefer to stay in Deptford for the convenience of everything nearby.

2005 - I try to travel to Vietnam to visit family when I can, but as all my immediate family are already here in Deptford, it is easier for me to stay in Deptford.
- I try to save money to help my family in Vietnam when I can.

2019 - I have been in Deptford for 34 years,
- I like Deptford more now for the shops and new things to see but I prefer the old Deptford community.
- I like all areas of Deptford except for the front of Deptford lounge as there are too many intimidating people, who are drug users and alcoholics

JADE LE - TIMELINE

1983 - I was born in Scunthorpe.
- From what I can remember, we moved around alot but finally resided in Deptford. I grew up in Deptford.

1990 - I have spent a long time in Education from studying at Tidemill
| primary school to going to Deptford Green school, to Lewisham
1998 college (Deptford campus).

2000 - I went to uni at London Arts Institute but chose to stay at
| home rather than stay in residence.

2003 - I have always loved Deptford and will always class Deptford as my home, however it feels less like how it used to be.

2005 - Growing up the community has helped my mother to nurture us,
| to which we are grateful for. Life was easier back then.

2010 - I have spent a lot of time working in Deptford at the Albany Theatre, in the markets, local pharmacy and even with the local community, teaching and putting on projects.

2019 - I do like some of the new developments around however I do feel that there has been a big loss of community spirit and people feel less safe. Too many old shops and community based projects are being pushed out and feels fake. Bring back the community projects!...

after meeting Jade and her family. “I was impressed with the very tangible sense of community and the creative energy here, especially in the Albany and the different things they do with differently-abled people – it’s amazing! Then I found love at work and became enamoured with the traditional feel of Deptford and New Cross because they still had a lot of working-class culture part of their fabric, like Pie and Mash shops on the High Street, and I think that’s really important. But I could also spot the potential for regeneration there and then, that it was primed for gentrification. I mean, it’s in Zone 2 with trains to London Bridge, close links to East London, and Greenwich, it’s got lots going for it despite being rough around the edges. I know regeneration is sort of inevitable but I’m aware that it can often isolate the natives and the locals, the ones that grew up here. Change often comes at a great price and pains for a lot of people that have always lived here. There’s always that juxtaposition of the new and the old and it creates this tension and boundaries that stop people connecting with each other. Deptford Market Yard is an example of that because even though it’s still part of the market, it’s not quite part of the market; it’s its own little enclave and it does its own thing. And obviously, some people get priced out unfortunately and there’s still a lot of buildings that don’t seem to be doing what they’re supposed to be doing – actually housing people.”

For Matthew, Deptford has become his home-from-home, and he loves the fact that Deptford still has a strong sense of a close-knit community. In his view, despite all the changes Deptford has witnessed, it hasn’t lost its heart and soul. “When I go out with Jade and mum and we go through the market, we can never just go out to get something because people start saying Hello and How are you. What starts as a 5-minute trip turns into a 2-hour sojourn”, he laughs. According to him the danger that Deptford will become the new Shoreditch or Dalston is always there. He gives what happened in Islington as an example how one of the roughest areas of London was turned into a hotspot for the wealthy. But like many others, he feels that people in Deptford, who he describes as salt-of-the-earth people, have a reluctance to let that happen. “It really depends on the young people we see now and how they deal with it. In Islington, there didn’t seem to be much of a fight; they were offered sums for their houses they bought for a fraction of that years before and saw the opportunity to make a better life for them and their families. You can’t really blame them. Market forces unfortunately do determine where we live and how we live. There is no guarantee that you’re going to live where you were born and grew up and knew all your life, and it sucks the life out of places destroying their identities and making them sanitised and homogenous like everywhere else. As a community, we can only do so much, but because of the active participation of the local community here in Deptford, it’s less likely to be wholly gentrified. There’s too much love for the area and people know what they’ve got here; there’s a deep-seated feeling of ‘this is where I’m from, this is where my family is from, generations of our family have been here’. I think it’s also to do with the geography, it’s so close to Greenwich and the centre of London, and the river gives it an expansive feel. An area needs an identity, it needs to be authentic. Sadly, today the celebration of an area is more the commercial aspect rather than its authenticity. Deptford still has that level of authenticity, even if it’s the homeless people sitting outside Deptford Lounge or down-to-earth people walking down the market. We need to look after all people and perhaps the future lies in trying to re-establish a way of looking after Deptford communities.”

Right

Jayden’s impressions of Deptford and Matthew’s timeline in Deptford

Jayden 110 he

In Deptford it's always sociable and loud. At first I really liked Deptford however now its become worse. Many people now don't know the old Deptford. In the past few years, Deptford ~~has~~ was full of adventure however, now it's just full of buildings that are most of the time not even half-full. For me a massive ~~building~~ place that is now gone is the old tidemill building's garden. Many kids went there including me and we always had loads of fun. As a former student of Tidemill, I was very sad about the destruction. To improve Deptford the new lewisham council should listen to the ~~comonit~~ community as many in the community wanted to keep the garden however they destroyed it anyway. In my opinion they should of destroyed the old tidemill building as no one used it and it was very worn out. Even though many negative things has happened there are some positive. I love the community. Coming out into Deptford knowing many people I can always talk to someone. Deptford is my home and the body of Deptford is still together and I hope it doesn't break apart. The Deptford market is the heart of Deptford and you can always get good quality stuff for free. In the future, I hope Deptford can go back to how it was before.

Matthew Timeline (in Deptford)

2003 - The Albany: Working as Film Editor. Was impressed with the tangible sense of community, creative energy and potential for improvement / regeneration. New Cross station was still part of the old East London line.

2005 - Found love at work, became enamoured with the 'traditional' feel of Deptford / New X. I recognised that it was being primed for gentrification once I realised its location had many things going for it, despite a 'rough-around-the-edges' appearance. Deptford Market is a massive draw - inexpensive, locally-based and good quality.

2008-2012 - Visited Deptford / New Cross for work intermittently (Living outside of London), I did notice that more construction occured; part of London Olympics 2012 efforts to 'beautify' the area and attract more tourists (especially via Greenwich connection). New Cross station now part of London Overground service - very good transport links.

2013-Present - Deptford now home-from-home (as a north Londoner); some elements of the regeneration is obviously welcome and necessary: Positive elements include the creation of Deptford Lounge (where I've also worked), Market Yard (despite the gentrified feel and price point) and school regeneration (Tidemill). Negative elements are mainly speculative: What happens to the locals when it becomes too expensive to live here?

“Deptford is where I feel most at home”

This text was written in December 2018 by Annette Butler, General Manager of Deptford Lounge. All thoughts and views are her own and do not necessarily reflect the ethos of the library.



Annette Butler outside M&D in spring 2019

Photo: Lea Lukacs

What is gentrification? The dictionary says “The process of renovating and improving a house or district so that it conforms to middle-class taste”. The banner on the round-about opposite the Birds Nest says “Gentrification is legalised crime”.

Me? What do I think? Well, I don’t want to put a label on it or focus on the negative. I want to focus on what we can do to protect and grow on the amazing characteristics that make Deptford a true community, something that it does the best! I have experienced this at first hand having left the North of England 10 years

ago and living in most areas of London, North, Northwest and West. Finally settling in the South East and in particular Deptford, which is where I feel most at home, and how I remember community life when growing up in a small pit village just outside Sheffield.

We need more homes and that is simple. As the population is growing and without the new builds where would we all live? We are all living longer, medical intervention strengthens life along with everyday changes that aid us to make life somewhat easier for ourselves. You know things like hoovers instead of having to beat your rugs until the dust is removed, cars to make getting places quicker and the internet to name but a few. So maybe change isn't all bad.

We can see this need for new homes as many flats are sprouting up all over the area and yes, they are sooo expensive but this is not indicative to Deptford but London in general. Will this change the dynamics of Deptford, yes! But not all people moving in are rich and many want to feel part of the community. Deptford is known for its diversity and the new people moving in are adding a new variety to the area. I want to share with these new residents all what is good about Deptford. I want to take them to Terry's Discount Store and Aladdin's Cave, which we can all guarantee will have that one thing people need for their new home and haven't found in some big chain store. I want to share with them my favourite places to eat; I can't get enough of The Waiting Room and M&D Japanese. I want to invite them to my favourite pub; The Dog and Bell has a great selection of beers especially from Belgium. And I want to join them on Saturday and experience the new Market Yard with them and then share my experiences of Deptford Market and introduce them to the stall holders. I want to spend an evening with them at the Albany Theatre or a Sunday afternoon at Deptford Lounge reading the Sunday papers. Most of all, I want to be welcoming, open and friendly and help the new faces integrate into Deptford.

I think fighting for what you strongly believe in is good, so I want to fight to keep the spirit of Deptford, fight for diversity, fight to keep making friends and making the best community possible.



Terry's Discount in spring 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser

“It literally was a case of ‘Save The Waiting Room’ as we had been on the verge of closing for good”

This text was co-written by Anita Strasser, Alec Snelling and Kevin Greenham from The Waiting Room, a veggie/vegan café on Deptford High Street.

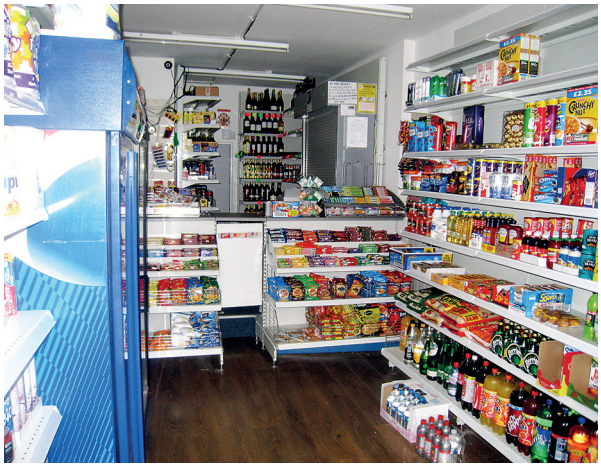


Kevin and Alec in The (new) Waiting Room at 134 Deptford High Street not long after relocating - April 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser

When The Waiting Room announced its move in spring 2018, they did it with a Kickstarter campaign to raise £12,500 to help them cover the relocation costs. They’d been in the tiny premises of 142 Deptford High Street for 7 years, experiencing difficult working conditions (mainly heat and lack of space), leaks and structural issues, and a fragile lease agreement. They had seriously considered packing it in but when Nightingale Pharmacy moved to the former HSBC building and offered the premises at 134 Deptford High Street for a reasonable price, the guys at The Waiting Room saw an opportunity to move to bigger and better premises only 3 doors down from their former shop. This was important as The Waiting Room isn’t just a coffee shop but is part of the community on this bit of the High Street with close connections to Kids Love Ink, Rag ‘n Bone and other shops. However, they could not afford the move without financial help which is why they started the Kickstarter campaign.

Information about the campaign spread like wildfire, with locals very keen to save the much-loved Waiting Room. But I also noticed one comment on Facebook: "Why don't they just take out a bank loan?" one woman asked. Little did she know about The Waiting Room, its origins and the people who run it. Alec and Kevin were aware that the history of The Waiting Room wasn't commonly known when they wrote on top of the campaign page: "Many of our hardcore regulars don't even know how The Waiting Room came to be in existence." They tell the story of what happened:



The fully stocked Off Licence at 142 Deptford High Street in 2010 that became The Waiting Room in 2011

Photo: Courtesy of Alec Snelling, with the kind permission to reproduce it here

"Back in November 2010 we found ourselves with the keys to a fully stocked Off Licence. We had been looking for someone to take over the lease of what had been Kids Love Ink Tattoo Studio, which moved to bigger premises next door. The newsagent, which used to be located at the old station building, was happy to take over the lease but shortly after they had set up and stocked the place, they decided at the final hour before signing that they didn't want to commit. The guy handed us back the keys and waved goodbye. The shop was fully kitted out with racks on the walls full of sweets and household stuff and fridges full of beers. They took the cigarettes and high-end liquor but left all the other booze behind. It was crazy. We had a choice. We could try and find someone else to take over the lease or do something ourselves with the space. After much deliberating and looking at what the High Street was lacking, we realised it desperately needed a place that served good coffee and a veggie/vegan menu so we decided to set up just that. Vegan food was not really in the public conscience then as it is now and after some research, we're pretty sure we were one of the first vegan places in south-east London."

Neither of them had ever served coffee or food before – Kevin was working as an assistant in operating theatres handing surgical instruments to surgeons, and Alec was the piercer in Kids Love Ink next door. But something had to be done – they couldn't afford to pay the rent and leaving the shop empty and not paying rent would have meant going to court, so they decided to give a coffee shop a go. Both left their previous jobs and got lots of advice and training on how to make good coffee. They simply took the plunge. But first, they had to get rid of all the booze and make the shop fit for purpose. They explain how they did this:

"We had no money at all! Doing everything by ourselves was the only way to go. We set about selling everything in the shop… and I mean EVERYTHING! Local hero Terry took the home goods, chocolates, crisps and what else he could sell. At Kids Love Ink we hosted an exhibition by Fos, founder of Heroin Skateboards and New Cross skating legend, where we offloaded most of the booze; the remainder of which went to a local punk venue in Battersea. Even the long gone Shital's Off Licence took all the racking from the walls. The only money we had was the money we gained from selling the stuff.

After many long, tiresome days but few short weeks of renovations, The Waiting Room began to shape. Using near entire back catalogues of Scorpions, Rush, Iron Maiden and AC/DC as our musical motivation we got pallets from Resolution Way, stripped them down and used them for the counter, found paint and all sorts



Kevin and Alec in The Waiting Room at 142 Deptford High Street (August 2018), with a picture I took of them in their first week of trading in 2011

Photo: Anita Strasser

from Freecycle, and travelled to Southend for a sofa. At one point we had 2 sofas in the coffee shop but we soon ran out of space and replaced them with tables and chairs. For next to nothing we were lucky to get our hands on our first grinder and Espresso machine, our trusty old Rancillio Epoca. Much like your first car, it was terrible but you loved it unconditionally. We still can't express enough thanks for the help that Camilla from Union Hand Roasted gave us from way before day one; the training and support, helping us through choosing coffees and giving a serious MOT to the Rancillio. Splinters, blood, sweat and many beers, on April 1st 2011 we opened the doors, where we held a benefit for those who suffered and lost their lives in the 2011 Tsunami."

The Waiting Room was well received from the outset, with many locals happy it wasn't another bookie, but it was very quiet to start with. Alec recently found old till receipts, a reminder that on some days they made approximately £25. Some days it was so quiet, Kevin and Alec would watch a whole film at the back before another customer came in. The first time they made around £100 on a Saturday they felt ecstatic – they couldn't believe it. Humble beginnings indeed. Actually, it could have all gone terribly wrong and it took some time to build up a customer base, but local artists, mainly from Utrophia, local squatters and property guardians soon became their regular customers. Kevin and Alec were working non-stop, 8am starts, 7pm finishes, 6 days a week then falling asleep over pints at the Birds Nest. Although friends came in to help out every now and then, in the end they needed a third person just to give them a day off. As time went on and it got busier, they started to take on more staff. "The list is long but for a coffee shop in London, the staff turnover is small and all members have been awesome (and mostly from Laban). It was these people who truly made The Waiting Room what it was and what it still is today", Alec and Kevin say.



Long-term staff members Albert and Dom in The Waiting Room at 142 Deptford High Street - August 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

According to Kevin and Alec, Deptford has changed a lot since they set up in 2011. "Anyone who knows Deptford no doubt heard about how much it's changed from its shady past. But even back in 2011, it was a completely different place to what it is now. This is not to say that we don't like the new changes – no-one wants to walk around a place that's falling apart. We like the mix of the old and the new and there is still enough of the old that we still want to be here. We still love Deptford, it's a great place to be and as long as this is the case, we're happy to be here. But there is no denying that some things have changed. When we set up in 2011, there were lots of places with cheap rent, artist studios or buildings with property guardians, so there were a lot of skint artists and musicians around. A lot of them have gone now and there's definitely a different clientele with all the new developments around – people with a bit more money and less time, and some people with that kind of busy lifestyle, who come in with a level of arrogance and expect a certain service they have grown accustomed

to elsewhere. But we also get a lot of locals now who've lived here ages and probably wouldn't have come into a place like this, people from housing estates, the Birds Nest or like the Millwall supporter who came in today and said: 'It took me a while to take to your place and you guys but now I love it!' A coffee shop with vegan food and bar staff tattooed all over is just not part of their lives, but over time, people started coming in."



Details in The Waiting Room at 142 Deptford High Street - August 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser

Over the last 7 years, the people working at The Waiting Room have become an integral part of the community. As Alec says: "Deptford is our home, especially the High Street, and we were desperate to stay. It really would break our hearts if The Waiting Room were to close. We really care about our community and there's also a wonderful community among shopkeepers here." Being a business owner, Alec likes to see change in Deptford and is keen to see new people coming into the area as it's good for business but he's clear that it's important to care for the area and the local community and that businesses need to integrate and communicate with others. "It's important to show respect to each other and the local character of an area!" He is especially critical of big developers with big money who fail to do that. An example is when Deptford Market Yard painted over the Lipton Ice Tea sign that had been there for decades. "At what point would anyone look at that and think 'that's a really annoying sign that's been here for many years, we're gonna put a massive thing over it to advertise our shops'? How they got planning permission for that I don't know. It was just treated with no respect."[1]



Small individual businesses clearly have to save long and hard just to be able to do any renovation work and it is hard to keep up with big corporations that can pay huge rent prices. An all too common occurrence these days, the landlord of 142 Deptford High Street was not looking to renew the lease so he could develop the property. Issues began when recurring leaks and unfixed damage were making it difficult to run the coffee shop, causing frustration for the staff and customers. By 2017, they had been working without a new lease agreement for a year, risking the danger of being kicked out any time. The Airbnb run upstairs called Greenwich Park Apartments (the irony!), which was apparently full of mould, some mice and dodgy plumbing and couldn't deal with the constant stream of people, added to the frustrations. The lack of space also made it difficult for the staff to do their work, the heat in the summer was unbearable, food and cups had to be stored in the tattoo shop for lack of storage space, and any time work needed to be done, the shop had to be shut, losing business. They had wanted to move for a while but couldn't find suitable or affordable premises until 134 Deptford High Street suddenly came up. Kevin jokingly says that at some point they considered,

[1] Interestingly, a week after publishing this story on the blog at the end of May 2019, the Lipton sign appeared again as if it had never been painted over. However, by August 2019 it was covered again with different advertising.

not seriously, the empty flower shop next to the Funeral Parlour, calling the place ‘Coffee Mourning’. “I don’t think that would have gone down too well”, he laughs. “Then the people from the pharmacy just came in one day and said: ‘We’re moving, do you want to take over our premises?’ We went there, had a look and just grabbed the opportunity straight away. The fact that it’s just 3 doors down was a huge bonus as we didn’t feel we’d have to start all over again. Being anywhere else on the High Street wouldn’t feel the same. The imminent move took us by surprise though. We have had no way of saving up for this eventuality! Financially, we weren’t doing great – we managed to pay all bills and wages but that was it, so it literally was a case of ‘Save The Waiting Room’ as we had been on the verge of closing for good.”

After raising more than £15,500 and doing lots of work on the new coffee shop, they moved in autumn 2018. “The new landlords are incredibly helpful and kind – they seem to understand what we’re about – and the move was smooth.” The idea is to keep the original ‘image’ of The Waiting Room just in a larger form, and as in the premises before, the look and wall decoration will change all the time for a while, until they are settled in properly. They were excited at the prospect of having more space – more space for staff to move about, more space for cooking and preparing drinks and food, and more space for customers. “Customers will hopefully be able to stay rather than having to go somewhere else because there is no space”, Kevin said when I interviewed them in summer 2018. In the meantime, with The Waiting Room being so popular, it has become difficult again to get a seat but having recently created a seating area in the back garden, this ‘problem’ should be solved – in the summer anyway.

Right

‘Merkin Turnip’, who has been at The Waiting Room from day one

Below

Deptford map and fridge magnet collection in The Waiting Room at 142 Deptford High Street - August 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser





Goddard's Pie & Mash Shop closes after 128 years in Deptford

Text written by Anita Strasser in July and October 2018



Simon at the entrance to Goddard's Pie & Mash Shop - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

When I found out that Goddard's Pie & Mash Shop was closing its doors in autumn 2018, I immediately went down to the shop on 203 Deptford High Street to find out whether it was true or not. As soon as I walked in I knew it was; everyone in the shop was talking about it. With Goddard's unable to pay the rent and do much needed repairs, Lewisham Council could not renew the lease.

I went in on a Tuesday late morning. There were three mums with their babies having pie and mash, Keith Walton from the Evelyn Tenants & Residents Association and his son Simon were there, and Simon, the person running Goddard's, was serving a customer who was ordering a whole load of pies, mash and liquor to take away. Not long after that, a couple came in to place a large order and have a cup of tea while waiting for Simon to get the fresh pies out of the oven. Then Tony came in, ordered his meal and sat peacefully in the corner, eating and reading the newspaper. All the conversations that took place revolved around the closing of Goddard's. Disbelief, sadness and anger were in the air. How could this happen? How could the council allow one of the last remaining Pie & Mash shops in London, whose history in Deptford dates back 128 years, to close down? Couldn't they invest



Tony eating pie and mash and reading the newspaper in his usual place at Goddard's - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

in it somehow? But there seemed no alternative to Goddard's shutting down. All customers asked how much longer Goddard's would still be open, how much longer they could come for their pie and mash. In all their frustration they joked about giving Goddard's a proper send-off, something like a funeral procession calling it 'The Death of Deptford'. But joking aside, for Simon and Goddard's customers the news was heart-breaking.

Simon has been working at Goddard's for over 20 years. "I only came down here one day to help clear the tables and I've been here ever since", he tells me. Up until a few years ago, Clive, the business owner, was still working there and still does all the book-keeping from home.[1] Clive's daughter Karen, Simon's other half, was there until a few years ago, but like her dad, her ill health is stopping her from being able to come to the shop. Because of this, Simon has been running the shop by himself for a couple of years. "It's hard work all on your own! I get up at 5 o'clock every morning to get here for about half 6 to prepare everything (I live in Bromley). I actually make and bake everything here by myself. I make the dough, I sort the meat, I make the liquor gravy. I have a spuds machine that peels the potatoes but we use proper spuds here, none of that powder crap, and I make and bake as I go through the day. That's why sometimes when customers come in and I'm busy, they might have to wait 10 minutes for the pies to come out of the oven." In the past, when Goddard's was really busy, the pies were all baked and left on the rack and heated up when customers ordered them, but now, with fewer customers, Simon makes and bakes as he goes through the day so the pies are always fresh. If he has any left over at the end of the day, he freezes them and sells them as frozen cooked pies.



Keith Walton tucking into his pie - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

"When I first started here, the queue in here was hanging out the door, we had 4 people just serving, that's how busy we were. And now I'm doing it all by myself because the clientele ain't here no more." Simon's mate Simon, Keith's son, thinks there are still enough people who like a pie and mash but says the problem is that these people don't live here. "I mean, think about it, all the customers that used to live here and come back once or twice a year to take back whole loads of pies. Or the German, Chinese and American tourists that came in recently. So there is clientele but not from round here."

Simon (the shopkeeper) agrees. "All the Deptford Boys have moved out. Most of the people that are moving in now, they prefer deep-fried chicken or bistro or somewhere where they can get a burger for £11. They don't want old-school pie and mash, not even the veggie or vegan option.[2] They want a Flat White from Costa for

[1] I photographed Clive in the shop in 2010 and those photographs were still hanging on the wall.
[2] Many newspapers reported that Simon blamed veganism for the lack of business and that he refused to sell veggie or vegan pies (e.g. *Daily Star* and *Metro* on 25 September 2018). This is untrue. During my many conversations with Simon he never blamed vegans but rent increases and the lack of business. Goddard's did make veggie and vegan pies upon request (see *HuffPost* article of 26 September 2018).

£3. And I understand not everybody likes pie and mash, you either love it or hate it, but people come in here and have a home-cooked meal for £3.50! Where else do you get that? And I'll even throw in a cup of tea, know what I mean! We had Professor Green come in here recently, even he said, 'the people out there, they haven't got money to pay £3 for a Flat White'."

Goddard's have had to relocate once before in the early 60s, when they had to vacate their shop on Evelyn Street, their original location. Goddard's moved to 203 Deptford High Street in 1964, but all in all, they have been in Deptford for 128 years. "We should have bought the building all them years ago but it all boils down to money, doesn't it? We don't have that sort of money. All I make in here, I put back in, just to keep it running… it's fucking hard work!", Simon tells me. "The terms of the lease were: pay a certain amount each quarter and manage the upkeep and maintenance of the building. The building is so old now, there are leaks here and there and I would fix it all myself but I haven't got the money. And rent and rates have gone up in the air, I can't afford it. It's heart wrenching! I've had people come down here saying, 'Si, if you're closing this shop I won't come down to Deptford no more'. It's gonna be sad, really really sad. I'll have a tear in my eye and I don't cry over nothing!"



The three musketeers: Simon, Simon and George at Goddard's - July 2018
Photo: Anita Strasser

Simon (Keith's son) has been coming to Goddard's for years. "I was practically born in here", he jokes. He is really good mates with Simon and helps out in the shop when things get really busy. He loves Goddard's and what it stands for and seeing Goddard's go is like losing a family member for him. "I've been coming here for over 30 years and I bring my kids in here as well. My son wasn't too keen at first but one day he ate 5 pies at once! My record is 9 pies, one after another! I hate processed food and here

everything is homemade – you can really trust the food." Like everybody else in the shop, Simon feels emotional about the fact Goddard's is closing down. "It's part of our heritage, you won't get any better heritage than this. Shutting it down is just ridiculous!" Simon the shopkeeper feels the council aren't interested in people like him. "I don't know what's the matter with the council – 128 years we've been down here and it's all disappearing. And all that talk about heritage, it's all mouth and no trousers that's what I call it; all the talk but nothing to back it up with."

The irony is that Simon was expecting a film crew the day I came in. They'd called as they were looking for a traditional pie & mash shop to use as a location for their film, and you'll be hard-pressed to find a pie & mash shop that is more traditional than Goddard's. It contains all the original features from when it was first set up and furniture from Victorian times (the benches used to be in a Methodist Church). So while heritage and tradition live on in films and photographs, the actual object of historical significance is being erased from real life. Simon remembers when the Great British Bake Off asked Clive to recreate an eel pie. "Mel (from Mel and Sue) came in, and Clive had to create an eel pie, because that's what they used to do when they first started. After that – obviously it went on TV – we had all these Chinese people come in here wanting an eel pie and we said 'sorry, we don't do them no more'! And they'd say, 'but I've just seen it on TV!', and we had to explain that we had to recreate it for TV and that we don't do them no more. I don't bloody like 'em anyway – slippery little things!", he jokes.

Over the past few months, Simon has been trying to fill the freezers with frozen cooked pies. He is expecting that on the last days before final closure, people will be queuing up to order whole loads of frozen cooked pies. He remembers one fellow who used to come once a year to buy 12 bags of frozen and 2 trays of cooked pies and take them up north. Simon has a really good relationship with his customers, and it is because of his customers that Simon wants to come to work every day. "Sometimes I wake up and think I can't be bothered but the thing that keeps me going is my customers, they and the banter with them make my day. They really can't believe that we're closing. They say to me, 'Si, you've been here how long?'" Customers are also asking Simon for the original recipe but that will remain a secret. "I don't care how much money you got, you ain't having the recipe", he laughs. But according to him, it's not that simple anyway. "It's not like you've got the recipe and know what you're doing! I still get things wrong sometimes!"

When I asked Simon about his own future, and whether he had any thoughts on what he was going to do, his face turned sad. "I'm 49 this year and I haven't got a clue what I'm gonna do. Back in the day I was a bit of a bad boy, you know, and I ain't going back down that road, and I don't really want to go and sign on. I might sell pies out the back of my car (he laughs) - mobile pie & mash! Oh well, the extra cash from the film crew today might pay for my holiday. I haven't had a holiday in 4 years! I used to take my kids down to Camber [Camber Sands] every year – I might open a pie & mash shop down there!"

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October 7th 2018 was the last day Goddard's Pie & Mash shop opened its doors to the public. Customers had vowed to give Goddard's a proper send-off and what a send-off it was! As Simon had predicted, the queue was hanging out the





Goddard's last day of trading - 7 October 2018

Top left

Customers queuing, eating and chatting

Top right

Andrew and Andre with their mum Maria

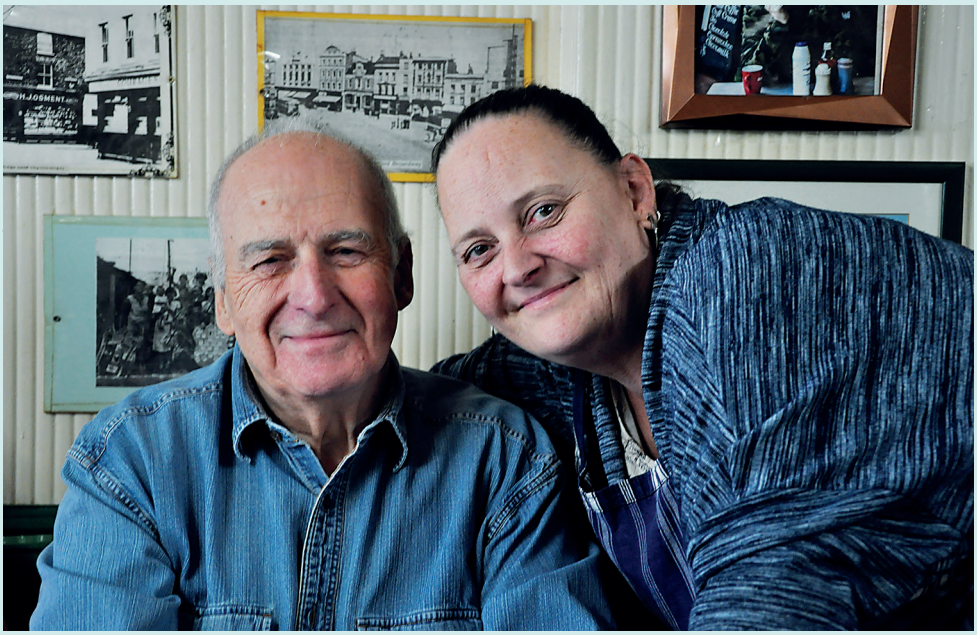
Bottom

Clive and Karen

Photos: Anita Strasser

door for most of the weekend with whole families – babies, teenage kids, parents, grandparents and dogs – coming to eat at Goddard's for the last time. People had travelled from Gravesend, Charlton, Catford and many other places. Simon was assisted by Karen and other family members and friends, trying to keep up with the constant flow of large orders. People waited patiently, taking photographs, sharing memories and expressing sadness and disbelief that Goddard's was closing. Customers ordered the lot: pie, mash, peas and liquor (or gravy), some added chilli vinegar, a cup of tea, followed by pudding and more tea. Some young lads asked for 3 or 4 pies on their plate, and one lady ordered just one pie and gravy, then helped out in the kitchen, chatted to customers before ordering another pie and gravy. This was her strategy to prolong her stay. The atmosphere was a mix of sadness, anger, celebration and hope – sadness and anger to see this place go but a celebration of memories, good times and long-standing friendships. And hope that Simon will open another pie & mash shop. It seems there is a good chance he will.[3]

Simon and Karen were incredibly busy as customers kept pouring in. Simon was at the back making the food and Karen was serving customers. Despite being worked



[3] In fact, in September 2019 preparations were already underway to open up a new shop in New Eltham.

off their feet, there was always time for a smile and a quick chat, and Simon was constantly ‘interrupted’ by customers wanting to say good-bye and wish him luck. As I was waiting for my pie, Clive came in. There were cheers, people taking photos, chatting and shaking hands with him on the way out. It felt like a celebrity had arrived. I asked him how he felt and he said: “It’s the end of an era. It’s as simple as that.”

As I was waiting in the queue to place my order, I spoke to many people. Almost everybody who was there had been coming to Goddard’s for more than 30 years, some for more than 50. They remember their parents taking them here when they were children. Some remember eating their first pie and then taking their children to Goddard’s for the first time. Many don’t even live in Deptford but have been coming to Goddard’s once a month as, in their view, Goddard’s in Deptford makes the best pies. One lady told me that once Goddard’s is closed, she does not have a reason to come to Deptford so saying good-bye to Goddard’s was saying good-bye to Deptford. Eyes were filling up when narrating the memories and family traditions of coming to Goddard’s (and Deptford) and how much this place means to them. In the end I met Maria and her 16-year old boys Andrew and Andre, who have been coming here ever since they were little. Finally, Maria tells me: “I have been coming here for 55 years, since the day I was born. Today is a very sad day.” I left with a heavy heart but glad to have witnessed such a coming together of people with a passion for Goddard’s Pie & Mash.



Simon in Goddard’s Pie & Mash - July 2018
Photo: Anita Strasser

“There aren’t enough incentives from the council to help existing businesses to survive”

Text written by Anita Strasser in March 2019



Muhammad in Roots Fruits & Veg in March 2019, sitting under a photograph of family friends which I took in 2010

Photo: Anita Strasser

In 2010 I photographed Muhammad and some of his friends and family members in Halal Butcher’s where he worked for 35 years. It was a project designed to meet my local shopkeepers, learn about Deptford’s history and find out what people thought of the proposed changes to the area. I had recently moved to Deptford and wanted to understand its political and social complexities through people’s experiences and perceptions. I went back to see Muhammad at the beginning of 2019 but this time I didn’t find him in Halal Butcher’s but next door in Roots Fruit & Veg, which I also photographed in 2010. Muhammad cannot do the hard work of a butcher anymore and so he runs Roots. Muhammad is actually of retirement age, but he says it makes him too tired to just sit at home. Instead, he comes every day to work a few hours over the morning. “I like coming here. It’s nice to see people I know, have a chat, be in the shop and have work to do. At home I would just sleep and feel tired of life”, he tells me. Although he also feels tired after a few hours of work, it is a different kind of

tiredness – a satisfied tiredness, satisfied with having been at work, having served customers and having had interesting conversations.

We start chatting about Deptford, how it's changed and whether the changes have had any impact on how business is going. I ask Muhammad what it's like to be a trader on the High Street these days. "It's not what it used to be", he says, and as Muhammad says this, a customer comments: "Yeah, Deadford!" Muhammad explains that in times when trade was good, many people used to come up from Kent to do their shopping on Deptford High Street. Due to the busy market in the past, traders used to have fairly high takings and could therefore charge lower prices, which made the area attractive for shoppers. But today, even if prices are still fairly low, Muhammad says that people go to Lewisham or Peckham because it's even cheaper there.



Deptford Market on a Saturday afternoon in autumn 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Muhammad blames the lack of (free) parking spaces in the area, meaning that people who drive up from Kent to do their shopping go elsewhere because they cannot park here. "What is the point of doing up the road and the pavement if people can't come here?", he asks. "The council are saying they are improving the area but for whom? The new people coming into the area don't do their shopping in our shops. And the people that come from elsewhere, even if they spend £100 on shopping, they still don't want to spend £2 on parking so they go elsewhere and we're missing all the passing trade. If only parking was free on Saturdays, for example, it would make a huge difference to the takings of local businesses."

According to Muhammad, the majority of traders he knows on the High Street are struggling. "Business isn't going well and the rents in this area are going up and up. With the little trade we've got now, we're not even covering our costs and we're lucky to get any wages. I recently had to take out a loan to cover the rent and all the costs and I am not able to pay it back because we're barely surviving here. In the butcher's next door, we used to have 10 people working there, now even one is too many. Deptford High Street isn't even expensive but we just don't have enough turnover." On the day I spoke to Muhammad he needed to go to a meeting to discuss the rent with the (private) landlord. "If the rent increases again, I won't be able to continue, I simply cannot pay it anymore!"

I ask Muhammad what the best times were on the High Street and without hesitation he says: "The 90s. People were working hard, they were happy and smiley, there was good trade and good earnings. I miss that!" Overall, Muhammad feels that the council aren't doing enough to support existing businesses. The Halal Butcher's has been on the High Street since 1975. "There aren't enough incentives from the council to help existing businesses to survive", he says.

All Muhammad would like to do is carry on working – carry on coming to the shop as long as possible. "I like the contact with the people, like you coming in today to talk to me and other people. It's nice and you feel good at the end of the day. If only I can come here a couple of hours a day."

As I was leaving, Muhammad's grandkids came in to say hello – it was the twins I photographed in 2010 on the same day as Muhammad in the butcher's next door. How they've grown!

DAGE Pensioners' pop-in

Text written by Anita Strasser in July 2018



DAGE Pensioners' pop-in - April 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

The pensioners I was meeting regularly between October 2017 and March 2018 for tea and cake on Wednesday mornings at DAGE, Deptford Action Group for the Elderly, have been coming to DAGE pensioners' pop-in for many years. Women such as Brenda, Carol, Barbara, Kathy and Winnie met at DAGE many years ago and have since become very good friends. DAGE on Wednesdays is an important part of their week and the familiarity between them is clearly visible. Many of DAGE's more local regulars such as Winnie and Dee come daily to the social meetings made possible by funding support. Whilst many come on a Wednesday because of the market on Deptford High Street, DAGE very much promotes the other days of the week for visiting as well and many make a point of coming on the least busy days.

Kathy, who is 74, explains that DAGE has always been a place where it is possible to find out how things work. She highlights that information sharing is so important for elderly people. "Older people don't know how to do things anymore because everything's online now or over the phone, and there is not enough information about how things work. We now also have to pay the rent online. So far, we've paid our rent in the post office. I have no idea how to pay online and I'm worried that I'll be robbed of my money because we lose control over it with doing things online. The elderly are simply left behind, and we don't understand how these systems work. All this online business is getting to me", she says, visibly worried.











At DAGE Pensioners' pop-in in 2017/2018

Clockwise from top left: **Laura; Kathy; Barbara; Kathy and Barbara; Eku and Carina**

Photos: Anita Strasser



The late Harry Haward (around 2013)

Photo: Courtesy of DAGE, with the kind permission to reproduce it here

Kathy tells the story of how she became part of DAGE about 16 years ago. She was just walking past and someone asked her if she wanted a cup of tea, so she went in. What she has always liked and why she has kept coming back is the information she gets at DAGE. "People from the NHS have been down to inform us about services and art students from Goldsmiths have worked with us too. At times you wouldn't be able to get a seat on a Wednesday it was so packed. Harry [an active pensioner volunteer who died in November 2016] used to be the driving force behind this – he used to tell us our rights and shout and swear at the MPs over the radio on DAGE's weekly radio programme, telling them what's what! We really miss him!"

DAGE has also organised daytrips and parties for the elderly. Everybody at the pop-in reminisces about the great trips and activities over its 18 years. "We have been on many outings, they have always been great days!"

Barbara is 83 and was born in Deptford. DAGE is very important to her too. "I've been here since it's opened and I'll be here until it closes. This place gets me out,

otherwise I'd be sitting at home looking at my four walls", she says. Barbara is a regular on DAGE's outings to the coast, and she also remembers the day when they visited the Queen's garden party at Buckingham Palace. "We had afternoon tea. It was such a lovely day." Barbara and Kathy also pay tribute to the Job Centre (a pub on the High Street) which has provided free Christmas dinners for DAGE members. They also recall being invited to a school through DAGE to tell young kids about how they used to live in the past, which they really enjoyed. Another highlight was the outing to the Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden in summer 2016, where they admired the wildlife, ladybirds, trees and other nature. "It's such a lovely space with lots of kids", they said. They were horrified when I informed them about the approved planning application to build blocks of flats on the garden and to demolish Reginald House to make way for more flats. "Why are they demolishing perfectly good houses?", they ask. "Buildings in the past were built to last. These flats were spacious and the aim was to provide decent living conditions for everyone. These new flats, restaurants and bars are all for the wealthy and not for the poor or for people like us." Luckily, these ladies live in what seem to be secure places and don't have to worry about moving or housing in general. "But we know that others are not in this position, and that a secure home is a luxury in today's standards." They can't imagine how the younger generation can afford to pay the rent and how people manage to live in flats. "The developers don't think about the people living there. They just find a gap somewhere and build on it, it's ridiculous, and it ain't for the poor!"

"And what about pollution levels?", Barbara continues. "If everything is so built up, there is less space for air to circulate and so we have more pollution! I live on the 9th floor and there are 4 flats with children on the same floor and they're stuck up there, you never see them, it's not healthy! We used to see children playing outside. Now, they are locked up in the sky without fresh air. With houses everything was more friendly."

Kathy also worries about the younger generation and what they'll be missing when they get older if DAGE (and other community spaces) could not continue to function. With a loss of funding to DAGE from the council due to their general budget cuts, Kathy asks: "What are people gonna do when they're older? Places like this won't exist anymore." Thankfully DAGE does not rely on a single source of funding and Tim Hamilton, DAGE's Project Development Officer, has received monies from some 30-plus funders each year to see DAGE continues. However, due to the huge funding shortfall from a major source, DAGE constantly need to fundraise to try and cover their full running costs and to ensure DAGE continues to provide services for the elderly.

Later I meet Eku, Carina, Ola and Laura who come here every Wednesday after communion in All Saints Church in New Cross. They always used to come here "to see the lovely lady [Diane who used to run the pop-in], she was very good to us." The four have been coming here for 14 years and they said it would be a great loss if DAGE could not continue. They have been to many of DAGE's parties and outings and stress the importance of such events for elderly people. They also have fond memories of Harry. "He was such a nice man!", they say.

Finally, I speak to Diane, the lady who ran the pop-in for many years, serving tea and cake to the pensioners, and handing out bread, rolls and other food stuffs donated by Marks & Spencer. Like most members at DAGE, Diane pays tribute to Harry who volunteered every day for DAGE and remains a shining example of the benefits of volunteering at DAGE in befriending more isolated pensioners and signposting those elderly who need advice and support.

Diane explains that she was an employee of Harry's from the age of 18 and worked for him in the nightclub *Cheeks* and *The Harp* pub, among other places. Diane worked for DAGE for many years following the centre being opened in 2001 with the support from various charitable funds. The pop-in was also assisted in its running by volunteers who Diane used to supervise. They mostly befriended but also signposted as Diane kept the centre stocked with leaflets on agencies for advice and support. Sadly, Diane's time at DAGE came to an end in January 2018 when the Big Lottery funding ran out, and she was forced to sign on for the first time in her life and look for a job. Diane falls into the category of women born in the 50s whose working life was extended unexpectedly in 2011. Diane tells me to look at WASPI – Women Against State Pension Inequality. They have demonstrated on the streets to be allowed to retire early but without success. Diane is angry at the government for the fact that she cannot retire for another year. "On my 64th birthday I will have to sign on and look for a job! I'm tired, it's time to put my feet up but I can't. I've worked since the age of 15 without a break! That's 50 years I've paid into the system and who is going to employ me at the age of 64?", she asks.

The pop-in is now run by volunteers, and on Saturdays, Scott is there, Harry's son who is just as devoted to helping the elderly as he was.



An outing with DAGE pensioners organised by the late Harry Haward

Photo: Courtesy of DAGE, with the kind permission to reproduce it here

DAGE and Rough & Ready

Text written by Anita Strasser in April 2018



Sharon and Harry Haward (front middle) receiving the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2008

Photo: Courtesy of DAGE, with the kind permission to reproduce it here

Sharon Haward works for DAGE, which also recycles used furniture to sell it on for affordable prices.[1] Since 2015, Sharon also runs the café Rough & Ready on 311 Evelyn Street, where DAGE used to store furniture. The funds raised from selling food, drink and the items in the café which people donate are used to look after the Deptford elderly. Sharon set up DAGE with her husband Harry Haward, a real Deptford character who was born here, loved Deptford, and died here in November 2016 aged 83. Since then Sharon's been struggling to keep the charity running, encountering many obstacles and severe cuts to funding. At times, she feels like giving up as it's simply too hard to keep going when constantly hitting brick walls, but she won't let the obstacles win. She tells of her experience:

"Me and Harry used to run a nightclub called *Cheeks* on Deptford Broadway, this was in 1997. Harry always looked out for the elderly and put on big party nights for pensioners. The business wasn't going well though over the last 2 years and then I saw something on DAGE in the South London Press. DAGE already existed – it had 5 members and was run by an 80-year old lady in a wheelchair. She was going to shelve it so we rang her to see if we could take over the charity. She agreed. We

[1] The furniture shop and pensioners' pop-in are located on the same premises on 71 Deptford High Street.



The late Harry Haward (centre) at DAGE Pensioners' pop-in - date unknown

Photo: Courtesy of DAGE, with the kind permission to reproduce it here

found an empty shop on the High Street, which was absolutely derelict. Just to make it inhabitable cost £11,000 with a local building company (now closed). We rented the premises and made an agreement with the owner that if our Lottery bid was successful, he would have to sell us the space for £90,000. He agreed as no-one expected our application to be successful but it was and so he had to sell it to us for the agreed price. We got a Lottery Grant of approximately £250,000, which paid for the full refurbishment and the set-up.

We have a pop-in space at the back, we offer free tea and coffee, cakes, no membership fee, and in the evenings I go out to collect donated food from Marks & Spencer and hand it to the pensioners. We also used to do 5 outings to the seaside and 2 big parties a year. All the food, tickets and transport was free. We have won the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service and other awards for recycling as we do furniture pick-ups to then sell for affordable prices to the local population.

The council always supported DAGE in the past, but in 2014 they warned us that there was going to be a cap, and that they would reduce 25% maximum of our funding. In the end, they took it all away, everything of the £40,000 we had previously received. Apparently, they wanted to fund other projects and we were told 'the council has no funds left'. We appealed but without luck.

At that time Harry started to get very ill and I had to spend more time sorting out the charity's affairs rather than being at home with my ill husband. It's all very sad, especially when you have devoted your life to caring for others. Before Harry's death, I had been a trustee for DAGE for 15 years and had never earned a penny. After Harry's death I had to get paid a little salary, after all I couldn't live on thin air. I do the book-keeping, the food in the café, I manage the shop, I sort bags of clothes we receive and bring them to DAGE, and I sell on e-bay – it's so much work.



Sharon preparing food at Rough & Ready in spring 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Until January 2018 we had a bit of Lottery funding but that's run out now. We still have some money from smaller trust foundations but we need to think about our future. We also try to support ourselves with the furniture we sell but there's not really any profit because we sell for very cheap and there are costs involved as well. It's also very hard to find volunteers – most stay for a day and then leave. It's hard work and they don't always realise just how hard it is when they sign up. The café also doesn't make much profit, so it's hard work to try and keep it all going. Since the council stopped funding DAGE, we have been struggling to keep afloat.[2] For a long time, I didn't even have time to grieve because I'm always so busy.

Harry was an exceptional man. When MRSA, the hospital bug, first came out, he protested with others outside Lewisham Hospital to have better hygiene policies. Because of that, Lewisham Hospital was the first hospital to have the hand gels everywhere. He also protested about the reduction of blue badge parking and made sure there were more blue badge parking spaces outside Lewisham Hospital car park. He always looked out for pensioners, but never saw himself as one of them, not even at the age of 83 when he died.

[2] At the time of preparing this book (October 2019), a deal was being negotiated and it seems the future of DAGE is safe again.

The pensioners bear the brunt of all the cuts. The outings to the seaside and the big parties have stopped as we don't have the funds to do this anymore. Many of our members have lost partners and while some of them still have family who look after them at weekends, sometimes DAGE is the only reason why they might come out during the week. DAGE fights against isolation and it is a safe space for pensioners to be in. We used to have the Pension Service come down to help pensioners with their benefit claims. A lot is not claimed as pensioners don't always know what they're entitled to. Also, the police community support officers used to come to see if there were any issues people wanted to raise. So, without these services, elderly people are isolated and not cared for. There is a lot of money out there, especially for the young and the arts, but not for essential services to look after the poor. The young should have every opportunity there is, but one day the young of today will be needing those other services and they won't be there anymore."

In the end I ask Sharon about the regeneration about Deptford. "What about those big developers – don't they have to bring back money to the community? Where is it? And I can't bear the word 'affordable' because it's only affordable to an elite few. Yes, Deptford needs a facelift but scrapping all the old and bringing in the new is just creating an elitist society."



Items for sale at Rough & Ready in spring 2018; proceeds go back into the charity

Photo: Anita Strasser

“Locals are priced out”

Text written by Anita Strasser in April 2018



Ashley and Sharon in Rough & Ready in spring 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Ashley worked at Rough & Ready for a couple of years until she had her second child in 2018. She absolutely loved it. She looked forward to going to work every day, where she experienced a real sense of belonging and appreciation. I spoke to her while she was still working at the café.

Ashley grew up on an estate in Forest Hill and remembers the local family-run pub which hosted all the local birthday parties and other celebrations, and where her family and friends met every Thursday. “This pub has now become flats and has turned a community where everybody once knew each other into strangers where no-one knows each other anymore”, she says. Ashley’s experience of regeneration is that it breaks up existing communities. She explains what she means:

“Building flats everywhere and taking away little shops takes the heart out of the community. Having pubs and little places that are run by ‘ordinary’ people whose names you know is what brings people together. Over the years you build a rapport with each other and people become like friends who pick you up when you’re having a bad day just by having a little chat with you. I think that being in one place over a long time brings the community together, like DAGE where you find the older generation together with the younger generation; with Scott [Sharon’s son] and with all the younger people coming in, helping out with the van and other work.”

Ashley mentions how surprised customers in Rough & Ready always were when they were being served by such a young person like her. Ashley was 27 when she worked there. She says that her nan always taught her to say hello and show respect to other people, values she now wants to pass on to her children. “Young people today are generally not brought up with the same kind of sense of community as older generations were and many don’t know how to talk to people. No-one wants to go into a shop today and speak to people, so customers were amazed when I started chatting to them.”



Ashley working in Rough & Ready in spring 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

During my visits to Rough & Ready, I have often overheard Ashley and Sharon speak to customers, whose names, life stories and personal circumstances they seem well acquainted with. Ashley mentions a lady who lives alone and comes in regularly. Ashley once asked her why she comes to Rough & Ready and she replied: ‘To be sociable; to get me out; I feel myself being panicky being indoors on my own every day.’ So, coming to Rough & Ready where people talk to her has had a really positive impact on this woman’s life. “You don’t realise what just talking to someone can do”, Ashley states. “She only comes in an hour a day but it is something that she looks forward to a lot. Of course I didn’t always have time to talk but if I did, I’d talk to her and she was obviously touched by it. And it made me feel a lot happier too rather than being somewhere where I could earn more money but where I would be just a number”, says Ashley, who is actually a trained accountant but preferred working at a café. “Going into work every day, having people around me that want to talk to me, people that are friendly, kind, that have stories to tell makes me happy.”

The people who come into Rough & Ready come from all sorts of backgrounds – builders, pensioners, elderly couples, people with disabilities and health issues. For example, there’s this bipolar gentleman who comes in daily and leaves money with Sharon to make sure he doesn’t go overboard with his coffee orders. “He gets a weekly allowance from a relative, and in order not to spend it all at once, he leaves some behind the counter. But he does like to go to the betting shop and sometimes runs out of money as he finds it difficult to stop, but he knows he will always get food and drink at Rough & Ready. He currently owes us £25, but we know he will pay up eventually. If it weren’t for us, he wouldn’t eat or drink sometimes. Then there’s this gentleman who recently had a stroke and comes in every day for his breakfast, which Sharon or I cut up for him to make it easier for him to eat it. Sometimes he is unable to pay on the day and we allow him to pay us back another day. And there is a young man at the age of 20 who has Down-Syndrome and comes in every Wednesday and sits in the same chair, which we keep



Rough & Ready in spring 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

vacant for him for when he comes. When certain regulars don't come in on their usual days, we are immediately aware of their absence and feel relieved when we see them again well and happy the next day."

Ashley says she has never felt so rewarded and appreciated anywhere else than she has at Rough & Ready. She felt like she had a family there, particularly after her nan's death, and working with Sharon was a wonderful experience.

When speaking to Sharon and Ashley over the course of a few months, I also met two elderly gentlemen – Paul and Jerry, who meet regularly for coffee and a sandwich and like trying out the new cafés in the area. I asked them about their experiences of living in Deptford and their views on local regeneration programmes.

Jerry has lived in Deptford since 1980; he lives in a council flat near Abinger Grove and Childers Street. He got decanted from Limberg House on the Pepys Estate in 2002 and was moved into his current council flat. But as his place is very near the Anthology Deptford Foundry development, Jerry worries that he might be evicted and moved on again to make way for more luxury flats. Paul is leaseholder of a former council flat nearby and wonders where the council tax is going. "Being a leaseholder", he says, "I pay a fortune for a caretaker and maintenance services, but nothing gets done. The council seems to have enough money to put towards private developments, but the old stock gets neglected. I've complained to the council many times. I've also been to a few meetings, but you never hear back from them and nothing gets done. The council just blames the government, but I think councils have more money than they say."

Both Paul and Jerry say that there is a serious lack of facilities in the area. "With large numbers of people coming into the area and no new facilities such as doctor's surgeries, the local population is not serviced. You wait for ages to see a doctor now." However, in terms of existing services, Paul can't praise Lewisham Hospital enough, where he had his cancer treatment. "There is no better hospital", he says, "but it's the only one in this growing area and they are threatening to close it! We're just numbers on a piece of paper, it's just about money."

Both agree that changes have got to happen in Deptford but that what is happening "is not for the likes of us. Locals are priced out." Paul and Jerry like trying out the new cafés in the new developments, but often they find that they cannot afford them. "There's a new café on Childers Street. It's huge and really posh. We went in to try it. We asked if they do toasted sandwiches, they said no; then we saw their giant sausage rolls and asked if they could heat them up, they said no. So we ordered two coffees, which were tiny with not much in them, and 2 of those sausage rolls and it came to £14! We can't afford that! We're old age pensioners! Then, I [Jerry] wanted to pay with cash but they said card only. I don't have a card! Luckily Paul had his card with him. What would we have done otherwise? We couldn't have paid. These places are only for people in those flats, they're not for us." Paul and Jerry had a similar experience when going to one of the new cafés under

the railway arches, where two coffees, a sandwich and a muffin came to £12.50, which they cannot afford. So even though they would like to participate in the new establishments, they are simply priced out.

Paul and Jerry used to love and regularly go to the train café, a café in a former train carriage located just off Deptford High Street, at the end of the railway ramp. “It had a wheelchair accessible ramp and toilet, it was reasonably priced, it was lovely. It cost a fortune to bring it here with the tracks and everything else. They said they would bring it back after it was taken away, but it’s not coming back. Same with the anchor, it was ours and then it was taken away. We are given promises but nothing ever happens.[1] The local population is simply not consulted or considered.”

Finally, Paul and Jerry talk about the new cycling route through Deptford. “This proposal for the new cycling route we got through the door some time last year – they’re planning to move bus stops and make changes to where you can turn with your car. Evelyn Street is one of the busiest roads in the area and is one of the major routes to the centre, and there is already too much traffic. With these changes the roads will be even more congested. Why don’t they consider locals? Moving a pedestrian crossing or a bus stop further away from the shop where you can top up your Oyster can have a huge impact on the elderly and people with walking difficulties.”



Rough & Ready café at 311 Evelyn Street in spring 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

[1] The anchor has since been reinstated, but only after 4 years of persistent campaigning by local residents. More information on p.77-80.

“The community we have here is the community no-one sees”

Text written by Anita Strasser in February 2018

Armada Community Hall is a community centre on McMillan Street, not to be confused with Armada Court – a small estate right next to the community centre with mostly council flats inhabited by elderly people. Bridget Perry is the Development Manager at the Armada and has worked there for more than 15 years looking after the elderly and those in need. I’ve been visiting Armada Hall for some time now, observing all the activities throughout the week and meeting lots of people. Bridget explains how the centre works:



Bridget serving roast dinner during the Armada Christmas dinner - December 2017

Photo: Anita Strasser

“The community space is provided by the Royal Borough of Greenwich, and we are very lucky because the local councillors are very supportive and interested in what goes on. We have various self-funded groups organising activities such as the Deptford Divas (who do arts and crafts) on Wednesdays, Play & Stay on Thursdays (organised by Charlie Baxter – p.150-153) and others. The core funding comes from a local charity, and renting the space out occasionally generates some income.” Bridget explains that the hall was built around 40 years ago; the flats at Armada Court were originally built for the over 55s, but some have been bought under Right-To-Buy and then sold on so now there are a few younger people living there too. Overall though, it’s mostly pensioners living in council flats. There is also a community garden at the back which is maintained by the residents.

“The community we have here is the community no-one sees”, Bridget explains. “Here you see the kind of care you experience in tight-knit communities. It’s about community networks that cannot have a value put on them through box ticking. For example, Lenny, who lives at Armada Court, has a dog. When he went on holiday to Spain, he asked Vicky, who used to work here, to look after it. He then had an accident and remained in a Spanish hospital for 6 weeks. All this time Vicky continued dog-sitting, making sure the dog had food and walks. Another example is Les, who has problems with his eyes and came into the Armada once with a loose frame. Although he can kind of see, he can’t judge how far people are away from him and he was worried he’d drive into people with his mobility scooter, so I went with him to the opticians. When we arrived, they were still shut so we went for a coffee at Rough & Ready. When the optician’s opened, we got the frame tightened and went back to the Armada. Altogether, it took just over an hour. It’s not always signposting people need, sometimes you just need to take people somewhere.”

According to Bridget, the biggest problem in this day and age is loneliness and mental health issues. “Sometimes people just come in for a chat and a cup of tea, or to use the loo.” She says you might plan your activities for the day and then the day pans out completely differently and you don’t get done what you set out to do. “It depends on what happens – one conversation might end up as one-month’s work, or somebody needs help with repairs and I email the council for them. Sometimes I might end up just chatting to people all day long but this is just what some people need – a chat, company, getting out of isolation and loneliness.” People also often pop in and help out; there are lots of volunteers that go out of their way to help: fixing things, getting some shopping, bringing biscuits, calming down a mental health patient on the estate, and other things. “What box do you tick for that?” Bridget asks. “There’s no price to put on that!”









Top

Pensioners during the Christmas dinner at Armada Community Hall - December 2017

Bottom

Pensioners during Friday lunches at Armada Community Hall - October 2017

Photos: Anita Strasser

When I ask Bridget about housing, she says that Right-To-Buy in itself was good as it gave ordinary people the opportunity to own their own home. However, she thinks that the money the councils made should have been put back into housing. “Not allowing the council to do that was the biggest mistake and has now resulted in this shortage of really affordable homes. Some people who bought their homes under Right-To-Buy then sold the places and now rent them out. Just look at the neglected gardens in Watergate Street, they all used to be lovely. Now you can tell which houses are privately owned and rented out. People come and go, sometimes you have 10 people living in one house because they can’t afford anything else. Personally, I think pensioners who live on their own in larger accommodation which they don’t need should be rehoused in nice 1-bedroom bungalows to free up larger

houses for those that need it, but then there are no such places available, so this is not an option."

Bridget is clear that nobody can stop the regeneration of the area but that little things can be achieved by getting involved. "Realistically, just because we can't afford it [new housing] does not mean new flats should not be built, but they should respect and listen to the local community. If we let them, the developers will walk all over us so it's important that we don't just sit there and do nothing."

During my visits to Armada Community Hall, I met some of the people that come in regularly: the Deptford Divas, Deptford pensioners, community workers, volunteers and other wonderful people. I recently also met the Sir John Evelyn Charity Pensioners who meet regularly at the centre for Friday lunches and told me about the work the charity does. A lady who prefers to remain anonymous explains:

"The Sir John Evelyn Charity is for the relief of the poor of the parish of St Nicholas and St Luke's only. It grants a small pension to poor-worthy pensioners (as Evelyn[1] defined it) in the ancient parish of St Nick's, and gives grants to organisations within this ancient boundary. If there is any money left, small grants are given to organisations of St Luke's as well. Sir John Evelyn invested his money well, and since the 17th century there has been this exceptional source of money for the elderly of the area of benefit. The money is used to help pensioners financially and to combat isolation; it is used to organise an annual trip (including some spending money), a Christmas Party with a financial gift, and a small amount of money paid to eligible pensioners each Friday at the Armada, where lunch is also provided on that day. The Armada Community Project is incredibly important as it is the hub where everybody can come with any issue they have. If the issue is not within the remit of the centre, the volunteers of the Armada will try and help in any way they can, often signposting people to the service they need, such as signposting homeless people to the 999 Centre for example."[2]



Notice on the wall at Armada Community Hall in autumn 2017

Photo: Anita Strasser

"Need has increased in recent years, but also changed", they tell me. "The pensioners we know are fairly comfy – the main problem is isolation. Isolation is a major issue, people are lonely, but food brings people together and so the Friday lunches are great for that. However, those really struggling are the young and families, the unemployed or those on low incomes – they feel the impact of welfare cuts the hardest. What we really need is a food bank, right here, but with Lewisham on one side and Greenwich on the other, this area doesn't really fit into any category. The biggest problem is food because when one doesn't have enough to eat, everything else becomes an issue too: work, well-being, health. It's crazy that in this day and age we're talking about hunger! Kids go to school hungry and come home hungry, and this has a knock-on effect on everything else."[3]

[1] John Evelyn was a 17th century English writer, gardener and diarist who lived at Sayes Court, Deptford.
[2] The 999 Club is a charity on Deptford Broadway that helps the homeless in Lewisham and South London. More information on p.188-193.
[3] Lewisham has the highest proportion of children and young people (29.6%) and older people (25.7%) in economic deprivation in England (Voluntary Action Lewisham website).

When I ask about the regeneration schemes going on in Deptford, the pensioners don't feel it's for local people. One lady exclaims: "People feel that they are being pushed out. They are unable to afford property, even the rent. There's not enough social housing and yes, they are building Convoys Wharf but that's not for locals. And these cafés, they are not for local people either. Many here are ex-dockers, they want a bacon and egg sandwich in a Greasy Spoon – not an arty cake in some expensive café. Some new properties are advertised as being in West Greenwich rather than Deptford – well why is that? It's just a way of getting people in because many of these people wouldn't move to Deptford. The area is still very poor which is not acknowledged at all. You have all these fancy flats and the Waitrose, all of which entice barriers of segregation. On one hand you have £800,000 flats and on the other flats infested with mice. There is also a major alcohol and drugs problem here; there is a major undercurrent – people are scraping by, kids grow up in an environment thinking 'I'm not gonna get a job', the schools are bad, many people are illiterate, so they need to find another way of getting by. We're not supporting this but it explains why people might go down that road.

Wealthier people are being sold a fake dream too. They think this area is so up-and-coming and posh, but once you go beneath that posh layer, you see reality and we need to get people to understand this. We seriously suffer from overcrowding with people living on top of each other. This here is the reality, but it's all covered up with sticking plasters so that well-off people don't see this."

"We need more funding for community centres to enable them to do more and open food banks. We need to keep things together, people have a need and they should be taken into account. We need to make life easier for those struggling; if everyone is better off, everything else will get better by itself."

Armada Community Hall window display - April 2018
Photo: Anita Strasser



“Affordable housing is the joke of the century”

Text written by Anita Strasser in March 2018



Brenda and Chrissie during the Ketso Workshop at Armada Community Hall - February 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

In February 2018 I did a workshop with three members of the Deptford Divas at Armada Community Hall. The three ladies are also part of the Sir John Evelyn Charity Pensioners and regularly eat lunch with other Deptford pensioners at Armada Hall on Fridays. They have been coming to the Armada for many years and have witnessed the many changes to the area. In the workshop we talked about Deptford and its regeneration – what they like and don’t like about it, and what a better vision for the future would be. For the workshop I used a toolkit called Ketso – an African word (from Lesotho, southern Africa) meaning action. On the Ketso website it states that “the toolkit was invented in Lesotho and has been refined over two decades of action research with communities across the globe. With Ketso, everyone can participate and be more creative. Ketso gives everyone a voice, so everyone is more engaged.” With the small group I was working with, it was less difficult to give everyone voice, but the toolkit helped to ensure everybody got a chance to speak and voice their opinions. There was time to think, write and discuss, as well as listen to others’ views and change one’s opinion. The different-coloured leaves helped to organise thoughts and ideas and create a visual image of the process.



The newly opened Marcella Restaurant on Deptford High Street - January 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Maralyn has lived in Gilbert House on the Hughes Field Estate for over 20 years. She likes most of the regeneration going on in Deptford. “I’m not your average Deptford pensioner”, she says. “I like the more upmarket places which I can try out. I’m very keen to try Marcella, the new Italian restaurant, and I like the new wine bar, the new shops and the new, media-savvy people. Overall, I find that Deptford has a great variety of ethnic shops and is generally an interesting hotchpotch of cultures. I also think Convoys Wharf will look nice, the riverside walkway with the swing bridge is a great improvement, I love the new Deptford train station, the High Street is improving, and I feel that Deptford is now a lot safer, although I still wouldn’t walk around alone at night because of gangs hanging out on the High Street. If we had more walking PCs, I’d feel safer walking home alone at night.”

Still, Maralyn believes that gentrification makes areas safer. “Years ago in Southwark you wouldn’t have walked around at night, it was way too dangerous. Now, you can walk around no problem. You might not be able to afford the restaurants but it’s safer to walk there now. We have to go forward and accept change, accept the shops even if you can’t afford them, but I can see that many older people cannot access this change. Also, many of the nice new things had to be fought over as well: access to

the riverside or opening gated communities, for example, was only granted after local populations expressed their views. So this can also be seen as a positive thing as issues can give local people voice sometimes."

However, Maralyn agrees that most of the changes are intended for people with money. "The only thing I don't like is that the new houses are built for people with top jobs and high salaries who can afford these places. I do worry about Convoys Wharf, the access to the river and whether there will be some affordable housing. The new developments contain lovely flats but they are not affordable; even if you live in a housing association flat, it's not secure tenancy and they can put the rent up when they feel like it. Housing now is not affordable unless you're working full-time earning a minimum of £50,000 a year, so when they say affordable, it's the joke of the century. We need new life here but we need to be able to exist together."

Maralyn used to do the electoral roll and got a real insight into some people's living standards, particularly in flats above the shops on Deptford High Street. "At times it was hard to guess just how many people were living in one flat and what the arrangements were in terms of bed-sharing", she says. She also became aware of people living in garages and sheds. "It's like third-world standards in a country as rich as ours! It all boils down to cut-backs, whether that's to do with the council, the police or with community centres."

Deptford High Street looking towards Evelyn Street from the train station in 2014

Photo: Anita Strasser



Brenda is a retired council employee (housing) and really likes Deptford, its transport connections, its diversity, and above all, its people. "I think there is something about Deptford people – they are easy to talk to, easy to get on with, and they are very friendly." Brenda also likes the new blocks of flats being built all around, especially those along the river. "They look good and it's quality housing", she asserts, "but it's not for everybody, is it? It's bringing people into the area who want to live here probably because it's convenient, but many go and work in the city or elsewhere because you need to earn a lot to be able to afford to live here. What about all the young people in Deptford? They will all want to get work some time in the future,

but not everybody can work in an office somewhere and they've not brought any industry back into the area, it's all been replaced with housing. There used to be little factories all around, but now it's just apartments and they are not really introducing new jobs." Brenda sums up Deptford's (and London's) regeneration as "replacing industry with outpriced housing", making it impossible for local people to buy or rent. Brenda says that this has resulted in the breaking up of families and community networks. With young adults having to move out to other areas as they are unable to afford where their parents live, the whole family structure of looking out for each other, helping with childcare instead of having to pay huge amounts of money for nurseries, and looking after elderly relatives has been broken up. "We need more affordable housing in order to keep families together! Whole families are being split and we're also losing community because local people can't afford all these new places and the new people coming into the area often don't get involved in our communities." All in all, Brenda thinks change is good and many good things are happening, but change has got to be fair and for everybody.

Chrissie lives in Armada Court, where she, together with her neighbours, maintains the community garden. For Chrissie, community networks are really important and what she appreciates about Deptford is that she feels she belongs here. "When I go to the market, people always say hello even if you don't know them, and if they see you sitting there, having a cup of tea, there's always someone asking you 'Are you alright? Do you need anything?'" But Chrissie agrees that this sense of community



Deptford Market on a Saturday afternoon in autumn 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

is getting lost with many new people not interested in getting involved in existing communities. "What we do here at the Armada, table-top sales and other activities, even if we advertise on the internet or put leaflets out and sit outside, people don't turn up to things we do here, they don't seem to want to know."

Being a mother and gran, Chrissie's biggest concern is the lack of places and spaces for kids and youngsters. In her view, there aren't enough parks and clubs,





Chrissie (top) and Michelle (bottom) selling handmade Christmas gifts at the Armada Chrismas Fete - December 2017

Photos: Anita Strasser

and with the adventure playground in Deptford mostly shut, there simply aren't enough places for kids to go to. "When we were kids, we used to play on the streets and schools used to be open at weekends and during school holidays and volunteers used to keep an eye on us. Now, the streets aren't safe anymore and the council is not putting enough money into keeping places like the adventure playground open. Where are the kids supposed to go when their parents are at work?", she asks.

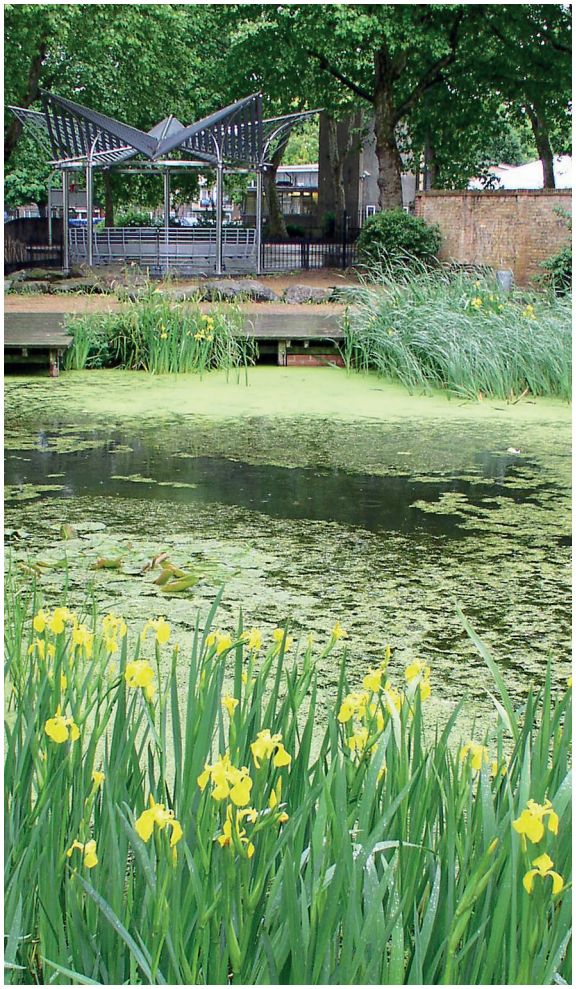
In terms of Deptford's regeneration and housing in the area, Chrissie says: "All the new properties are not for the likes of us really, and even housing association flats are too dear for some people. One of my grandsons who's 24 still lives with his mother because he can't afford to rent, and another one of my grandsons lives in a housing association flat. He's got two children and works at the museum, and he says he'll never be able to save up for a deposit to buy because the rent is so high. Chrissie also points out the condition of some of the flats rented out to poorer people. "Sometimes you have 5 or 6 people living in flats on the High Street, paying high rent prices for places I wouldn't let anybody live in, mouldy walls and things like that, but they do because they can't afford anything else!"

Deptford High Street is a particular discussion point for Chrissie. She doesn't feel safe at all coming up from the train station to Evelyn Street. She thinks some of the shops look terrible and with many shops shut, the whole street doesn't look very inviting. "The problem", she says, "are the high rates and lack of business. The new people don't shop there and I think the council wants poorer people out anyway." Chrissie points out how nice the new places under the railway arches look, and that they should make other High Street shops look as nice as them but without increasing the rent so that local shopkeepers can remain. "If they do all the old buildings up nicely and keep the rates down so that shopkeepers and stall holders can afford to stay, then the rich people might come in and shop there too."

What strikes me about these comments from this workshop is that these three pensioners don't seem against the physical regeneration of Deptford at all and don't dislike the new blocks of flats, cafés and eateries, and things looking different. What they dislike is that most of these improvements only cater for the people who can afford the overpriced properties and who aspire to a certain kind of urban lifestyle, which does not include existing communities. The fact that these changes mean the displacement of existing residents and the breaking up of their community and family networks is a particularly sore point. It seems to me that people just want to be included in change and that, if this were the case, there would be far less resistance towards regeneration processes.

Twinkle Park and Charlotte Turner Gardens

This text was written in December 2018 by Carol Kenna, multi-disciplinary artist, founder of Greenwich Mural Workshop and the Charlton Park Reminiscence Project, and coordinator of Twinkle Park Trust. Her article describes what it means to work with local communities to respond to the regeneration of their neighbourhood and to ensure that regeneration proposals work towards more sustainable and inclusive redevelopment. She worked primarily with Arts and Environmental improvement funds, central government Single Regeneration Budget and local government regeneration programmes that invested in neighbourhoods to create a better quality of life for existing local communities. Carol says that what is happening today is not a regeneration programme, "it's simply developers clicking their fingers to make more profit". Although working with local authorities is never easy, Carol's work demonstrates what local communities can achieve when given the necessary resources.



Gazebo across irises in Twinkle Park in summer 2011

Photo: Carol Kenna / Twinkle Park Trust

Stephen Lobb and I set up Greenwich Mural Workshop (GMW) in 1975 with the intention of using mural painting as a way of working with local communities to express their hopes and fears, brighten their neighbourhoods, help communities work together and make an impact on the city. The murals were intended to have a short life – just 5 years, as we began by using indoor emulsion paints. Contrary to expectation the murals lasted much longer and when they did show signs of wear and tear we found the host community wanted it restored or repainted or created in mosaic to ensure a long life. We also found that the initial mural often led to building an adjacent pocket park or campaigning for environmental improvements to the neighbourhood.[1]

We collaborated with architects, landscape architects, neighbourhood resource centres, other arts organisations and eventually became part of a community forum monitoring development proposals and how they met the needs of the community that would be affected. Although both of us were trained as fine artists – Stephen taught in an architecture college and I had undertaken a postgraduate course in social and economic planning, we were both naturally interested in the design and layout of the city and how it supported or ignored the indigenous communities, and we were both interested in using our artistic skills in this setting, finding the fine art scene stultifying. Working

[1] Greenwich Mural Workshop has recently published *For Walls with Tongues: An Oral History of Street Murals 1966-1985* (2019).

with tenants associations primarily, we worked to produce murals, set up a silkscreen print workshop to produce agitprop posters and banners for community organisations and trade unions and began working with schools to help them refurbish their playgrounds to make them more interesting and responsive to the children's needs and wishes. All our work centred on working co-operatively with other groups and in a setting where residents and professionals including us artists brought their relative skills to the table to find a solution to any problems as they presented themselves to us.

I became chair of the Greenwich Community Forum and then joint chair of the Greenwich Waterfront Development Partnership (established in 1991), a tripartite organisation that sought central government Single Regeneration Budget funds to support projects along the length of the Greenwich Waterfront. The three partners were local authority, business and community, all working well collaboratively.

Deptford fell under the auspices of the Creekside SRB partnership and their 'Building Bridges' Programme.

In October 1992 I was asked by a resident of Rowley House, Watergate Street to help redevelop the adjacent and derelict local authority playground – once known as Hughes Fields Recreation Playground – as a play space for local children. The play area was less than enticing as it housed shoulder high weeds, rusted play equipment, Victorian railings and an abandoned metal container. So began a life long relationship with the residents of Hughes Fields in Deptford.

Twinkle Park in 1994, before refurbishment

Photo: Carol Kenna / Twinkle Park Trust



By February 1993 we had set up the Twinkle Park Steering Group involving Hughes Fields Primary School, the school's After Care Club, Hughes Fields Tenants Association, various officers from Greenwich Council departments – Leisure Services, Strategic Planning – architects and landscape architects, GMW and EEA (Emergency Exit Arts). An eclectic mix, but enabling potential conflicts between activists and the establishment to be worked out through amiable conflict and solutions found – a methodology we use to this day.

GMW ran workshops in the primary school, collected ideas of how a park could work to support both the needs of the locality and the school, and raise the necessary funds to implement the proposals. Taking on this role we attended many tenants association meetings and gradually overcame their natural suspicion of the interloper.

The proposals to re-establish Hughes Fields Recreation Area as Twinkle Park and refurbish Charlotte Turner Gardens, establishing a pedestrian friendly route between Deptford High Street and the river, were neighbourhood changing and therefore potentially financially prohibitive. Our attitude was that if Deptford was becoming gentrified then the resident community required an equally adventurous, well-designed, top quality materials playground. Deptford City Challenge arrived about that time but concentrated on Deptford High





Top

Pond weed clearance in Twinkle Park in 2009

Bottom

May day celebrations in Twinkle Park - May 2007

Photos: Carol Kenna / Twinkle Park Trust

Street. Deptford Power Station was demolished in 1992 for a riverside complex with the social housing element at the rear of the development away from sought after riverside apartments. For about 3 years the loss of the power station opened up views to the river for the council tenants. Unsurprisingly the new development – Millenium Quays – re-obscured these views but through community pressure the original single wall of flats was divided into two or three blocks, but still the social housing was at the back of the development. Gentrification was coming to Deptford threatening a strong cross borough community who identified strongly as Deptford people, not Greenwich or Lewisham.

Between 1994 and 1996 the Steering Group looked at various ways of implementing the refurbishment of 'Twinkle Park' – the name taken either from the amount of broken glass on the ground that 'twinkled' in the evening lamplight or the name of the original playground supervisor – Mrs. Twinkle.

We were determined that the project was developed by local people not some outside developer so we considered a volunteer workforce, fruitless offers for help by TV personalities and finally agreed that the Trust would raise the money, develop the masterplan and employ professional contractors to undertake the work.

By 1996, despite a slight hiccup whereby the primary school and local council had tarmacked the play area as playground space, we persuaded Greenwich Leisure Services that to provide a grant to develop a public park that could operate both for the general public and the school was an innovative and vibrant idea. A requirement of the grant was to include Charlotte Turner Gardens in the plans in order to encourage greater use of this public space, empty even during a scorching summer.

Working from ideas that had arisen during workshops with the school we prepared questionnaires delivered throughout Hughes Fields neighbourhood and undertook a 'Planning for Real' workshop in Armada Community Hall. The Armada Hall workshops included the Steering Group, local authority architects who were coincidentally working on plans to expand the primary school, other local architects, landscape architects, officers from the local authority and the Creekside SRB Agency, local residents and children.

A masterplan was developed from these discussions, presented back to local people for their agreement and amendment, and eventually in late 1996 a landscape architect was appointed to 'detail' the masterplan.

It was agreed that the Steering Group should be set up first as a business and later a charity and that GMW could either become 'employed' by the Trust to continue to raise funds and oversee the project or be a Trust member but not both. It was agreed that GMW would become the Trust's coordinator thereby establishing the



Opening celebration with paper boats on the pond in 1999, led by Nick Raynsford Greenwich MP

Photo: Carol Kenna / Twinkle Park Trust

Trust from local representatives and implementer of the project.

Greenwich Council eventually agreed this format, but would elect a local councilor as a member of the board and a lease was negotiated between Greenwich borough and the Trust, leasing both Twinkle Park and Charlotte Turner Gardens to the Trust for a period of thirty years with the option of renewal in 2028.

It took 3 years to conclude this lease. At the same time an agreement was set up between the council, the school and the Trust for use of the park for play facilities during the daytime in return for subsidised community use of school facilities that had been designed into the school when the school buildings were expanded, achieved by GMW and the council architects working together to produce a design for the park to support this. Sadly more adventurous ideas such as the tree walk linking the second floor of the additional classrooms through the park trees fell by the wayside. Again this was due to not finding creative borough officers willing to work outside-the-box and a joint belief that blue-sky thinking is essential for the resulting compromise to be adventurous.

The masterplan was enacted step by step. Twinkle Park was installed in two sections. The pond area first, followed by the games area, necessary as work on the school development was delayed. The gazebo design and working floor compass was the result of a public competition, open to children, residents, and professionals resulting in eleven designs displayed in Armada Hall and voted on by the public. Architect Piers Gough chaired the competition group and although his choice was not the choice of the public he expertly chaired the group through the necessary scrutiny of the designs before they were passed to an engineering firm to ensure it would stand up properly. In all, three designs were chosen, one for the structure of the gazebo, a second for the bench gates that could be wheeled open or shut to isolate the games area from the rest of the park for school use and the third for the floor design.

Over the past twenty years the masterplan has been enacted in stages relying on GMW and the Trust raising the funds. At each stage the original masterplan proposals were subjected to renewed consultation by the local community to ensure that the original proposals were fit for purpose. Some changes were made but the essence of the masterplan was maintained and some interesting elements added – an apple orchard, naturalised cherry trees whose fruit could be safely eaten – influenced by knowing a local resident annually harvested the cherries from the street trees, fitness equipment and then a toddlers play area. The overall design referenced the nearby River Thames, something that many residents were unaware of. Each stage contained an 'art work' – so Twinkle Park included both the gazebo and a purpose-built tug dinghy as a seat. Benbow Street included school railings with a wave motive and the corner projected as the bow of a ship, also a circular stone roundel that one day might be replaced with a fountain that reflects the state of the tides; the Gardens have a functional analemmatic sundial and the toddler play area sports a Viking ship and sculptured stepping stones that reflect drawings

developed with Rose Bruford nursery school children and members of the Spice playscheme and produced by local sculptor Richard Lawrence.

Throughout, residents' ideas have been incorporated – retaining the cobbles in Benbow Street, gleaned from their use as ballast in the cargo ships leaving Deptford Dockyard; keeping the Victorian railings around Twinkle Park, protecting the ancient Plane Trees with TPOs (Tree Protection Orders).

The completion of each stage is celebrated with a public festival event, which over the years has developed into an annual festival. In between, the Trust and GMW fundraise to support events such as Chinese New Year, environmental and wild-life courses, a secret mosaic pathway in Twinkle Park and the I-spy poster to raise people's awareness of the local history of the area.

Over the years the Trust has received a variety of accolades, from BURA (British Urban Regeneration Agency) for developing a model of local implementation that could act as a template for other communities; from the Civic Trust for quality of design, from Keep Britain Tidy for quality for the two parks. We have raised near £2million pounds to implement the improvements and various allied projects and we constantly look for ways that the Trust can continue as an active element in the local community.

Will we ever finish? This year (2018) we restored the pond to the park, it having mysteriously disappeared overnight in 2013. We work to stay involved with local developments, Convoys Wharf, redevelopment of the school yet again and the Sayes Court project.

Charlotte Turner Gardens with the newly installed ping pong table - summer 2017
Photo: Anita Strasser



“We need green spaces – we are breathing in a lot of toxic air!”

This text was written in January 2019 by Jacky Jones, long-term Deptford resident, community worker, volunteer and grandmother, who I met at Armada Community Hall. She tells the story of how she dealt with her own loneliness and depression by becoming a member of a community that helps others in need. Worried about the increasing levels of loneliness and mental health issues in a vastly growing area, she has recently set up a befriending service, offering the most precious gift: time to listen.



Jacky Jones in front of the Mulberry Tree in Sayes Court Park - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

My name is Jacky and I have been living in Deptford/New Cross for more than 30 years. When I arrived in the 80s, I moved into a flat in Arlington House along Evelyn Street SE8 with my young daughter. My son was born not long after. When I first arrived, I didn’t think much of the area. In fact, I felt very depressed because I didn’t know anybody and went weeks without talking to anyone. Where I come from, a small village in Wales, people are very friendly and always nod their head when they see you. In London it was difficult to even get eye contact and not being acknowledged made me feel even more depressed. Some days I would smile and acknowledge

people whom I had seen on many occasions. If I got one smile, I felt it wasn't so bad. I suppose it's what you make of your situation. Overall, I wasn't in a good place mentally when I moved here, but I knew I had to do my best for my daughter!

To help me with my loneliness and depression, I started doing voluntary work for a charity in London. I was supporting families of people in prison in the London courts. I also trained to be a befriender and worked on the national and local helpline. Because of my experience in the courts and other volunteering work, I was offered paid work in the Deptford nursery my daughter went to. I was also able to take my son into work, which was a bonus.

From my flat in Arlington House I could see young children at the bottom sniffing glue. I was mortified and realised, I don't want my kids to grow up hanging around the streets so I decided I wanted to run an after-school club for my and other children to keep them off the streets. I went to college to do a business course and to get a diploma in child care. This enabled me to be qualified to run the after-school club. During that time, I realised how little there was going on for young children or how little there was on offer to help parents to go back to work or college. After my qualifications, I did a business plan and I had to present my ideas to a grant committee with people from the government and trustees from the Sir John Evelyn Trust. Doing all the qualifications and volunteering work had really lifted me and given me so much self-confidence and determination to make things work. I couldn't believe I was sitting in front of this committee talking about my business plan! The funders liked my proposal so much, I got a start-up grant there and then! I ran the club in Charlotte Turner School (formerly Hughes Field Primary School and now Invicta Primary School) for years until financial issues prevented me from continuing.

In the 30 years I've lived in Deptford, facilities for the young have not really changed. Other things have changed like more blocks of flats and less green spaces. Even I live on land which used to be a park for local people. The council sold it over 20 years ago and now the land has houses on it. Obviously, I am very pleased to be able to live in one of the houses – the flat in Arlington House was too small for a family with two children and I moved over 20 years ago. I can now grow food in the garden, which is my passion. But all these big construction companies promise to build extra facilities for the extra people and then don't. Regeneration is important but it's also important that they provide extra schools and facilities to cater for the needs of people. Lots more flats are being built but not everyone can afford to buy or even live in them. It's grossly unfair to the local people whose families have been extended and live in overcrowded conditions for a long time. Some families have moved out and many are even leaving London. Some retire and move into the countryside or the seaside, but others move because of the stresses and strain of living in the city. With all the gentrification going on and all the new people moving in, they build up into the sky because there is no more room on the ground and that means more isolation for people. I know because I lived in a tower block for over 10 years and I felt totally isolated because you never see anyone. This isolation then causes multiple other issues such as mental instability and depression, which then cause strain on national health services. Also, being surrounded by such tall blocks is enough to make one feel suppressed. When I come out of my house, I now have a 22-storey and other, smaller blocks in front of me. This takes away a lot of day light and makes me feel closed in. It's not good for our mental health. Here's a little poem I've written:



Jacky in her favourite green space: Sayes Court Park - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Oh no, walk out the door
Oh no, another floor☹
Oh no, how many more
Oh no, can't see the sun no more☹

Another big problem with all the extra people coming in is traffic, which has got so much worse over the years. And because of that, we are breathing in a lot more toxic air! The pollution has gone so bad and at the same time we are losing all the green spaces. There are hardly any left in Deptford and I often walk around with a scarf covering my nose and mouth because of the pollution. With all these huge building projects like Convoys Wharf for example, there must be money about. These big corporations deal with millions if not billions! We need green spaces and places for people to go to.

I'm not saying everything about gentrification is bad; it's much better than slumification. The type of people that are coming in now just have different requirements. Many like eating vegetarian food and like to sit in coffee places. Not all the people coming in are rich; many move here because that's the only place they can afford. We all just want to make a decent living and make the best out of life. In Deptford, people congregate from all over the UK and the world. I'm not a local here, although after 30 years in Deptford I do see myself as a local. My children certainly are. Anyway, London's always been a place where all kinds of people congregate, and if you have the energy and passion, anything can be achieved in this city. But I fear London is running out of space and it will just be high-rise homes in the future. And the problem is that when there's gentrification going on, there's mostly always deprivation alongside of it. Statistical information shows that Deptford was one of the most deprived areas in London 30 years ago. I don't think this has changed much.[1] The only thing that's changed is that more and more people have moved in. Years ago, I used to go to a lot of council and planning meetings and already then they used to say Deptford was up-and-coming. Oh yeah? I see more betting shops than ever! With the influx of so many different nationalities who gravitate to London for a better life, different people face different challenges every day. The social make-up has changed a lot in the area and for me it's about getting the balance right to create change for all people. We're all different people with different needs and we need to live together the best we can. I think the vibrational energy is much better now than 30 years ago so evolution can be a good thing but it depends on your situation whether change is good for you or not.

There is such a lack of social clubs for the elderly and for the young, there is nowhere for them to go and because of that I have recently started up a befriending drop-in in my local community centre, doing holistic healing and other things. Older people, especially those that have been in Deptford for several generations, are often too proud to seek help and admit that they are lonely. So many older people out there are lonely, have no-one to talk to so I'm here for them. I make them a cuppa, talk to them, give them a little back massage, or we do some knitting and drawing. It's not going to be easy, but it's achievable if there's enough support. If I can help only one person each time, it's worth it. I feel lucky that I was able to achieve what I have.

[1] According to the *Index of Multiple Deprivation* 2015, Deptford and New Cross are still among the most deprived areas in London and England (Voluntary Action Lewisham website, 2016).

My Deptford Story

This text was written by Garry Lengthorn in April 2018. I met Garry's dad and wife at one of the Friday lunches for pensioners at Armada Community Hall. We spoke about Deptford's regeneration, and Garry's wife, who used to accompany her father-in-law to the Armada, suggested that I speak to Garry as he was born in Deptford. This contribution came out of this conversation.





1965: Garry basking in the outdoors; Garry's parents and brother on the day of his Christening

Photos: Courtesy of Garry Lengthorn, with the kind permission to reproduce them here

My name is Garry Lengthorn and I was born in April 1965 in Watergate Street, Deptford. I can truly say I am Deptford born and bred because, being the second of two children born to Maureen and John Lengthorn, my mum was allowed to give birth to me at home! No.4 Rowley House in Watergate Street!

Here is an early picture of me in the pram basking in the outdoors!

Bordering on the edge of the Royal Borough of Greenwich it would be all too easy to say that I was a Greenwich child, but I have always been proud of my Deptford roots; an upbringing that was tough for my dad, as we lost our beautiful mum to cancer when I was only 7 and my brother 12!

In December 1969 we moved to Chester House overlooking Sayes Court; with shops below and a fantastic park in front of us it seemed a step up from Watergate Street; it was a shame that we lost my mum within a few years and she never had the chance to enjoy our modern flat and childhood life.

My early school life at Hughes Field was largely a pleasant experience, albeit interrupted by my mum's passing. I had a great set of friends who all lived either local in Watergate Street or the surrounding streets of the Dacca Street and Sayes Court estates.

We were always looked after; when I was about 9 or 10 I got collared by the Sayes Court park keeper for being in the park playing run outs when the park was closed; one of the older teenagers politely asked the keeper to let me go when he was threatening to call the police; it seemed polite at the time!

Football started to become a big part of my life playing 20 a side football every Sunday in the gravel pit at the end of the park with all the lads from the area, playing football in Sayes Court with my dad and brother, as well as going to Millwall with my dad, brother and uncles; fantastic memories I will never forget!

As I developed into my teens and attended West Greenwich boys school, it became clear that Deptford was a much tougher place to grow up as a teenager; avoiding fights and trouble was something you learned very quickly; an instinct I hope I still have today. Unfortunately, many of my friends at West Greenwich did not have that solid home life behind them and I am sure are now either in prison and/or struggling





Garry's football team and school group at Hughes Field Primary School in the late 70s

Photos: Courtesy of Garry Lengthorn, with the kind permission to reproduce them here

to cope with what life threw at them; I consider myself very lucky, but also realised early on that a solid family background was a key part of why I survived these early years.

Once I left school with a solid, but uninspiring set of qualifications I attended South East London College after qualifying for a paid computer course; from this I got my first job as an IT engineer and this has kept me in work to this day.

Deptford was a tough area to live during those early 80's, as I left school and started working life; the community spirit was there in patches, but families were struggling under the cloud of a Thatcher government, the real threat of a nuclear war and a general mood of depression; cars regularly being broken into and the threat of burglary real, as I found to our cost on at least 3 occasions. Deptford High Street and the market were in decline and pubs were not nice or safe places to drink.

Most of my close friends left the area and started to live in the surrounding areas or the Medway towns. Deptford was certainly not somewhere you chose to live, and it was only getting worse.

During the early nineties I met my wife and, as she comes from South West London, it was inevitable that we moved out. It is fair to say that I was not sorry to leave.

My dad to his credit remained in Deptford (my brother had already moved out to Kent during the eighties) and never had a bad word to say about Deptford, going about his usual way of life; if he ever felt threatened he would just give someone a piece of his mind; something he continued to do into his eighties!

During the nineties and noughties, we continued to regularly return to Deptford to see my dad with our kids and stay over; this typically coincided with a family party, a game at Millwall or just a visit to see my dad and enjoy Manze's Pies and Mash (of course with Liquor)!

But then we started to see the changes; gradual at first with the old Surrey Docks being redeveloped and then parts of the Pepys Estate, as well as the Deptford Market and station areas. Now Deptford was being touted as the new Shoreditch; edgy, but the place to be seen! The old Job Centre that I had visited on one or two occasions become a cool bar and all of a sudden, a number of the original pubs become Kitsch or Hip to be in. Little Nan's became a hip cocktail bar to go to and suddenly Deptford was becoming popular again.

It is easy with all this going on to look back and say what a shame Deptford is changing! It is easy to say that with rose tinted glasses if you don't remember the bad old days of the eighties when it started to become a very unsafe place to be.

Deptford has always had a fantastic community spirit; this started in the war when people's houses were bombarded by German bombers, but it continued in the sixties when the council decided to demolish some fantastic properties and build a concrete jungle, as well as the eighties when parts of the UK and South London were becoming very gloomy places to live.

People were proud through all of this to come from Deptford; to think they had survived their childhood and come through it. They always looked after the old folk; even today the community spirit is amazing.

Do I think Deptford is better for the changes we are now seeing? I have mixed views; as I said earlier, Deptford was a dangerous place to live in the eighties and certainly you had to be very lucky or have a good solid family background to survive this; today the developers are all over the area and no doubt property prices will go up and people will be forced out; it will be very bad if this happens, as once again this will put a huge strain on the community spirit.

I have confidence that no matter what happens, Deptford will remain a great place to live, as it has seen many changes since the turn of the 19th century and it has always survived. Yes, it will see a whole new community enter the area, as it has done in the past, but I suspect the mix of old and new folk will ensure that the underlying spirit continues.

I would also like to see Deptford prosper again and hope this includes its rich heritage of shipbuilding and dockers. With the plan to regenerate Convoys, it is likely the rich heritage of shipbuilding will be celebrated once again, so Deptford should become the home of this historic boat craft rather than a popular estate agent!



Rowley House on Watergate Street where Garry was born

Photo: Garry Lengthorn

“It scares the hell out of me bringing up boys in London”

Text written by Anita Strasser in March 2019



Charlie Baxter with two of her boys at the Scouts Hall in Deptford - October 2017

Photo: Anita Strasser

Charlie Baxter has lived in Deptford for the past 11 years and in that time, she has got really involved in local communities. Charlie volunteers as a Scout Leader at 2nd Deptford, the local Scouts Hall, she volunteers and is trustee at the Sir John Evelyn Trust, a charity which looks after the elderly, and she volunteers at Tidemill School, reading with the children and acting as a parent governor. Charlie also has two jobs: she is Fun and Wellbeing Leader at Tidemill School and runs her own business – Baxter Party Services – organising family events in the local area such as the Summer Festival at the Armada Hall/Charlotte Turner Gardens, the Stay & Play Group, a weekly toddlers’ play group at the Armada, the Halloween, Christmas and New Year’s Eve parties at the Scouts Hall, and privately booked parties. Charlie also has a family with 5 children, some of whom are Scouts and attend local schools. Although Charlie does so much for local families, she doesn’t think of herself as doing anything special. “Being in touch with local families and having my fingers in all those pies is also for my own benefit as it gives me links for my own business. Also, my kids are the next generation living in Deptford and I want them to grow up in a safe area so if there’s anything I can do to improve it I will. So, my voluntary work is not just out of the greatness of my heart, it is for a purpose as well!”









Summer festival in Charlotte Turner Gardens organised by Charlie Baxter - August 2018

Top

Mum and kids selling bows (left); local resident Serena and colleague selling food (right)

Bottom

Local dad Chris entering the festival with his girls (left); kids having fun at the carousel with parents and kids watching (right)

Photos: Anita Strasser

Charlie used to be a community worker and tells me a bit about the kind of work she used to do: “For example, if a family came to the Children Centre or the nursery and said ‘I need help with housing, I’ve got damp up my walls’, we would speak to a housing officer, get medical reports and try to get the problem fixed. Another common issue we would deal with were women in abusive relationships that had run away from home and needed help with rebuilding their lives. There used to be this phenomenal course on offer, a *Discover-Me-Course* that was funded by the Children’s Centre where you would witness the transformation of these broken women who couldn’t cope with the most basic things in life into confident, independent women. The course was all about knowing yourself again, learning how to get out of bed in the morning and back to bed at night without fear; basically, how to have a normal life again, how to go back to work, how to get their shopping and whatever else they needed. It was amazing to see the journey they went through. All this has stopped now, the funding is gone, advice centres have closed due to funding cuts, meaning women can’t escape abusive relationships and many families live in unhealthy conditions for years.”

Despite Charlie being incredibly well connected, she wouldn’t know where to send women now if they came to her saying, ‘I’m being beaten up by my husband, I don’t know what to do’. According to Charlie, there is no community worker at her local nursery anymore, no-one doing home visits anymore and no-one to ask for advice on this. The only nursery with a community worker Charlie is aware of is in Greenwich, but as Charlie comments, “if you’re suffering from domestic violence, you’re not going to go far from your house. The fact that you’ve come out of your house is a miracle in itself, so having to go somewhere else is out of the question

for many. I just don't understand why they've taken away community workers: you've got a nursery full of families, you got a children's centre, why not have a community worker that can help with common problems?"

Charlie tells the story of a lady who recently went to a family liaison officer at a school, asking for help with being rehoused. "Her house is covered in damp from top to bottom so that it almost looks like it's the wallpaper. Her baby, who is sleeping in the living room as the damp in the bedroom is worse, has asthma, coughs all the time and has chronic throat infection because of the damp, and yet no-one is able to help her. She's been to the doctor several times, spoke to housing, spoke to the family liaison officer but no-one is behind her saying 'This is not acceptable!' She's been fighting this for 2 years. It looks like she's not getting anywhere. It's shocking!"

On top of all that, Charlie says there is another problem – the stigma of being poor, particularly for single mothers, who are often perceived and represented as being dumb and as benefit scroungers. Charlie argues that jobs for mums, jobs that happen at a time when the child is in school and that offer 16 hours a week such as a dinner lady or cleaner, are scarce and that childcare is too expensive to take on a job during school hours. "If you're a single parent with young children and need to pay for childcare because you're working, you need to earn £30,000 a year, if not £40,000 now, to be able to afford that. Childcare is expensive and there is no way on earth some of the women in this area would be able to afford it. And even if they were to work full-time, with housing benefit, income support and council tax reductions taken off, they would never be able to support themselves with the little they get paid!" Charlie herself knows what it's like not being able to afford to work as once she had to turn down a job at a school she really wanted because it would have left her worse off than on income support, a cut she couldn't afford. Now, with her children being older, she has two jobs and works ridiculous hours to support herself and her family. And yet, she manages to do voluntary work as well.

When I ask Charlie about how she perceives Deptford and what she thinks of the changes happening, she expresses concern about crime, particularly on her road which houses a centre for young ex-offenders and where incidents and patrols are frequent. She is particularly worried about knife crime and the safety of her children, particularly her boys. "The amount of times I've turned on the news and a lad down the road has been stabbed and killed, or there's been a fight and someone's in hospital, and all my friends on Facebook go 'Oh my God that's So and So's boy'. I really don't want to be that mum who receives that phone call. I've got 2 girls and 3 boys, and it scares the hell out of me bringing up boys in London. So, if I can influence the area in any way, I'll do that. My children are the next generation and I don't want them on the streets in gangs and with knives, that's why I try to get young kids involved in the Scouts group, to get them off the streets. We really need an evening club for 16-20-year-olds, a safe place for them to go and hang out, but there is nothing!"

In terms of regeneration, Charlie is all for bringing money and businesses into the area – but only if there is enough social housing and if it benefits the right people for the right reasons, something which, in her view, isn't happening. "These new developments – they are supposed to give a percentage back into the community, but I don't know where the money is gone because I can't see anything done for









Halloween Party at the Scouts Hall organised by Charlie Baxter - October 2017

Top

Local residents Tracey and Charlotte having fun (left); Charlotte and Michelle selling drinks and popcorn (right)

Bottom

Barmaid serving drinks (left); other guests having fun (right)

Photos: Anita Strasser

the local community. We tried to get money for a desperately needed new roof for the Scouts Hall, but we were told the Section 106 money had already been spent! Really? Where? The Scouting Association are known world-wide, so don't tell me you don't know anything about local community groups or where to put your money. Developers are making huge profits and local people are losing out. It's shocking! With only £5,000, a drop in their ocean, they could do something really lovely for a community group. I know parents or some elderly people that only come out once a week to a group. Without that group, they would have nowhere to go. I see so many people that are isolated because there is nowhere for them, where they can find support and information. There used to be a lot of local services and support groups – there was a Somalian mum's group, a Polish group that started out for vulnerable mums that had come over and developed into a post-natal group that was run by health visitors, there was a breastfeeding group, baby massage, lots of things. So many groups have disappeared because funding was cut and they can't afford to rent the spaces anymore. There are now massive gaps here for people of all walks of life for all different reasons."

Luckily, there are a lot of people like Charlie who are making up for some of these gaps, providing assistance for the most vulnerable on a voluntary basis and organising affordable events for local families. Even if the community work is also for her own benefit as Charlie says, the positive impact of her commitment to the area will be felt by a lot of people. Through this research I have met so many people who spend their own time helping others. I have witnessed so much good work going on in and for communities, work that is not heard about, not known about, not praised enough and not funded, and that is a real shame!

How do children aged 8-10 see regeneration in Deptford?

Text written by Anita Strasser in February 2018

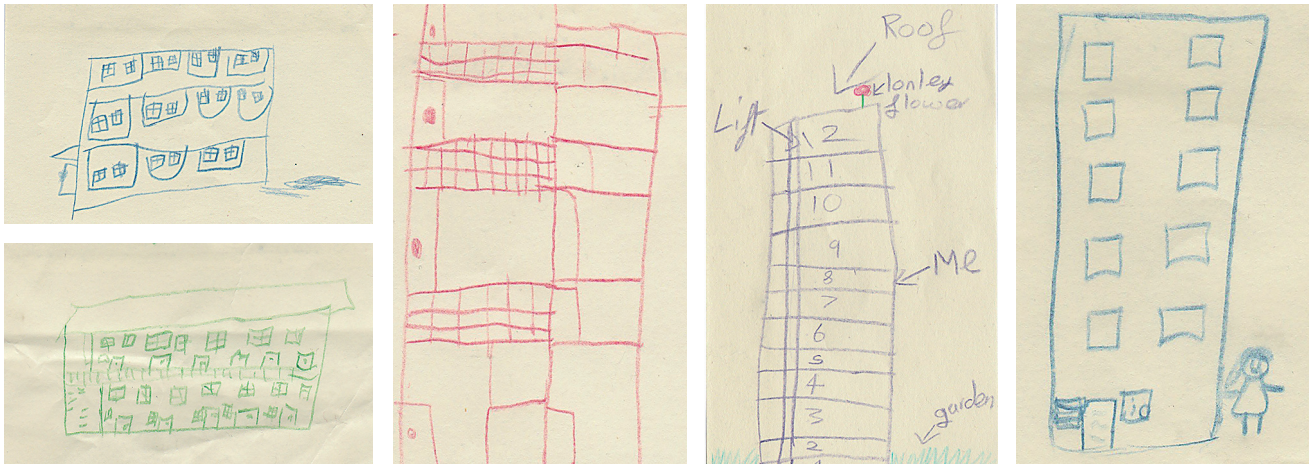


Lego® models built and placed by Cubs on a Deptford map (hand-drawn by Adam Ramejkis) during a workshop at the Scouts Hall - January 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

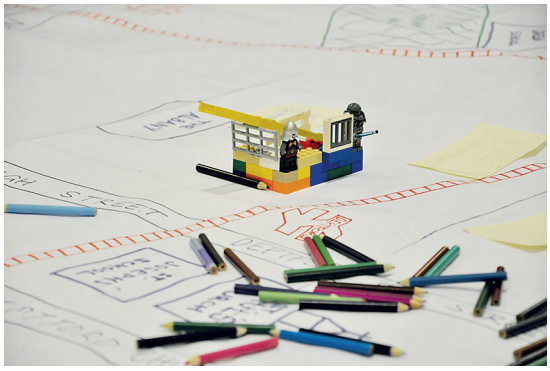
In January 2018, me and Adam, assisted by Scout leaders Peter and Michelle, ran a Lego® workshop with the local Cubs (8-10-year old Scouts). We started off with a quick orientation task on a giant hand-drawn map of Deptford before asking the kids to draw the buildings they live in and place them on this map. This showed that the majority of these kids live in blocks of flats in the heart of Deptford. We then asked them what they like and don't like about living there. They complained about being unable to sleep because of noisy neighbours banging and stamping on the floors and playing loud music in the middle of the night. Regarding the positive things, most comments were related to space: a spacious bedroom, space to play football, and having parks nearby where they can play and relax. When we shifted the conversation to Deptford as a whole, and all the new tower blocks being built all around, they commented on the huge amount of flats being built and that there aren't enough schools and surgeries for all these new people coming in. In their view, there are too many flats; flats that block out the sunlight for others, flats which stay empty and flats built for the rich.

We then asked them to build buildings with Lego® and place the models on the map of Deptford, where they think they belong. In the first round, we left the brief open



Drawings made by Cubs showing the buildings they live in

to see where their imagination would take them. This didn't show anything unusual or surprising, so after talking more about Deptford and the regeneration of the area, we specifically asked them to build something that is missing in all this, something that would make Deptford a better place. This is what they came up with: a hospital because there are so many new people but no new hospitals or doctor's surgeries, a police station (located next to the hospital so that injured people found by the police could go straight there) as there are too many robberies in the area, a few new schools with one that involves animals in education, a café where people can overlook the Creek, a garbage centre that recycles automatically – situated near the river to stop all the plastic bags being thrown into the Thames, a 'safety place' in Deptford Park where people can relax and feel safe, and more parking spaces outside schools and nurseries.



Model of a police station built by a Cub

Photo: Anita Strasser

When we asked them at the end what they've learnt from this workshop, two children said: "If we used our imagination we could make Deptford better" and "I learnt that if we put into Deptford what we have made here, then Deptford would be a lot better place." Finally, one child was put forward to be the next mayor to which he responded: "I'm gonna go in a crane and get a wrecking ball and break down some of the flats and build more schools. That's what I'm gonna do for the future!"

Prior to this workshop, I'd met the Cubs and the leaders and observed a couple of Wednesday sessions, which were then led by Peter Hulcup. Peter also used to be in charge of the Scouts, but Charlie Baxter had recently taken over as Scout Section Leader. Peter told me a bit about the history and the workings of the different sections.

"Scouting started in 1907 and already in 1909 we had 2nd Deptford St Luke's (now St Nicholas' & St Luke's) and the Scouts have been here since then. Ron Hoskin, a local businessman and Scout leader, did all the fundraising at that time to have the Scouts hall built, which is why it's called Ron Hoskin Hall. It stands on Lewisham land but the building is owned by the Scouts. There are three different sections: the Beavers on a Monday, age group 6-8, the Cubs on a Wednesday, age group 8-10, and the Scouts on a Tuesday; they're age group 10-14. There's also a group called







the Explorers (aged 14-25) but we don't have any of them here – it's harder to get older kids into the uniform. The uniform is good, it means that everybody is the same. It doesn't matter if you come from a millionaire family or a poorer background, everybody is the same. We have 7 laws and a promise to which we adhere. There's a fee of £3 per child per night and £1 if they're not present to pay for the insurance."

Charlie then told me about the issue with funding. "We constantly need to fundraise, and the kids do a lot of the fundraising from families or people they know. It's difficult sometimes as we need funds for the activities and to maintain the building. For example, the roof has been leaking for 5 years – we really need to do the roof and also paint the outside as the walls are chipping off. But we also need the time to do it. Time is always an issue. It's really difficult to find volunteers. Many young people come for a bit and then disappear again, so we're desperate to find committed volunteers as this is eating into our family life. I won't get home till about 9 o'clock again tonight – it really affects your family life. There's a lot of work to do that no-one sees, all the organising and planning, and we could really do with some help with grant writing. We're also working on getting a new kitchen, the old one is too small and not well-equipped, and you can't really teach kids how to cook in here. We've got money to do the electrics, and then we need to do more fundraising for the rest. We have to do it slowly, bit by bit. An infrastructure service company, who are doing a lot of work in the area, have promised to give us disabled access because we're not being inclusive without an entrance suitable for disabled people, but they haven't come back. We've been chasing them but there's been no response."

The Scouts Hall on Childers Street - January 2018
Top
Paint chipping off the exterior
Middle
The small kitchen inside
Bottom
Knots display in the hall
Photos: Anita Strasser

As a mother of 5, Charlie joined the Scouts as she recognised its value in providing a safe space for children to be together. Charlie first started helping out, then she became Secretary and then Group Scout Leader. "There's still a lot of stigma attached to Scouts. People say it's only for boys but it's not and the kids are proud to wear their uniform. And when they wear the uniform on the way here from home, they're insured as well." Charlie says that about 60% of the kids come from deprived backgrounds and from single parent families. If families can't afford to buy the uniform, the group helps them with that. Charlie says there are clear benefits to being a Scout: "We have a couple of kids who came here angry – they've obviously been through some really difficult situations in life… it makes you wonder what they've been through and also what kids that are not here are going through. Then they came here and they have become the kindest children. They still have their moments of course, but overall they're very kind now. One has also become a Sixer, this means that he looks after 3 others here."

Charlie explains what they do: "We start off with the basic skills in life such as cooking, sewing and doing maths before we go on to sailing and other things.





Cubs building models during the Lego® workshop at the Scouts Hall - January 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser

But we do lots of other stuff such as woodwork, working with hand-powered tools, first-aid, particularly CPR, bike maintenance, building a grotto for Christmas with stuff from the garden, we go bowling, they're given compasses and a map to find things, team-building, we have a cinema night with popcorn – that's always a fun night, they love camping, and they can also earn badges. The Beavers do a bit more art and craft."

During the first evening I observed with the Cubs, they did team-building exercises. The second time, Peter showed them how to make a fire and how to grill marshmallows without burning them or their hands. It was a fun evening and the roasted marshmallows tasted lovely. I can really see the benefit of this place and the activities, and how important this place is to the kids and leaders alike. They also really appreciated the Lego® workshop and I'm planning to come back to do more activities with the kids.

Lego® workshop with Cubs at the Scouts Hall - January 2018

Photo: Adam Ramejkis



“I think it’s going to be turned into a block of flats”

Text written by Anita Strasser in July 2019



Evelyn Community Centre

Photograph taken by a Cub on the Photography Walk in July 2018

Following on from the Lego® workshop with the Cubs, I did another two workshops with the same group in summer 2018. The first was a photography walk and the second a photo-elicitation session, where the kids responded to the photos they had produced the week before. The purpose was to continue the conversation about regeneration and engage with Deptford with a more critical eye.

As we had to start and finish at the Scouts Hall, I planned a 1.5 hour walk down Childers Street to the Lord Clyde and Evelyn Community Centre and back via Arklow Road and the Anthology Deptford Foundry Development. I went out with a group of 15 Cubs, 2 Scout Leaders, one parent and my husband, who all helped me keep the kids focused while keeping an eye on traffic and making sure that the children wouldn’t run out into the streets. I asked questions, recorded answers and helped the kids take photographs with three different cameras.

The walk and talk started at the controversial empty business units on Childers Street, units that, according to the website of Deptford Folk[1], were intended to provide much-needed employment floorspace and to support the local economy,

[1] Deptford Folk: a constituted park user group for Deptford Park & Folkestone Gardens in Deptford SE8.

but which have been priced way above the quoted price, thus making the units unaffordable to local tenants. At the time of the walk, the developer was planning to make these premises into residential units, but their application was being challenged by Deptford Folk. When I asked the kids what they thought the units were designed for, one child replied: “It’s supposed to be an office to sell flats!” This is interesting considering that many developments do have a sales suite on ground floor level. When I asked why they thought it was empty, they replied: “It’s too expensive!”

We took some photos and continued our walk to the old cardboard factory where Warren, a Cub’s father and who came along with us, worked when he was young. “I used to make sure all the women had lots of pamphlets to stuff in envelopes otherwise they would shout my name out. They’d go WARREN!!!! You see, they used to get paid by the amount of leaflets they got through so they used to be really quick in shoving them into the envelopes. Those were the envelopes that would go through your door as trash mail. That was my Saturday job.”

We noticed that one end of the building was empty and covered in graffiti while the other end had already been developed into a new-looking block of flats. We first looked at the undeveloped end and asked the kids to explain the condition of the building:

“It hasn’t been used for centuries.”

“I think it’s going to be knocked down and turned into a new shop.”

“I think they’re going to renovate this place.”

“There’s a lot of graffiti on it.”

“It’s old and abandoned.”

“I think this was like old abandoned flats which was long ago and now I think it’s going to be renovated or demolished to make something new.”

Peter, one of the Scout Leaders, explained that it is a Grade B listed building, which is why the old front of the building is still there. “The front, the face of the building, cannot be demolished, only cleaned up, but the interior and the back can be completely redeveloped, which is what is happening.” When I asked the children to look at the redeveloped side of the building they noticed:

“There’s no graffiti on it!”

“It doesn’t have the grills in front of the windows.”

“This building has flats in it, it’s not abandoned.”

“If people live here and somebody comes and does graffiti they would want them to go.”

We continued and stopped outside the now closed Lord Palmerston pub on the same street, which Deptford Folk had been trying to save to preserve cultural heritage and to have it re-opened with improved facilities that could cater for the rising numbers of people moving into the area (as stated in their online communications). I asked the children why they thought it was empty. Interestingly, they could not really come up with an answer. Instead, we got some funny responses like the owners didn’t keep it clean enough or drank too much of the wine themselves. Another response was: “I think there are dark forces in the pub.”

In the end, Warren explained that the beer in pubs has become so expensive that people can't afford it anymore and are buying it in the supermarket instead, to which one child replied: "It's always about money, everybody always goes after money." Another child then remarked: "Money money money money!" We then talked about another pub building – the Lord Clyde. Peter informed us that the building used to house two things. After guessing "pub" immediately, the children started shouting out whatever came into their heads: "a pharmacy, a bank, a shop, a betting place?" Peter explained that downstairs used to be a bar and upstairs was a boxing club and a gym. "After years and years of being in the community and deemed nice, it was suddenly declared not fit for purpose. Now we have flats". One child responded: "Why does Deptford have so many flats?" They were able to answer the question themselves: "Because with new people coming, flats are more ideal because they can house more people."

Right page

A block of flats on Evelyn Estate

Below

The Lord Clyde - former bar and boxing club

Photographs taken by Cubs on the Photography Walk - July 2018





When we started looking at the blue tower blocks on the Evelyn Estate, the children's responses became more interesting. One girl thought that "poor people who live in the streets and don't have any food and water can live in those blocks" but she was very quickly corrected by another boy who lives there. He told her in no uncertain terms: "I disagree with you. I live here and my friends live here, not poor people from the streets." A different child noticed the colourful mosaics around the estate and commented that people are attracted to colourful places. We continued to Evelyn Community Centre, where Peter got married and regularly goes to meetings to discuss changes to the area. One child immediately recognised it as a community centre. "People can come here for help, attend meetings to talk about the community and the area, children can come and play while their parents are working (it has a nursery at the back) and homeless people can come here to ask for advice." At the end, one child said in a very sad voice: "I think it's going to be turned into a block of flats because they know what the rest of the place is like!" Peter assured them this was never going to happen because people would be putting up a good fight to save this centre.

Cubs sorting the photographs in the order of taking them, and responding to the images - July 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser







At the end, we went to the Anthology Deptford Foundry site on Arklow Road, going past the houses that stand on what was once a park. Warren remembers playing in that park when he was a kid. I pointed the children towards the towers covered in blue material and asked them what we were looking at.

"Flats being built."

"Apartments!"

"Construction going on."

"I know what it is… for the FBI."

"It might be the Illuminati."

It was time to go.

Each child had taken 2-4 photographs which we discussed the following week. After a brief task to see what they remembered about what we'd done the week before, I lay down all the images and asked the kids to organise them into the order of taking – basically laying out the walk in images. They were very keen to find the images they'd taken and after that excitement passed, they managed to put them in the right order, almost anyway. We then went through all the buildings they'd photographed to see if they had managed to retain any of the information from the week before. They remembered some of it, like that the houses on Arklow Road replaced a park and that most new buildings are for flats.

I asked them again about the tall buildings covered in blue material at the Anthology Development by Arklow Road. Their responses were:

"I think it's flats being built for the future."

“I think it’s gonna be turned into like, big and wide flats.”

“I think it’s for people that have like, people like landlords, people who like work for the mayor.”

“I think it’s for people that are moving to London, they might want to live in those new flats.”

“People with money.”

At the end, I asked the children to choose the 15 best photographs – each child chose one. Unfortunately, there wasn’t enough time to talk to them a little bit about composition and what constitutes a good photograph or to ask them about the reasons for their choices other than “I like it”. Parents were already waiting to pick up their kids and one child still had to be given its Moving On Award (from Cub to Scout) before the short closing ceremony. We quickly hung the images on the wall of the Scout Hall and the rest of the images were handed out to the children.

The Cubs’ chosen photographs on the wall of the Scouts Hall - July 2018
Photos: Anita Strasser







Evelyn Community Centre: community store and much more

Text written by Anita Strasser in May 2019



The volunteers of the Community Store at Evelyn Community Centre, including Natasha Ricketts (front left), Keith and Jane Walton and local councillor Silvana Kelleher (back left in that order) - April 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser

In spring 2019 I spent some time at the Community Store in Evelyn Community Centre in Deptford, speaking to the amazing volunteers and the families that shop there. Natasha Ricketts, manager of Bunny Hop Day Nursery located at the centre, and Keith Walton, Chair of Evelyn Tenants and Residents Association with an office in the centre upstairs, were approached by Lewisham Homes to set up this Community Store to provide families on low incomes with affordable fresh food. Together they developed a concept, and with funding from Lewisham Homes for the first year, Natasha and Keith decided to go for it and opened their store for the first time in February 2019. Supported by over 10 keen volunteers – local residents such as Jane Walton, Keith's wife, local councillor Silvana Kelleher, and others, some of whom are also members of the scheme, the store became an instant success. "Our plan was to make it look like a small-scale store where members could pick what they want", Natasha tells me. "The idea was to remove the stigma of food banks and the perception of begging, and to provide people with a shopping experience in their local community space. People pay £3.50 a week membership and for that price they get about £30 worth of shopping each week. Our aim was to slowly build up to 20



Evelyn Community Centre on Evelyn Estate - April 2019
Photo: Anita Strasser

members in the first 6 months and to then slowly increase the number of members. However, on the first day, already 20 people signed up and we had another 20 on the waiting list. When we shut after the first day, we just couldn't believe how well it went. For me this was a massive eye opener to see so many people in need of this. A lot of our customers are also parents from the nursery, and to see their happy faces when going home with 4 bags full of fresh food is just wonderful!" The shop is open every Tuesday from 5-7pm.

Good quality surplus food is donated by leading supermarkets to FareShare on Deptford Trading Estate.[1] Places like Evelyn Community Centre pay an annual membership for a particular package, which they collect from FareShare. If requirements increase, the membership fee increases. On top of their weekly delivery, surplus food orders can also be made online on a live feed, depending on what is available, enabling the centres to top up their weekly deliveries with special additions. As for Evelyn Community Centre, Keith collects the food which can then be frozen and stored on site. "And it's great when you can provide families with that bit of extra and special food, for example for Easter or Christmas", Natasha says. "Some families are literally on the breadline and it's nice to see that some of these families have become members of the Community Store. To see people's faces when they leave is so rewarding! People don't feel ashamed coming here, that's why we have the tables out for people to sit down and talk. And while they're waiting, they can have a cup of tea and some biscuits. It has a real community feel."

All this involves a lot of groundwork and work behind the scenes, which Natasha and Keith do on a voluntary basis: going online every morning to see what surplus food is available, collecting food, freezing it, informing people, advertising, organising, etc. Sometimes they also contact companies directly to see if they can obtain free nappies or food for Christmas to give to families. One Christmas, Natasha contacted Aldi to see if she could pick up some surplus food. When she

[1] FareShare is a charity that fights hunger and food waste (fareshare.org.uk).



Outdoor space of Bunny Hop Day Nursery run by Natasha Ricketts at Evelyn Community Centre - April 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser

arrived, she was given so much food that she had to ring Keith to come with the minibus as she couldn't fit it all into her car. They then distributed all the food among the families that came for a pickup on Christmas Eve.

Natasha Ricketts is founder and manager of Bunny Hop Day Nursery located at Evelyn Community Centre. She trained at a nursery in the same location about 25 years ago and, after working there 18 months, the opportunity to set up her own nursery came up. Together with another lady who now works elsewhere, she set up Bunny Hop in 1996. Although it is a private nursery, Natasha decided a long time ago that she wanted the nursery to be available to local families on low incomes. With the view that she wasn't going to retire early, and the fact that she has comparatively low overheads despite increases in rent and food prices, she charges low rates. This, together with her flexible attitude to timings and other requirements (i.e. children are supposed to bring their own lunch but as some families cannot afford this, Natasha often feeds the kids), and the fact that Natasha is willing to be here all day long, has enabled many struggling parents and families from all different walks of life to leave their children at the nursery while they go to work, fulfil carer responsibilities or have the chance to get much-needed rest. "There are children here that unfortunately haven't had the best start in life and if we can help them a little bit, we will", Natasha says. "Most our children come from high-rises", Natasha explains, "and you know which ones because they're the ones that want to be outside all the time cos there's no balconies and a lot of the flats are over-occupied so when they come here, they want to be outside, come rain or shine."

Because Natasha and Keith are at Evelyn Community Centre all day, they deal with the day-to-day tasks that come up. Although there is a caretaker for the building, Natasha and Keith sweep floors, clean the toilets and kitchen area and do a lot of the repairs – particularly Keith. Keith says that because Lewisham Council is currently in the process of transferring the centre over to Lewisham Homes, repairs aren't being dealt with. "For me that's unfair because we've all been paying our

rent and taxes to the council (there are others that also rent spaces) and they're not putting the money back into the centre", he says. One of Natasha and Keith's biggest questions is: "Where is all the money going?"

With a 2 to 3-year wait on getting repairs done, Keith and Natasha prefer to fix things themselves. At one point, Natasha even got a loan out to have a trip hazard fixed in the garden. It would have been the council's responsibility and Natasha tried ages to get it remedied, but rather than waiting for an accident to happen, Natasha decided to sort it out herself.

When the centre seemed to be under threat a couple of years ago, Natasha and Keith were ready to fight. Evelyn Community Centre was on a list of centres that were potentially going to be closed, so each centre needed to compete to remain open. Natasha and Keith collected signatures, listed all the things they do at the centre and went to the consultation meetings. "There's no way they can take this down, there's too many kids that need that place, where would they go?", Natasha asks. They managed to save it but Keith says there are now possible plans to knock down the centre and rebuild it within 50 new properties for rent but apparently without parking. "How are people supposed to access the centre then? It's all very well trying to reduce traffic and building cycle lanes, but not all people can cycle or walk. We have people with mobility issues here – how are they going to access their community centre? Sometimes plans are really badly thought-through."

For now, the centre remains open but with the council not hiring out the centre to more user groups, and with so many of the council's assets being sold off to develop flats, you never know what will happen next. "We just hope the council is going to start hiring it out again. We already have some user groups such as us, the nursery, a Vietnamese dance group, a church group, a knitting and crochet group – we all pay rent. There are a lot of other things people want to do, like an after-school-club, a dance club for the youngsters with hip-hop and street dance, and these things bring people together, it stops segregation! And it would bring in revenue too. Community centres are vital for an area, especially this one because it's right in the middle of an estate."

Since the cuts and the closure of so many vital centres that used to help people with paperwork, Natasha and Keith have also become go-to persons for people needing help filling in forms and other things. Natasha expands: "One day this elderly gentleman came here, looking for the housing office, and I said 'Sweetheart, that closed years ago. Is there anything I can help you with?' So we sat down, I filled in his forms, put them in an envelope, put a stamp on it and posted it. After that he kept coming back about 2 or 3 times year to get help with his paperwork. If we hadn't been here, what would he have done? Or the kids that are in the basketball court outside, when it's really hot, they come in asking for water. So in the summer, we tend to put jugs of water in the fridge so we can give them chilled water."

Other times when Natasha opened the community centre for people in need was when shelter was needed for residents having been evacuated due to a fire breaking out in flats on Evelyn Estate on two different occasions. Being so well connected with local people, Natasha was informed immediately upon which she informed residents that she had opened the centre. Both times, residents spent the night there, had access to shelter, hot drinks and a quiet space for mourning

and counselling upstairs. Another time she opened the centre during a power cut, enabling mothers to prepare bottles for their babies. Natasha loves living in Deptford, she likes its diversity, the community relations she has built up over the 30 years she's been here, and she likes her place within the community. Despite working "from stupid o'clock to stupid o'clock", if she can help local families in need, she is more than happy to do so.

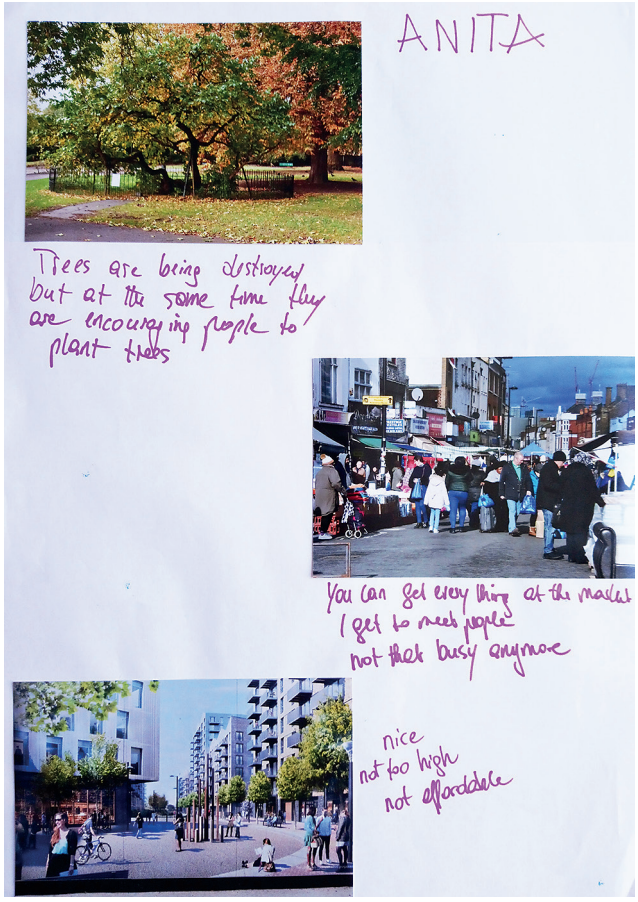
Spending time at the community centre, particularly Tuesday evenings during the Community Store, I can see how important this centre and its initiatives are for local people. There is a buzz in the hall with people chatting, kids playing and parents doing the shopping. I sat down and chatted to a few people to hear their views and experience of Deptford, regeneration, housing and welfare cuts. I met two young mothers who shared their experiences of being homeless due to unfortunate circumstances in their lives. They talked of sleeping in a car with an 8-month old baby or sofa-surfing for months on end; of being treated as a number in homelessness statistics rather than as a human being; of the horrific, stressful and lengthy bidding process to finally get housed only to find themselves too scared to be in the kitchen with their children in case the dodgy boiler, which isn't being replaced, explodes again. I also met Rebecca, an 11-year-old girl who dreams of being an artist and who eagerly wrote a poem about how much she loves Deptford (see below). As her mum did the shopping, she made a beautiful collage using some photographs I brought in to express her views about Deptford. Also other shoppers wrote comments and made collages with images of Deptford I'd taken over the last couple of years.

Rebecca's contribution made during Community Store hours at Evelyn Community Centre - April 2019

Photos: Anita Strasser







Above

Esther and Anita's contributions made during Community Store hours at Evelyn Community Centre - April 2019

Next page

Rita and Ekra's contributions

Photos: Anita Strasser

I also spoke to Natasha and Keith about their views, and like the members I chatted to, they like some things and are sad about other things. One of their bug bears is that, in their view, there isn't enough consultation with residents and that decisions seem to be made by people not living in the area. Natasha's particularly cross about the way Deptford High Street has been and will be changed (pavements have been flattened to merge with the road; promised parking wasn't delivered; the planned one-way system). "When they first said the pavements needed doing on Deptford High Street, they said that all the residents and tenants had been sent letters, inviting them to come to consultations. So I asked a few traders on the High Street and none of them had received any letters. So, I don't know who decides what's to be done and how but I doubt it's people that live or work in Deptford. Some people are making these changes which they think are for the best, but best for whom? We have a major issue with parking and the change in road layout has resulted in more rather than less congestion." Keith agrees, saying the needs of local people are not being taken into consideration, particularly when it comes to parking.

Another issue for Natasha is the proposed moving of bus stops on Evelyn Street, which, in her view, seems to be in favour of commuters and new developments' aesthetic rather than people in the area. "Who asked the elderly whether moving the bus stops would be convenient for them? They say there were consultations but with whom? Did they reach out to elderly and disabled people who might get confused or whose journeys will be made more difficult if bus stops are moved? You can't just put letters through the door and expect people to come to consultations. Some people can't read, others can't see, others can't leave the house. And many cannot navigate online sites to put their views in. I don't know what the solution is but if you tell me you consulted the community, then I'd like to see evidence for that!" Natasha herself lives with a disability and knows what it means to not be able to get out of the house. She has issues with her back and relies on a huge daily dose of strong pain medication to get her through the day and at any moment she could have an episode that would leave her unable to walk and with pain that can only be relieved through spinal block or an epidural at the hospital. And Keith knows what it means not being able to access the increasingly more digitised information and consultation processes. He is severely dyslexic and despite being very computer-literate and involved with the local authorities,[2] he finds it difficult to deal with all the written information. "There's never going to be such a thing as complete digital

[2] Keith was awarded Tenant Champion by Lewisham Homes in 2016 for the good work he does in his local community.





inclusion. There are too many people in this borough with disabilities and dyslexia like me that don't allow you to be included."

Another thing Natasha dislikes is the rapid increase of rent prices for businesses on the High Street. "There was a flower shop next door to Albin's (Funeral parlour) which did really well. It was lovely with little trinkets in the window, and the lady had built up a nice clientele and friendships in the area. I saw her on her last day – she looked like a defeated woman. She said the rent was raised so much in one go that she couldn't afford to keep the shop open. I just don't understand why they would do that. It's sad because there is a lot of potential on the High Street and people are investing into their businesses and a year later the rent doubles and they have to close again. Instead of making Deptford more diverse and getting people to come down and stay, they're just shutting everywhere down so it slowly dampens everyone's spirit. It's absolutely lovely to have little shops again on the High Street, like the Gin Bar, Tony's Daily and other places, but how long will they be there before they're shifted out?"

Natasha also likes some of the new housing developments if they are not too dense and crowded. She particularly likes the Anthology Development just down the road from the community centre. Not only does she think the development looks fantastic, she also likes their ethos as one day they came in, offering to decorate the inside of Evelyn Community Centre. "They came round with all the different colour charts they use, asked us to choose a colour and they painted the inside. Since the council wasn't doing it, we really appreciated the grand gesture! And then the builders they were using came round and donated toys made by their apprentices, among them a toy kitchen which the kids love! So that was amazing!" But as much as Natasha likes the Anthology development, she is also aware that the people who live on Arklow Road are losing much of their daylight, making their homes gloomy even on a bright summer's day. And she is particularly concerned about the Tyre Shop who'd been there 'forever'. "Did he have to go? Was he outpriced? Did he have to move because they'll put housing there? Did he have to go because he doesn't fit with the image of the development? I don't understand because he was always busy. I would really like to know what happened to him."

Pepys Resource Centre: an inclusive community space open to all

Text written by Anita Strasser in April 2019



Community lunch with the Befriending Club in Pepys Resource Centre - December 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

I remember walking past Pepys Resource Centre many times, always standing in front of the locked doors wondering why this interesting-looking library was closed. And then, in October 2017, it suddenly came to life with regular opening times and people coming in and out. Today, the library is open every day (Mon-Fri) with activities throughout the week: English lessons for Syrian refugees twice a week, arts and crafts, reading, cinema and popcorn and outdoor activities for children, free Pilates classes on Tuesdays, a befriending club for the elderly on Wednesdays with quizzes, singing and other activities, and WE Women Circle on Fridays, where women share their talents and skills such as cooking, arts and crafts, dancing and other activities. WE Women – Women Empowering Women – is the group that run the library and volunteer every day of the week to keep the library open, to organise activities and to cook lunch every day, lunch that is eaten in the library space together with people that happen to be there.

The building that houses the library is owned by Hyde (Housing Association) and is leased by Eco communities. Before the library was re-opened, it was used mostly as storage space, open to the public just 16 hours a week. Then members of WE

Women, which was set up in March 2017, approached the leaseholder saying that they wanted to transform the space into a community space. Since October 2017, WE Women have been working hard to provide an inclusive community space open to all. Not long after opening, I met Luciana Duailibe and Joyce Jacca, the two women who volunteer at the library every day, running the day-to-day activities, cooking lunch and helping people to access the library. We have had many stimulating conversations over the months, in the library and at events in other places. In summer 2018, I had a long conversation with Luciana about the library, her vision of the world and the work that she is engaged in. This is what she told me:

Top

Joyce Jacca teaching people to cook healthy and cheap meals on Wednesdays - December 2018

Bottom

Joyce's daughter with homemade food in Pepys Resource Centre - December 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser

"I moved to Deptford 14 years ago and have stayed ever since. What I love most about Deptford is its diversity. When an area is diverse it is so rich because diversity creates opportunities, opportunities to learn and flourish. Some people are scared of diversity because they fear difference, they are so wrapped up inside of themselves that they forget about others, but for me, it's the opposite. I love difference because it's not me so I see it as an opportunity to expand myself, to learn and to transcend my own self. Deptford is a place where the world meets and so it has a lot of opportunities. My daughter, for example, she always used to play with a Chinese boy and I used to ask him: 'How do you say *good morning* in Chinese? How do you say *how are you?*' And then my daughter started learning Mandarin when she was in Secondary School. Deptford for me means opportunities to learn, to become more sociable, and to be more tolerant. Many people are not even aware of all the opportunities out there because generally, our society is so rooted in prejudice; many people don't share, don't collaborate, don't cooperate. I think we are ONE in this whole world, we are ONE people, ONE human race, we are humans living in this world and we should get together and make the most of it. This is why I'm involved in lots of community projects; this is why I'm here all the time, opening the library, sharing this community space and helping people to get involved. The library is open for meetings, we exchange books, time, and talent. For example, there is a lady, a Flamenco dancer, and she rehearses here on Tuesdays, using the space for free. As an exchange she gives free Pilates classes. So it's this kind of exchange!"





Luciana's nickname is *Tinhanha*. It's a nickname she's had since the age of 13 and was given to her by her cousin, who instead of calling her auntie Luciana, came out with



Luciana with her daughter participating in a workshop in Tidemill garden and discussing the processes of regeneration - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Tinhanha. This nickname was to define Luciana's future path as *Tinhanha* in Tupi-Guarani, the primitive Brazilian language, means *Exchange*. "My whole life has been based on exchange, on giving and receiving, on sharing. I have a lot to give and a lot to learn, which is why I'm involved with so many activities to make our community a better place." Indeed, Luciana not only volunteers at the library every day where she helps run the centre, she is also treasurer of Deptford Neighbourhood Action Group, a member of Voice4Deptford, treasurer of Kender Primary School, where she raises money for school events and equipment, helps out at school events and acts as playmate for the children to help teachers. As well as this, she is Chair of Co-oPepys Community Arts Project, a charity that focuses on arts for mental health and well-being and where artists can access truly affordable studios. Luciana has been involved with Co-oPepys for more than 11 years and tells me of her remarkable journey: "When I first came here, I couldn't speak any English but I didn't want to go to English classes doing boring grammar exercises. Instead, I made handmade toys for local children and took them to places like Sure Start and 2000 Community Centre. Word got out about (quote) "the lovely things I was making" and eventually I met Joyce, who was organising a carnival here on the estate. She loved what I was doing and introduced me to a friend so that we could do workshops together for children during the carnival. And that's how I met Dalva, who was involved in Co-oPepys and in the carnival preparations we did there. I became a member and together with Dalva, who sadly passed away four years ago, we managed to clear the debt Co-oPepys had accumulated, got funding and got the place back on track. This encounter between Dalva and me changed both our lives as we both got heavily involved with communities in our local area."

Sadly, Co-oPepys is under threat and Luciana is trying very hard to keep it open. Unsurprisingly, it seems there are plans to transform the space into flats. They had already received a one-month's eviction notice on the grounds that the space lacked fire safety, but Luciana managed to fight against this. "They used fire risk – basically the tragedy of Grenfell – to get us out. They told me that if a fire happened, as manager of the space, it would be my responsibility. This made me really angry because over all those years, I had reported leaks, dodgy electrics, a dangerous roof and many other things – all of which got ignored. How was it that they were suddenly concerned about fire when they left leaks and the dangers of electricity and water getting together for years? So I said that we weren't going to move until we've found another similar space and that we need to work together on this. I proposed the ground floor of Aragon Tower, the promised part of Section 106 money (money for the community) that never materialised, but with no luck. We're now in the process of negotiating and I hope we can find another space."[1]

Despite all the things Luciana is involved in and the fact that she has a family with 2 children, she is at Pepys Library most days, always helping people with what they need. I have been to the Resource Centre on a few occasions and have shared

[1] In autumn 2019, it emerged that Co-oPepys seems to be safe again. However, the future of Pepys Resource Centre is now uncertain with plans to transform the space into something else.



Joyce and Luciana discussing racism (with Dr Adam Elliott-Cooper) during Black History Month in Pepys Library - October 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

many beautiful moments with Luciana, Joyce and others. The loving energy that is put into this community space and which comes off the group and the people they work with is heart-warming and contagious. Luciana is an educator, but not the kind of educator that likes to put fixed ideas into people's heads. She's not the kind that views education as indoctrination. For her, education is an exchange of ideas, where she learns with her pupils more than she teaches them. "I'm not the one that has all the answers. Everyone has a talent, a skill, something they are good at. If you give people a chance to share their skill, they can flourish. I'm trying to build on this idea that community is based on exchanging, on giving and receiving, on respecting, trusting and tolerating. At the same time, I'm learning how not to do things or how to do things differently. It's hard to explain. Imagine we live in communities without money, where we all exchange our talents and skills, where we share and teach each other. This is the basis of this library."

Luciana has a very simple vision for the world – for people to be happy. "People, communities are what really matter in this world. It is not about the individual but about living together – there has to be a balance between individual needs and the needs of the commune, and when this balance is right, we can feel happy. It's about humanity and whilst humanity is inherently good, there is a shadow. I once did a performance about this dichotomy of good and bad, where I wrote about the Cherokee myth of the two wolves. In this piece, the granddad said to his children: 'There are two wolves inside all of us. One is full of greed, anger and vanity and other negative emotions; the other is full of compassion, kindness, empathy – all the good emotions. The two wolves are fighting a battle and the one that will win is the one we feed'. So, if we feed ourselves with negative things, we will be full of bad energy but if we feed ourselves with kindness, compassion and all the things that are good for our soul, then we'll be happy and others around us will be happy too. Therefore, we need to promote peace and love."

Luciana protesting outside Deptford Lounge to save Tidemill Garden from destruction - August 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser



I ask Luciana how her vision of the world relates to what is happening in Deptford. She thinks that the council and the government are generally feeding their bad wolves too much, creating very bad energy in the area. "It seems that for them, many people, particularly those on the bottom of the social ladder, are invisible in their drive for profit. They have no voice, no choice, no rights, no opportunities to be listened to and to be seen. I think that if Tidemill Garden or Reginald House were in Telegraph Hill, Blackheath

or Brockley, where many wealthy people reside, the demolition of the garden and the house would never happen because people with money are also the people with power, and the council would listen to them. But poor people are nobodies in the eyes of the council. Instead of equality it is all about quality, meaning those with more money and power are seen to be higher quality beings and so their wishes and desires are given priority. There is a huge lack of empathy in this world, a huge lack of love for others who have less. We are not important for the government, we are nothing, we are disposable to them, and we don't have the same rights. We don't have the right to keep our green spaces, our community spaces, the right to the river, even the right to our homes or the choice to take part in decisions about our homes. People should be given a voice in what happens here, opportunities to share their talent, to improve their skills, and to make them a valued part of the community. We should work with the idea of becoming ONE, that we are ONE in this world, and not enforce segregation. I think the Age of Aquarius will come but before we enter an era of love, I fear there's going to be a really painful moment, a really hard time where the big bad wolf, the government, will win the battle. That's why we started WE Women – not because we don't care about men or think they have no sensibilities, or that we want all the power for women, but because we need to find a balance between masculine and feminine energy. At present, the power of men is still largely oppressive. A lot is about money, control and power and less about caring and sharing. This energy needs balancing out with the female energy of love. We don't want to turn the table, but we want feminine energy to surface more so we can eat together on the same table; where we both prepare the table and eat together."



Inside Pepys Resource Centre - December 2018
Photo: Anita Strasser

“Top-down; lacking input from community”

Text written by Anita Strasser in June 2019

In December 2018 I did a whole-day drop-in workshop at Pepys Resource Centre to see how people using this library feel about the regeneration of Deptford. It was an interactive workshop where people could choose how they wanted to express their opinions: by drawing, building a model, chatting and/or writing some comments in response to four questions. The latter two were the favourites.

I set up in the main library space where everybody could see me and I invited people to join me as they came in. It was a Wednesday, which meant Luciana and Joyce were there with many others. Luciana was assisting whoever came in, Joyce was teaching people to cook, the Befriending Club for the elderly was present and stayed for a community lunch, and downstairs there was a security training course for local women. In the morning, before people arrived, Joyce showed me how to cook a simple, cheap but healthy and tasty meal in just 20 minutes. I also joined the community lunch where we all sat together and ate all the different things that had been made that morning including ‘my’ dish. In the afternoon I chatted to the women on the course. Throughout the whole day, I engaged in interesting discussions with various people about the changes happening in Deptford and collected views and comments, which I’m publishing here. I’ll leave it up to the reader to interpret the comments.

Below and next page

Comments to questions written during a one-day workshop in Pepys Resource Centre - December 2018

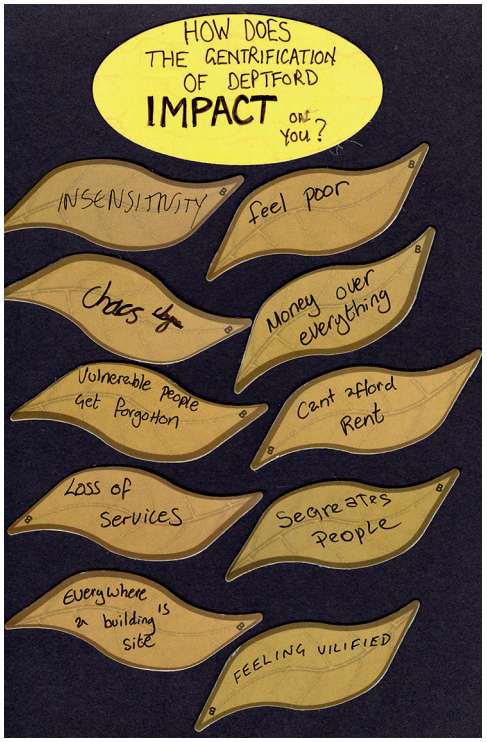



HOW DO YOU SEE
REGENERATION
IN DEPTFORD?
HIDING HISTORY BECAUSE IT UNCOMFORTABLE
Greedy.
INCONSISTENT
UNJUST
INEVITABLE
MONEY-ORIENTED
ONE-SIDED
Support your Local Shops not main-stream
Short Sighted
Social Cleansing
Shiney Empty Tower blocks


HOW DOES
THE GENTRIFICATION
OF DEPTFORD
IMPACT ON YOU?
FEELING INVISABLE
FEELING FORGOTTOW
NOT FOR ME.
IT'S NOT FOR ME
feel abandoned.
UNCERTAIN ABOUT MY FUTURE IN DEPTFORD
FEELING UNWORTHY
FEELING INSECURE
Rich vs poor
AIR POLLUCTION
Loss of familiar places + people


WHAT DOES
GOOD
REGENERATION
LOOK LIKE?
COMMUNITY COHESION
Safe places To go for homeless
LONG TERM PLANNING
GREEN
chyna make homes
EQUALITY OF ACCESS
SUSTAINABLE
CATER FOR EVERYBODY
WORK WITH LOCAL COMMUNITY
WITH A LONG-TERM VISION
inclusive development. Projects that don't use the term social housing to fill in a tick box


HOW DO YOU SEE
REGENERATION
IN DEPTFORD?
Money over the heads of the Poor
Theft of culture + Arts
Social Cleansing
Plastering Over People
Money orientated
untrusty councils for caprabrate firms.
coal chyna
Top-down, lacking input from community
Concrete over Green
Sterile


HOW DOES
THE GENTRIFICATION
OF DEPTFORD
IMPACT ON YOU?
INSENSITIVITY
feel poor
Chaos chyna
Money over everything
Vulnerable people get forgotton
Cant afford Rent
Loss of Services
Segreates People
Everywhere is a building site
FEELING VILIFIED


WHAT DOES
GOOD
REGENERATION
LOOK LIKE?
Non-Divisive
Socially inclusive.
Social Inclusion/ Better Social housing
AN INVESTMENT IN THE YOUNGEST COMMUNITY MEMBERS
INVEST ON OPPS FOR CHILDREN DEVELOPMENT
Inclusive
RESPECT GREEN SPACES
Real Consultation
NEIGHBOURNESS
BUILDS LOCAL ECONOMY

Paul's Deptford Journey

This text was written in May 2019 by Paul Clayton, local resident, IT trainer, occasional gardener and artist.



Paul Clayton's Mirrorplants project, which consisted of photographs taken of plants on walks around the area and then composited and mirrored into a form of mandala. The project was a response to the amount of building going on in Deptford.

Photo: Paul Clayton

It's been an interesting reflection of my activities here as a journey. I've recounted a story as much to place some factual bias, alongside my own subjective bias. All are stories, all are narratives. We're all blow ins, but the ones that love being here join in and make more stories that are retold. All are accepted. Deptford does this if you let it.

Cue video cut to London in 1997, wanting to set up an Internet cafe, finding that there was no money in it. After moving around various parts, the starting in Notting Hill, then to well-heeled Docklands and settling into SE London as The Millennium started. This is where I found things really interesting, my northern sensibilities warmed to the area's lack of pretension, but having a place to be odd and creative; especially around Deptford and New Cross. Always interesting and fun, especially as an old rocker that was at home hanging out in pubs with live music. I'd already been an occasional visitor, making an internet radio station called Meantime Radio with a friend and publishing event listings of what was going on in Greenwich, New Cross, Deptford and Woolwich. A labour of love with fun. It was great moving from Charlton to Deptford in 2002, but getting knocked over in 2003 celebrating my first wages as an IT trainer certainly made things traumatic.

Standing as a 'champion'

As part of Meantime activities, we attempted to host 'It's your News' in a couple of venues; the idea stuck, my sensibilities intrigued by the possibility of getting involved in the area more. The Council of Champions appeared. Part of the early noughties trend for parish councils, the idea was coordinated by a local consultancy based on New Cross Road. A local marketing company created their outreach materials for the project – one-word postcards, banners and posters (e.g. demo-crazy), which were impenetrable, almost as if the whole exercise was a means to just show 'community engagement'? I did wonder what this was, and joined in. My pitch was to host regular News Parties to get people talking about the local news as well as their own. This promoted some interest, with 80 or so votes, a result in my view – didn't make the council though.

Afterwards I noted that other parish councils had websites inside their local council, which would surely have been a possibility? The Council of Champions outreach evidenced no such liaison, apparently the youth council lasting a little longer than the adults, but not very long; the Wayback machine shows that the site disappeared in 2005, which reflected the apparent lack of real local power. Demo-crazy, huh?

The consultancy seemed to be riding a wave of Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) money and this showed more an infrastructure approach than supposed community development – my naive view of the initiative was preparation for regeneration, giving the area some cushioning to the shock of change. The consultancy worked with developers it seemed to me. The Ha'penny Hatch was built, a return of a local pass through to Greenwich, and the town hall was sold to Goldsmiths University (where are the details of that purchase and public access?).

Around the same time, Broadway Fields was created in exchange for the Seager building converted to flats, or so I was told. A loss of a huge artistic and creative space.

Pepys Estate at that time was a place unexplored, though there was plenty of apparent activity there on a community level. I interviewed Malcolm Cadman in 2018 for a heritage project by Voluntary Action Lewisham, which later filled in some gaps of knowledge.

Cut to my next scenario. Kicking around and wanting to get away from computers and get gardening. I found the McMillan Herb Garden near the McMillan Nursery School and all of a sudden was chair of a gang of volunteers wanting to make an interesting and peaceful community space. This was reclaimed waste ground turned into a community garden (coordinated by the same consultancy mentioned earlier). The artist and caretaker of the space had trouble communicating his vision, but it did transpire and indeed it was a great place to get into some nature. The man is a great artist and a good gardener, but not always the easiest to collaborate with. It could have been me, granted. After a few years it meant a moving along to a different scenario, still keen to get into community gardening.

A wonky Prong, space by St. Paul's and a garden hidden in full view

Community gardens started popping up around the centre of Deptford after 2010:

The Wonky Prong – a Crossfield resident took the initiative and got funding for a great little garden backing on to a nature reserve, installing some table tennis tables

nearby. This was great. I knew the venerable guerrilla gardener, a wonderful and magnanimous human being if there ever was one. He ensured more trees in the area, a great attitude. My involvement was especially marked with a riding an ice cream making tricycle from East Greenwich and back. We made ice cream with fruit from the market because things weren't quite in season.

Thames Tideway developers provoked a response by locals to get together in solidarity and plant some raised beds in the space by St. Paul's Church. This was a bit of a landmark moment for me as I then noticed the real speed of change in term of the development in the area. If there was a metric, it surely was the amount of big trucks moving building materials and black cabs that suddenly decided to go south of the river.

Hidden around the back of Tidemill school was a garden in plain sight.

The Tidemill School has a narrative starting with Mark Elms who infamously was reported earning more as a headmaster than David Cameron (*The Telegraph*, 13 July 2010). I'm wondering what comparisons are to be drawn other than wealth for an educator and a politician. My narrative would be to make Mark Elms poorer than the Prime Minister of any time. Much poorer.

The school had been left to its own apparent devices after being decanted of pupils. Lewisham Council strangely bought in a North London Guardian company accompanied by a gang of artists, musicians and other creative people.

It was interesting to note that another local gang of artists (Utrophia) that I knew and supported (I did try to rent a studio space from them, but was foiled by an internal politic) were at that time inhabiting the Job Centre space, which is now the bar. The Job Centre is only, what 100 steps away? Utrophia artists came to the opening night for the new artist's residence and walked out not very happy; could understand completely. From my own view, the Utrophians provided a humorous, inclusive and very local set of situations, which the council didn't seem to be interested in, yet the new people didn't seem to offer anything in the same vein, inclusion was not on the agenda. This is a form of story telling when you ignore local artists.

Hidden by fencing was the Tidemill garden leased by Assembly, a creative bunch of artists and gardeners.

The gardeners however did have a local agenda. I got involved. We talked, fell out and yet the proposed scenario was pushed. My goal: an event to bring all of the community gardens together, but this was not to be. Instead my work was facilitating an event hosted by Madcap Theatre Company in 2014, in what was called 'Deptford Gardens', or DIG for short. This was a promotion of local community gardens in a garden fenced off and directly experienced by few. The hope was to bring more to a garden, no matter where it was. Everyone enjoyed themselves, and a friends group formed as a result; which didn't get appropriate support from the gang of gardener artists constantly seeking funding. As the narrative of the council continued, there was a campaign.

I'm still here.

There are many activists with a community passion that Deptford does foster, but the shiny shoe brigade of smartly dressed people in suits and the well-heeled young



Signs at the squatted Social Centre Plus at the former Job Centre on Deptford High Street in 2011

Photo: Paul Clayton

couples investigate and look up (cough, bring money) but don't want to integrate – businessmen, yes even some councillors. Community integration for rich people is very simple. Just support local businesses of all kinds. Even the ones that went to Kent, after all this area was part of Kent apparently. As a firm believer in keeping economics local:

Support the street markets, the high street – talk as well!

Ask how long that barber/hair stylist has been in the area.

Loving the interaction of people in a place with great diversity. Everyone is a blow in.

Say hello to the guy who sells coffee on the second hand market, he has a great attitude.

Talk to the lady emptying out snails into a bucket, talk to the cheeky lads at the fish stall.

Say hello to older folk slowly making their way down the high street and give them space.

What I do see with these young folk on the street that are insular yet seeking interaction is a sort of shyness mixed with the arrogance of privilege? Mental health issues, poverty and homelessness have been themes of the Deptford / New Cross area for some time. Yet as an exercise in saying 'I live in Deptford' is some cachet of cool then the new faces have to be accepting of others. Artists seek patronage and sponsorship, local business needs to be encouraged – to fill a gaping maw of

emptiness. People that make just make money, just make money, just make money. No inner world to cultivate, so culture fills a void. Voids in housing associations and councils are empty houses. Not sure if that's a metaphor for anything.

It is interesting to note that the work in Neighbourhood 1 (according to the council) seems all about development of building flats, rather than negotiating proposed change. Instead there were (and still continue to be) supposed consultations as token presentations, 'This is What You' Getting'. Nothing about working with churches, charities, services and businesses providing a network for the vulnerable folk; promote a sense of dare I say, community coherence? If that is a dialogue, then I've never heard about it. This area has evidently been a hub for homelessness and associated aspects for many years, more than three generations? Building expensive flats must alleviate those ever present themes for not including vulnerable people? Surely that's a strategy I've never heard of in housing planning documents. Although Lewisham Council did once promote the housing of students and graduates on Crossfields Estate in the 1980s, next to a stinky summer creek never mentioned by letting agents. Amazing.

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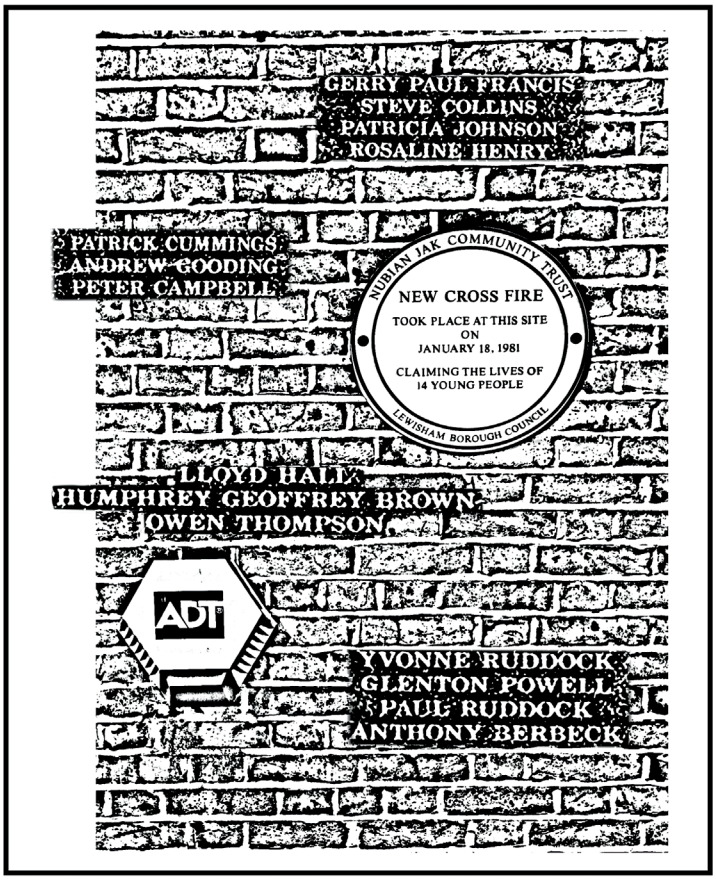
Artwork by Paul Clayton in his book Colourful Deptford: A colouring book of local social history



439 New Cross road.

13 young people died here in a fire January 1981.

"Thirteen Dead and Nothing Said"

Fordham Park has a memorial to those who lost their lives. It is quite hidden though, can you find it?

The fire came at a time when many people in the black community especially felt under attack from both the Police - leading to riots in Brixton and elsewhere - and organised fascists, including the firebombing of the nearby Albany. Many people continue to feel that the New Cross Fire was not properly investigated.

7

So, regeneration.

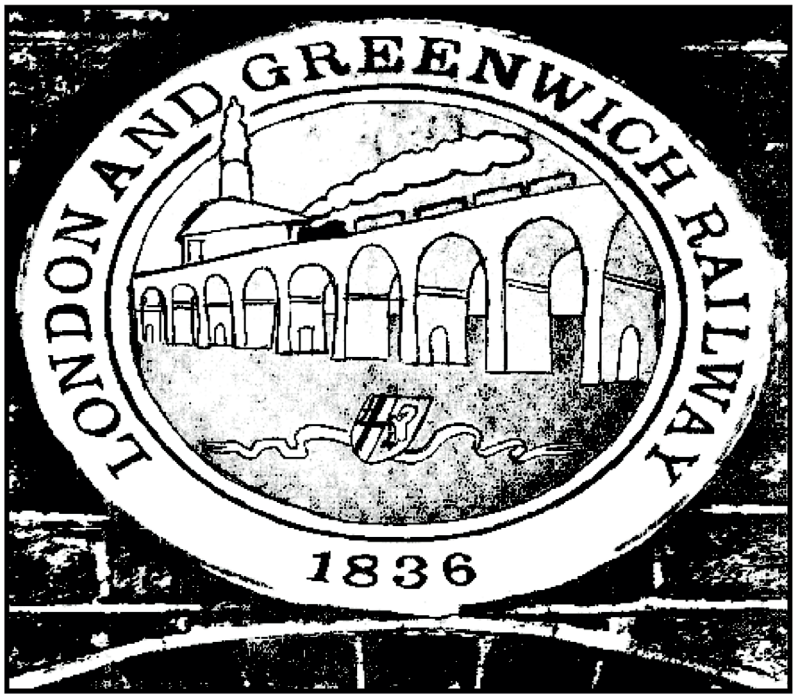
I wander around taking photos of trees, bushes, walls and gates and make them into simple kaleidoscopes, also painting jobcentre signs and streets. There are a whole bunch of reasons for this. The everyday is in front of us, and without any form of nature around it becomes boring. Imagine walking around with concrete everywhere. Just concrete. Really boring, just like privilege trumps being poor generally.

The faces and characters are changing in the area as people die, get sick, tired or move away before they get sick and tired. Tired, then sick too?

Integration with services and people has fallen by the wayside in Neighbourhood 1 in favour of developers and building – with associated traffic.

So much going on in the town centre of Deptford; yet there are community efforts from Pepys and Evelyn estates promoting open space for community use in all sorts of ways. The best safe spaces for public use are generally green and given some wildlife, especially in urban areas. Gardens are great places to share a good chat, pick some blackberries, make seed bombs, get creative, catch a newt and so on. People are definitely calmer in a garden, no doubt about it.

Planning an offset to increased local pollution and working with local networks is definitely a building block for community development, promoting healthier living to everyone, especially when joggers are around – another metric of change? Gangs of joggers (instead of lone lycra wearers) would go and be happy around the parks rather than the streets, cutting up old people and buggies with their bad street style? I just don't know. People in the area talk to one another, it's a basic form of respect, something to be perceived as 'old school' and depreciated. Something that used to happen, like nostalgia, a form of utopia, a place that doesn't exist.



Deptford railway station.
The station, until its recent renewal had become a tatty, tired space. The renewal brings with it new pools which form with heavy rain, and a window that blew out in high winds.

The sign has not been replaced at the time of writing some 2 years later, indicating the history of what is the first commuter railway station in London. Back in 1836 you could ride in a cattle wagon to spa road, Bermondsey for 6d. The line was later extended to London bridge.

18

Buy my book?

2016 was the collection of some Deptford photos as a social history colouring book. Copies available from The Word bookshop. It's called *Colourful Deptford: A colouring book of local social history.* Colour in the pages with whatever you want, make your mark if you're interested.

More reading:

'Regeneration in Deptford, London' by Dr Gareth Potts, 2008

The Deptford Charrette

Lewisham Business Profile 2013-2023

“Deptford’s poverty is not really visible on the surface”

Text written by Anita Strasser in April 2019



Evelyn 190 Centre in St Luke’s Church on Evelyn Street - January 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

When news broke that Evelyn 190 Centre – a community-based advice centre that offers assistance and advocacy to people who have difficulties with debt, housing, employment and welfare benefits – would close its doors on 31st July 2019 as Lewisham Council would no longer be funding the centre, it was a timely moment to publish the story of the centre: how it came into being, how it operates and what it does, and above all, how essential its services are. Publishing this story was an attempt to raise awareness and hopefully contribute towards saving the centre from closure.

I spoke to Maureen Vitler, member of the Ministry Group at St Nicholas Church in Deptford and member of the Management Committee for Evelyn 190 Advice Centre. Maureen came to Deptford in 1967 when she trained as a teacher at the Rachel McMillan School. Ever since then, she has been looking after people in need. Through her involvement with the parish of St Nicholas and St Luke, Maureen and others such as Reverend Fr. Jack Lucas played an important role in setting up Evelyn 190 Centre in 1979.

“It was set up as a community centre with just one community worker at the time”, Maureen told me. “Initially, there were a boxing club and various other community groups, and we as a church supported them by giving them a building for use at much lower rent than they would have got anywhere else. This was part of our tithing – our giving to the community because we as a church wanted to help. Eventually, as more people were coming in asking for help, the community centre changed its role to an advice centre with more staff available to meet demand. There are so many people, even from our own congregation, that have needed the centre’s support because they can’t cope with the things that are put before them such as the difficulties when losing your job for example. So, this centre is really needed in the area and we have been growing all those years.”

When the community centre came into being in 1979, St Luke’s Church (on 190 Evelyn Street) was divided into three sections: the front section as the worship area, the middle section for church halls and the back as the community centre. When the community centre was changed to the advice centre, an extra floor and stairs were put in to make more rooms for individual counselling or other similar situations. Sadly, due to the building now crumbling and having become too dangerous to

occupy (and too expensive for the church to repair), the centre has been looking for other premises.

Over the years, the management committee managed to get funding from different bodies, and they also got a kitemark – a trusted symbol for safe and reliable services. Recently, apart from small funds here and there, their main funder has been Lewisham Council. However, as Maureen told me, funding for the 190 Centre has been reduced at each round of funding (every 3 years), with a reduction of 25% in 2016 despite there being much more demand. This has made it harder and harder for the staff to assist people in need. Then, in spring 2019, Lewisham Council announced that it would not fund the centre any more at all. The management team was trying to appeal this decision but without luck.[1]



Maureen Vitler at the altar of St Nick's Church, in front of Grinling Gibbons' famous wood carvings - January 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser

I asked Maureen about the sorts of things that people come for help with and how the centre has assisted them. "Recently, there have been a lot of people on disability benefits that needed help. With the new regime and the introduction of Universal Credit, disabled people have had to go through a whole lot of new medicals and exams to see if they were still eligible for their benefits. Some of them were told they weren't even though their disability hadn't changed, and their benefits were stopped. As our centre has also offered advocacy and representation in court – not many do this as it's very time-consuming – we went to court with them to challenge these decisions of not being eligible. Some have won their court case. Or the staff might be seeing someone who's in arrears with their rent and needs help sorting this out and also the debt they have accumulated. They get advice on how to pay their debt, how to get through to the council to get a reduction in council tax or rent and other things. There are a lot of hidden processes that a lot of people don't know about and can't sort out themselves."

When I asked whether demand has increased in the last decade, Maureen nodded without hesitation. According to her, austerity and the implementation of Universal Credit have put a particular strain on the centre, firstly because people don't really understand how Universal Credit works, secondly because people's benefits have been reduced, leaving less money to pay higher rents, and thirdly because a lot of

[1] In the meantime, the centre has managed to find grants from various other places and continues to exist. As of October 2019, the centre was continuing its fundraising activities and looking at ways of surviving in the future. They were also still looking for other premises.

people haven't got the wherewithal to budget for a whole month due to having been paid weekly for years, resulting in people running out of money half way through the month and building up rent arrears and debt. As such, there have been more evictions and cases of homelessness. Another reason for the extra strain is, according to Maureen, the changes to the way the 190 Centre delivers its services, dictated by Lewisham Council who, as the main funder, introduced a centralised telephone hub with clients having to call first before they can speak to somebody face-to-face. The idea behind the hub was to make the system fairer by providing access for more people, but in Maureen's experience, it has put extra distress on service users, most of whom are already very vulnerable. "Where in the past people could come straight into the centre and get face-to-face attention – some advice and an appointment, something which can provide immediate comfort in distressing situations – they now have to phone the Central Advice Line to make an appointment with either Evelyn 190 Centre or other centres that offer similar services and are funded by Lewisham Council. This means they often have to wait 3 to 4 weeks before they actually get to speak to somebody face-to-face."

Maureen continues: "The staff now cannot give appointments at the 190 Centre as they used to – they have to send clients away and refer them to the Advice Line. They are also not allowed to give advice on the phone – they can only take clients' details, assess their needs and make an appointment. This is an issue because we are dealing with very vulnerable people, some of whom are elderly, have mental health issues or have English as a second language. For them, having to make a phone call is really scary and they would really benefit from face-to-face contact. Our staff now have to spend at least 2 days a week just answering phone calls – time they used to be able to spend on actually helping people. Casework (e.g. going to court, preparing the materials for court, etc.) is extremely time-consuming and with the changing regulations and the number of cases on the increase, the staff are overwhelmed with the workload. On top of that, due to the funding cuts, we've had to cut a 5-day week to a 4-day week as we can't afford to pay our staff for 5 days a week (and one member of staff had to go), leaving only 2 days a week to deal with casework. But this is exactly what clients need the most as they are unable to represent themselves; these are poorer people that haven't got the wherewithal to do it themselves. And all the pending cuts to our centres and welfare benefits – it's all interlinked. Life for poor people is becoming really difficult and if getting help is difficult too, then you can imagine the distress this is causing. And then there is all the online stuff, which is another no-go area for a lot of older people, and those who do know how have to go to the library because they don't have their own computers. All this is adding more stress to people who are already in difficult situations. And our staff are under a lot of pressure too as it's difficult for them to not be able to help as much as they would like!"

Maureen thinks that the implementation of Universal Credit is also linked with increased demand for food banks, saying that a lot more people who could have managed themselves in the past are now using food banks. "It's endless with the poverty we have in the area and it all links up: poverty, education, food banks, housing…" I ask Maureen what she thinks the biggest problem is in Deptford. She says that Deptford's poverty is not really visible on the surface. "We have all the new dapper buildings bought by foreign investors, who leave them empty or charge

really high rents, so you don't see the poverty. It's only when someone tells you or you are in contact with people on the ground, when you get down to the nitty-gritty underneath that you see the poverty amongst some of the people. Some people here don't even have the £3 to pay for the bus fare to go to the Job Centre in Bellingham. We used to have a Job Centre in Deptford but now people have to go to Bellingham. It's privileged people making decisions about what poorer people can and can't do. For them it's only a £3 return bus ticket but some people can't afford that. We're at a point in our society where we're not taking people as whole human beings with individual circumstances. One problem is that poor people lose any self-worth when they see all that wealth around them that isn't for them and because they've got no self-worth they've got nothing to live for in a sense. When I first came here in the late 60s, even though people were poor money-wise, they had a sense of 'this is our place' and a 'we can do it' attitude; that's gone now amongst a lot of people. At the time, there weren't any what you would call rich people – some had more and others were more poverty-stricken but on the whole, there weren't any outrageously rich people. Now, even with the so-called affordable housing – where they've had to build it, it's right on the edge, separated from others, creating a visible class divide between those who can afford nice places and those that can't. Sometimes it reminds me of India where the rich and the poor live side by side."

In the end Maureen tells the story of a young woman, who, with her 4-year old child, had been evicted from their rented flat. "She had been paying rent to a landlord who was subletting and not paying his rent, and so she was evicted in the end. The council couldn't help her, at least not immediately, and so she was left on the streets with a child. Our vicar housed them for a while until she found a place for the mother and child to rent."

Maureen in the labyrinth she made in St Nick's churchyard - March 2018. She says that the meditative and spiritual nature of following the path of a labyrinth can help troubled souls see clarity.

Photo: Anita Strasser



“The amount of homeless people in the area is horrendous!”

Text written by Anita Strasser in March 2019





The 999 Club on Deptford Broadway and its revolutionary sleeping pods in the Night Shelter, providing a bed and privacy for homeless people - February 2019

Photos: Anita Strasser

In February 2019 I did a workshop at the 999 Club to speak about homelessness, how some of the local homeless people navigate Deptford and how they feel about the changes happening in the area. The 999 Club in Deptford is a charity that provides essential services for homeless people or people that are vulnerably housed in Lewisham and South London. Service users can take a shower, have breakfast, see a health professional, and stay in the Night Shelter, where they also get a hot meal. The 999 Club recently became well known for introducing 10 sleeping pods for their Night Shelter in December 2018, which means that instead of sleeping on a mattress in a shared open space, people can sleep in a bed in a little pod that can be closed off with a curtain. This gives the service user privacy and their own space. Service users can also take part in activities such as First Aid training, IT courses and other training, and can get help with finding work. As well as this, they can meet with an Advice and Support Worker to get help with accessing benefits, managing finances, challenging eviction and finding accommodation.

Homelessness has increased steadily over the past decade, with Lewisham being one of the worst-faring boroughs in England. There are currently 2,000 households in Lewisham that are either sleeping rough or in temporary accommodation. Government welfare policies and the aggressive housing market have directly contributed to this crisis of homelessness, leaving already vulnerable people to fend for themselves. Because of this, demand and provision at the 999 Club, which was established 25 years ago, has increased, with the Night Shelter running at full capacity and a waiting list.[1]

When I arrived for the workshop in the morning, the communal space was packed with people drinking tea, chatting, using the computers or just sitting in a warm place. Zisca, the Learning Coordinator, had already prepared a table and Paul, Nick and Jermaine were sitting there waiting for me. Liliana, Christiana and Bibiche, who were doing their work practice as part of their Social Care and Health Studies at the time, joined the discussions. Dalair, another service user, joined the conversation later.
We began the workshop by highlighting on a Deptford map the places that are of importance to the three men before we went on to talk about memories of Deptford, how the men ended up homeless, how they navigate Deptford and its surroundings, and the impact of homelessness on mental health. We also talked about the importance of places that look after the homeless and how the 999 Club has helped the four men deal with homelessness. Each person’s story is different, however, one thing all agree on: homelessness can happen to anyone!

[1] For more information, please see London government websites and the website of the 999 Club.





Mapping Deptford workshop with service users of the 999 Club - February 2019

Photos: Bibiche Alembene (top), Anita Strasser (bottom)

Nick became homeless due to family issues. He was living with his son and daughter-in-law, who decided to divorce his son. Supporting his son in every way possible, Nick ended up losing all his money, his home and his job. Before seeking help from the council, Nick slept in his car for 2 weeks. When he finally went to the council, he was referred to the 999 Club. “I was lucky”, he says, “during the day I was here [the communal space] and during the night I was in the Night Shelter – so it was alright for me. It’s great that once you’re referred to this Night Shelter, you don’t have to apply daily to get a place; you’re here until they’ve found you somewhere. I was here for 10 weeks before I got a place, and now I’ve got my own room in a house and it’s brilliant. I can just walk in and shut the door behind me. It’s quite an amazing feeling. Anyone now who wants to see me has to knock on my door. That’s massive!” Nick can’t express enough praise and gratitude to the people of the 999 Club. “The perseverance of people working at the 999 Club helps people get a home again. Everyone who is in the Night Shelter ends up with somewhere to live eventually. They are brilliant!”

Looking at Nick’s map, I can see that he has only highlighted the Albany and Deptford Lounge. This is because these are the only places where he feels he can go. “When you’re homeless, you travel from library to library because the thing to do when you’re in a homeless situation is trying to avoid boredom. I start my day coming to the 999 Club before I walk around to the Albany or Deptford Library to do some reading or watch a film. Sometimes I go to Lewisham or Peckham Library, but Deptford Lounge is the most convenient and the staff in there are very understanding. You can’t go to sleep of course but you can stay there all day if you want. You can also go to the park but not when it’s raining and cold.” With libraries being under threat in the borough of Lewisham, I asked Nick what it would mean if Deptford Lounge were to close. He said that “it would be disastrous for the area and for homeless people.” Nick explained that when you’re homeless, it’s not just about not having a home but also about not having any money to spend. This means that it is important to have local spaces where homeless people can go as they often cannot afford the bus fare to go to a free museum elsewhere for example. “A lot of us haven’t got any money but most things cost you something. I’m not saying transport should be free but there should be heavily reduced bus fares, not just for the homeless but also for people who don’t earn much, so that they can get around as well.”

Nick’s Deptford map of accessibility

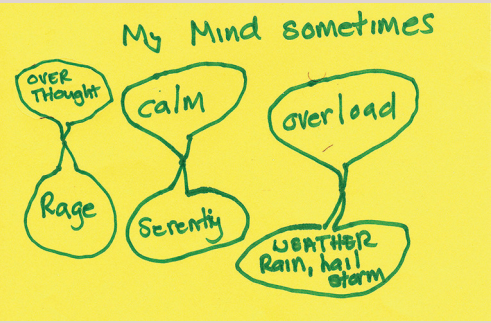
Photo: Anita Strasser



Nick has only been in Deptford for a couple of years but already he thinks that Deptford is going to become a central place for the homeless. “The amount of homeless people in this area is already horrendous and it’s only getting more. The council is so overstretched that if you go there and report that you are a single man who is homeless, they just shrug their shoulders.” For him, the reason for this housing crisis is Right-To-Buy, which, in his opinion, was misused. And the fact that the money was not put back into building new social homes has also contributed to the crisis. Nick is also concerned about the amount of betting shops and thinks

this should be illegal as these shops exploit poor people by giving them false hope.

In the end, we talked about mental health issues, a huge problem for homeless people, including Nick who hasn't always felt strong enough to deal with his situation. Being homeless and out of work for the first time in his life, he felt ashamed of his situation and having to ask for help. He also struggles with the general perception of homeless people as drug addicts or alcoholics and never as people who have suffered misfortune. He feels much more capable now that he has had support and come out the other side, but he has first-hand experience of what it means to be put on a long waiting list to get help with issues that actually need immediate attention. Being housed again was a big first step to help him cope but he still has a long road ahead of him. "Not everybody is as lucky as me to be sent to the 999 Club and get my own place in just 10 weeks", he says. But Nick is also incredibly pro-active and has joined many courses, workshops and training sessions. He completed First Aid Training and he's doing everything he can to bring his life back on track.



Paul's visualisation of his mind at times

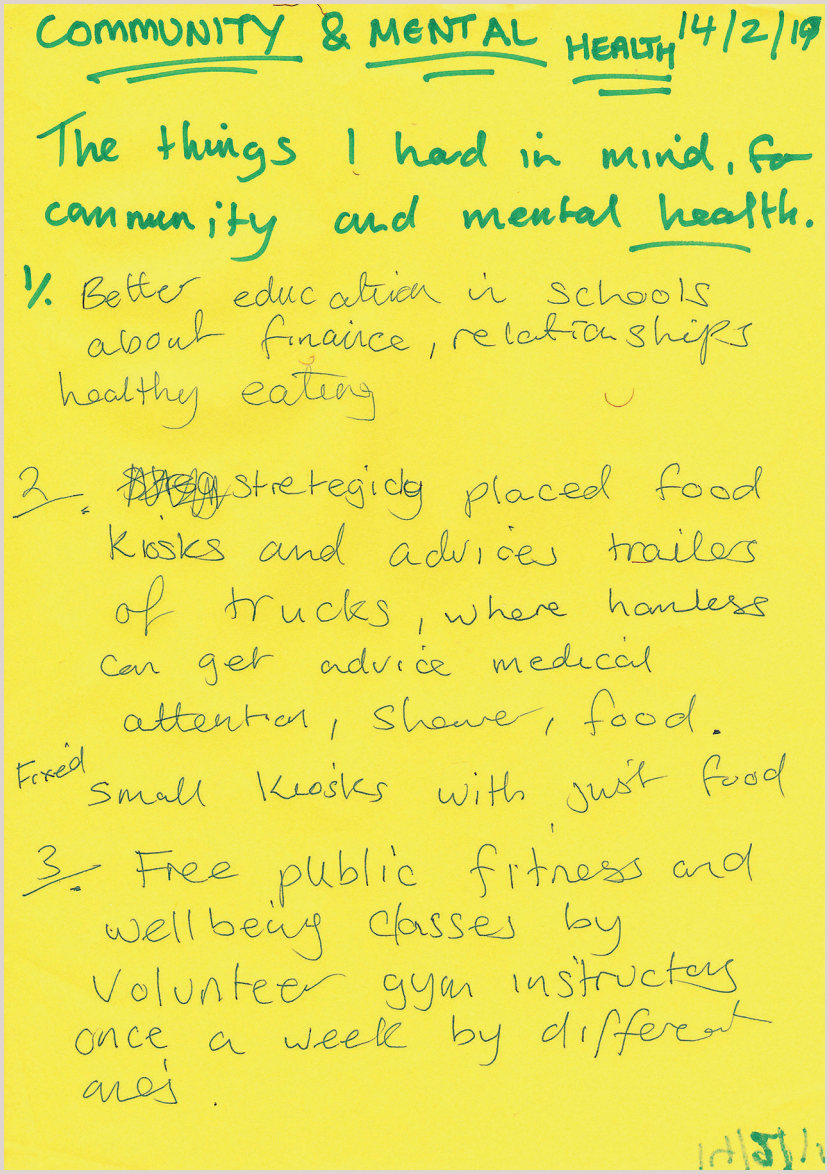
Paul has also experienced severe mental health issues during his 15 years of being homeless, suffering major nervous breakdowns. Paul grew up in Deptford and became homeless after he returned from the army. At the time, councils only had to rehouse you if you had a local connection. As Paul had been away for a long time, he was deemed to have lost this connection and so it wasn't the council's duty to rehouse him. "I hadn't lived down here [Deptford] for so long so they couldn't find me anywhere to live. They changed that legislation and today it's possible to be referred to another council, but it's still like warfare", he says. Paul has lived in numerous house-shares and now lives in a garage in Camberwell. He comes to the 999 Club every day and loves walking around Deptford. Deptford is where his heart is and walking around helps him take his mind off negative things. He also takes advantage of the support that is provided for people with mental health issues.

Paul has many memories of Deptford, good and bad, and he also has strong views about Deptford today. "I remember the legendary music parties in the Crypt at St Paul's, actually I was 14 then so wasn't supposed to be there but we looked older so could get in. We were goths at the time and just loved those parties. In the 80s, there were the Irish, the Pakistani, Bangladeshi, West Indies, that's what made it so interesting, and the parties got a lot of us together, we were less segregated. You just knew that if you got into certain areas, like down by Millwall or the river you're gonna get grief. We could never walk down by the river because we knew we'd get beaten up by skinheads. You really had to be able to run in those days, especially down by the river because you were so far from anywhere. Now you can walk down the river without fear, no-one's gonna attack you. Because I grew up here, I know so many people now, people that used to get up to bad stuff, but amongst all that, we just got on so well amongst ourselves. I also remember that everybody learnt a different trade and you often got a job with someone your dad knew. This is how people got into work. I don't see such a great spirit of community these days. I mean the people who run the new businesses, especially the coffee shops, why don't they go into local schools and offer work experiences for young local kids? We have a lot of young people in the area and there's a lot that could be

done for them. I like the new businesses and I'm sure the people work hard but they don't engage enough with the local community and after a few years, when they've earned enough, many sell on and move out. I think that businesses should provide opportunities for local young people. Work experience for a local young person could give them a chance in life, set them on their way."

Generally, Paul really likes the changes Deptford has undergone in the last decades. He thinks it looks much better, has better transport connections, and he can walk around freely without experiencing the racism that was rife in the 70s and 80s. He also wouldn't be too upset if Deptford Market were to disappear as he used to hate being 'dragged' through it all the time when he was a kid. For him, the area has a lot of potential which should be used to help young local kids. Like Nick, what he considers really sad is that the money from properties bought through Right-To-Buy years ago wasn't put back to build more social homes, and that homeowners now make huge profits on these properties while simultaneously enjoying favourable tax laws. "Social Housing has been misused, leaving poor families with nowhere affordable to live."

Dalair's suggestions of what homeless people would benefit from, made during the workshop at the 999 Club - February 2019



Paul says that finding a home is obviously a priority but he thinks that this in itself does not solve all problems. In his experience, homelessness comes with a lot of other issues that are often ignored. "My own issue is I fall into a depression and have suicidal thoughts; other people need to feed their addictions. Housing is always put first but people need training in how to cope with life: paying bills, managing finance, getting back to work, how to survive basically. Many who manage to get rehoused, eventually fall back with their rent because they buy a 42inch TV screen or sometimes drugs. Then housing benefit gets cut and then the depression kicks in. And it doesn't mean that if you then approach a centre you get help instantly. Centres are over-stretched and there is a long waiting list, especially for mental health issues. So, it's good to do as much as you can from the beginning. There is lots of training out there, and the 999 Club offers lots of courses, but sometimes people seem too lazy or despondent to engage. They think once they're housed, everything will be fine."

Like Nick, Paul is very proactive and goes to Deptford Lounge to search for jobs on the internet. He does jobs here and there, whatever comes up, and manages to get by like this. Having been homeless for 15 years, Paul is very clued up on the services that are available. He says the beginning, when you don't know what's out there, is hard, but once you have all the information, you see that there are a lot of centres that help the homeless. But to access them you have to be able and prepared to walk a lot and far.

Dalair, father of two who has recently been housed after being homeless for some time, agrees with Paul, saying that the physical and mental wellbeing of homeless people and those on lower incomes should be a priority as this could help them get lifted out of dire situations more quickly. He benefited from group therapy and physical exercise, particularly walking. As he joined the group late in the day, he wrote a list (incomplete) of things that need to be considered (see previous page).

Finally, Jermaine told us his story, another reminder that homelessness can happen to anybody, even once very successful people. "I put my hands to all different kinds of things to make it in life – I did music, catering and before I came here [the 999 Club], I was a property developer. I worked really hard for 20 years and managed to buy myself a 6-bedroom house on a mortgage which I was paying all the time. I also took out a loan which needed paying back. Unfortunately, I had an accident and then things started to go wrong. I couldn't work and pay back my loan so I approached the loan company because I should have been covered through PPI (Payment Protection Insurance) but then I was told I couldn't claim for it because my work had been seasonal when I took out the loan. I argued if that was the reason, they couldn't have signed me up in the first place as my work was seasonal then. But they refused and so I challenged them because I had paid for cover all those years. I then got sent from branch to branch and then the company in London went into liquidation. Then I found that they were working from Guernsey, but they have different rules there and so I found myself stuck with this loan. It's been an ongoing battle. I have received 15 eviction notices from my house but so far, I have managed to save myself each time. Now they've gone to the High Courts to send in the bailiffs. Again, I applied to stay in my house and I won, but then I was told I had one month to try and sell the house. So I went to an estate agent and stupidly told them about my situation because they then tried to take advantage of me – they first only offered me £100,000 for a 6-bedroom house! Then they offered £200,000, and then £500,000. I mean there is a big difference!"

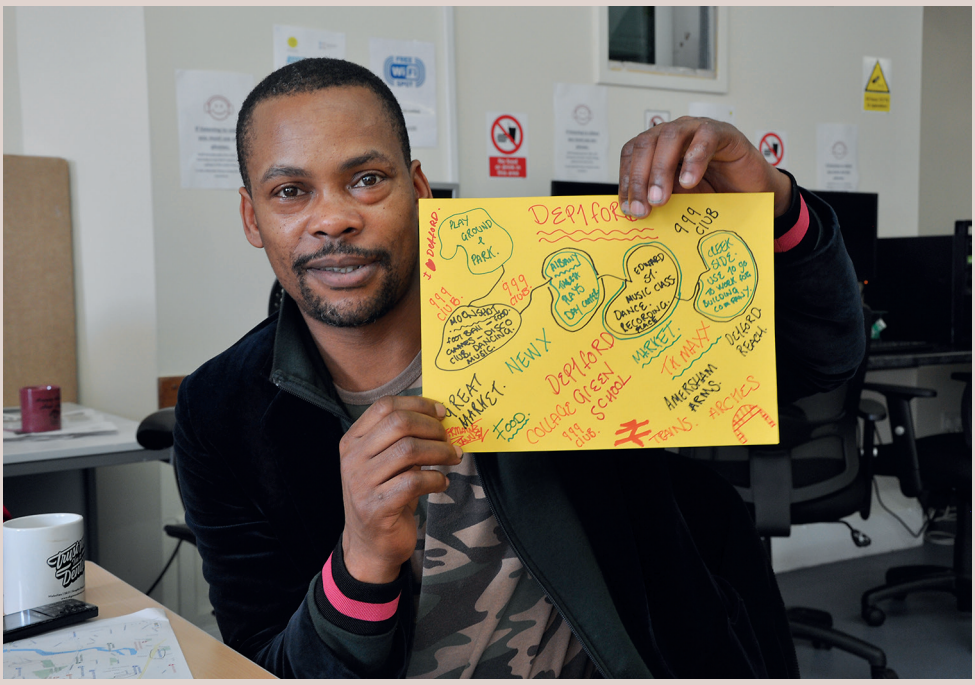
Jermaine is aware that if he gets this money, he's very lucky because it is unusual to get this kind of money. "But I've worked so hard and it's very hard in this country to get to where I was, and then it seemed like it was all just gonna get taken away from me for nothing and there's not much I can do. The system isn't working for me, I tried every single possible thing and still I'm just going to lose my home. I asked what I need to do to not lose my home, they said I need to pay £35,000, which I didn't have. When I found a company that would give me the loan, I was told I now needed to pay £68,000. So, within the space of a week it went up by £33,000. They are making it impossible for me to pay the money. I feel so hard done by! And to think how many other people experience the same!"

Jermaine admits that before this happened, he used to think that people hanging out in centres for the homeless were lazy, that homelessness was their choice and

that they didn't want to work. Through his own experience, however, he has realised that this is just a common misperception about homelessness.

In the end, Jermaine drew a map of 'his' Deptford (he grew up here) and it very clearly emerged what kind of places have importance for him: places of gathering. Most places he highlighted are from his youth, such as schools and playgrounds, Moonshot, the Albany, and the market. He loved what is now the Richard MacVicar Adventure Playground on New King Street, where he attended wood workshops, painting classes and where he had a lot of fun. He also has fond memories of Moonshot, where there were discos, basketball, tennis, ice-skating, days out and where he had his first date. He also remembers when his cousin got pulled out of the club by his ears by his father because they had stayed late. He also used to go to the Albany, where he did some shows as a performer, and finally, the Music Technology School on Edward Street "where you were sent when you were a bit of a bad boy", he laughs. Jermaine also worked for various places in the area and particularly remembers working for various stalls on the market, selling things like socks, ladies' and men's underwear, scarves, gloves, shoes and handbags. "I like thinking about those days, it makes me feel good", he says at the end.

In conclusion, it is important to remember that homelessness can really happen to anyone and for a variety of reasons. We also concluded that the sooner one asks for help, the sooner one might get out of it. Nick, Paul, Dalair and Jermaine have all been very proactive in seeking help, but it is a long road to get back on track. In the end, Paul highlights the fact that there are also a lot of hidden homeless people who do not come to these centres and that we need to reach out to them too. "There are a lot of hidden homeless women out there who are too afraid to ask for help. For them it is much harder as there is always the potential to be abused, beaten and trafficked. You wouldn't believe how many homeless women are out there! We need to reach out to them to get them access centres like the 999 Club."



Jermaine and the Deptford map he made at the Mapping Deptford workshop at the 999 Club - February 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser

Achilles Street Stop and Listen Campaign

In November 2017, I was invited to work with the Achilles Stop and Listen Campaign to help them tell their stories of life on and around Achilles Street. Since then I have been documenting residents' and shopkeepers' memories of the area, what their homes and shops mean to them and their experiences of gentrification processes. These stories can be found on p.197-236. What I have found is an intricate social network of mutual support among residents and shopkeepers, one that is not necessarily visible but that consists of information-sharing, helping each other, and shared memories and experiences. Erasing the estate and the nearby shops would break up this vital social network that provides these people with a sense of belonging, emotional stability and community.

The following statement was issued by the Achilles Street Campaign:

The Achilles Stop and Listen Campaign started in June 2016 after Lewisham Council revealed their plans to demolish the whole of the Achilles Street area. The campaign demands that Lewisham Council give residents a genuine choice about what happens to the Achilles Street area. Residents have repeatedly asked for options of refurbishment and infill to be discussed and explored but Lewisham is intent on one thing only, demolition and the inevitable destruction of the local community. Lewisham Council are allowing the decline of the area (known as managed decline) and are refusing to explore options of refurbishment.

It is now a requirement that, in order to receive funds from the Mayor and Greater London Authority, residents on estates undergoing 'regeneration' are balloted. However, Lewisham Council have excluded many in our community from the right to vote in the ballot. Private tenants, businesses and community groups, whose homes, livelihoods and community groups are under threat of demolition have had no say in what happens to their local community. We demand that everyone is given the right to a vote.

The area Lewisham Council want to demolish runs along either side of Achilles Street between Clifton Rise and Pagnell Street, and includes the flats, maisonettes (known as 363), businesses and Dean House halls of residence along the New Cross Road between Clifton Rise and Pagnell Street. If the plans go ahead every home, business and community organisation will be erased (except the Venue and the old bank). The plans originally also included the flats, businesses and community organisations on the east side of Clifton Rise, but in July 2019 Clifton Rise was taken out of the council's 'redevelopment' proposals. Whilst this is good news, it remains to be seen what effect these changes will have on the rest of the development. All on Clifton Rise are very much part of the community network in this area, and their stories and the damaging impact

Below

Screenshot of the video Beating the Boundary, in which David Aylward of RUR marked the boundary of the whole Achilles Street area with his drum. In the background: Austin House (1st left), Fenton House (2nd left) and Azalea House (right) - July 2019

Shortly after making this video, the boundaries of the development were redrawn, saving some of the green space in Fordham Park

Screenshot from video by Anita Strasser



potential eviction from their premises has had on their lives remain very much part of this narrative.

To date, residents and businesses have petitioned, collectively asked public questions at council meetings, put in FOI's, produced fact sheets, organised workshops, screenings, discussions, alternative data collating including wild flowers, facilitated walks, have had campaign tables on New Cross Road, connected with campaigns locally and London-wide. Thank you to Lilah Francis for Achilles Fanzine, our own font and more, everyone who has supported the campaign and Anita Strasser for helping tell some of our stories.

Web: https://achillesstreetstopandlisten.wordpress.com
Facebook: @The AchillesStreet Stop and Listen Campaign
Twitter and Instagram: @achilles_newx
Email: achillesstreetcampaign@gmail.com

Part of campaign poster made in time for the balloting process - October 2019

Poster design: Diana E. Cîrstea
Campaign font design: Lilah Francis



VOTE NO



@achilles_newx

achilles street
stop and listen!

TO DEMOLITION

“How can you call this flat uninhabitable and ready for demolition?”

Text written by Anita Strasser in March 2018



Top

The living room in Seph’s flat in Austin House on Achilles Street before she moved - January 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Left

Campaign poster made for the start of the balloting process - October 2019

Poster design: David Wojtowycz and Antonio Ciutto

When I come up to the third floor of Austin House on Achilles Street, where Seph lives, I am enchanted by the beautiful floral display outside her flat. Big ceramic pots align the corridor and flowers are growing in the big window boxes. The display extends to the next flat where a Vietnamese family grow ginseng which grows to a considerable height in the summer. I enter Seph’s flat and I’m completely overawed by the beauty of her place. The quirky corners and alcoves, high-ceiling rooms, the light streaming in from all the windows, the wonderful props and ornaments, plants and massive vinyl collection, as well as the colour orange present in every room, makes the flat look incredibly spacious, homely and lived-in.

The first thing Seph shows me is the view from the kitchen window. “I love this open view! You can see Canary Wharf and at night it looks so nice with all the lights, and when the trains go past at night the lights flicker.” From her kitchen window you can see all across from London Eye down to Canary Wharf, and on New Year’s Eve Seph used to have parties where they would go out on the balcony to see

the fireworks. She tells me how horrified she was when she first heard about the redevelopment plans and the big tower they are planning to build on that bit of land. “It would completely obstruct my lovely view.”





Seph in her beloved flat - January 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser

Seph has lived in her flat for over 20 years. When she first got the flat, it had been completely flooded from above and needed driers for some time to make it inhabitable again. She was offered by the council to either have the flat refurbished or to get the money to do it herself. She opted for the latter and did all the wallpapering herself. In 2002, she bought the flat under Right-To-Buy to secure her future in New Cross.

“I feel so safe here. Once my door is locked I feel so at ease. It’s so quiet and the spacious flat with views of trees and greenery gives you head space too. It makes you feel good.” Seph also mentions a project carried out by local residents to counter the stigma of ‘sink estates’ by looking at the plants around the estate. They invited an eco-botanist who discovered more than 120 species of wildflowers, which included some very rare plants only found on former bomb sites.

This is not to say that there are no problems in the area. “Living here hasn’t always felt safe”, Seph admits, “and I still sometimes don’t like walking up the stairs at night, but this is mostly to do with what was going on 20 years ago. At that time, there were lots of muggings in the area, but thankfully this has improved a lot. There have been rare occasions of people hanging out in the staircase at night, but they are never from here”, Seph asserts. “I know many of the residents at Austin House and they are generally all decent hard-working people. I have seen lots of kids grow up here and they have turned into lovely, polite caring young adults. It’s others, who think because it’s a council block they can just come here and hang out as no-one will care, who generally cause the problems.”

Seph is offended by the fact that these flats are labelled as rat-infested, damp and unfit to live in. “How can you call this flat uninhabitable and ready for demolition? Yes, we have some mice around the block and some flats have issues with damp but so do other blocks and lovely Victorian houses. These issues could be resolved easily with proper maintenance of gutters and drainage pipes in the blocks in my opinion.” Looking around her flat, you can understand why she feels resentful about the demolition plans and you wonder why the council would pull down flats, which have been found to be structurally sound. It also makes you question the whole rhetoric of crime-ridden ‘sink estates’ the government deploys.

The rhetoric of the ‘sink estate’ and the stigma of living in council housing is very widespread and lack of transparency and consideration for local residents angers Seph. “The council treat us like they think we’re stupid! They say things we do not believe and we can see straight through them. If everybody was really considered; if residents were given suitable alternative homes; if like-for-like really meant that,





Details of Seph's lovingly decorated flat: kitchen (left page), part of her living room (top) and bedroom (bottom)

Photos: Anita Strasser

i.e. if you demolish someone's flat you give them another one, not a half share of one (shared ownership); if the elderly were given flats with wheelchair access and not coerced off to old people's homes; and if residents were treated fairly and listened to, I don't think I would be so against redevelopment. But this doesn't happen, we've seen this in other developments – all these promises are made and then broken, the reality is a completely different story. It's this fact which makes me so annoyed."

Seph also mentions councillors' repeatedly stated mission of having to house the poor, homeless and those living in temporary accommodation, making campaigners who fight against the development look unreasonable. "It will be interesting to see how many of these people will actually be housed", Seph says. "The figures seem skewed and originally the proposal for Achilles Street included very few extra flats for social rent. And what about private renters in our block who have lived here for years and have children in local schools? Who cares about what happens to them and whether they can afford to live in the area? The council have no responsibility to help rehouse them at all!"

When I spoke to Seph, she was unsure of what to do. Shall she jump ship before she's pushed, before the council decide what to do? Shared Ownership is not an option for her, and she doesn't trust the council to give her what her flat is worth or what would enable her to buy another place in the area. The only thing she can afford is another council property but she's aware that "you could move into the same situation further down the line, when it will be even harder to deal with it as I'll be older. It would be the third time in my life I have moved to a generally poor but creative area and then had to leave. I moved to Hackney in the 80s, near where Broadway Market is today. I lived next to a massive waste ground and paid £40 a week; then it got trendy... Now New Cross is being developed. I don't want to move again, but feel I have little choice."

Seph told me that if she moves, it'll be out of London, probably to Kent somewhere. It's a difficult decision and she's trying to put a positive spin on it. London, particularly south London, has been a creative and exciting place to be on a personal and professional level. She has loved living in the New Cross and Deptford area, the live music on the streets, the dancers on the square, and Deptford Market where she has bought many of the curious objects in her flat. I take lots of photos of her flat. I am perhaps the last person to see the flat as it is; I'm beginning to feel emotional myself. I can't imagine what it must be like having to pack up 20 odd years of memories in a much-loved home, a home Seph thought would be her home for the rest of her life, a home which gave her stability and security.

Since our conversation, Seph has made the decision to move. Some might consider this as a choice but when looking at the circumstances it can hardly been seen as that.

Memories of an ex-stevedore

Text written by Anita Strasser in June 2018



The old gas fire in Bill's living room - January 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Bill has lived in his flat on Achilles Street for 66 years, ever since he moved in, in 1953. Bill was born in St Olave's Hospital in Rotherhithe – now a housing estate – in 1928 and is 90 years old. He started to work in 1942, and on his way to work by bike, London was getting bombed all around. "All the houses in our neighbourhood were getting bombed, but in those 6 years our house managed to stay safe." After the war, the houses were being pulled down and his family had to move. His father was working in the docks at the time and didn't want to move too far away from work. They found this flat on Achilles Street, a London City Council building at the time and built not long after the war. Bill and his family moved in when he was 25, and he has lived here ever since. The flat hasn't changed much since moving in.

For the family, it was the first home where they had electricity and a bathroom. When we talk, Bill shows me some photographs of his mum and other family members. You can see the same settee and other furniture in the photographs, and his mum's bedroom still has the same wallpaper as when she passed away 20 years ago. Also, the gas fire is still the same as on the day they installed it; only Bill is not allowed to use it anymore for safety reasons. Bill used to know all the neighbours, and he still remembers all the names of people and in which flat they lived. Sadly, many of them





Bill's immaculately kept flat: lounge (top and left page) and bedroom (bottom) - January 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser

have moved out or died. "Now you don't know who lives next door!", he says.

Bill is still incredibly fit for his age. He manages the whole household by himself and has a memory as sharp as a pencil. When he shows me photographs of him and his colleagues at the docks, he tells me the name of every person, where they were from and whether they have died or are still alive. Bill worked in the docks as a stevedore for 30 years and has very fond memories of that time.

"It was a wonderful time, the camaraderie amongst men was out of this world", he reminisces, "not like today where everyone just looks out for themselves. Working at the docks was hard work but it was very rewarding", he continues. "It was all about friendship, you knew all of your mates and we helped each other out." Together they played football and cricket, and took part in marches. "Many of the strikes were to support other people and when we went on strike, everybody was united! This kind of camaraderie doesn't exist anymore today."

Bill started working in the Surrey Quays Commercial Docks in 1950 and took bus 202, which used to run from New Cross to Rotherhithe, to work. "At that time, there was work in abundance", he remembers. When those docks shut in 1969, the workers were sent to Millwall and West India Docks where Canary Wharf now stands. In 1980, when all the docks shut down, Bill, after 30 years of being a docker, was made redundant. But he was lucky. After looking very hard for another job, Bill started work as a maintenance worker in Nat West Bank in the city less than 2 months after being made redundant. He worked there for another 13 years doing anything that needed doing such as cleaning, polishing and repairing before retiring in 1993. "It was a good job and well-paid", he says. "At that time the bank paid all their own staff, engineers, labourers, everyone. Now all the services are sub-contracted, and you see what happens… like with Carillion. How can the government give them a £2bn contract with taxpayer's money without doing their research?", Bill wonders.

Bill also has fond memories of New Cross and Deptford, and how he would spend his free time. "We'd come home from work and there was plenty to do. The Venue was a cinema called Kinema, there was the New Cross Empire Theatre, the Broadway Picture House and the Odeon in Deptford. And if you wanted a drink, there was a mile of pubs on Deptford High Street. You could start at one end and by the time you arrived at the other end you'd had enough." Sadly, pretty much all pubs on Deptford High Street have disappeared and whilst many of the pubs in New Cross are still here, Bill says they've been taken over by Goldsmiths students. "You might as well call New Cross Goldsmiths with the amount of buildings they own", he says half-jokingly. For Bill, New Cross pubs are too dear now, and he likes to go





Bill with fellow dockers - date unknown

Photos: Courtesy of William Lowery, with the kind permission to reproduce them here

to the Greenwich Wetherspoon's or the Crosse Keys Wetherspoon's in the city, where he regularly meets his former Nat West colleagues, those still alive and well enough to go.

Curiously, Bill says he doesn't mind if he has to move into another flat, but this is mostly to do with his age. "When you get to the age of 90, you don't expect too much. If I was younger, I'd be more interested in how I live but now it doesn't make a lot of difference to me; as long as they don't send me to China or North Korea, or into an old people's home – I don't want to go there. I want to live somewhere quiet and stay in the area I'm familiar with; that's important. I can look after myself and just want to be able to do my thing." When I ask him if he would miss his flat, considering he hasn't changed it in all these years, his pragmatism comes out again: "I haven't had much change in my life, I moved from Rotherhithe to here, that was my only change. I won't get a flat as big as this but it'll be something I can manage better. I might even get a nice view into the park. But I don't want to live on the ground floor though, it's too noisy!"

He does feel sorry though for the younger generation, for leaseholders and private renters. "They are probably in a much worse situation than me. Most of the flats are private now and they're not building any more council houses."



This used to be Bill's mother's bedroom; the wallpaper has been there since 1953

Photo: Anita Strasser

“I like living in Austin House”

Text written by Anita Strasser in February 2018



Quoc Ton Luu in his flat in Austin House on Achilles Street, where he made all the doors and floors himself - January 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Quoc Ton Luu and his wife Pam live in a council property on the third floor of Austin House. They have lived here for 30 years and brought up their four children in this flat. All four children, two boys and two girls with the eldest 48 years old, have moved out already, and until 20 years ago, Quoc Ton’s mother lived with them as well. Quoc Ton came to Britain as a Vietnamese refugee in the 1980s. They lived in Newcastle for 5 years before moving to London. “My son liked London so we followed him”, he laughs. “There were no jobs in Newcastle but there were jobs in London so we moved here”, he adds. Quoc Ton is a retired carpenter and has put down all the floors in the flat himself and made all the beautiful doors as well. He’s also a keen gardener and the window sill in the living room is adorned with colourful orchids. He also grows ginseng on the balcony, making the approach to the front door look very inviting. Generally, despite his age, he’s a very active man and still goes jogging regularly. Quoc Ton likes living in Austin House and would like to stay. “I like living here, I like the area. It’s near all the stations, it’s very handy.” When I ask him how he feels about the demolition plans, he takes a pragmatic stance. “If everybody else will move, I’ll move. I will follow other people. But living here is better for me. I prefer staying here.” When I ask him if he would make all the floors and doors again himself if he had to move to a new place, he replies “yes, of course” with a smile.

The window sill in the lounge adorned with beautiful orchids

Photo: Anita Strasser



“We tenants, we are not going to win”

Text written by Anita Strasser in August 2018



Bernard playing the guitar in his flat in Austin House on Achilles Street - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Bernard is a pensioner who lives on the 2nd floor in Austin House. Until his retirement in September 2017, Bernard was a Drugs and Alcohol Worker helping young drug users find a way back into normal life. It was not something he had planned; he had done a moulding apprenticeship in a factory in Charlton in the 70s and became a skilled moulder/core maker for making ship propellers. When the propeller section moved to Birkenhead in the mid 70s, he didn’t know what to do, so he went to Oxford Street to look for work, where he met a blind man from South Africa. Bernard told him about himself and that he didn’t know what to do and the man said: “It sounds like you like working with people. Why don’t you try working with young people?” Bernard was intrigued and then it all fell into place.

Bernard found voluntary work in north London to help troubled young adults, where he was taught everything from the ground up. And through some coincidences, one of the managers there, Karl, was to play a big part in Bernard’s long-term future. When Bernard took a paid job in a mental support office in Brixton, Karl was

Bernard's manager again, and after Bernard was diagnosed with sickle cell disease after coming out of a 7-week coma after falling ill at a family party, Karl offered him a job in Newham as soon as he was getting better. "Do you want a job working with young Class A drug users?", he asked Bernard. This is how he became an Alcohol and Drugs Worker.

After being diagnosed, Bernard needed to be rehoused in more suitable accommodation. He was living in Forest Hill at the time and then he was offered this council flat in Austin House. At first, he didn't realise where Achilles Street was, despite the fact that he grew up in New Cross, but when he arrived in 2005, he immediately went down Memory Lane. "I came to the UK in the early 1960s when I was 9 years old and grew up not far from Achilles Street", he tells me. "I used to live in Batavia Road, went to Childeric Primary and attended the doctor's surgery at Clifton Rise where now the new flats stand. What is now Fordham Park used to be all houses and what is now the underpass by New Cross Station and McMillan Park used to be a road that would take you all the way from Pagnell Street to the Albany", Bernard remembers. "It has changed so much; my past is all but a memory now." Later his family moved to Brockley and Bernard has moved around London a fair bit, but he has always stayed closely connected to New Cross through school, music and friends. Sickle cell disease has brought him back to New Cross for good.

Bernard remembers Moonshot (when it was still in its original location) and Sybil Phoenix, a Caribbean woman who put her heart and soul into looking after the black community, organising youth and community projects that kept young people off the streets. Bernard was one of those kids, and all the events organised at Moonshot kept him out of trouble. "At that time, there were lots of gangs in the area and a lot of territorial rivalry between Jamaicans. I got invited to join a gang but I said no because my parents taught me to always be a good person. Unfortunately, refusing the invitation made me the enemy of the gang. One day it got nasty and my friend stabbed somebody in the side in self-defence. I just ran home. To this day I can hear the blade going into the guy's body and it will stay with me forever."

Life in the 70s was tough for a Jamaican living in New Cross, and Bernard was part of the British Black Power Movement. He remembers his first experience of racism. "I was 12 and walking home from school in my school uniform and then three white women walking past said to me: 'You have dirty black knees!' I ran home and asked my parents to buy me long pants!" Later, when he was a young adult, he had a friend living close to the Millwall Den and they used to watch the games together but afterwards "I could never walk her home, I had to leave straight after the game because otherwise I wouldn't have made it home in peace." Bernard was nearly killed at Dartford Train Station, when a group of skinheads who'd been drinking in the Railway Tavern beat him up really badly. He only survived because a white girl shouted: "You're going to kill him!" and then they stopped. The train guard put him and another badly beaten black guy onto the train. "I have no recollection of that train journey but luckily the other guy also got off at New Cross and somehow I made it home."

Bernard went to school with Jah Shaka (or Nev Powell as he was called before), the well-known DJ whose sound system, the Shaka Sound, became well-known across the country for promoting roots music and a spiritually charged atmosphere.[1] Before

[1] Anim-Addo, J. (1995) *Longest Journey: A History of Black Lewisham.* Deptford Forum Publishing.

Shaka became famous, he used to DJ in Moonshot using the sound system Freddie Cloudburst. Bernard has always loved music and was part of that scene at the time and it was through a strange coincidence that he became a DJ himself. “Shaka was the DJ that night but was not known by that name at that time. We were in Sybil’s house with Shaka getting ready. We were in different rooms and Shaka asked me to put a record on to check that the equipment was working. I was so nervous my hands were shaking. I’d never put on a record before. My hand was shaking so hard I dropped the needle onto the record. I looked up and then the strangest thing happened. All the people in the room were looking at me and I became aware how much I loved the attention I was getting. It was magic. It was then that I decided to become a DJ.”

Music became Bernard’s No.1 love. Bernard used to DJ in a club on Peckham High Street called Bouncing Ball (later Mr Bees) but he also recalls a night where he was DJ-ing in Ram Jam in Brixton. “You have to understand that people who used to go to Ram Jam knew their music; resident artists there were mostly Jamaicans and so expectations were high. If you didn’t hit the mark with the music, people would not move. There was no-one on the dance floor at first when I started but I remember that after I started playing music the dance floor filled up. It was this power of music that was greater than I. Music was the love of my life”, he says, “music, liquor and weed, this was the life. It was rough and at times dangerous, but life was good!”



Bernard playing the guitar - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

His DJ career ended when the smoking of weed became so much that he lost focus. “There are times when your senses are heightened or slowed down and if you’re not mindful, the music will draw you in and distract you from focus. It was a very competitive scene so there was someone ready straight away to take over from me.” But Bernard has no regrets. This love for music is now gone and has been replaced by the love for God; Bernard became a born-again Christian. He first had doubts, but it was God that told him he would blind him to music, and this is what happened. Bernard stopped DJ-ing. But music has taken on another role in Bernard’s life: he’s learning to play the guitar. Now that he is retired, he’s bought himself a guitar and is taking lessons at home.

Bernard likes living in Austin House because he’s back where he grew up. Living on the 2nd floor is convenient because of his illness. As Bernard can fall ill any time, the ambulance need to be able to get to him quickly so he can’t live higher than on the 2nd floor. Bernard also knows some neighbours who are there for him if he needs them. “There’s Bill obviously – he’s been living here for a long time. He also helped me out once when I locked myself out. Since then I always have a set of keys in my pocket. And there are some other people I know, but the community here has changed a heck of a lot. Many of our former neighbours have moved on or died. Goldsmiths has enlarged its territory and students aren’t mixing very well. They’re here for a bit and then go off again. You can talk to the older folks but the younger ones aren’t interested.”

Bernard would rather he didn't have to move and he's not happy about the demolition plans. "I first got wind of the plans when the council came round telling me they are making provisions for the homeless. I'm not saying no to that, of course we need to house the homeless, but it's the way the council goes about it. They just steamroll over people's views; and will the flats really be for the homeless? The council need to put more thought into this and think about how it will affect us. I've seen the full implications for our community in the past and now we're going through the same again. All the community spirit of people living here, and the effort people have put into it over the years, that's all going to be lost again. Some people call it progress; I don't think it's progress if all community centres and council homes are being knocked down. At least my memories can't be erased, but when I'm gone, my memories will go with me and my history will be erased. But the way the whole area is changing, the local communities will also be erased."

Bernard is a council tenant and has been promised to be rehoused. He has informed the council that he cannot live higher up than the 2nd floor but hasn't heard back whether this will be taken into consideration. "It is only a matter of waiting now. We tenants, we are not going to win but please treat us right, treat us fairly! We need better regeneration and think about all people. They want to build a car park on Clifton Rise and have Achilles Street free from parked cars. But I am registered as disabled; sometimes I cannot walk as far as Clifton Rise, especially on days when I'm not too well. I need close access to my car and need to be able to get home quickly. At the same time, I need to keep fit and do exercise to manage my illness but on days when I feel dizzy or weak, I cannot walk to Wavelengths to do exercise, I need somewhere closer and cheap to use a gym. I'm a pensioner now and I know what it means to live on a state pension. I used to go on holiday once a year and never worry about money, but now that I'm retired, things have changed a lot. So, I'm limited, physically and financially. I can take sick at any time and I'm very aware of that; the first sign of back pain and I need to stop everything right away and go home. So, it's good to have people around me that I know and can trust, but I don't know where these people are going to be housed after that. I hope I'll be fine."



In Bernard's flat in Austin House on Achilles Street - July 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

“I want to stay here and die here”

Text written by Anita Strasser in October 2019



Nancy’s living room - October 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser

A week before the ballot started for residents to vote for or against the demolition of the Achilles Street area, me and Jacquie (neighbour and campaigner) went to see Nancy who lives in one of the maisonettes in the buildings known as 363. These maisonettes are above the shops on New Cross Road, overlooking the estate on Achilles Street at the back. They are part of the redevelopment plans and face demolition. As soon as we walk in, Nancy tells us how distraught she is about the council’s plans to demolish her sanctuary, the only place where she has felt safe during a life that hasn’t always been easy. Almost in tears she shows us her beautiful home, which is filled with family photographs, perfectly arranged ornaments, tastefully chosen wallpaper, lace curtains and tablecloths, and chandeliers. The love for detail is immediately visible. I feel like I have stepped into a cabinet of curiosities, a cabinet of wonder. She points to the Italian-style floor tiles in the lounge, which look new but have been in the flat for 25 years. She also tells us about the wooden floors upstairs which she put down. Nancy and her family took out everything the council had put in and decorated it themselves. The only thing that’s now from the council is the new walk-in shower that Nancy needed after two hip operations. You





Details in Nancy's lovingly decorated and well looked after flat - October 2019

Photos: Anita Strasser

Nancy going to a friend's wedding in Cyprus in 1967

Photo: Courtesy of Nazlie Memish, with the kind permission to reproduce it here



would never guess this is a council flat simply because of the personal investment that's been made. "It's my home!", Nancy says, visibly upset at the prospect of losing it.

Nancy and her whole family (she is the eldest of 10 children) came to the UK from Cyprus in 1968. She was in her early twenties then. They first stayed in Battersea before moving to the borough of Lewisham, where Nancy slept on a mattress on the floor because there wasn't enough space for such a large family. Nancy was desperate to get her own flat and was told to move into a hostel to speed up the process. When she hadn't heard back after 3 months in the hostel, she moved back to her mum's to sleep on the floor again. Then, after one month, she was finally given her own council flat on the Pepys Estate. This was in the late 1970s. Nancy lived in that flat for 7 years, but it wasn't a good experience as she felt very unsafe on the estate. She remembers frequent fights, drug problems and other troubles. Her worst experiences were getting burgled and having firecrackers put through her letterbox. "I lived in a flat at the end of a horrible corridor that resembled a hospital corridor. I never felt safe there. One day I got burgled. They came through my window after climbing onto the scaffolding. I was at work – I used to work as a seamstress and sew buttonholes in a Deptford factory. All my lovely jewellery got stolen, even my shopping in the fridge was taken. I had no insurance at the time. I lost everything. Another time, somebody put a firecracker through my letterbox. It was around Christmas and teenagers were playing with firecrackers. I wasn't in at the time. When I came back, the carpet was burnt. Luckily, the fire went out by itself. I was lucky the flat didn't burn down. This was just after I had got pregnant, so I told the council I can't live there anymore."

During that time, Nancy passed the 363 building and noticed that the flat she now occupies was empty. She asked somebody how many bedrooms there were in the flats – she was told 2. She asked the council about the place and was told that it was unfit to live in and that she would have to wait until the flat had been refurbished. Eventually she got the phone call to view the flat. Although the council had only done basic decorating, she immediately liked it and said: "I'll move in!" Nancy was 8 months pregnant when she moved in.

Her son was born in Guy's Hospital in January 1987 and now Nancy has one grandchild. She also used to mind Christian sometimes when he was growing up on the estate (next story on p. 211-214). Her life in the 363 building has been a happy one. "I'm happy here. I have my GP down the road, Lewisham and Greenwich are nearby, Guy's Hospital is not far. The flat and the building are really good quality, there is no damp or any other issue here." Nancy shows me her spacious balcony where she keeps her garden. There's even space for a little wooden shed. She talks me through all her plants: the plum tree, which bore lots of fruit last year and







Details in Nancy's garden: the rose bush from her son (top), ornaments and blue evil eyes (middle), autumn colours on the plum tree (bottom) - October 2019

Photos: Anita Strasser

whose leaves have turned red during the early autumn start, olive trees, a money tree, a chilli plant with really hot green chillies, a lemon tree, a citronella plant and others. There is dill and mint, and there is a very special rose bush: one year for Mother's Day, Nancy's son bought her a rose, which has since grown into a whole bush with lots of flowers. As she tells me about each plant, she gently touches the leaves of each of them and clears away any dead leaves, making it very visible just what the garden means to her. There are also ornaments everywhere, and necklaces with blue evil eyes to prevent bad things from happening. After I tell her that I love dill, she cuts off the whole bush to give to me. She also asks me if I like mint and cuts off a bunch of leaves for me. She says having this outdoor space allows her to stay at home where she feels safe while having the opportunity of being outdoors at the same time. She can't go out as much these days although she still likes going to Lewisham to do some shopping. She's had hip operations and looks after a very ill husband. Her garden and the open space outside her front door give her much needed breathing space and allow her to keep in touch with her neighbours.

"I'm so happy here", she exclaims with her eyes filling up again. "I feel safe! I have never been burgled; nobody ever knocked down my door, never been in any difficulty here. I feel safe here because I know all my neighbours. I'm afraid to move into a new place because I won't know who lives in the building, I won't know who the people are and what they're like. I just don't understand why the council want to demolish perfectly good flats which have no damp, no issues with the electrics, no problems whatsoever! If I wanted to move, I would have moved a long time ago! Nobody from the 363 flats wants to move. The new buildings are built with low quality – cheap wood, cheap materials – with kitchens in the lounge and no outdoor space."

Nancy takes me upstairs to show me the rest of the flat. Every corner is decorated with love and attention to detail. The neat array of family photographs, ornaments and lace cloths continues in every room. Every time I take a picture, she double-checks nothing is lying around and that there are no creases anywhere. In the end, she says: "Money is not important. Most important is being happy and the place where you live is so important for happiness. What are you doing in life if you aren't happy? My home, this home, is where my happiness is. Here is where I feel safe, where I feel happy. I want to stay here and die here."

In the end, Nancy shows me a photograph of herself in Cyprus in 1967. She was going to a friend's wedding. It was the year before her family moved to the UK. 51 years on, she is still that same good-looking woman as in the photograph. Forcing her to move out of her home at this age will destroy her.

“I want to live in this home for the rest of my life!”

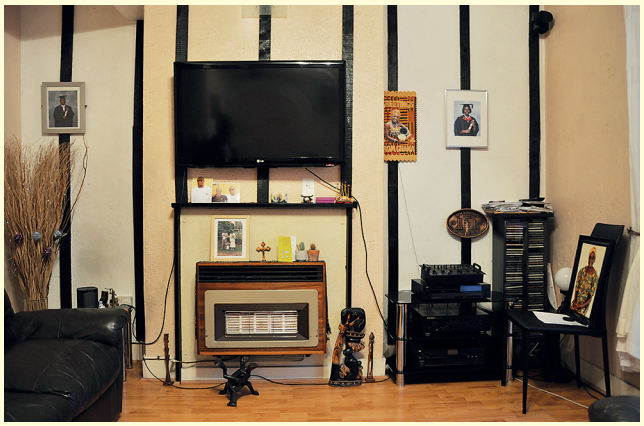
Text written by Anita Strasser in August 2019



Christian on his balcony overlooking New Cross Road - August 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser

In September 2019 I met Christian, a young man in his mid-twenties who works as a project manager for a tech start-up. He lives in the building referred to as 363, which contains maisonettes above the shops on New Cross Parade on New Cross Road. The maisonettes and the shops are under threat of demolition as part of the Achilles Street development. From Christian’s front door you have a fantastic view into Fordham Park and over to the Pepys Estate and other high-rises scattered across Deptford. You also see the green shrubbery that surrounds the Achilles Street buildings. The approaching sunset over the buildings as we approach the door adds another dimension to the view. The first thing I notice is space – green space, space for play, for cars, space to breathe. We go onto the spacious balcony on the other side of the building, overlooking New Cross Road. This is Christian’s favourite place in his home and together with his dad we stand there for a bit and watch the world go by. It’s an interesting new perspective of New Cross for me. Being raised above the usual eye level, I suddenly see writing on top of buildings I have never seen before and I notice the sense of space you get from having the buildings set back from one of the busiest roads in south-east London. I ask them if they experience noise issues being so close to a major artery, but they say that the width of the parade does not

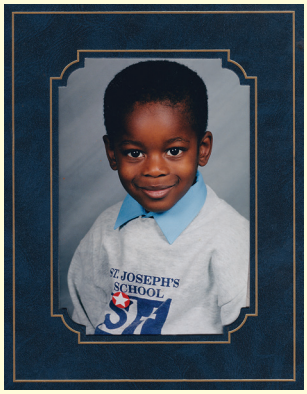




allow the noise to come through good windows much. They can't imagine what it would be like though if the building went right up to the road – like they will if redevelopment takes place.

The thought of having their family home demolished is very upsetting for Christian and his family. "This is our home, where our memories are kept. This is where some of our greatest memories happened, where our community is and where we feel a strong sense of belonging. I want to live in this home for the rest of my life! Having that taken away from us means we have to start building a life from scratch again because we won't be able to afford a new place in the area", Christian explains.

Christian gets his photo album out and together we look through it. It contains mostly family photographs taken in this flat, particularly in the lounge. Some features like the fireplace, the wooden beams and a lamp are still the same. Other things like the photograph of Christian's late grandmother, who passed away last year, are newer additions. There are photographs of birthday parties and other gatherings, school photographs and family portraits. Somewhere in the flat there is a VHS of Curtis' first birthday party.



Top

The living room of Christian's family home

Middle

Christian looking through one of his family photo albums

Photos: Anita Strasser

Bottom

Christian at St Joseph's School in the late 1990s

Photo: Stanley Baker Studios Ltd, with the kind permission to reproduce it here

Christian's parents came to South-East London from Ghana at different times and didn't meet until they were both living here in the 1980s. After they'd known each other for a few years, they moved into a flat in Hawke Tower on the Woodpecker Estate in Deptford in 1989. When his mum got pregnant with Christian, they were given this flat in the 363 building in 1993 – the year Christian was born. His brother Curtis was born a year after. When being told about the flat, the councillor at the time said: 'You are lucky, your flat is in New Cross' but Christian's parents didn't actually know where New Cross was. Now, they can't imagine living anywhere else. Gradually, the family made the flat their home – they decorated it, had birthday and family parties. One of Christian's favourite memories is sitting on the floor in front of the hot fireplace in winter, wrapped in a blanket and watching TV.

Christian and Curtis first went to St Michael's Nursery on the Woodpecker Estate before they went to Childeric Nursery just around the corner from 363. The two of them were often dressed in matching outfits. "Mum had always wanted twins and since me and Curtis are only one year apart, we practically were twins. I remember walking through Fordham Park to get to nursery. I also learnt to ride a bike in Fordham Park and me and my brother used to cycle around the park. We always stayed in the area. We used the playground on Achilles Street, where we played with local kids from Azalea and Fenton House. The other kids often used to come to our flat", Christian tells me. The boys then went to St Joseph's Primary School on Deptford High Street before going to St Michael's Catholic College in Bermondsey. They often played football together on the parade in front of the block and they've had many parties and BBQs on the balcony.





Top

Christian on the balcony of his family home in 1994

Bottom

Christian on his third birthday (with his auntie and brother in the background) in 1996

Photos: Courtesy of Christian Codjoe, with the kind permission to reproduce them here

There are other close connections located within the area. Ever since they arrived, the family have been going to the Catholic Church of Our Lady of The Assumption on Deptford High Street. “The boys were baptised there, had communion there and confirmation. Now I’m waiting for holy matrimony”, Christian’s dad laughs. Christian also loves Deptford Flea Market. Funnily, he didn’t like it too much when he was younger. “Mum always dragged us down to the market to buy second-hand clothes. We were embarrassed because we went to St Joseph’s. Now I love the market, I always get bargains and I know everyone there. Funny how perceptions change but when you’re a kid you don’t always understand things”, Christian says.

After about 8 years living there, his parents managed to buy the flat off the council. It took a lot of hard work. Christian’s mum, for example, worked 2 jobs and studied at the same time. Christian’s dad started studying later. The parents had a plan: to work hard and build up a secure future for their two sons. “In a city like London it is especially important to have a security blanket that protects you from a life of uncertainty and instability”, Christian says.

Having the dream of home ownership fulfilled and the ‘assurance’ of providing their children with a ‘stable and secure’ home, Christian’s parents were slowly preparing to move back to Ghana. Then news broke that the council was planning to demolish 363 along with the shops and the four blocks on Achilles Street. Since then, and particularly with not knowing what is going to happen, their lives have been put on hold. The move back to Ghana has been put off until no-one knows when, and the family feel that the rug is being pulled from beneath their feet. “We’re living in limbo. It is very destructive and hurtful. We’ve worked so hard to have security and provide opportunities for our children and this is now being taken away. Those making the decisions don’t understand what they are doing to us and our neighbours, who have been here so long as well”, Christian’s dad says.

Losing this home would mean losing a kind of structure for Christian – a secure home, a sense of belonging, and the connection to the building through all the memories that have been shared in it. “Living in a flat in a new-build won’t be the same. They lack character, they don’t have the same amount of space and it would be an empty shell. We would have no connection to it, no family memories. It would be a house instead of a home.” But Christian’s family won’t be able to afford a new build in the area anyway. Although it seems they are being offered the current value of their home plus 10%, it still won’t be enough to buy a 2-bedroom flat in a new development or in the area. In fact, the way things are going, it won’t buy them anything in Zone 1 or 2.

So, this isn’t just about losing a safe and secure home, it is also a story about belonging to a place where one grew up and where all one’s memories are stored.



Christian on his newly-decorated balcony - August 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser

Both Christian and Curtis love living in New Cross, with Christian describing his life in the area as "wholesome". "It's been home since I was born, it's where my family are and my close friends are here on the Woodpecker, in New Cross, Deptford and Greenwich. It's a great community, it has a very diverse population, good transport links to other areas, and a great mixture of busyness and quietness. It has everything from Jamaican, Indian, Turkish, African food to pizza for a good price. My dad gets his hair cut in Unique Hair Technique across the road (I used to go there too but now I go to a hairdresser in Deptford) and I love listening to Motown music on the balcony and people watching. It's a great place!"

Ever since they have found out about the potential loss of their much-loved home, their lives have been full of uncertainty. Christian says that, at first, he didn't buy into the idea of 'social cleansing' and he thought that the people employed by the council to talk to residents in the newly decorated community space at Fenton House about the redevelopment plans really had the community of Achilles Street area at heart. However, having seen what is happening in New Cross and Deptford and noticing how the demographic is changing, and experiencing the threat of displacement himself, he does believe it is social cleansing. "You just need to go to Deptford Flea Market on a Saturday and then cross over to Deptford Market Yard. You can see a barrier there." To Christian it feels like the heart of New Cross will be ripped out if the redevelopment plans go ahead.

I ask Christian and his dad whether they've made plans in case their home will be demolished. They haven't. They can't bear thinking about it; it's too upsetting. They keep hoping that their home won't be demolished and that they can finally follow up on their original plans.



View over the back of Achilles Street area including Fenton House (left), Azalea House (centre) and Austin House (right) from Christian's front door - August 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser

“People here don’t want demolition”

Text written by Anita Strasser in June 2018



Bola in Divine Cargo - May 2018
Photo: Anita Strasser

Benson Odidi is the proprietor of Divine Cargo on 355 New Cross Road. Divine Cargo is a shipping company that provides a full range of air, sea and road freight services. If you need a parcel over 23 kg shipping anywhere in the world, Divine Cargo is the place to go, but Divine Cargo can also be a collection point. On the premises, there are also computers with internet access, copy machines and scanning and binding facilities. And finally, there is also an array of colour samples of African textiles which can be ordered in bulk and shipped anywhere in the world.

I am speaking to Bola, Benson’s wife, who in his absence tells me about their business, the area and the fact that their shop is under threat of demolition. The first thing Bola tells me is the kind of relationships that have formed over the years through the shop, and that the shop is not just a shop but plays an important role in the community. She tells me about an elderly gentleman who recently died as a result of an attack on a night bus. “This elderly gentleman who used to live upstairs came in asking for help with filling in an insurance form to give to the police because he had been attacked by a group of youths on the night bus. He was punched on the side of the head. He’d been in before a few times using the computer or asking for help with other paperwork and I’ve always helped him, so he felt he could come



Divine Cargo shop front - May 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

in here asking for help. A few weeks later he died and because I helped him fill in the form, I was able to tell his family what happened. Without this they would not know the reason for this death."

We then talk about the shop – how it all started and how the planned demolition will affect them. "We started in 2010. The parade wasn't really lively then, many shops were closed and properties empty. Straight after we came others followed and the parade is really lovely now. Some put up Christmas decorations, people sit outside, sometimes there's music playing and children are dancing. There is a really nice atmosphere here and children and adults like it."

Bola tells me that many of their customers are (Goldsmiths) students who, after finishing their studies, need their belongings shipped back home or a place elsewhere, or who come in to have their projects printed and bound for college. But their customer base is very mixed. Some elderly people who live upstairs come in to use the computers, often asking for help with technology and paperwork, other people, also often living upstairs, have their parcels delivered here (and Divine Cargo also collect smaller parcels to be picked up by neighbours who are not at home). Many people come in ordering textiles in large bulk to be shipped somewhere – often to Africa for a traditional wedding or elsewhere for curtains.

When I ask Bola about the demolition plans it becomes clear, as with the other businesses, that it would mean the end of their business venture. "All the rates will go up – for phone lines, broadband, water and rent. We won't be able to exist with those rates. We would become jobless and it would also deprive our customers of our services." Bola understands that redevelopment has to happen, but thinks that this should happen in areas where there is space or where buildings are in a really bad state. For her, this does not apply here: "The buildings here are fine, they are not in need of demolition. They need maintenance and they should have been maintained better to stop demolition but since we've been here no repair work has ever been done. And there is no space here already. The traffic is always congested and with more people there will be even more traffic. People here don't want demolition; it's



The shops and maisonettes on New Cross Parade - December 2017

Photo: Anita Strasser

not the right decision and it will affect a lot of people. The parade is already lively as it is – we are like a family here and demolition will separate many people who have built up lasting friendships. For example, there is an elderly man living upstairs who comes down to the parade every morning. As we are the first shop to open, we often sit down and have a chat. Or sometimes people just come in asking for help with letters to the council."

When I ask Bola what she would like to say to the council she replies with: "Listen to the people, take their experience into consideration. Revisit the decision to demolish – the area is ok the way it is, it just needs decorating." What strikes me most though is what Bola says afterwards. "Children love the parade, they come here every day after school and hang out here – it's such a nice atmosphere. And they know us and they come in to use the toilet. There is no public toilet in New Cross, the next one is in Deptford Lounge. And it's not just children that use our toilet, other people too. Some people are diabetic or have other health conditions where they might suddenly need to go urgently, and we let them. I know we as a business don't have to but we need to look after less privileged people – there are no more places for them to go and not having a toilet in the area might mean not going out for them. Today it's all about money, it's all for the posh and those with money. I know we need business but it doesn't mean we can't look after the less privileged."

Bola tells me that she has experience working with people with autism and knows about issues of access for less privileged people and how they are treated at times. And when I listen to her passionate account about the lack of public toilets, the wider implications of this influx of private money and the persistent cutbacks of public facilities becomes apparent again, restricting access and participation even further for the less privileged.



Computer stations at Divine Cargo - May 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

“New Cross was one of the last areas without being out in the suburbs”

Text written by Anita Strasser in January 2018



Mark and Star King, owners of Mughead Coffee on New Cross Road - January 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Mark and Star King are the business owners of Mughead Coffee. They love coffee and set up business in June 2017 with a 5-year lease, knowing that the area might be redeveloped in the near future. “At the moment it’s just talk and no fixed plans have been approved yet. It might not even happen and so we set up with the hope that we might be able to stay”, Star explains. The reason why they set up in New Cross is its art scene and the amount of artists and freelance workers that live in the area. “When we were looking for an area conducive to coffee shops, the Deptford and New Cross area stood out. This location here is so good – the layout of the courtyard and the fact that the buildings are set back from the road – you won’t find anything like this anywhere else”, Mark explains. With the limit of the 5-year lease, Star and Mark have not invested much money in the building itself, but they have built up a very good customer base very fast. Their customers are, according to Mark, “50% from Goldsmiths and the other 50% are freelance workers in the area.” The coffee shop was pretty much an instant success, at least in terms of popularity. “We’ve got dozens of people who come daily, with some customers having become almost family and calling the café their community hub. We know

many of our customers by first name, know about their personal lives, and we'd miss the community if we had to go. It seems there really was a need for a place like this."

The 5-year lease, however, makes the future uncertain and it carries a high risk for their business. "If the area does get redeveloped, we might not be able to find anywhere in the area within our budget. Where coffee shops are successful, the rent is already high and we need to find a balance between affordability and profitability in a difficult business climate. At the moment, we're working towards financial 'security' if things remain as they are, but we fear we'll be pushed out of here."

When I ask Mark what he thinks about what's generally happening in London, he describes it as an "unstoppable ripple effect". "It is the inevitable pushing out of populations through exorbitant pricing. People who used to be able to afford Greenwich had to move to Blackheath before then being moved on to Hither Green, which is also now becoming unaffordable", he expands. Mark and Star live in Hither Green and expect to be moved on again to somewhere further out soon. "Most of London is inaccessible to us as renters and entrepreneurs, and New Cross was one of the last areas without being out in the suburbs."

Mughead Coffee on New Cross Road - January 2018
Photos: Anita Strasser





It is evident that regeneration affects all those who don't have the money to pay the high rates after an area has been developed. This applies to homes and to businesses. Currently, the buildings on New Cross parade are owned by the council which makes rents more affordable, giving some entrepreneurs the chance to run an independent business, adding variety and diversity to the area. However, once the area has been regenerated, with buildings most likely owned by private developers, rents will be so high that most current businesses will not be able to set up again.

“The council has not fulfilled their part of the deal”

Text written by Anita Strasser in February 2018



YIP Oriental Store on New Cross Road - December 2017

Photo: Anita Strasser

Emma Zhang is the owner of YIP Oriental Store on 361 New Cross Road. Emma has had her shop for 7 years during which she has built it up to a thriving business which has a good customer base, particularly with students from Goldsmiths. The shop serves local students but also the Chinese and Japanese student communities based locally during their studies. Many of the students signed the petition to stop the demolition of the shop because it would mean that they would lose the store where they buy their products. Emma has built up a very good relationship with all her customers, who, according to her, are very kind people and often come in every day. Some of her customers have become friends over the years as well.

“We don’t want them to knock down the buildings”, Emma says. “About 2 years ago, the council posted a letter and then we had a meeting in Deptford Green School, where we told them that we’re not happy about the plans. We haven’t had confirmation yet about what’s going to happen. Demolition will be very expensive and really affect our business, and there is no guarantee that we will be able to move back or stay in the New Cross area. We have invested a lot of money in setting this up and if we have to find another location, this will lose us earnings and we’ll have

to invest more to set up again. It's unlikely we would be able to stay in this area, and so we would lose all our customers as well. We would have to start afresh."

Emma agrees that the area is and looks run-down and needs refurbishing. She and her brother Dean, who helps with the shop a couple of days a week, also have experience of knife-crime in the area, and the shop has been robbed a few times. Just 3 days before I met with them, somebody tried to break into the shop again. Emma says there is not enough police presence in the area, not enough CCTV and not enough protection for local residents or businesses. However, Emma does not think that this is a reason to demolish the existing blocks and shops as the run-down character and dangerous feel is due to the council's neglect of the area.

"We have an agreement, a contract with the council. As tenants we have to look after our property inside, and it's the council's responsibility to maintain the outside and the building with the rent we pay. We have paid our rent, and before we opened the shop years ago, we changed the terrible shopfront into a much nicer one. But the council has not fulfilled their part of the deal, which is to look after the outside. Maintenance and regular repairs cost much less than to redevelop everything. If a little money had been invested over the years, the area wouldn't be in such a state now. You could improve the area a lot by refurbishing and looking after it rather than demolishing everything."

Emma also says that the council needs to consider the local area more: "It's quite a special area with lots of interesting people who come into the shop. We also have many working-class people who shop in here. If you build more properties, the rents are going to be more expensive. The developers are promising people that they will have the same conditions afterwards and people might think 'oh great, I'm moving into a nice flat in a new development for the same price' but they just don't realise that prices will go up in the near future and that the service charges for shared equity properties are really high. We've seen this happening in other areas."



Emma's brother Dean working at YIP Oriental Store - December 2017

Photo: Anita Strasser

“I have stopped making plans”

Text written by Anita Strasser in January 2018



Teyfik, the manager of Delicious Café on New Cross Road - January 2018
Photo: Anita Strasser

Teyfik Taghan is the manager of Delicious Café on 365 New Cross Road. The current owner and team have been here for almost 4 years and they are not happy about the demolition plans. Teyfik explains:

“The team here have worked hard to build up the business which is going really well. We all have families to look after and bills to pay, and running this business has enabled us to do that. When we came here, nobody said anything about the redevelopment plans. We have never received a letter from the council about the demolition, but some time ago, the developers sent a letter announcing the plans. When I called them, they said they have plans but need time to work on them. How long, we don’t know.”

Teyfik and the team are not happy about the plans as it would mean losing their business and having to start all over again. Over the years, the team have built up very good relationships with their customers, which they see as very important. Some of the regular customers are teachers and pupils from Deptford Green School, Goldsmiths students, local residents and shopkeepers. There are also a lot of builders who come in for their breakfast. Teyfik recognises most faces and some contacts have even developed into friendships. Sitting in the café for some time, you can tell Teyfik has a very good relationship with his customers and that most of them are regulars.

Losing the business would have devastating consequences for him and his team, but even without the plans having come into fruition yet, the impact is already felt. “I have a family to worry about. I have 4 kids and I feel really settled here. I had lots of plans for my life: we wanted to go on holiday, send the kids to a good school to provide them with a better future. But now, I have stopped making plans because we don’t know what’s going to happen. We don’t know whether we’ll be here another year, 2 years, 5 years. It’s like with Brexit: people don’t know whether to stay or leave, whether to invest or not, buy a house or not. We’re in limbo, unsure of what to do. Anyway, if we lose the business, we will have to start all over again.”

What is adding to the anxiety is that their lease, which ran out in 2018, has not been renewed. Teyfik’s solicitor has already sent about 5 letters to the council asking to renew the lease but says he has never received a reply. This is making Teyfik feel even more worried about his future. Teyfik also says it’s not just about him. The rest of the team are in the same situation – they all have families to worry about. They also feel the same about being here; they really like it here. Finally, Teyfik concludes: “I’m very happy here. I love this place, I love the people here. I really want to stay.”



Students chatting outside Delicious Café - January 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

“Most laundrettes are surviving because they are in council properties and have a reasonable rent”

Text written by Anita Strasser in December 2017, updated in August 2019



The Launderette on New Cross Road with the shop front design by Artmongers - December 2017

Photo: Anita Strasser

Until spring 2019, Angelo was the owner of the Launderette on 369 New Cross Road. We met up in December 2017 in Mughead Coffee (p. 218-219), where the staff know exactly how he likes his coffee. After a brief chat with Mark, the owner of Mughead, Angelo talked about the Launderette and the council’s plans to demolish it.

“The Launderette itself has been here since the early 60s. It used to be a father and son operation with launderettes in different areas”, Angelo explains. “In the early 90s, my brother Joe bought this launderette and did a lot of refurbishing work, replacing the old machines with newer versions.” Angelo took over in 2008, and since spring 2019 it’s been in the hands of his nephew Marco. “It’s a contagious disease, I’m not joking”, Angelo laughs, and tells how many of his family and friends have become involved with launderettes. “It all started with my brother dating a girl whose father was of Italian origin and owned a string of launderettes. The relationship didn’t last but my brother thought ‘I’ll try that’.” His brother has since bought a few launderettes,





Above

Angelo with former employee Nicola inside the Launderette on New Cross Road - December 2017

Below

Marco in his newly decorated launderette - August 2019

Photos: Anita Strasser

including one on Jamaica Road which is now owned by another one of Angelo's nephews.

Marco, who runs the New Cross launderette by himself now, wanted to carry on with the family tradition and took over the business in 2019. As soon as he started, he repainted and decorated the inside, but he hasn't invested too much as he is aware of the development plans for the area. He also got to know his customers very quickly and built up nice relationships with them. He is particularly fond of Bill from Austin House (p. 200-202), who comes in every Friday and tells Marco stories about the past. They also talk a lot about football.

Taking over the business was a great opportunity for Marco, especially being 21 years old. But being in the Launderette business doesn't make you rich. As Angelo explained previously, "a launderette business doesn't grow like other businesses do, and it doesn't have a high turnover. Most launderettes are surviving because they are on good locations in council properties with a reasonable rent. What kills them is the high market rates, so once the new development is here, with rent prices double if not triple, we won't be able to return. Even if we are offered funds to relocate, which the council has, and new premises in the new development, the overheads will be too high to run it." Another issue is, Marco explains, the 2-3 years it will take to redevelop the area, during which the business would be shut. Additionally, the machines wouldn't be running during this time and might not work anymore afterwards, so he'd have to invest in new machines, which would cost a lot of money. "I don't have the capital to do that so I doubt I'll set up again!" Marco still has hope that he might be able to stay but says "we don't have the power to decide that." With business owners not allowed a vote in the ballot for or against demolition, they have no say in the future of their businesses or the area.

As business owners, they say, they are keen to see investment in the area and people with more money coming in but this shouldn't mean that others with less capital, including themselves, are priced out. They agree that the parade and the area needs investment and say that this is due to the council not having done a lot for its upkeep. "It's a nice parade but it's stuck in the 60s", Angelo states. "Lewisham Council did commission *Artmongers* a few years ago to spruce it up a bit. They came into the shops asking people what they'd like to see, and together we designed the shop front you see today. It really takes an artist to see things from





The newly decorated launderette - August 2019

Photos: Anita Strasser

a different perspective. I was just going to suggest some writing to advertise the services but the artists said no, we need something more interesting and then he came up with the design you see today. It really makes a difference", he says. "But that's all that's been done. Lewisham Council doesn't involve itself much in making the parade look nicer, they seem more concerned with housing. The plans I've seen for this area – 5-storey blocks across the whole parade starting from the old bank building – this is huge! I'm pretty certain redevelopment will go ahead and I'm pretty certain we won't set up another launderette here."

Many people might think that because of improved living standards there is no need for launderettes anymore. In actual fact, there is still demand, even if most people now can afford a washing machine. "The association of launderettes merely with the working-class and people in social housing is outdated – we have customers from all walks of life. The demand today is due to convenience: the machines we have can handle high capacity and the laundry can dry quickly, so the whole laundry can be done in an hour. Drying is a particular issue today. Many people live in small flats with no space or facilities to dry clothes so coming to a launderette solves that problem." In this particular launderette the water is also treated before it's used and people notice the change in the fabric, another reason, according to Angelo, why this launderette is doing good business. "If the launderette closes, people will have to travel further away for this convenience", making this convenience less convenient. I immediately think of 90-year old Bill. Where will he have his laundry done?



Marco working in the launderette in front of a regular customer - August 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser

“If I’d known they were going to demolish this, I wouldn’t have invested in this business!”

Text written by Anita Strasser in March 2019



Ali at Mez Mangal Turkish Restaurant on New Cross Road - March 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser

In March 2019 I spoke with Ali, the business owner of Mez Mangal, a Turkish restaurant on 379 New Cross Road. When I came in, he was behind the counter preparing for lunch business. I’ve eaten here a few times – the food is lovely and freshly prepared to order in the restaurant. I’d met Ali a year earlier just after opening this new restaurant. At the time, he was full of hope, energy and enthusiasm. When I met him again in 2019, he was a changed man: stressed, suffering from depression and without hope.

Ali once owned a café in Covent Garden and after a few years of doing jobs here and there he wanted to own his own business again. He wanted to have a secure future for his wife and children and was happy to invest in this. He took over a 7-year lease on this council property just over a year ago, costing him £100,000. He then spent a fortune on refurbishing and decorating the beautiful and large restaurant, and as it takes time to create a customer base, he has also been without a wage for







The newly refurbished restaurant Mez Mangal - March 2019

Photos: Anita Strasser

the past year. Sadly, business isn't going well yet for Mez Mangal – Ali isn't getting the number of customers he needs to earn a wage and he has recently had to take out a loan to pay some of the bills. He shows me his bank balance – he's massively in debt. One might think this is a simple story of a new business not having taken off yet. However, there is more to it than that.

Just over a year ago, when Ali was planning his hopeful future, other residents and shopkeepers already knew that there are plans to demolish 379 New Cross Road along with the other buildings on New Cross Parade (shops and maisonettes) and the buildings and shops on Clifton Rise (which have now been taken out of the plans), as well as the council blocks on Achilles Street to redevelop the area. The Achilles Street Stop and Listen Campaign had already been launched to stop the redevelopment plans, with information and planning proposals posted on their blog.

According to Ali, he wasn't given any information about these plans when signing the lease. He even paid a solicitor to check whether the council had plans for demolition and redevelopment. Ali understood that he could safely invest in his business. He has since been made aware of the redevelopment plans by the campaign group and is very worried about his future: "If I lose this business, I will lose everything! I have put my life into this business, I'm in huge debt and I have no idea what's happening in the future! Since I've been here, there has been no information from the council whatsoever. The only information I have is from the campaign group. This is wrong! I have put my children's future into this business! In total, with the lease, the refurbishment and the loss of wages I have spent about £300,000, and that for a business that might be demolished some time I don't know when. If the council want to give me £300,000 okay, I'll go and start again. But who is going to compensate me for my stress? If I'd known they were going to demolish this, I wouldn't have invested in this business!"

Since Ali has found out about the uncertainty of his future, he has suffered badly from stress, depression and at times suicidal thoughts. He can't concentrate on his work and has been unable to sleep because he is so worried about what's going to happen. On top of that, his worry and stress over the last year have ended in divorce after 18 years of marriage. "I am losing everything. I have lost money, I have lost hope and now I have lost my family because they can't cope with me being stressed all the time! What am I supposed to do – go and kill myself? I am not joking, I have thought about it. Who's going to compensate me for all this?

I feel cheated, without hope and without a future. I want to take the council to court!"

Ali needs to know what's going to happen so that he can move on with his life. He needs to know whether 379 New Cross Road will be demolished and, if so, when; he needs to know whether the council will compensate him financially and, if so, how much; he needs to know whether there is a light at the end of a very dark tunnel so that he might have hope again. In the planning proposal from 2016, the council has said that in previous consultations, business owners requested more information and time scales. The council also said that feedback is extremely important to them.[1] So why, then, hasn't Ali had any information from the council in the last year and a half about the plans to demolish his business? The council also promises to "provide financial and practical assistance to all affected businesses" (in planning proposal 2016) but will they pay off the debt Ali has accumulated due to investing into a building the council plan to demolish? And as he says, how can he ever be compensated for the stress and personal upheaval he has suffered?



The newly refurbished restaurant Mez Mangal - March 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser

[1] Planning proposals and information can be found on the Achilles Street Stop and Listen Campaign online pages (Links to their Twitter, Facebook and Wordpress pages can be found on p.195).

“The end of this shop would be the beginning of the end of my life in London”

Text written by Anita Strasser in February 2018



Adrian and Stefan in Green Onions Health and Record Shop on Clifton Rise - February 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Stefan Finnis owns Green Onions Healthfood & Records on 6 Clifton Rise together with his business partner Adrian Ovari. Green Onions specialises in organic food, including a range of vegan and gluten-free foods, vinyl records, houseplants and garden essentials. The design of the shop has been carefully and lovingly thought through by Stefan and Adrian with the help of friends and family. I ask Stefan about the redevelopment plans in New Cross, and it is immediately clear from the response how strongly he feels about this:

“The regeneration of this area has an impact on all aspects of people’s lives, which is something the new communities that are coming in are less aware of. They just move into an area, wanting everything completely new, as though everybody can start anew at a whim. It ends up damaging for existing communities. We need a more gradual process of change! Change itself is not the issue, but how it happens and how it is being forced upon us, the way it is dictated and not negotiated, that is the issue. It feels very aggressive and it is designed by people who have little or no connection to the place they are changing. Money is the prime motivator now

and decisions are influenced only by how much money can be made. The perverse idea that an area can be left to decline and suddenly go from degeneration to regeneration in a very short space of time doesn't work. Good change can only happen over a long period of time and it can only work if people who are already in the area can stay to develop it rather than being moved on, because these people take with them everything an area such as New Cross is, leaving behind a shell."

Stefan has experience with such processes and is very aware of the gap between the decision-makers and those on the ground. He used to be part of a bee-keeping project in Kennington Park, which needed to make way for a ventilation shaft in relation to the extension of the Northern Line. "It became very clear that, despite the consultations, where developers and councillors acted as if they cared, decision-makers would always get what they wanted", Stefan remembers. Stefan came to New Cross with this background, seeing history repeat itself in the early consultations about the redevelopment of Clifton Rise. "Councillors attended one of the earlier meetings of the Achilles Residents Group, and the way they twisted and turned everything to their advantage… the way they put down their arguments, it's very clever. It felt so pre-planned. Basically, you're up against people who are able to come into a room full of people without really answering a single question. They appear to have an interest but I think they only come to get an idea of the opposition they're facing; there's never going to be a fair outcome with people like that in the room. You do also feel that they are the ones sent from above to carry the message, but they're also there for themselves, as this is how to establish their credentials as politicians. You're dealing with people who are meant to represent the community, but you never feel this is what they're doing. It's a new generation of politicians being born in front of your eyes."

We change the conversation to talk about the shop. Stefan explains how he and Adrian ended up on Clifton Rise, as this is a very important element of their business. "Adrian and I used to be involved in a shop called Dig this Nursery, situated between the former Hobgoblin pub (now The Rose pub) and the railway bridge, opposite New Cross Gate Station. The shop was a hybrid of healthfoods, plants and records, and we had a casual arrangement with the owner, who provided Adrian with a space to sell his records and offered me a workshop space in which to develop hand-made paper products, which I sold in the shop. The place became very important to the local community over a number of years, so when the Hobgoblin was sold on to new owners, the owner of Dig this Nursery was forced to move on. He relocated his shop to the site of Green Onions on Clifton Rise but moved out a few months later, leaving an empty space. We saw this as an opportunity to establish ourselves in our own business but we also wanted to keep something going that had been started: a place important to the local community. It takes time

Leah, a member of staff, stacking shelves in Green Onions - January 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser





Records for sale in Green Onions - January 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

to establish something like a community space and it takes people time to get used to something new in their area, so we wanted continuity."

Stefan is aware that for some others their shop is a symptom of the gentrification in place, but he says it's necessary to keep in mind the processes involved in setting up such a business, particularly considering its history next to the Hobgoblin. "We were always very careful about the way we present a shop like this to people. We debated a lot about what to name it and it was important to avoid using words that would immediately exclude people." Stefan and Adrian were well aware that their shop would be the first move of regeneration in this area but they did not anticipate the kind of regeneration that is happening now. "It's a dilemma, because as a business we have to develop and with other businesses coming into the area we've had new customers too, but we did not see this kind of development coming. But in a sense our shop is also the antithesis of what is happening in the area. When we set up, there was this active intention, our philosophy if you will, that the shop would demonstrate a healthy community, a sense of continuity and of how you can do something on a budget through the use of existing materials that would otherwise have ended up in landfill. Most units in the shop are from recycled wood, prepared and installed by friends: the counter top is from an old night club and the unit from a brand new kitchen discarded in its original wrapping due to excessive overspending during the new development across the road."

Ever since they found out about the plans to demolish all the shops on Clifton Rise, Stefan feels to be living in limbo. "It happened so soon after starting in 2015, although I guess we should have seen it coming." Stefan has experienced something similar before when he lived in Brixton, which he moved on from once it became more expensive. He now wonders whether he should stay with what they've built up in New Cross or whether to go somewhere else, where life feels more 'normal' but where he has to take the risk of starting afresh. Many of his friends have already left London but he tries to keep positive: "I try to come back to my primary motivation which was an opportunity to take things to another level – to be self-sufficient… and deal with continual financial pressures. I do not want to see the energy that has been put into the shop go to waste. It also gave me purpose as I had found it difficult to put down roots in New Cross at first but now I feel more at home here. I live in one of the local housing communities and I have invested quite a lot into the life of that community as well."

When I ask him what other motivations he has for keeping the shop going, he replies: "People appreciate a shop like this in the area, it brings people together. I am proud because we employ three local people, and most of the artists and makers whose work we sell live in the local area. If I want to measure the success

of our business I can say that we have created jobs for ourselves and for local people, and we are also giving local people the opportunity to put their work out there. The shop has provided them with a platform to establish themselves in the same way that we were given the opportunity in Dig this Nursery. That was a tradition Adrian and I agreed we should keep going, and this gives us a real sense of what you can do when working together; it's a microcosm of how we see a healthy community functioning. Take this away and you immediately feel the impact on other areas of life."

This impact becomes clear when Stefan talks about the profound, life-changing impact closing the shop would have on his life. "This will be a huge loss of something I have invested a lot of energy in. It can't be recreated. The end of this shop would be the beginning of the end of my life in London, it would be the final straw. It would be the end of a person living in London who has wanted to contribute and get actively involved in his local area and community. This loss of people who want to contribute is brain drain; it is a loss to London as a city and to the communities living in areas such as New Cross that make up the city. This process is threatening an organism, the diversity of the city. People leaving is doing serious damage to areas."

Although the decision to demolish the shops on Clifton Rise was reversed in July 2019, the ambiguity in the letter Green Onions received from Lewisham Council doesn't make Stefan feel any more secure. "The threat to the larger area around the shop and to the existing community as a whole, of which the shop is a part, remains the same. It's not clear to me either why the council made the decision, but I'm encouraged to think that the people owning the buildings on Clifton Rise may have been able to put up some resistance."

Seating area in Green Onions, with plants and canvas bags made by a local artist for sale - January 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser





“My world would fall apart”

Text written by Anita Strasser in May 2018



Rose in Rose’s Kitchen Caribbean and English Food on Clifton Rise - April 2018
Photo: Anita Strasser

Rose is the proprietor of Rose’s Kitchen on 8 Clifton Rise. I have often eaten food from Rose’s Kitchen. I’m in New Cross a lot and as I appreciate good and healthy food, Rose’s Kitchen is the best place to go. The portions are huge, the price is good and the food tastes amazing. And each time you walk in, you are served by the same three people.

Before Rose set up her shop 10 years ago, she had been cooking with someone else in a restaurant, and it was there that she fell in love with cooking. “I love cooking and I decided to follow my dream”, she says with a big smile on her face. In 2008, she set up Rose’s Kitchen and now she has 2 employees working for her.

“When I first came here, there was not a lot going, there wasn’t a lot of business because people didn’t know me. But when they came and got to know me and the food, they started to enjoy my cooking. I now have customers not only in London but people who come a long way as well: from Kent, Croydon, Birmingham and even Kingston. Yes, people who come to London from Kingston come into my shop to get food. And people who used to live and eat here but have moved away, come back and buy large quantities to put in the fridge.” When I ask Rose how she got so many customers, especially from so far away, she says: “It’s all word-of-mouth; through good and healthy food, and good relationships with customers. I have never done any advertising.”



Rose's Kitchen Caribbean and English Food on Clifton Rise - April 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

The food is a mix of Caribbean and English food and caters for different tastes. All the time I'm sitting in Rose's Kitchen, talking to Rose and photographing, there is a constant coming and going of people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds. "We have all kinds of customers", Rose states, "Chinese, White, everybody, and of course people of Caribbean heritage because it gives them authentic food from home."

Rose's Kitchen does the catering for Deptford Green School Prom and Black History Month. It also provides lunch time specials and offers £2 school meals during term time for pupils from Deptford Green and Childeric Primary. Also many Goldsmiths students come down for lunch time specials. Rose seems to have a very special relationship with local kids, wanting to make sure they have the opportunity to get a fresh, healthy meal. "Sometimes parents don't have the time to cook and give their children healthy meals; sometimes kids don't even have lunch money but I give them food anyway. And parents often come in to thank me with presents." Once, the mother of a Goldsmiths student came in with a bunch of flowers, wanting to meet and thank the woman whose food her son so adored.



Karlene at Rose's Kitchen - April 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

Talking to Rose it strikes me just how important her work is to her and to the local and larger community. Rose's Kitchen is not just a shop or a food joint with social interaction a mere exchange of food and capital; it is a social space, an intricate network of social contacts formed through food that reaches much wider than just the stomach or the local area. "We are like a family here. Even if people have moved away but come back to visit, they come in. People see me as a family member, like a mum or a gran and for me, my customers are like my children", Rose explains.

When I ask Rose about the planned demolition of the shops on Clifton Rise, her facial expression becomes more sombre. "I could never lose this place! I don't want to lose my customers. I look forward to going to work every day. Sometimes I wake up tired in the morning but when I come here I don't remember that I was tired. I would like the shop to remain the same." The same can be said for her customers, most of whom have signed the petition to stop the demolition of Clifton Rise (the number of signatures from just her shop is in the hundreds). "If the shop were to close, for my customers it would be like losing their mum or gran, and it would deprive many local kids of fresh and healthy food. It's like taking candy away from a baby."

Rose feels that the small businesses on Clifton Rise are not being treated well by the council. "We've had no information, nothing's been offered, and we don't get compensated for anything. When we try to call we just get passed on from person to person – you're never able to speak to anyone. The regeneration here is terrible, it's just about making more money. They are demolishing small businesses like us who have no chance, who can't afford the prices they are charging. Everything is





Delicious Food at Rose's Kitchen - April 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser

sold to private people with money. They are not going to want us here." I ask Rose what message she would like to pass on to the council and she replies with: "If you break us up, it's like you are destroying a home!"

As I sit there listening to this, I become incredibly sad. It is another story of somebody who has contributed to and built up strong relationships with the local community; somebody who has invested a lot of positive energy into creating a thriving business that serves the local area not only with affordable, fresh and healthy food but also with important personal connections that have developed into long-lasting friendships. For me, Rose is a real pillar of the community and her displacement would be a tragic loss to the area. It is another story of dispossession and displacement, of communities being destroyed, of an uncertain future, of having to start all over again.

I ask Rose whether she has thought about what she is going to do if demolition goes ahead. She shakes her head, visibly upset by this prospect. "I don't know what to do. I don't know any other job; I only know cooking." But it isn't just about the shop itself, or her love for cooking, it is about much more than that. "My whole world would fall apart", Rose exclaims, "I don't know anything else." With the decision to demolish the shops on Clifton Rise reversed in July 2019, Rose won't have to think about that anymore, but her story demonstrates that the effect of redevelopment starts well before demolition begins.



“We want to open Deptford Town Hall to local people”

Text written by Anita Strasser in June 2019



Achilles Street and Deptford is Changing Workshop with members of the Goldsmiths Anti-Racist Action group (GARA) during their occupation of Deptford Town Hall - May 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser

In May 2019 me and Jacquie Utley from the Achilles Street Campaign did a workshop with the Goldsmiths Anti-Racist Action group (GARA) – mostly Goldsmiths students who were occupying Deptford Town Hall (DTH). The aim of their occupation was to tackle what they term ‘institutional racism at Goldsmiths’ (and by extension in academia) and highlight the college’s role in the gentrification of New Cross. The occupation ended on 28th July 2019 after 137 days, after the Senior Management Team of Goldsmiths agreed to most of GARA’s demands. Point No.12 of their demands posted on their Facebook page on 27th July 2019 called for greater local community access to DTH, with more targeted outreach to BAME communities.[1]

[1] Further information about the occupation can be found on GARA’s Facebook and Twitter pages, the Goldsmiths website, in Guardian articles and other online platforms.



Achilles Street and Deptford is Changing Workshop with members of GARA - May 2019

Photo: Anita Strasser

During an informal conversation with members of GARA about how young people, aged 18-26, experience and respond to gentrification, it emerged that they were keen to know more about the planned regeneration proposals for Achilles Street and the surrounding area and how they could get involved. The joint workshop came out of this initial conversation.

We started off with Jacquie providing information about the Achilles Street Campaign before I shared some of the stories I had recorded of the residents and shopkeepers affected by the proposed redevelopment scheme. The students expressed many concerns in the subsequent discussions, such as the exact difference between social and council housing and whether local residents understand this. They were also concerned about the all-too-often broken promises of social housing figures and Section 106 money, and the impact gentrification is having on local communities. Despite all the promises and 'community consultation', the students can't see how gentrification is including and benefitting local communities at all. Above all, the students have huge concerns about the involvement of Goldsmiths in all of this and the role of universities in gentrification processes in general.

One student commented: "Goldsmiths, like other universities, got rid of the student numbers cap, meaning that in order to break even they have to let more and more students into the area, which also means they need to take up more space. So although they are definitely culpable in some ways, it's a systemic problem of Higher Education in the UK. And with Goldsmiths being an arts college, it finds itself swallowed up in culture-led regeneration, using the arts to gentrify a place. That wasn't always the case but it's hard to break away from that today because all these notions of culture and creativity are so swept up in these processes."

Students already find it difficult to be able to afford the very expensive student accommodation and with Dean House (local student accommodation with lower rents) under threat of demolition, they are worried they won't be able to afford the more expensive student dorms.[2] At the same time, they are worried about playing a part in the 'studentification'[3] of New Cross – redeveloping an area (housing, eateries, clubs, etc.) for the increasing student population, thus alienating existing communities.

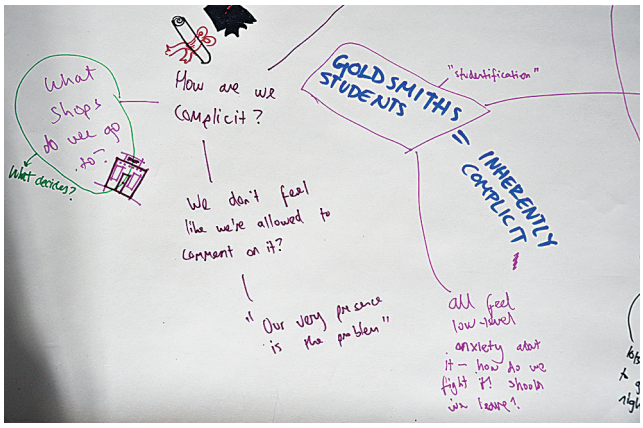
Next page

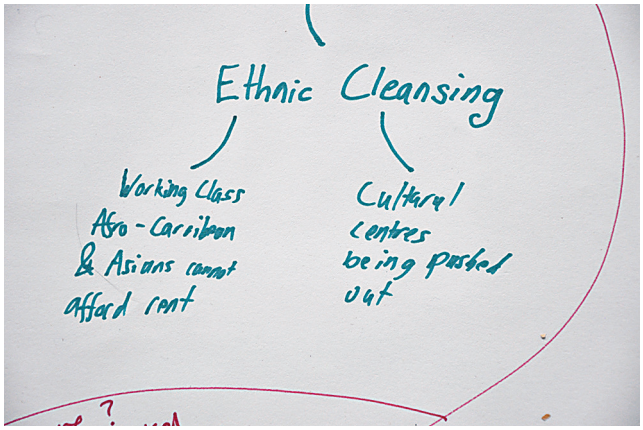
Output from the mapping exercise during the workshop with members of GARA - May 2019

Photos: Anita Strasser

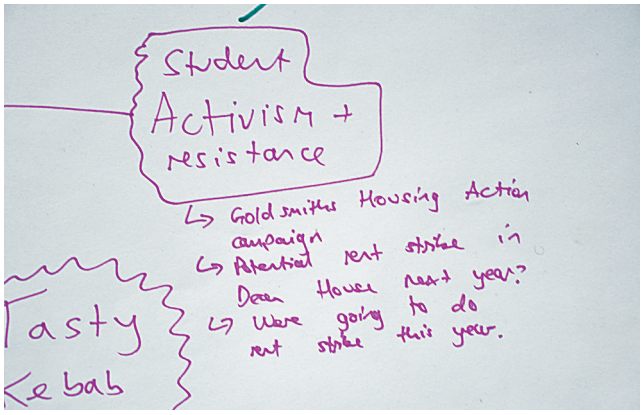
We asked the workshop participants to map out some of their concerns on a large scroll, to stimulate further discussion. It emerged that the students feel that gentrification is social cleansing: not only alienating existing residents but also pricing them out of the area. They also feel that gentrification has racist undertones. With a large proportion of London's BAME population living in social housing located in working-class areas to be regenerated, areas such as New Cross and Deptford,

[2] Dean House was built on public land with Deptford City Challenge money and leased to Goldsmiths for the provision of student accommodation – hence the lower rents. The rental income is paid to Deptford Challenge Trust, which awards grants to local voluntary and community organisations for activities which benefit residents (Lewisham Mayor and Cabinet notes from 12 December 2018).
[3] The students mention Darren Smith's article on studentification: Smith, D.P. (2002) 'Patterns and processes of studentification in Leeds', *Regional Review*, 12(1), pp.14-16.









gentrification is a class and a race issue (with 47% Lewisham has one of the highest percentages of residents of black and minority ethnic heritage and ranks as one of the most deprived areas in London and England).[4] For further reading, please see Jessica Perera's recent report on the interconnectedness of race and housing (and policing) and how multi-cultural working-class areas are being eroded (Perera, 2019).[5] Another issue students are really concerned about is pollution. Again, no surprises there considering the frequent reports about the high pollution levels in the area and the world in general.

What really emerged from the discussions was how anxious these students feel about their presence in New Cross, anxious about being complicit in gentrification by simply being a student. Because of their transience, which often comes with being a student in an area, they are feeling the local resentment towards them. At the same time, their transience isn't always a choice. Even if they wanted to stay in the area (some do), they have no control over where they might live in the future as most areas are becoming unaffordable for them to live in. This is exemplified by one girl who cannot afford to live in the area where she grew up – King's Cross – and who won't be able to continue living in New Cross after graduating and moving out of Dean House. Her parents were involved in a housing campaign in King's Cross and she has experienced the processes and detrimental effects of gentrification on local communities first hand. "Community and gentrification don't seem compatible, with gentrification pushing local communities out of areas", the student says. At the same time, the students feel powerless to do anything about it. Them not living in New Cross would certainly not solve the problem as others would just replace them. But as the group concludes: "We can be active though and try to actively resist being complicit in it. And other students need to become aware as well how their presence and actions are affecting local communities because they are not always aware of the gentrification taking place!" And indeed, this group requested this workshop in order to learn about the proposed Achilles Street redevelopment scheme and to see how they could get involved in the campaign to join the resistance. And after hearing the stories of shopkeepers on New Cross

[4] Information from the website of *Voluntary Action Lewisham*.
[5] Perera, J. (2019) *The London Clearances: Race, Housing and Policing.* London: Institute of Race Relations.



GARA's 56th day of occupying Deptford Town Hall Goldsmiths - 7 May 2019

Photos: Anita Strasser

Road and Clifton Rise from *Deptford is Changing*, they were determined to support and shop more from those businesses.

What is interesting is that GARA were occupying Deptford Town Hall, which was bought by Goldsmiths in 1998. The students said: "This building should be open to local communities. We want to open the town hall to local people. We've had birthday parties, baby showers and all sorts of events here!" At the same time, the students are concerned about what they perceive the town hall represents – close associations with Britain's slave trade reflected in the figures celebrated on the front of this building. To the group, this is a physical manifestation of the racism in the college. An interesting article about the history of the town hall and its ornaments was written by the late Paul Hendrich.[6]

The students are aware that occupying a university is one thing but that fighting against unjust gentrification processes is another. They feel there needs to be a change in ideology, in political thinking to bring about real change. Whether that's going to happen remains to be seen. Their positive energy and determination to effect change is a good start.



[6] Hendrich, P. (2008) 'Charting a new course for Deptford Town Hall', *Anthropology Matters*, 10(1).

Lewisham People Before Profit's successful campaign to stop the sell-off of council homes in 2012

This text was written by John Hamilton, Secretary and Campaign Officer of Lewisham People Before Profit. Email: john@peoplebeforeprofit.org.uk



A small 'house' built out of estate agent poles and For Sale signs by Lewisham People Before Profit in 2014 on the town hall lawn

Photo: John Hamilton

Local newspaper headlines in South East London were peppered with the story of how a radical, broad-based party opposed to privatisation of public services scored a notable victory in preventing the sell-off of seven council houses through mobilising public support for their occupation.

Back in 2012 Lewisham People Before Profit learned by chance that five council owned family homes were to be sold off at auction in February with ridiculously low guide prices of £140,000. Another two were also scheduled for sale at a future date.

We occupied the houses during the weekend before the auction and sent a video (search for 'Lewisham's Housing Crisis' on youtube), to every councillor calling on

them and the community to intervene with the Mayor to have the houses refurbished using local tradespeople plus training for unskilled workers and then to be re-let to families on the housing list. We distributed 20,000 leaflets in 10 days explaining what we'd done, upgraded one of the houses ourselves so that a family with three children under five could move in and kept the pressure on the council through a series of articles in the local papers, coverage on radio and London TV and further occupations.

We were contacted by dozens of people either in need of help with housing issues or those reporting empty houses to us and asking us to occupy them.

On May 30th 2012 the Mayor changed his mind and agreed to all our suggestions for renovation. We handed back the keys to the houses one by one as the renovation teams were ready, the last being in June 2013.

In addition to the council owned homes we also occupied a Victorian house built as two flats owned by London & Quadrant Housing Association which had been transferred to them from Lewisham Council 18 months earlier. They had simply moved out the tenants and wanted to sell the building for around £300,000 at auction, citing "prohibitively high renovation costs". We obtained a quote of £9,800 to put the two flats into good repair and offered to pay to have the work done from a collection among our members, asking only that the money be repaid over the coming year from the rental income. London & Quadrant refused our offer and initiated eviction proceedings which we did not contest. The occupation did provide a home to a 60 year-old grandmother and her grand-daughter for two months, who were living in a severely overcrowded studio flat together with the little girl's father and his new partner.

We were alerted to six flats owned by a local housing association where three had been left empty for several years. We reported this to the council's Empty Homes Officer who ordered the housing association to offer the flats to tenants from the housing waiting list within 28 days. They did nothing and on the 37th day we took control of all three flats, housing people who would otherwise have been homeless. By explaining the issues to the housing association we came to an agreement that they would refurbish the flats one by one and we would vacate the flats as they were needed. All the flats were refurbished and let and everyone was happy!

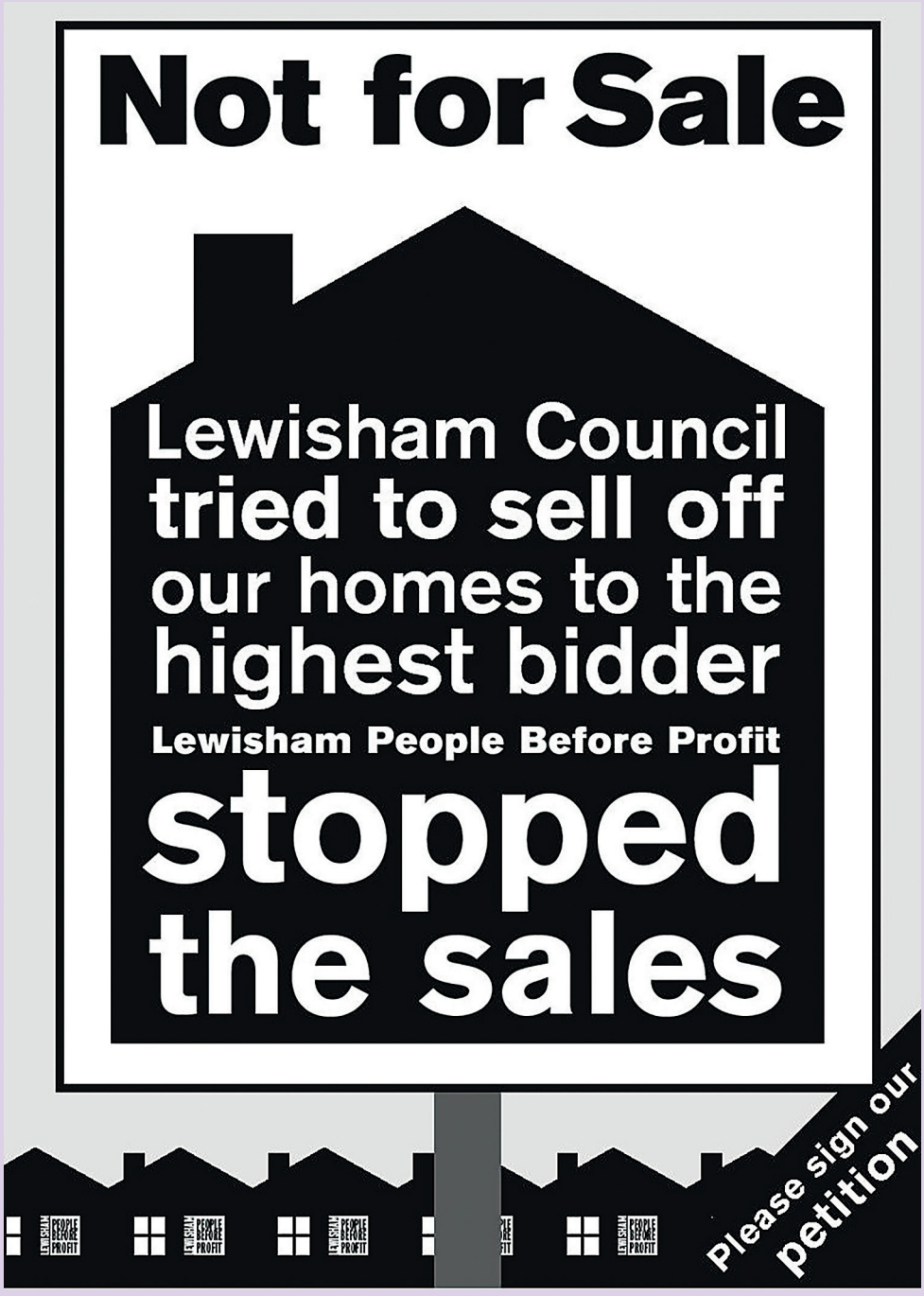
Shortly after these victories, the Mayor and council announced plans to build 250 council homes in various vacant sites dotted around the borough – not a vast number when considering that there are around 400 families in hostels or bed and breakfast accommodation, but these will be the first new council houses to be built for over 30 years. While we cannot take all the credit for this decision, our direct action has helped those within the ruling Labour group who support public housing to press the case for new social housing to be built.

We kept up the pressure in 2014 by building a small "house" on the town hall lawn out of estate agent poles and For Sale signs. We lived in it for a week to publicise a London-wide housing demonstration and collected over 2,000 signatures for a petition demanding that all new developments be 100% council housing.

The key to Lewisham People Before Profit's effectiveness is its broad-based approach. It is not another left group – it is not a socialist party, though socialists

and communists are involved. It welcomes all those opposed to privatisation and the corruption which goes hand-in-hand with that. We don't seek to replace existing campaigns, but work with them. We invited other political parties and trade unions to join with us in opposing the cuts, in campaigning against TTIP and CETA and in abolishing the mayoral system through the Bring Back Democracy campaign. We try not to be sectarian but Labour in Lewisham is very arrogant and generally refuses to co-operate – not surprising when they are implementing Tory policies!

Visit our Facebook page for more information. We normally meet on the first Monday of the month. All welcome.



Not For Sale Flyer

Image: Courtesy of Lewisham People Before Profit, with the kind permission to reproduce it here

Fighting for fairer change

Text written by Anita Strasser in October 2019



Banner at Deptford roundabout - January 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

In January 2018, banners appeared in Deptford overnight, accusing Lewisham Council of gentrifying and socially cleansing Deptford, and calling on the public to join the fight against unjust urban development. The banners went up near sites under threat of demolition and redevelopment: Creekside and the boating community on Deptford Creek, the Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden and Reginald House, where planning permission had already been granted to make way for more flats. One banner appeared on Deptford Bridge DLR station, and two more banners were hung on either side of the underpass between New Cross and Deptford, leading to Achilles Street and New Cross Road, where plans have been announced to rip out what for many represents the heart of New Cross to make way for further redevelopment.

There are many debates around the term ‘social cleansing’, whether it is apt or too aggressive. Even ‘gentrification’ is controversial as it is often misunderstood to just mean urban regeneration, the arrival of wealthier populations, more expensive establishments, and a new visual aesthetic that speaks to middle-class tastes. This visual aesthetic and the compelling rhetoric that speaks to our values used to promote regeneration schemes, with stated aims such as housing the homeless, working with the local community and job creation, and words such as progress, sustainability, culture and creativity, have become so embedded in people’s understanding of regeneration processes, that they are accepted without questioning. As such, being against gentrification is often seen as being against change and progress. But there is more to gentrification, particularly with much of urban real estate relying on global

finance and private investors. The rhetoric may suggest that gentrification is of great benefit to all people but the full reality of such schemes is often very different from the promises, calling into question the notion of progress. To many, gentrification symbolises its widespread, often invisible consequences: forcing people who cannot afford the constantly increasing rent and house prices out of their homes, their neighbourhoods and boroughs; dispossessing the less well-off not only of their homes but also of valued community resources, green spaces and community networks; and devaluing the cultural and social practices of people who do not identify with the new visual aesthetic or aspire to the new lifestyles (except when they provide the authentic feel for those attracted to moving to an edgy working-class area). Bringing wealthier populations into a post-industrial working-class area and promoting middle-class tastes and behaviours as the desirable lifestyle for all suggests that an area needs to be cleaned of its working-class culture, that people who engage in social and cultural practices that are different from the promoted lifestyle need to be cleansed of their 'undesirable' tastes, behaviours and lifestyles.

This is evident in the language used to refer to working-class people: *chavs, benefit scroungers, the underclass* and other derogatory phrases which imply that inequality is down to their own deficiencies. It also works in tandem with austerity politics and other policies that are being implemented alongside regeneration programmes, such as benefit caps, Universal Credit and funding cuts, to name but a few, further vilifying poor people and their lives, making it even less likely for them to participate in the processes of regeneration and afford gentrified quarters.[1] This not-so-hidden stigmatisation of less privileged people suggests that they are seen as *dirt* that needs to be cleaned away. Hence the term 'social cleansing'. This interpretation is also unsurprising considering the fact that council estates are now treated as the *brownfield sites* of urban development, with many council estates facing demolition. Once only used to refer to former industrial land that needed to be cleaned of industrial waste before construction, using that same term for council estates, which are mostly inhabited by a multi-ethnic working-class (ranging from council tenants – flats and shops – to private renters and home-owners due to Right-To-Buy), carries a strong symbolic message: inhabitants of council estates are seen as *waste* that needs to be cleaned away. And if we also take the term *sink estate* into account, which has become a frequently used substitute for council estate and which suggests the idea of going down in quality (to sink) or of the need to wash away dirt (in the sink), it becomes clear why 'social cleansing' is an appropriate term when talking about gentrification.[2] Even if some people will be rehoused and able to remain in the area after redevelopment, although broken promises in other developments have shown that this isn't always the case[3], to many 'social cleansing' represents the

[1] For more information on the effects of Universal Credit, please read 'Figures suggest Universal Credit is driving homelessness and evictions', in *Inside Housing*, 14 December 2018; and 'News from Len Duvall OBE: Lewisham amongst worst Boroughs in England for Homelessness' on the *London Assembly* page from 16 November 2017. I also want to refer back to Footnote 3 in the Introduction for some statistics.

[2] For further reading on the symbolic meaning and violence of the language used when speaking of working-class people and council estates, see:

- Elmer, S. and Dening, G. (2016) 'The London clearances', *City*, 20:2, pp. 271-277.
- Jones, O. (2011) *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*. London: Verso.
- Slater, T. (2018) 'The invention of the 'sink estate': Consequential categorisation and the UK housing crisis', *The Sociological Review Monographs*, Vol. 66(4), pp. 877-897.
- Tyler, I. and Slater, T. (2018) Rethinking the sociology of stigma', *The Sociological Review Monographs*, Vol. 66(4), pp. 721-743.

[3] The Heygate Estate in Southwark is a classic example. See displacement maps in *Gentrification Handbook for Council Estates in London* produced by Southwark Notes in 2014.

symbolic violence of gentrification: the perceived cultural unworthiness of working-class people, and a lack of recognition, respect and voice for people who cannot or do not want to participate in current forms of urban development.[4]



Top

Banner on Deptford Bridge DLR Station - January 2018

Bottom

Banner on the Deptford/New Cross underpass - January 2018

Photos: Anita Strasser

The messages written on the banners demonstrated people's anger with the current housing market, economic injustices and the symbolic violence exercised against them. Many people are unable to understand and engage with this anger and dismiss it outright. But if you are constantly reminded that your lifestyle, behaviour and cultural practices are not recognised as valuable except for providing a sense of authenticity; if you constantly bear the brunt of unjust governmental policies, are constantly being dispossessed of the things you hold dear and/or forced to live in intolerable conditions, and your possibilities to a life of fulfilment and opportunity are being restricted more and more, to the point of non-existence; and if your attempts to change things in a formal and polite way have failed time and again, then this anger seems justified. Anger is a basic human emotion which surfaces when we feel devalued, disrespected, hurt or threatened, or experience some kind of loss. The loss of one's home and a secure and stable future, of one's sense of belonging to an area and community, one's self-esteem and sense of worth, and control over the direction of one's life, as well as the disregard for one's needs and desires are a threat to one's emotional security and value as a human. The lack of identification with gentrification processes and recognition as a human being of worth in future visions of areas to be gentrified constitute a form of oppression that causes emotional harm.[5] This is the symbolic violence gentrification brings with it. Gentrification isn't just about unaffordable housing; it hurts on so many levels. The underlying message on the banners needs to be understood as the emotional pain that is felt by those that feel invisible to the people in power, to those in control of their lives. This project attempted to engage with and understand those messages, and the stories in this book give a detailed and critical account of this emotional pain.



Unsurprisingly, the banners appeared on sites where homes, shops and community spaces are going to be demolished, where familiar social networks will be torn apart and where much-loved memories located in place will be erased. The dark passage from Deptford to New Cross, particularly at night-time, and the dimly lit haunting messages above the underpass reminded me of the inscription above the gate to hell in Dante's *Inferno*: 'Abandon all hope, ye who enter here'. There is still hope of course; otherwise the banners (and graffiti around the area) wouldn't have appeared and housing campaigners wouldn't be collecting signatures, organising events to raise awareness, and fighting to stop some of the proposed plans. I say *some* because what I have generally found, and what I hope comes through in this book, is that people are not against regeneration *per se*. It is worth remembering that Deptford City Challenge and Creekside Single Regeneration Budget were mostly embraced by local people and resulted in many welcome

[4] For further reading on symbolic violence and class distinction, please see Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction*. Harvard University Press.
[5] For further reading, please see Taylor, C. (1992) *Multiculturalism and The Politics of Recognition*. Princeton University Press.

physical improvements to the area, as well as the establishment of community groups and community spaces that helped provide mutual support and emotional stability. Despite the programmes' many missed opportunities and overall flaws (the short funding span being the biggest), communities were given resources such as green spaces, facilities, training and jobs, helping establish long-lasting relationships and connections. There were community development workers working closely with local residents, who were trained to write their own funding bids, given help to run community groups, and encouraged and funded to improve and maintain green spaces. The legacy of this is still felt today, not least because some of the people and community groups are still providing mutual support for each other, maintaining green and other community spaces and campaigning for better change. As such, ideas of the 'Big Society' might actually work if people are given the necessary resources to take part. Like Franck Magennis in the opening article in this book (p.7-9), I believe that regeneration would be much less contentious if all people had decent, secure and truly affordable homes, and if all people and cultural practices were recognised and valued as equal. However, many urban regeneration programmes today seem to work against many of the people they are supposed to help.

The fact that the Tidemill and Achilles Street redevelopments, and other estate regeneration schemes, promise to house some homeless families makes the emotional pain felt by many local residents very contentious, leading to further stigmatisation of working-class people who are trying to save their homes, protect their futures and fight for fairer economic distribution and cultural recognition. Accused of preventing the housing of homeless families despite the fact that multiple (luxury) developments have gone ahead in the area without a single home for social rent and very low percentages of 'affordable' homes, working-class people – not well off themselves – have been made into the scapegoats for the misery of other working-class people. Despite achieving the currently promised higher percentages of social homes in the contested developments, despite constantly arguing for more council homes, and despite all the voluntary work many of these people undertake to make up for the constant rolling back of the state and reduction of public services, residents and campaigners are blamed for the continued misery of poor people. Is it merely a familiar case of divide and rule? Of rupturing social solidarity?

The people on housing lists and in intolerable living conditions all deserve a secure and decent home, but if housing poor families necessitates the dispossessing of other low-income families and the destruction of their homes, which for many constitutes the centre of their world, then there is something fundamentally wrong with urban policy. When we begin to question why so many families are on the housing list and/or are forced to live in substandard, insecure, and overcrowded accommodation in the first place, the justifications for the current system and the vilification of anyone speaking out against this system fall apart. While the building boom is justified by needing to house the homeless, in actual fact, the building boom is the cause of growing homelessness. Most new flats are built in partnership with international investors for private housing affordable only to people on high incomes. Not only this, the private housing market also pushes up prices for low-end housing, making previously affordable housing also unavailable to those on low incomes. This, together with the governmental policies mentioned earlier, make it even less likely for people on lower incomes to afford a home (to buy or rent), meaning that







Other graffiti in the area

Top

At Convoys Wharf in 2011

Middle

On Deptford Church Street - October 2017

Bottom

Off Deptford High Street - October 2017

Photos: Anita Strasser

people, who were previously able to pay their rent and make ends meet, end up on the housing list and needing benefits. Furthermore, by attempting to house some people on that housing list by way of redeveloping council estates, others, again mostly private renters on low incomes (of which there are more and more), for whom the council has no responsibility until they are officially registered as homeless, might end up on that housing list as a result as they cannot afford the inflated rents. As such, the housing market sustains and/or worsens levels of homelessness and the numbers on waiting lists. These official numbers do not even include people who have had their lives uprooted and moved into other properties, neighbourhoods and cities 'by choice' – to avoid paying extortionate rent prices, living in substandard accommodation, building up rent arrears and becoming homeless. They also do not include people not officially registered as homeless but who spend weeks, months, years in precarious living situations (living in cars, garden sheds, garages or on sofas). This is the reality of the housing crisis, in Deptford, London, Britain and the rest of the world. It is a crisis of affordability and policy, not of a shortage of actual housing. The number of empty homes has risen as has the number of second homes.[6] Homelessness is rising while homes are being built.

Such is the nature of urban real estate driven by global finance and endorsed by Conservative policy. It is part of the disturbing logic of neoliberalism: the pursuit of individual and economic freedom, private property rights, free markets and the rolling back of the state. We are told the state cannot afford social provision for the poor while more and more wealth is being created for the rich. We are told that increased mental health issues, which are caused, among other things, by homelessness or insecure and poor housing, cause a strain on health services, while the number of homeless families is being increased. We are also told that the number of homeless families in temporary accommodation is increasing due to increased house prices, benefit cuts and income inequality. The 'solutions' offered are further benefit cuts, closure of community centres that provide emotional support, cuts to social and health services, and the demolition of existing homes and the building of more private flats. We are told that there isn't enough council and affordable housing while whole council estates are being left to decline and then decimated and replaced with mostly private and luxury housing. The argument is that councils cannot afford to build new council homes without the collaboration of a developer and yet the money spent on increased levels of housing benefit, temporary accommodation, compulsory purchases, relocation costs and compensation, as well as dealing with local pressure (leading to redrawing plans, renegotiating percentages of social and affordable homes, and other costs) seems to be readily available.[7] A climate emergency is declared by the same local authority that orders the destruction of a community garden that mitigated high levels of pollution by half on the same day. That same garden featured as a case study for children at play for the Greener City Fund from the GLA in August 2017, a month before its planned destruction was announced, and that same garden was invited to be part of 'Tranquil

[6] For more information, see *Guardian* articles 'Number of empty homes in England rises to more than 216,000' from 11 March 2019 and 'Second-home ownership up 30% since 2000, research finds' from 19 August 2019, as well as 'Number of empty homes in England rises while homelessness reaches record levels', *Independent*, 11 March 2019.

[7] For the Achilles Street Area redevelopment, Lewisham Council paid over £50,000 (from Freedom of Information request) to refurbish an unused community space and employ a PR design studio to spend weeks trying to convince Achilles Street residents to vote for demolition. The Tidemill eviction and subsequent security presence cost the council approximately £1,400,000 (as admitted in a council meeting 27 February 2019).

City', a project funded by the same council, which maps green and calm spaces to promote health and wellbeing. These are only some of the contradictions inherent in a system imbued with neoliberal ideology. Authorities may present themselves as valorising green spaces and local communities, and wanting to house the homeless, articulated with a persuasive rhetoric that seems beyond question, but the reliance on economic redevelopment and transnational capital are the real drivers of current policy. This kind of capitalism plays one cause and one group of people off against another. Instead of blaming the system, people end up blaming their fellow citizens for the consequences of this system, fracturing social solidarity in the process. As Owen Jones puts it, 'Demonization is the ideological backbone of an unequal society'.[8] This is the trick of neoliberalism – to make its logic so incomprehensible and confusing but with a rhetoric so compelling and appealing to our values that it makes many people believe that it is necessary and inevitable, that there is no alternative. However, neoliberalism, the housing market and austerity politics are not economic necessities as Conservative governments would have us believe; they are political choices. We need a change in political ideology.[9]

In *The Good City* (2006), Ash Amin[10] writes that in order for people to co-exist well in cities around the world, urban solidarity and an ethics of universal care is vital. City life might be exciting for the secure, well-connected and those excited by the buzz of urban living, but 'for the many at the bottom of the social ladder, cities are the places of low-wage work, insecurity, poor living conditions and dejected isolation' (Amin, 2006, p.1011). He highlights four elements that would increase urban solidarity and make cities more liveable for all:

1) Continual maintenance and repair, underpinned by a political economy of attention and co-ordination – not only when things get desperate but at all times to provide a lasting infrastructure. If council blocks, local amenities and infrastructure such as roads and pavements were maintained and cared for properly, rather than running them into the ground to then justify demolition and replacement, local residents would be living in better conditions, have stable and secure homes and futures, and feel that they are valued members of the local area. Proceeds from Right-To-Buy could have been used to build new council homes, continually providing less advantaged citizens with decent and secure homes. This means we wouldn't have the same levels of homelessness, families forced out of their homes, families in temporary, substandard or overcrowded accommodation and there wouldn't now be such a desperate need for truly affordable homes. Keeping and maintaining treasured green spaces and community centres (e.g. Tidemill Garden, DAGE, Evelyn Community Centre) that host various (funded) community groups that provide mutual support for each other and engage in a variety of creative and cultural activities would contribute to fostering security, emotional stability and a sense of membership and thus a happier society. Investment in existing shops, eateries and other establishments (e.g. Pie & Mash shops, Deptford Market), enabling continuity of tradition and heritage, would also result in personal recognition and pride in the area.

2) A socially just and inclusive city, helping the poorer from the means of mere survival to human fulfilment. If local residents and shopkeepers are not priced out while new

[8] Jones, O. (2011) *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*. London: Verso.
[9] For further reading, see: Harvey, D. (2007) 'Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction', *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610, pp. 22-44.
[10] Amin, A. (2006) 'The Good City', *Urban Studies*, Vol. 43, Nos 5/6, pp.1009-1023.

infrastructure is being built, there would be less resistance to redevelopment and not such a strong sense of 'us-and-them' in the air. There is a very clear correlation between economic disadvantage and mental health issues, with greater income inequality reducing the ability to contribute to civic life and the possibility of happiness. Once again, having a secure home, stable community networks and a sense of belonging, as well as being recognised and part of future visions of neighbourhood plans enhances self-esteem and levels of worth, which are part of the fundamentals of human fulfilment. Inclusive community-led approaches to urban development, for example, where ordinary people can take ownership of decision-making processes about their homes, neighbourhoods and lives (not just minor decisions on street names, plaques and types of flowers), could give them recognition, confidence and pride. Another example is if local people are able to enjoy the benefits of regeneration as with Deptford Lounge, which has become a much-needed and appreciated social space with an inclusive and varied programme (free) for local residents and families.

3) The right (and opportunity) to participate in public life. Whilst this right is taken for granted by those with the means and entitlement (and opportunities) to do so, it is not necessarily always extended to those who lack the economic, cultural and social capital to claim that right. In the drive to create private urban spaces (e.g. private homes and gardens, academies, health clinics etc.), the greater freedom of the wealthy to pick and choose restricts the freedom of the poorer, thus limiting their rights and choices. Even if spaces potentially welcome people from all walks of life, the invisible financial, social and cultural barriers make it difficult for many people to participate (e.g. Deptford Market Yard). With the reduction of spaces that are free or affordable, social inclusion today is often dependent on economic participation that many people in Deptford cannot afford. With this lack of rights and opportunity, notions of democracy are diminished. As such, we need culturally democratic and free spaces where all people are given opportunities for a life of fulfilment.

4) Re-enchantment with the city through expanding social solidarity rather than fracturing urban life between the rich and the poor. Instead of dividing society through unjust urban development and policies, governments should create cities that foster solidarity, fairer economic distribution and cultural recognition of all its citizens. There have always been wealthier citizens but the ever-increasing financial gap between the rich and the poor and the disturbing logic of capitalism have created a rupture in our society, an us-and-them mindset that makes it harder and harder for people at the lower end of the social ladder to be enchanted by city life.

In many ways, Deptford is an example of the good city, not because of current governmental policies but because of all the residents who are constantly working on expanding social solidarity through their voluntary community work. These people help maintain and repair community spaces and help other, less fortunate local residents find support, fulfilment and opportunities to participate through food, the arts and other cultural activities. The solidarity shown in the fight against inequality is part of what Deptford is and is perceived to be: authentic, inclusive and with close-knit communities. It is what makes Deptford so attractive to many. *Community* (as defined on p.14-15) is at the heart of Deptford life for many of its residents, and their shared spaces, experiences and struggles provide meaning, support and friendships. These networks keep people feeling enchanted with city life, with many long-term residents saying: "Deptford is where my heart is." But the fear of losing these networks is part



Banner at Deptford/New Cross underpass - January 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

of the ongoing struggle. As life is becoming more and more unequal for those who cannot afford the urban lifestyle we are sold, the threat of losing vital community networks is very real. Not only are council homes and community spaces, where people experience social solidarity and an ethics of care, not really maintained or repaired, they either face potential demolition/closure or are being demolished and replaced with mostly private housing and spaces, thus erasing some people's opportunities to be included in urban life. How can communities thrive if they are deprived of choice, material goods, opportunities to participate and feelings of worth? How can it be called progress if more and more people are thrown into poverty, with living standards for the disadvantaged almost returning to Victorian times? People aren't against change; they are against being left out of change.

Social justice is as much about fair economic distribution as it is about fair cultural recognition.[11] Neoliberalism does neither. Current policies are designed to distribute to the already well-off and dispossess those on the lower end of the income bracket; they are designed to promote the tastes and lifestyles of the better-off and devalue those that do not aspire to or cannot afford those lifestyles; they enhance the freedom and finance of the well-off by restricting the freedom and finance of the hard-up. It is a profit-driven system built on individual and economic freedom, private property rights and free markets. It is a system that fails to recognise people on low incomes as human beings of value and worth, reducing their opportunities for participation in public life and human fulfilment and subsequently demonising them for lack of participation and fulfilment. It is ironic that one of Britain's core values is Liberty, which John Stuart Mill, one of the most influential philosophers on the principle of liberty, describes as the idea that each individual has the right to pursue their own good and act as they wish as long as their actions do not harm others (Mill, 1859).[12] One might argue that any action will potentially harm some people, but the actions engineered by neoliberal policies in the name of liberty are harming and removing the freedom of so many people they can hardly be justified with Mill's liberty principle. And as most individual pursuits now require capital, the freedom to act as one wishes is not extended to a large proportion of people. The gap between the theory of individual liberty and the practice of neoliberalism is too wide, with ideas of equal opportunity and a true democracy diminished. Unlike the social liberalism of the post war era, which advocated social reform and equal opportunity for the many through the welfare state, neoliberalism has dismantled these more egalitarian and democratic structures to benefit the few. The state's role within neoliberal ideology is to create the conditions for capital accumulation and protect property rights and free markets.

Now is the time to get angry and join the resistance to fight for a return to a more socially-oriented liberalism which fosters 'a true economic and social democracy' (Hessel, 2011).[13] *Time for Outrage*, as Stéphane Hessel, resistance fighter in France urged, time to reject the selfish power of markets and defend the social values of modern democracy. Only when we fully recognise neoliberalism as working against the values of justice and equality, as the stories in this book (and many others across the globe) vividly demonstrate, can we experience the necessary outrage to bring about change and the principles of the good and equal city. This is the outrage that was expressed on those banners hung in Deptford.



Banner at Deptford roundabout - January 2018

Photo: Anita Strasser

[11] For further reading: Fraser, N. & Honneth, A. (2004) *Redistribution or Recognition?* London: Verso.
[12] Mill, J.S. (1859) *On Liberty.* Penguin Books.
[13] Hessel, S. (2011) *Time for Outrage*. London: Charles Glass Books.

Conclusion

I know this book in itself won't halt gentrification processes or change the dire situation that some of Deptford's residents are experiencing. It also won't change most government officials, local councillors and many other powerful people's view that there is no alternative to the current housing project and neoliberal agenda – if they ever get to read it. But this is not to say that this book won't effect some kind of meaningful change, even if this is not the direct and immediate change we need, i.e. lifting people out of poverty and providing decent housing for all. For this to happen, we need a change in political ideology but at present that feels like trying to shift Mount Everest to a new location. However, by making visible some of Deptford's longstanding residents, shopkeepers, artists, community networks, voluntary workers and campaigners, and drawing attention to what life in Deptford means to them, I hope that it will lead to a better understanding of the impact the current housing market and aggressive governmental policies have on less advantaged people. Having a counter narrative to stigmatising representations and an understanding of a situation are often the first steps to direct action. Some of the articles in this book, when previously published on the *Deptford is Changing* blog and subsequently on other social media sites run by campaigns, local residents and their followers, often reaching a large online audience, have helped increase the visibility of local campaigns and raised awareness of existing places, people and struggles, leading to animated debates about how communities could be supported and how a place under threat could be saved. Some have led to donations and signatures on petitions to help community centres and their projects survive, some have led people to support their local businesses more and got friends to do the same. Some have resulted in requests to include the voices of certain individuals and community groups in this project, leading to further workshops, conversations and articles on the blog. Some of the personal stories have led to people contacting and putting more pressure on the council, with some accounts motivating people to help less fortunate Deptfordians get hazards fixed such as getting an explosive boiler replaced, leaks fixed and flats damp proofed. Others have led to publications in magazines such as Time Out, SPLIT Sociology Zine (1st issue) and fLIP Photography Magazine, reaching an even wider audience, and others still have encouraged people from other areas to come to Deptford to show solidarity. These are only the responses I know about. It is impossible to know what else has occurred in response to reading posts. Perhaps somebody started volunteering at their local community centre, donated money to a good cause, joined or showed support for a local housing campaign and/or wrote to their MP. Some articles might indirectly have contributed to positive changes in redevelopment proposals such as increasing the percentages of social housing or saving some green space. Perhaps the posts have shifted perceptions and assumptions. That in itself would be great change. But if this book could open up a democratic and empathetic dialogue between decision-makers and people who are/feel left out of gentrification processes, perhaps areas like Deptford could be changing in a more community-led and socially just way so that all people would be included and recognised in processes of change and able to enjoy the benefits of regeneration. That would be the greatest change.

Participatory arts and research projects like this, where the knowledges, histories, personal experiences and cultural activities of less advantaged people are valid and valued, have shown to be potentially transformative in some way for the people involved. Having the opportunity to speak and a platform to be listened to on one's own terms, to have one's voice, experiences and memories, as well as one's creative expressions recognised can boost self-confidence, increase self-esteem and trigger feelings of worth. They can foster learning – learning about the area, understanding what is happening and one's position within it, and what options there are for resisting. They can also act as a kind of knowledge and skills exchange whereby people pool their local knowledge

and organisational or creative skills to achieve a shared vision – like organising a workshop or event, planning a photography walk, or engaging in a discussion. Some might be inspired to become activists and engage in political activities, create propaganda material or start/join a campaign. After all, it is the participation and contributions of people in this book which helped contribute to the aforementioned impact of this project. Taking part in creative activities, alone or in a group, can also have therapeutic qualities (many participants commented on this), combat social isolation and loneliness, and 'make you discover your creative talents you didn't know you had', as one participant said. Some contributors to this book have written something, taken a digital photograph or participated in a workshop for the first time in their lives. Witnessing their joy of achievement was very moving. Rebecca, the 11-year old girl I met at Evelyn Community Centre and who wants to be an artist, might find confidence in seeing the poem she wrote for this project published in this book (p.168). I hope she does. Participating in democratic dialogues and culturally democratic activities can make people feel a sense of belonging and recognition, which might motivate further (political) action. The most frequently voiced feedback so far has been the appreciation of having been included in this project, of having had the opportunity to participate and create something, to be listened to, to have one's perspectives valued, to feature in a book about Deptford that describes their experience. It is hard to follow up what each event in this project led to. Some people might have continued critical discussions, organised their own walks, taken more digital photographs or continued writing accounts about their personal experience of life in Deptford. Again, aside from the feedback that was shared with me it is difficult to ascertain how much and how many individuals have benefitted from taking part in this project, let alone what changes they experienced. Social change is often slow and delayed, and feelings of recognition and worth, as well as the personal significance of taking part are hard to measure anyway. The significance of taking part and the project as a whole may only become apparent long after this book has been published.

If nothing else, the book at least acts as an alternative history to the dominant narrative of 'up-and-coming' Deptford, and to the often stigmatising representations of working-class people. By valuing and celebrating some of the local residents, community networks, creative talents, cultural activities and voluntary efforts to look after the disadvantaged that exist in Deptford, this book is a counter narrative which recognises the lived reality of many working-class people in the area. It allows people to represent their lives based on their own experiences and therefore redefine what life in Deptford means to them. History has many facets and it's important to write the histories of all people, including those who tend to be left out of the grand and linear narratives written by the powerful. Ignoring the stories of the less advantaged is like erasing them from history altogether. This project sought to enable those people to write their own histories and contribute what they feel is important. The stories speak of disadvantage, hardship and inequality, but they also speak of joy, community, solidarity and care. They may include romantic memories of a better past but they also offer critical perspectives of past and present issues. They also speak of the varied histories of migration, racial discrimination, the impact of regeneration and other complex issues often left out of conveniently fashioned representations for economic gain. The details in people's stories and critical accounts of the changes happening in Deptford provide deep insights into the urban and social fabric of Deptford and its historical complexities. The significance of these accounts will grow as Deptford continues to change.

Finally, my hope is that this book can act as a resource and inspiration for other residents, campaigners, artists and researchers who want to highlight social injustices in alternative, useable and participatory ways. Residents and campaigners might find courage and creative ideas to campaign differently and may find comfort in the fact that they are not alone and that not all is in vain. Artists and researchers might rethink their socially engaged practices and how they engage

with the communities they are working with. So much of participatory art and community research does not really work *for* and *with* communities, and I hope that this book can inspire different ways of how one might carry out an arts project with working-class communities or a study in the context of gentrification. Already during the two years of writing the blog I was invited to join many debates about the role of art and research in housing activism and to share my experiences of resisting with communities against the demolition of their estates and other injustices. This has been hugely encouraging. Even more encouraging have been invitations and requests to do further workshops with various local groups and the feedback from participants in this project / book, who have told me that they appreciated the way this project and this book were made: giving people the opportunity to be co-researchers and co-authors, to tell their own stories by taking part in the production of content on their own terms, and to take part in decisions regarding the final outcome. Many also appreciated that I was willing to create a lot of the material as they were unable to produce their own contributions for various reasons, but could edit the output and still decide how and where the material was shared and used. Although I am in control of the publishing platform, the content has been shaped in dialogue with participants. Above all, participants appreciated that the material was produced not only for research but also for their causes, making participation useful to them.

Doing a project that tries to bridge academia, art and activism, making academic and creative research useful and usable for the people involved, is by no means easy and without conflict. I have spent hours deliberating each decision and action part of this project, particularly the written and visual representations of people's lives, contemplating the ethics and possible consequences of these representations. I consulted many of my participants in at times difficult and emotionally charged conversations, and compromises had to be agreed during the editing process for the final output so as to avoid potential harm to participants and other residents. This ongoing and open dialogue with my participants and other residents, responding to their concerns, criticisms and needs, and letting them share control and ownership over the process and outcome, while constantly bearing in mind the possibility of harm at the same time, has necessitated the constant adaptation of my working method to make the project fit its purpose – to be useful to participants and other residents with similar experiences without compromising their positions. This has, in large parts, shaped the project, my understanding of what gentrification means to different people and my views on what constitutes meaningful participatory art practice and community research. My PhD thesis will be an opportunity to engage more with, and critically analyse, these processes.

I have considered very carefully, through images, texts and the design of the book and in dialogue with participants and professionals in the fields of Sociology, Art and Design, how to do justice to the experiences, personal accounts and artworks presented in this book and to the needs of people involved while trying to address multiple audiences and open up meaningful dialogue. I hope I have succeeded.

Anita Strasser, January 2020



Deptford Flea Market on a Friday morning in autumn 2019

Photo: Adam Ramejkis

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Index

Community spaces and Churches

2nd Deptford Scout Hall, 150, 152-163
999 Club, 133, 188-193
Armada Community Hall, 131-135, 137-138, 141-142, 144, 147, 150
Co-oPepys Community Arts Project, 100, 173
DAGE (Deptford Action Group for the Elderly), 120-127, 249
Deptford Cinema, 7-9
Deptford Lounge, 83-84, 89, 90, 92, 94-95, 97-98, 102, 104-105, 168, 170, 174, 189, 192, 217, 250
Evelyn 190 Centre, 184-186
Evelyn Community Centre, 158, 162, 164-170, 249, 253
Moonshot, 193, 205-206
Our Lady of the Assumption, 84, 213
Pepys Resource Centre, 171-176
Richard MacVicar Adventure Playground, 99-100, 138, 193
St Luke's Church, 133, 155, 184
St Nicholas' Church, 133, 155, 184-185
St Paul's Church, 179-180, 190
The Albany, 19, 21, 68, 79, 81, 88, 99-100, 102, 105, 189, 193, 205, 207

Estates and Developments

Achilles Street Area, 62-63, 194-236, 239, 247-248
Anthology Deptford Foundry, 129, 158, 162, 170
Convoys Wharf, 72, 74, 78, 80, 96, 134-136, 143, 146, 149
Creekside Developments, 24, 64, 75, 82, 140-141, 244, 246
Crossfields Estate, 24, 82, 182
Deptford Market Yard, 71, 82-84, 86, 102, 105, 109, 214, 250
Evelyn Estate, 160, 162, 165, 167, 183
Hughes Field, 135, 140-141, 145, 147-148
Pepys Estate, 21, 25, 32, 62, 97, 100, 129, 148, 179, 183, 209, 211
Reginald House, 10, 18, 22-23, 25-29, 32-34, 52, 55, 59-60, 62, 122, 174, 244
Theatre Arm Boating Community, 70-76
The Timberyard, 62

Food and Drink

Café Bianca, 82
Delicious Café, 222-223
Goddard's Pie & Mash, 112-117
M & D Japanese, 105
Manze's Pie & Mash, 148
Marcella Restaurant, 135
Mez Mangal Turkish Restaurant, 227-229
Mughead Coffee, 218-219, 224
Rose's Kitchen, 234-236
Rough & Ready, 124-131
The Birds Nest, 31, 56, 82, 104, 108-109
The Dog and Bell, 9, 105
The Job Centre, 122, 180
The Waiting Room, 105-111

Green spaces

Charlotte Turner Gardens, 139-143, 150-151
Fordham Park, 97, 194, 205, 211-212
McMillan Herb Garden, 179
McMillan Park, 99, 205
Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden, 9-24, 28-68, 83-85, 87, 99, 122, 173-174, 180, 244, 249
Sayes Court Park, 96, 144, 146-147
Sue Godfrey Nature Reserve, 82
Twinkle Park, 139-143

Groups and Organisations

Achilles Stop and Listen Campaign, 10, 194-195, 228-229, 237-239
Artmongers, 225
Deptford Challenge Trust, 21, 238
Deptford Folk, 158-159
Deptford Is Forever, 77-80
Deptford Neighbourhood Action group (DNA), 173
Deptford People Project, 7-8, 15
Deptford Society, 78-79
Entelechy Arts, 81
Evelyn Tenants & Residents Association, 112, 164
Friends of Deptford Creek, 70, 72, 76
Goldsmiths Anti-Racist Action, 237-240
Greenwich Mural Workshop, 139-142
Lewisham People Before Profit, 241-243
Madcap Coalition, 21, 180
Meet Me at the Albany, 68, 81-88, 168
Save Reginald! Save Tidemill! Campaign, 10-67
Sayes Court Garden Project, 79-80, 143
Sir John Evelyn Charity, 133, 135, 150
The Lenox Project, 72, 76, 79-80
Twinkle Park Trust, 139-143
Utrophia, 108, 180
Voice4Deptford, 173
WE Women Circle, 171-172, 175

Nurseries, Schools and Colleges

Bunny Hop Day Nursery, 164, 166
Childeric Primary School and Nursery, 205, 212, 235
Deptford Green School, 98, 220, 222, 235
Goldsmiths College, 1, 22, 121, 179, 201, 206, 216, 218, 220, 222, 235, 237-240
Grinling Gibbons Primary School, 95-97
Laban, 24, 41,108
Rachel McMillan School (Nursery), 179, 184
Sir Francis Drake Primary School, 95-96
St. Joseph's Primary School, 214-213
Tidemill School, 21-22, 28, 98, 150, 180

Shops and Shopping

Deptford Market, 5, 8, 70-71, 82-83, 86, 88-89, 100, 102, 105, 119-120, 137, 148, 169-170, 180-181, 191, 193, 199, 213-214, 249, 255
Divine Cargo, 215-217
Green Onions, 230-233
Halal Butcher, 118-119
Johnny Price's shop (El Cheapou), 25-26
Kids Love Ink, 78-79, 106-107
Nightingale Pharmacy, 106, 110
Rag 'n Bone, 106
Roots Fruit & Veg, 118
Terry's Discount, 84, 100, 105, 107
The Launderette, 224-226
Tony's Daily, 170
YIP Oriental Store, 220-221

Other

Deptford High Street, 7, 58, 77-80, 82-84, 89-90, 98, 100, 102, 106-110, 112, 114, 119-120, 122, 124-125, 130, 135-136, 138, 140, 148, 168-170, 181, 201, 212-213, 248
Deptford Town Hall, 1, 179, 237, 240
Deptford X, 11, 14, 18-19, 48-49, 63
Evelyn Community Store, 164-165, 168-169
Lewisham Hospital, 125, 129
Millwall, 109, 147-148, 190, 201, 205
The Battle of Lewisham, 92-93
The return of the anchor, 77-80, 130

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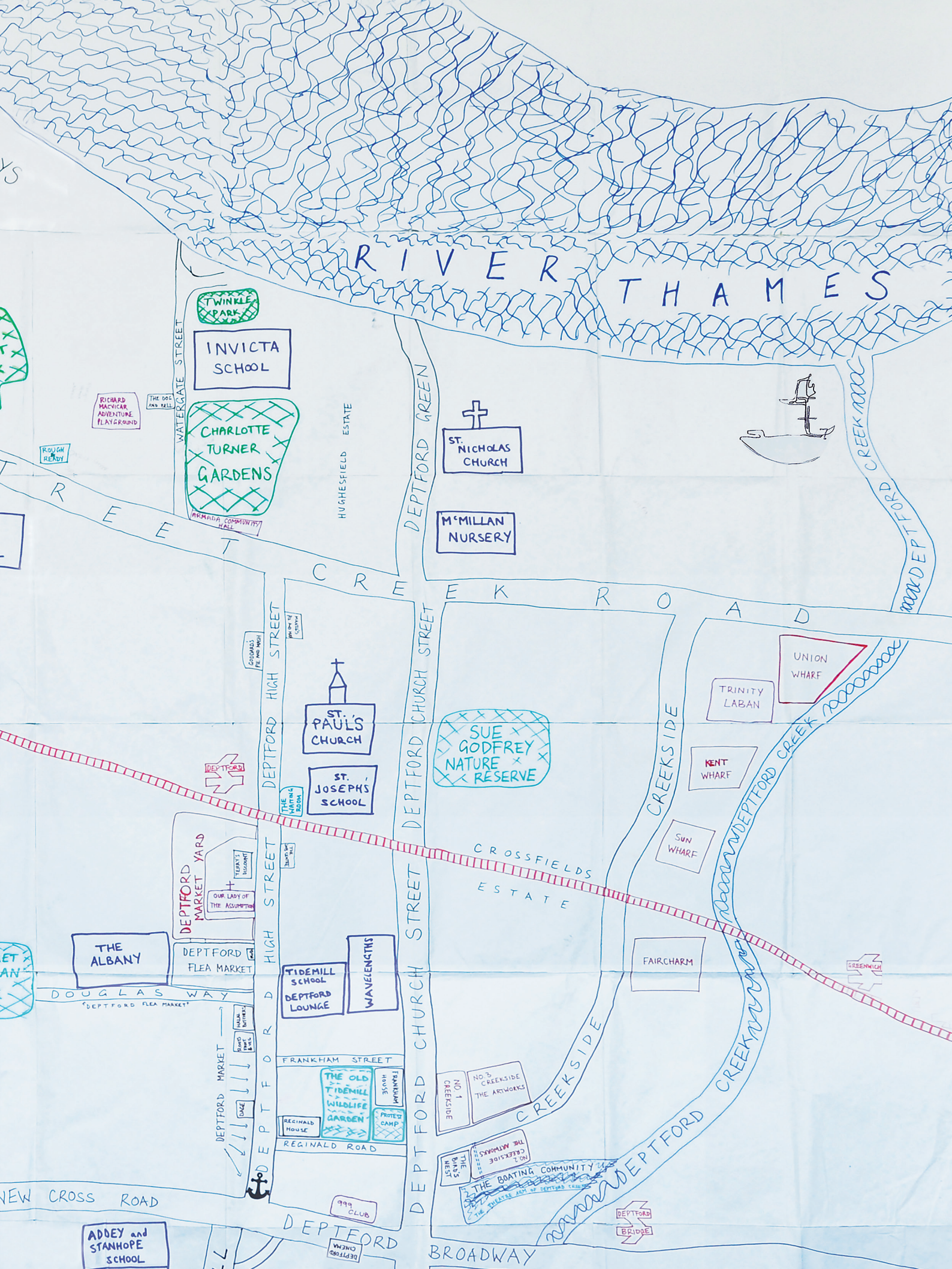
RIVER THAMES
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INVICTA SCHOOL
WATERGATE STREET
RICHARD MACNICAR ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND
THE DOG AND PILE
ROUGH READY
CHARLOTTE TURNER GARDENS
ARMADA COMMUNITY HALL
HUGHESFIELD ESTATE
DEPTFORD GREEN
ST. NICHOLAS CHURCH
McMILLAN NURSERY
DEPTFORD CREEK
CREEK ROAD
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SUE GODFREY NATURE RESERVE
ST. JOSEPH'S SCHOOL
KENT WHARF
CREEKSIDE
SUN WHARF
CROSSFIELDS ESTATE
DEPTFORD MARKET YARD
OUR LADY OF THE ASSUMPTION
THE ALBANY
DEPTFORD FLEA MARKET
DOUGLAS WAY
TIDEMILL SCHOOL
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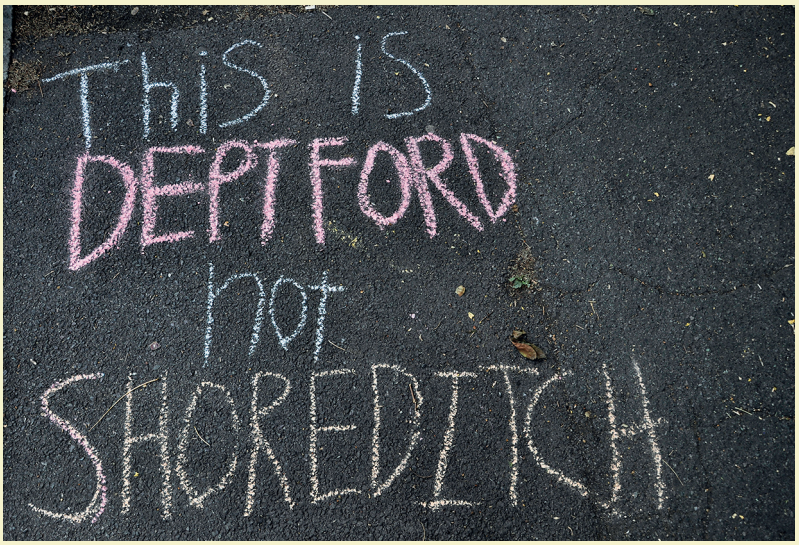
WAVELENGTHS
FAIRCHARM
GREENWICH
FRANKHAM STREET
THE OLD TIDEMILL WILDLIFE GARDEN
TRAMWAY HOUSE
REGINALD HOUSE
PROTEST CAMP
REGINALD ROAD
NO. 1 CREEKSIDE
NO. 3 CREEKSIDE THE ARTWORKS
NO. 2 CREEKSIDE THE ARTWORKS
THE BOATING COMMUNITY
THE THEATRE ARK OF DEPTFORD CREEK
THE BIRDS NEST
NEW CROSS ROAD
999 CLUB
ADDEY and STANHOPE SCHOOL
DEPTFORD BROADWAY
DEPTFORD BRIDGE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