

# THE ELEPHANT

MAGAZINE

Issue 20 / Spring 2021



## THIS ISSUE

### BLACK COWBOY COFFEE

Elephant Arcade's  
king of coffee spills  
the beans

### MEMORY MAKERS

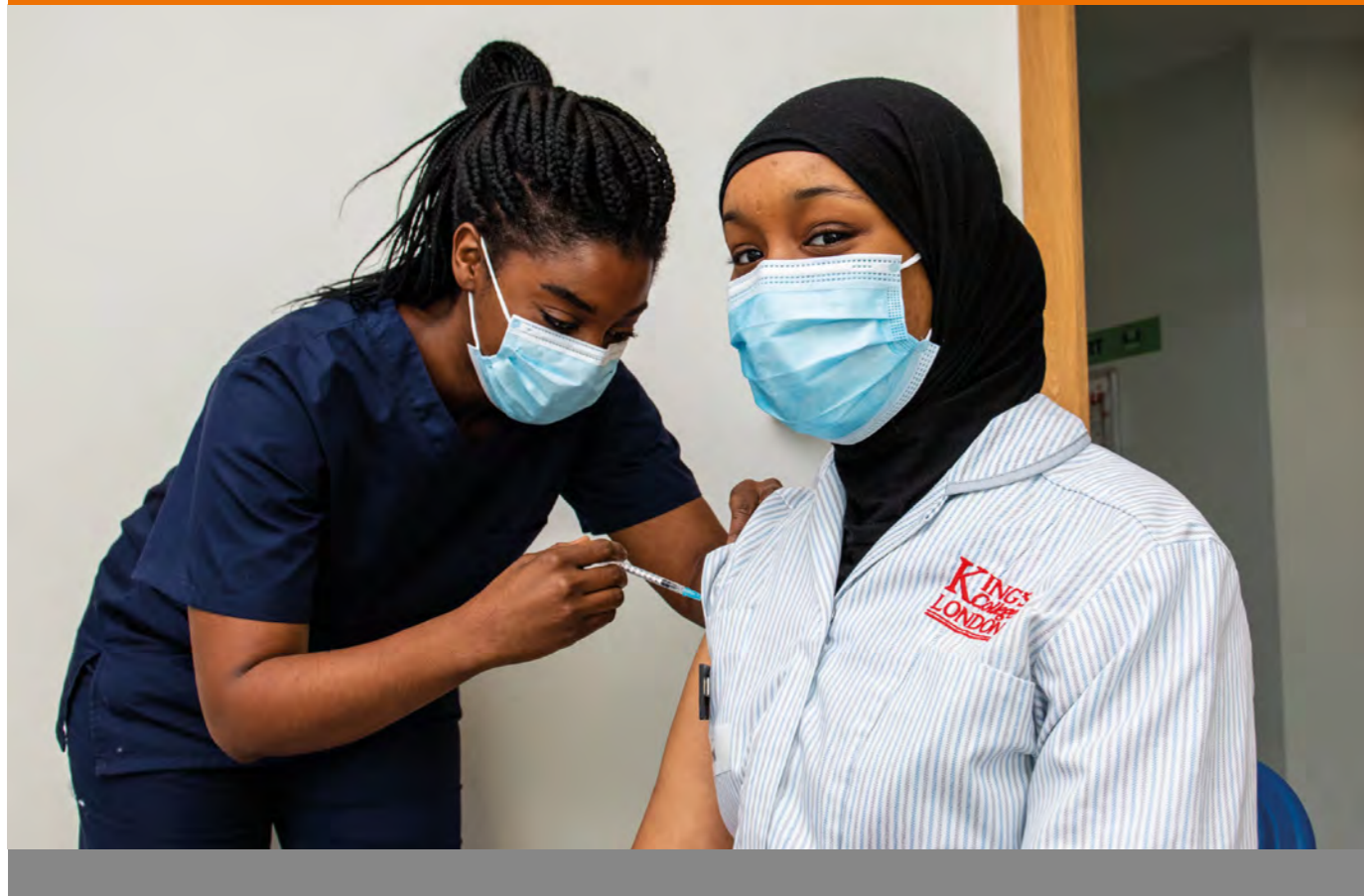
How The Cinema  
Museum is preserving  
local heritage

### BEZA

The Ethiopian  
restaurant that's  
taking London  
by storm



The COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective.  
 Keep yourself safe and protect the NHS by  
 getting the jab when it's your turn.



@lb\_southwark   facebook.com/southwarkcouncil   @southwarkcouncil

Find out more at [www.southwark.gov.uk/covidvaccine](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/covidvaccine)



# THIS IS THE ELEPHANT

And this is the Elephant Magazine.

The Elephant Magazine is the publication dedicated to all things Elephant and Castle. We want to celebrate all that is fabulous about our neighbourhood and our community. We want to look back with fondness on the area's past and look forward with optimism to the future. The Elephant is changing and the Elephant Magazine will be following every step of the way.



Published by Southwark Council

Editor Richard Wells

Additional copy Nikki Spencer Noella Pio Kivlehan

Cover photo John Otagburuagu

Designer Nathan Heins, Westco Creative

Printed by Swiss Post

Enquiries councilnews@southwark.gov.uk

We welcome your ideas, comments and contributions, so please get in touch.

Photography from left to right:

East Street sign; Adramo Tezgazzi; Lunch at Tupi; Castle Centre sign; Sokari Douglas Camp, artist; Elephant statue

### Keep in touch

Visit us at [elephantandcastle.org.uk](http://elephantandcastle.org.uk)  
 Email [info@elephantandcastle.org.uk](mailto:info@elephantandcastle.org.uk) to be added to our mailing list for digital updates: use the word UPDATES in the subject line, followed by your postcode.





# ELEPHANT PARK EXPANDS

*The second phase of Elephant and Castle's huge new park is set to open in the spring.*

The new park has long been the most anticipated part of Lendlease's mixed-use Elephant Park development. Now, following a year of lockdowns, the appetite for wide, green, open spaces has never been greater.

Elephant Park has already delivered hundreds of new homes alongside new shops and restaurants. When the second phase of the park opens in the spring it will mark the next major milestone in this vast project, set to complete in 2025.

Over the past few years, most locals will have enjoyed spending some time in the park, the first portion of which opened back in 2017. It provided around an acre of welcome green space in-between all the construction work.

Lendlease has had lots of feedback on the park and has learned some useful lessons from that successful first phase. The company also undertook extensive community consultation in 2019. This has informed the designs for the second phase, as well as a number of further improvements to the first part of the park.



## Twice the size and open 24 hours

The park will double in size when the second part opens – making it one of the largest new parks to be built in central London for decades. And, with some of the surrounding streets now complete, the park can remain open 24 hours a day (rather than having to close at dusk).



## Building on success

The second phase will retain and improve the successful elements that made the first part so popular. The design continues to be centred around a large, open lawn intended for relaxation and playing games. Vibrant, colourful planting beds and rain gardens will surround the park and a series of pocket spaces will provide some quieter, peaceful spaces around the edges of the lawn.



## A playable landscape set amongst mature trees

The whole park will provide a playable landscape but there will also be a dedicated play hub for children. The hub will have a natural feel, with a large, interactive water feature at its centre with jets, dams and pumps. Children and adults, alike, will be encouraged to interact and play with the water.

The park also retains many of the existing, mature trees from the previous site, helping to give the park a unique, established feel, right from the start. As with the first phase, many new trees will be planted as well.



## A landmark pavilion

The southwest corner of the park connects with Sayer Street, Elephant Park's new shopping street, dedicated to local food and drink businesses.

This section will be anchored by a new plaza and will include a new, landmark pavilion – built around a mature London plane tree and featuring a spectacular, public roof terrace. The terrace will have fantastic views across the park, as well as providing visitors with the opportunity to stand amongst the tree canopy.

The pavilion also includes new community space and a food and drink kiosk. It's due to be completed by the end of the summer, which means it will open a little while after the rest of the park.



## Park promenades

The original plans for the park were constrained by three surrounding roads but the latest, improved design removes all vehicular traffic from these roads – making them a place for pedestrians. It means the park will be a much safer place and will provide more space for new restaurants, bars and cafes.

One of the new, pedestrianised streets is Ash Avenue (along the northern edge of the park).

Businesses in Ash Avenue, will be able to take advantage of south-facing, outdoor seating areas which open directly onto the park. So Ash Avenue is sure to be a popular new space to meet and socialise when life finally starts to return to normal.



## More to come

This second phase will deliver the majority of the final, completed park, but there's still one more phase to come. The third phase will deliver the final, eastern section of the park and is expected to be complete in 2025.

## Get involved

Remember, Elephant Park is a community park for the whole neighbourhood. Local residents and groups are encouraged to host events and activities here. If you're interested in holding an event in the park, email [ele-ask@lendlease.com](mailto:ele-ask@lendlease.com) or visit [www.elephantpark.co.uk](http://www.elephantpark.co.uk)





## Southwark Playhouse is set to open a new, purpose-built, 300 seat theatre and community hub in Elephant and Castle.

After decades of being based at various venues around the borough, Southwark Playhouse finally has a permanent new home in Newington Butts and Artistic Director and CEO, Chris Smyrnios, is delighted. “Elephant and Castle has always been our spiritual home. To be here, right in the heart of the community, is really important to us.”

The team are currently putting the finishing touches to their new theatre, built at the base of the UNCLE building on Churchyard Row.

COVID permitting, the new venue will open in the autumn.

“What’s great about this space is that we’ve been involved right from the beginning. It’s been built with us in mind” explains Chris.

“In addition to the main theatre space, which is adaptable and allows for different seating configurations, it will also have a dedicated youth and community space.”

As well as staging high quality, cutting-edge performances, the Playhouse also offers three, free-to-join, community theatre companies. There’s the Young Company for 14-25 year olds; a People’s Company for 25+ and an Elder’s Company for those over 65. They also have an extensive schools programme.

“For the first time ever, these three companies are going to have their own space to make the magic happen” says Chris excitedly.

The excitement is understandable as Chris is the first to admit that the project has taken much longer than hoped.

“When I started as Artistic Director at Southwark Playhouse, in 2010, one of my priorities was to find us a permanent home, but it has proved very complicated and quite some journey!”

Back then, the theatre was based in railway arches on Tooley Street but the redevelopment of London Bridge Station meant they were asked to relocate by Network Rail.

A huge campaign was launched to save the theatre, backed by a number of celebrities. These included Stephen Fry and Andy Serkis, who had directed one of his first shows at the Playhouse and is still a patron to this day.

The campaign was successful, and the Playhouse was promised it could return to London Bridge once Network Rail had completed its work. But, in the meantime, they needed to find a temporary venue.

After a long search, Chris spotted a large building (old garages) for rent on Newington Causeway while walking to work one day. He took on the lease and spent four months converting the space into a fully functioning theatre which opened in 2013.

Since then, the Elephant and Castle venue has staged up to 20 shows a year, attracting old and new fans alike.

“A large proportion of our audience has been from Southwark and Lambeth, but people have come from all over London. We’ve also had some national and international visitors who come to see specific shows” says Chris.



CHRIS SMYRNIOS

With the ‘temporary’ theatre proving a big success, Chris was now offered the opportunity to put down permanent roots in Elephant and Castle at a new, purpose-built venue. The new theatre would be part of a development on the site of the old London Park Hotel in Newington Butts.

The development (which eventually came to be known as the UNCLE building) took a while to get off the ground but Chris never gave up hope.

“For many years the Newington Butts site was just a hole in the ground” he says. Eventually, in 2013, things got moving and by 2018 the team were ready to turn their new space – on the ground floor of the newly completed, 46-storey tower – into a working theatre.

The Playhouse needed to raise a lot of money to fit-out the new theatre. This included a successful ‘Million Pound Wall’ campaign whereby local people

and businesses could pay to include their names and logos on a feature wall in the bar area.

“People have really supported us, but we still need another £500k to add the finishing touches” says Chris, adding that COVID has delayed things and made everything more difficult, financially.

“When lockdown happened, we had a sold-out show which obviously couldn’t go ahead. Thankfully, about 40 per cent of the audience donated their ticket money to help us keep going, which was wonderful.”

Over the past year, the theatre has streamed live and pre-recorded performances and run community workshops, online.

Last summer, they even managed a number of socially distanced shows.

“Many performances sold out, and there has been a phenomenal response to our live-streamed shows” says Chris. “As soon as we could, we moved all our youth and community work online too. It’s so important to keep that connection with people, as lockdown can be so isolating.”

The new flagship theatre in Newington Butts will be known as Southwark Playhouse Elephant, while the current, Newington Causeway venue will be renamed Southwark Playhouse Castle.

While the new theatre is permanent, the plan is to move the smaller, Newington Causeway operation back to London Bridge in 2023.

Until then, the two Southwark Playhouses will operate, just a stone’s throw apart, in Elephant and Castle.

Chris is counting the days until they can open the doors to the public at Newington Butts. “We’re currently doing the final bits of fitting out and I can’t wait for people to come and see our shows once the restrictions have lifted.”

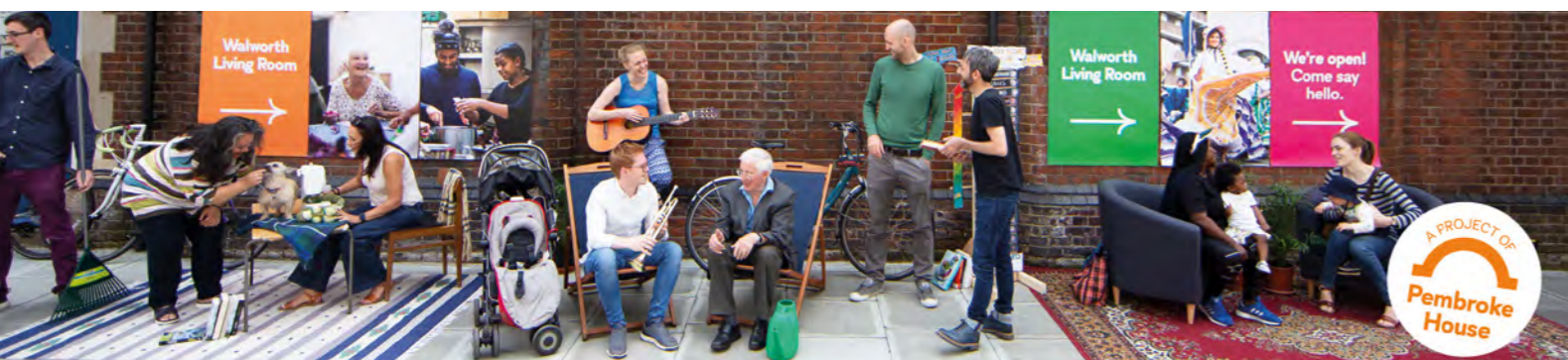
**Southwark Playhouse Castle**  
77-85 Newington Causeway, SE1 6DB

**Southwark Playhouse Elephant**  
9 Churchyard Row, SE11 4FJ

[www.southwarkplayhouse.co.uk](http://www.southwarkplayhouse.co.uk)



# THE WALWORTH LIVING ROOM



An historic church hall in Surrey Square is set to be restored as a new community space named the Walworth Living Room.

Step through a side door from the street, down the little corridor, and you emerge into a cavernous space with a high, vaulted ceiling and large windows which let the sun stream in.

It's the perfect welcome to All Saints Hall, Surrey Square, home to the Walworth Living Room. This community project, still a work-in-progress, is the brainchild of Mike Wilson, Executive Director, and his team at Pembroke House, a local charity that has worked in the neighbourhood for more than a century.

The vision is to create a 'home away from home' a community space where local people can come together again, when the pandemic recedes. The Walworth Living Room will be a place where a range of services, events and activities bring individuals and organisations together that otherwise might never meet.

The hall was built around the early 1900s, in the Arts and Crafts style, as an addition to All Saints Church (completed in 1865). The original church was destroyed by bombing in WW2 which means that the hall is the last surviving link to this little corner of Walworth's heritage.

Mike and the team had already spent

nine months trialling their 'living room' concept in the building (an idea some five years in the making) before the pandemic struck, last March. Decked out with floral sofas, movable café tables and chairs, Mike describes the initial décor as 'shabby chic.' At the heart of the Living Room is a café, with rentable office spaces.

“An amazing legacy of cooperation”

“We wanted to test the concept and for people to have an idea of their own involvement, rather than for us to simply build our version of the Living Room and find out that it didn't suit the community” he explains.

Unfortunately, the fledgling project was grounded with the advent of COVID and the hall has been closed to the public for most of the past 12 months.

But it won't stay closed for long. In January, Pembroke House was awarded £150k from Southwark Council's Community Infrastructure Levy. This

is public money, raised from private developments and building projects in the area, which is used to fund community projects and to improve local infrastructure.

The charity will use the £150k (alongside other grants) to give All Saints Hall a complete facelift, ahead of relaunching the Walworth Living Room in April next year.

Mike, who is delighted to see the project back on track, explains that the origins of the Living Room lie with Pembroke House's legendary Thursday Lunch Club (running since 2010).

“Food is an excuse to bring people together and it breaks down barriers. Whenever anyone came to visit Pembroke House, we'd always say make sure you come on a Thursday and we'll give you lunch” says Mike.

“You'd have all these different people sitting around a table together. It might include local service commissioners or councillors enjoying a meal with local residents from all walks of life. Soon the formalities melted away and each person would become a name rather than a job title.”

“My colleagues and I started to ask 'what would it look like if we had a big social space, like the Thursday Lunch Club, but every day of the week? A space



available to the community, whenever they wanted it?' It would operate like a giant living room for anyone who lives in the area, from Walworth, the Elephant or Old Kent Road.”

Having got the keys to All Saints Hall in February 2019, Mike and the team began the initial renovations using funds from Guys and St Thomas' charity. With the help of young volunteers (from Volunteer it Yourself) they began to refit the space which had already been put to numerous different uses over the years.

“We looked at this building in May 2019 and thought 'we could do more of the capital works now but let's open for a test-and-learn phase instead'” says Mike. However, after less than a year, everything had to stop for the first lockdown.

Mike says he was heartbroken. “We had to close the Living Room, and Pembroke House. We tried to make it clear from the beginning, that while the buildings were closed, we were still here. And, of-course, the community was still here, too. So how could we help?”

It wasn't long before Mike and his team refocused their efforts on providing pandemic support. They drew up a three-point plan to provide food, activities and information.

“We concentrated on food; flipping our activities online and keeping in touch with people by phone or the internet. We also set up a new website, WalworthSE17.info due to the lack of local information available at that

time. We shared useful tips like which supermarkets were doing slots for the elderly or vulnerable.”

Within weeks of the March lockdown, Pembroke House had set up an emergency food centre in conjunction with Southwark Council, Surrey Square Primary School, Villa Street medical centre and the food charity, FareShare.

More than 250 volunteers signed up within 24 hours (which has since risen to 700) and a bike service was launched to deliver meals to hundreds of local households. The food bank is still going today.

It has been a long hard slog but morale got a big boost when news came through in January that they'd been awarded the £150k for the Living Room project. The funds will go towards new heating, lighting and windows as well as creating a new entrance off Surrey Square.

“We're planning to do as much of the capital work as we can, over the summer and autumn so that we can open in April 2022” says Mike. “It's crucial that the Living Room is ready to open, with all the bells and whistles, next spring, as people are just desperate to get out and meet and socialise again.”

When it's ready, the office spaces will be rented to social enterprises and organisations working for social benefit.

Ultimately, says Mike, the pandemic has highlighted inequalities but it has also accelerated relationships between the various community organisations operating in Walworth.



He says “Up to 25 per cent of the local population were already skipping meals before the pandemic. But it's not about food – it's about employment, secure homes, debt and finance. We've been dealing with the symptoms of poverty and inequality so far, but now there's a collective ambition to address the root causes.”

Mike adds “Having said that, I think we've done more in the last nine months, than we've done in the nine years previous. Certainly in terms of how people have worked together with the council, GPs, the community sector and businesses.”

“Now we need to build on this. Coming out of the pandemic, there will be massive challenges but there's amazing stuff to build on and an amazing legacy of cooperation. That's why we need spaces like the Walworth Living Room – somewhere we can all learn to come together again, to reconnect and do it in a safe way.”

## Walworth Living Room

All Saints Hall  
Surrey Square  
London SE17 2JU

info@pembrokehouse.org.uk  
020 7703 3803

www.walworthlivingroom.org  
www.pembrokehouse.org.uk



# MEMORY

*Elephant and Castle's Cinema Museum is preserving local heritage rescued from the Coronet Theatre.*

Last September, a small group of cinephiles gathered in front of the old Coronet Theatre on New Kent Road, pondering the task ahead. Stood in front of the imposing, but somewhat shabby, modern façade, the group's mission was to salvage original artefacts from this Victorian venue; a theatre that had once played host to Charlie Chaplin, a young stage actor yet to take his first steps into the world of film.

The small band of foragers included Ronald Grant, Curator of The Cinema Museum, Katharine Ford, Deputy Director of the Museum, Jeremy Leach, Chair of the Walworth Society and representatives from The Bartlett School of Architecture UCL.

The Coronet is set to be demolished, along with the shopping centre, to make way for Elephant and Castle's new town centre.

The venue, which has seen many changes over the last 140 years, started life as a theatre before it was converted into an ABC cinema in 1932. It eventually closed in 1999 only to reopen four years later to host concerts, live events and club nights.

For most of its life, the Coronet had been one of several picture houses for which Elephant and Castle was once famed. So it was no surprise that the nearby Cinema Museum was keen to preserve a little slice of this local heritage, alongside the Walworth Society.

"We want to preserve old memories from Elephant and Castle as it continues to change and develop" says The Cinema Museum's Katharine Ford.

"Once inside the theatre, we walked around, looked at everything, took photographs and agreed what we could and couldn't save" she explains. "The Cinema Museum will give these items a temporary home. The long-term



The Coronet Theatre: photo by Luke O'Donovan

aim is to engage the local community into a reuse and upcycling project that will see the items secure a new home and purpose.

She adds "The building has been through a lot of hands over the years and each successive custodian has made changes and stripped parts out.

« **The things that people remember from many happy times spent at the movies** »

But we managed to rescue quite a lot."

Alongside features such as the art deco balustrades, there's a certain irony in the fact that the largest item salvaged from the theatre was the giant curtain pelmet from the stage – literally the final curtain.

Another irony is that while The Cinema Museum is busy preserving the

Coronet's legacy, the museum itself, faces closure. An ongoing battle to buy its premises on Dugard Way collided with the pandemic, last year, to create the perfect storm for the charity.

Established in 1986 in Raleigh Hall, Brixton, the museum was a labour of love for founders Ronald Grant and Martin Humphries, who got it started with their own private collection of cinema history and memorabilia.

In 1998, the museum moved to Elephant and Castle and it's been based in what was once the old, Victorian, Lambeth Workhouse, ever since. Appropriately, it was this very workhouse which had once been home to Charlie Chaplin, a child who would grow up to be Hollywood's greatest star.

Before the pandemic, the museum attracted 20,000 visitors a year, including children, students and tourists. Even those with ambitions to open their own museums, would drop-by looking for inspiration.

The museum is home to some unusual and unique collections but it also houses cinema artefacts that all cinema goers would relish. For Elephant and Castle's older population, in particular, it brings back fond memories of their own 'golden age of cinema'.

# MAKERS



Photos by Francesco Zavattari

"We have original signage, posters, seats, carpets, uniforms, fixtures and fittings" says Katharine "they are artefacts but they're also the things that people remember from many happy times spent at the movies."

She adds "We've got technical equipment such as projectors and cameras but we've also got unusual, quirky things such as the personal records of amateur film critics and their bizarre (sometimes hilariously rude and unprintable) reviews of cinema experiences."

As a result of the pandemic, the museum has been temporarily closed since last March, and unable to generate the income necessary to stay afloat. Thankfully, a recent crowdfunding appeal raised £75k which, alongside a grant from ArtFund, will keep it going.

For the last 14 years, the museum has campaigned to secure its long-term future at The Master's House, The Lodge, and The Male Receiving Ward; all of which form part of the Grade-II-listed workhouse site that it has been leasing on a yearly basis.

"Short-term leases make it impossible to raise the many millions that need to be spent on these heritage assets" explains Katharine. "You have a large, listed building that needs looking after and maintaining but you need security of tenure to be able to do that."

The original owners, the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, were due to sell the buildings to The Cinema Museum but changed their plans and the building was put up for sale on the open market.

The new owners, Lifestory, had been

hoping to get planning permission from Lambeth Council to redevelop the whole site, incorporating the workhouse buildings, but the scheme was rejected by Lambeth in January.

"We don't know what will happen next" says Katharine. "Lifestory bought this site with a promise to 'save The Cinema Museum'. Now we're in urgent discussions with all the interested parties to make sure it happens."

Katharine greets the mere suggestion of simply finding another building for the museum with an emphatic 'no'. She says "We've been here for 23 years and we've invested enormously in engaging with the local community. We're run by 50 local volunteers and we're firmly embedded here in the Elephant and Castle and Kennington neighbourhoods."

There is also the issue of the museum's collection, which is on long-term loan.

"A term of the loan is that we secure a future for the collection at The Master's House. If we lose The Master's House, we must give our collections back. Then we are nothing. We're not a museum anymore. No building, no local volunteer workforce, no collection."

Katharine says the museum's role in the community cannot be underestimated.

"The museum shares its buildings with the local community. It helps to fund community events, projects and meetings but it also runs its own social-benefit projects" Katharine explains.

"We work with hospitals, carers groups and people living with dementia who come here for workshops. They might not recall what they've had for

breakfast that day, but they can often remember going to the movies, maybe 70 years ago" says Katharine. "They handle objects from the collection and the smell and feel can bring back old memories. We try to make it a holiday from the pain and stress of not being well."

"We also run sexual health and peer support projects" she adds "including event nights aimed at the local LGBTQ community, especially those who feel isolated."

Saving material from the Coronet – artefacts which will be familiar to the cinema goers of the 50s and the clubbers of the noughties alike – is just one more way of rekindling memories and connecting communities.

This year, Katharine hopes they will finally resolve the 'cliff-edge peril' that the museum has lived with for more than a decade.

"Spending half your time in unproductive negotiations, discussions and campaigning is a huge drain on resources. We just want to get to a stage where we can save these beautiful buildings for public use and throw our doors open forever."

## The Cinema Museum

The Master's House

2 Dugard Way

London SE11 4TH

020 7840 2200

[www.cinemamuseum.org.uk](http://www.cinemamuseum.org.uk)

[youtu.be/n93C92ejhDU](https://youtu.be/n93C92ejhDU)



# YEEHAW!

After five years trading in Elephant and Castle market, Black Cowboy Coffee is now bringing a touch of the old Wild West to Elephant Arcade.



When John Otagburuagu started his coffee business, back in 2015, there was only one name he had in mind.

"The Black Cowboy is who I am" he smiles.

"I've always loved cowboy films since I was a kid and, growing up in Nigeria, I loved helping my grandfather herd and feed the cattle on his land."

John loves the cowboy look and likes to dress up and strike a pose (check out his Instagram). He's been wearing cowboy boots ever since the 80s, when he first came to live in Elephant and Castle, having left Nigeria to study in the UK.

Later, when he moved to America, spending nine years as a truck driver in Texas, one of the first things he did was to buy himself a Stetson hat. "I've got through about 50 cowboy hats since then!" he says.

It was while living in Texas that John learnt about the important role African Americans had played in the cattle industry.

"Black cowboys were pivotal in the creation of the iconic image of the cowboy that we all know. They worked as trail leaders, drivers, outriders and cooks and what kept them going was good, strong black coffee" he explains.

In John's new coffee shop, in Elephant Arcade, there are old photos of black cowboys from the late 1800s, along with some of his old cowboy boots. There are even saddles and riding equipment donated by the Ebony Horse Club in Brixton.

Things didn't work out in the US and John returned to south London in 2013 where he struggled to find work. "I was pretty destitute and living in a hostel" he recalls.

It was his local job centre that told him about the Community Enterprise Programme and start-up loans for small businesses. With support from a business mentor, he came up with the idea for Black Cowboy Coffee and Waffles.

"Before I went to America, I'd worked at various restaurants in the West End and I've always loved good coffee. So I decided to put all my life experience into my business, and really make a go of it. All guns blazing!"

The idea of serving Liège waffles came from a road trip he made around Europe with friends in his 20s.

"You will always remember your first Liège waffle" he says. "They're denser

and richer and sweeter and chewier than other Belgian waffles. I fell in love with them, instantly."

He later shortened the business name to make it snappier, but he still sells a range of waffles. They come with strawberries, peanut butter and other fillings and he even does a spicy chicken waffle with maple syrup (an authentic American recipe).

"You might think that chicken and maple syrup wouldn't work but it does. Trust me!"

John started by selling coffee, in the market outside the Elephant and Castle shopping centre, back in 2015. He traded from a wooden cart that he'd built for himself.



"I've always known how to build stuff. I've made all sorts of things over the years, including bunk beds for my kids" he explains. "With a £2,500 loan I couldn't open a coffee shop but I could afford to rent a coffee machine and sell from the pushcart."

His organic, fairtrade coffee and snacks proved popular with local residents, students and office workers. Trade was good and after a while he replaced the cart with a horse box which he bought on eBay for £600.

"I went to Tilbury with my daughters to pick it up. Then I spent six weeks working around the clock to convert it into a mobile café."

John knew his days at the shopping centre were numbered as the site was due to be redeveloped as Elephant and Castle's new town centre. But when the pandemic hit and lockdown began, the market closed earlier than expected.

John couldn't trade at all for a while but he says it gave him time to pause and think about his business. "For five years I'd been working non-stop so it gave me time to focus."

Using some financial support from the Government and a grant from the

coffee industry, he used the time to create his own range of Black Cowboy Coffee beans and ground coffee. He now sells the range online as well as in the new shop.

Before the shopping centre closed, John, along with other traders, received help to relocate from the Elephant and Castle Town Centre team and Southwark Council. He secured premises in the new Elephant Arcade, which had been built by the council, for the former shopping centre traders, at the foot of Perronet House.

His shop opened in October, and John says he's delighted to finally have a permanent base in Elephant and Castle. He's started delivering coffee, milkshakes and snacks (via delivery apps) and has even taken on five staff to help with the orders.

"Elephant Arcade is an exciting place to be. It's got such a good atmosphere and a wonderful ambience" he enthuses.

"When I lived on the Aylesbury estate, all those years ago, a trip to the cinema in Elephant and Castle was a big thing. Now, having my own business, right here in the centre of town, feels like a great achievement."

And while his love for his local neighbourhood is as strong as ever, the old cowboy in John can't help but look towards America.

"Elephant and Castle will always be the home of Black Cowboy Coffee" he says "but I'd love to open a couple of branches elsewhere and my ultimate dream is to open a shop in New York City."



**Black Cowboy Coffee**  
Elephant Arcade  
50 London Rd SE1 6FY  
07947 114 683

[www.blackcowboycoffee.co.uk](http://www.blackcowboycoffee.co.uk)  
[@blackcowboycoffee](https://www.instagram.com/blackcowboycoffee)  
[Facebook.com/ElephantArcade](https://www.facebook.com/ElephantArcade)



# BLACKFRIARS SETTLEMENT

*Blackfriars Settlement has supported the local community for more than a century.*

In 'normal times', the Blackfriars Settlement, based in Rushworth Street, would welcome up to 400 people through its doors every day. People would be taking classes, joining creative workshops, learning a new skill or simply meeting friends for a cup of tea in the café.

But that was before the pandemic. A year ago, as with so many other organisations, Blackfriars, a charity that sets out to improve the wellbeing of disadvantaged people, had to close its doors and its bustling SE1 building fell silent.

But even a global pandemic couldn't stop the work of this vital organisation, which has supported the local community for over 130 years (through Spanish Flu and two World Wars).

Director of services, Liz Ranger and her 12-strong team, alongside an army of local volunteers, were quick to swing into action, last spring, and ensure that their work could continue this time around, too.

"The teams that provide our two main services, Positive Aging and Mental Health & Wellbeing, were both fantastic. They switched to providing remote services, instantly, and they have continued to help people, in a variety of innovative ways, ever since" says Liz.

"They gave telephone support on a one-to-one basis. They made sure people had their prescriptions; that they weren't anxious; had someone to speak to and someone to call if they needed anything. The team also delivered about 100 meals a week to those in need as well as doing emergency shopping."

"Older people are now taking exercise classes online and they're singing over the phone" says Liz. "We've switched

our befriending services from in-person to by-phone, and we've expanded it too. It means that a lot of new people (who didn't get the service before) now get a weekly call from a befriender."

The befrienders are all volunteers and Blackfriars has had a raft of new recruits join during the pandemic.

"These are people who have been furloughed or simply use their lunch-break to give an older person a call and have a chat with them for 45 minutes" says Liz.

«

**We're here,  
we're back,  
we're open!  
Come and get  
involved!**

»

Corporations and businesses have also been quick to help out.

Charles Russell Speechlys bought sun canopies for the charity's outdoors space. "It meant we could seat people outside during the summer" Liz explains. "It's safer than being indoors and the canopies provided some shade. We could support more people and serve communal lunches where everyone could socialise. It was a fantastic help."

In January, Blackfriars was awarded £10k from Southwark Council's Community Infrastructure Levy. This is public money, raised from private

developments and building projects in the area. Liz says the funds will be used to transform the outdoor space into a proper garden.

Blackfriars' Rushworth Street centre also has a large hall and a kitchen that can cater for 100 people. There are classrooms, art rooms and even a woodwork room. In normal times, alongside the Positive Aging and Mental Health & Wellbeing services, the charity also offers adult education, a legal advice clinic and free, open-access computers, so that locals can drop-in and get online.

On the social side, they have the Orb Space, which hosts free cookery classes, film nights and spoken word sessions which help people to explore their creativity through poetry and speech.

The charity, originally named the Women's University Settlement, was established in 1887. Today's services are still very much in keeping with the original ethos of the Settlement movement which was designed to promote the welfare of people in poorer parts of London.

"Blackfriars was set up by a bunch of feisty women who wouldn't accept the status quo" says Liz, adding "they wouldn't accept the fact that all the other settlements were being set up by men, so they got together, got on and made it happen. It's a fantastic history."

And while its mission is still very much in tune with that of its founders, Blackfriars has continued to evolve and change with the times. Most recently, in 2018, it merged with the Mary Ward Settlement, based in Bloomsbury.

"We're still an independently registered charity" says Liz "but we're now part of an integrated structure



Since it began in 2012, the Elephant and Castle Community Fund has supported dozens of organisations and helped thousands of local people.

Last year, as well as Blackfriars Settlement, the Blue Elephant Theatre; Disability Sports Coach; InSpire and Ripe Enterprises all received £10k each, to help with their work in the community.

Find out more at: [elephantandcastle.org.uk/communityfund](http://elephantandcastle.org.uk/communityfund)

with Mary Ward. It works really well because we were working in partnership with them anyway to deliver adult education. The merger has formalised that arrangement."

Since the merger, the work has largely remained the same, but extra funding and support from various partners, including Southwark Council, United Saint Saviours, The Mercers' Company and St George the Martyr, mean that it is now set to expand.

Last year, the charity also received £10k from the Elephant and Castle Community Fund.

"The £10k helped keep the team working" says Liz. "The money was for the Positive Aging service and it paid for additional hours to respond to the extra need created by the pandemic. It's enabled us to keep going; to do things differently during a difficult time, and to make sure we can still be there for our members."

The pandemic has had a big impact on mental health and the charity's Mental Health & Wellbeing service (which has run for more than 50 years) has seen a huge increase in demand.

"The numbers went up dramatically" says Liz. "The amount of people needing help nearly doubled and, although they've since dropped, they are still higher than they were. They certainly won't return to normal straight away."

Thinking about a post-COVID world,

Liz reflects on how busy the centre had been before. "I'm hoping we'll get back to normal as soon as possible" she says, "including physical classes, like French, ballroom dancing, IT, poetry and baby massage. We'd like to introduce African drumming too."

Liz also has plans to provide space to additional, small, grassroots groups who may not have much money but who can offer great value to the local community.

"We already have one peer support group who use the building (Kindred Minds) and we want others. So if we can work with local people and make things happen, I'm keen to do so" says Liz.

"But my first task for the year ahead is simply reopening. How can we welcome people back to the building? I want to start to celebrate life and community again. I want to announce 'We're here, we're back, we're open! Come and get involved!'"

## **Blackfriars Settlement**

1 Rushworth Street, London SE1 0RB  
020 7928 9521

[www.blackfriars-settlement.org.uk](http://www.blackfriars-settlement.org.uk)

If you would like to volunteer as a befriender for the older people or mental health service, email [info@blackfriars-settlement.org.uk](mailto:info@blackfriars-settlement.org.uk)



# BEZA

*Authentic vegan Ethiopian food is on the menu at Beza in Elephant Park.*

**B**eza Berhanu began selling her home-cooked, traditional Ethiopian food at Camden Market in 2006.

Four years ago, she was offered a pop-up at The Artworks on Elephant Road, which led her to open Beza in 2019; a popular 25-seat restaurant, just around the corner, in Sayer Street.

And although she lives in north London, Beza says Elephant and Castle is very much where her heart is.

"I live in Swiss Cottage but the moment I arrive here I feel like I'm home" she smiles. "I love the atmosphere in Elephant and Castle. It feels like everyone here is family."

Since the pandemic began, Beza has done her best to support her Elephant and Castle 'family' as much as she can.

"My sister is a nurse and I saw how tired she was when she came back from work. I decided to do something to help the NHS workers at nearby hospitals as well as those in need" says Beza, adding "Having a good nutritious meal is so important and Ethiopian food is great for giving people energy."

Beza started a Go Fund Me page and with support from customers, as well as her landlords, Lendlease, she managed to buy enough ingredients to make hundreds of meals which she distributed via Feed the Workers and local charity, Pembroke House (see page 8).

"It's important to help each other as much as we can" she says. "The response from local people was wonderful."

Last year, Beza was nominated for a Local Hero Award from neighbourhood initiative, Elephant Says Hi. And, throughout the latest lockdown, she continued to provide meals for families in need, twice a week, via local schools.

"It's so important that children have a nourishing meal and our food is packed full of protein and iron. I make sure they get plenty of vitamins with lots of beans and spinach and potato."

Beza was taught to cook by her grandmother in Ethiopia. Abiding by the traditions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, many Ethiopians don't eat meat or other animal products on Wednesdays and Fridays. So a plant-based diet is quite common.

"My grandma cooked everything fresh and I learnt everything from her" Beza explains. "She was vegan but we never used that expression in Ethiopia. It was only after I came to the UK, as a student, that I first heard the word."

Beza studied nutrition and the knowledge she learned as a student, underlies everything she does today. "It's so important for me to feed people, healthily" she emphasises.

« ————— »  
**It's so important that children have a nourishing meal and our food is packed full of protein and iron.**  
 ————— »



While based at The Artworks, Beza cooked both meat and vegetable dishes. But when she was given the opportunity to open her own restaurant, in Sayer Street, she decided to make it wholly vegan.

"We have an open kitchen so everyone can see me cook. It just made sense to serve an all vegan menu rather than to have to separate everything" she explains.

Beza's speciality is sharing platters with colourful lentil, mung bean and split pea

stews, all served up on a giant injera (a sour, fermented flatbread).

Since opening her new restaurant, the food has proved very popular with both vegans and non-vegans alike. "A lot of people haven't tried Ethiopian food before but when they do - they love it" she smiles.

Everything is freshly made with produce bought locally, at East Street Market. "I love the market and I always shop with other small, local businesses. I think it's important to help and support each other" says Beza.

Reflecting on the past year, she says "It hasn't been easy. Especially as we'd only been open for less than six months when we had to close for the first lockdown. But this is something that's affected everyone. We all have to try and be strong."

The restaurant was able to reopen last June, boosted by the Eat Out to Help Out scheme. And in November, top chef, James Cochran cited Beza as one of his favourite restaurants in a TimeOut special, guest-edited by Peckham's Ashley Walters. TimeOut went on to run a full feature on Beza in the next issue.

"June was crazy busy and we got a lot of new customers. Then lots of people read about us in TimeOut. Now they can't wait to visit once we're fully open again" says Beza.

In the meantime, Beza is still open for takeaways and online orders.

"Being able to do takeaways has ensured we've survived" says Beza. "We have four staff but two are on furlough. So I'm working from early morning until late at night. It's been tough, but I still enjoy being here and local people have been so supportive. They always ask how we're doing."

Beza says "I'm looking forward to reopening fully, as soon as it's safe to do so. Now is the dark but we are starting to see the light."

**Beza**  
 8a Sayer Street  
 London SE17 1FH  
 eat@bezaethio.com  
 bezaveganfood.com



# Our first professional nurses

*Nurses, alongside many other key workers, have played a vital role during the pandemic and Southwark, especially Walworth, Bermondsey and Borough, has a unique place in the history of nursing.*

In the middle ages, nursing work was often undertaken by clergy such as monks and nuns. A perfect example is the Augustinian canons and canonesses who originally staffed St Thomas' Hospital.

Founded in the 12th century, St Thomas' was Walworth's local hospital for several hundred years.

The Reformation, in the 1500s,

saw the closure of monasteries and convents across northern Europe. In the process, these skilled carers, from the church, were removed from their positions in hospitals and almshouses and their training sites were destroyed.

Consequently, right up until the 19th century, nursing became the domain of untrained and often unskilled workers.

Many were widows or former

domestic servants who were unable to get any other job. Charles Dickens' character, Sarah Gamp (from *Martin Chuzzlewit*) reflects the popular early Victorian stereotype of a nurse as sloppy, incompetent, and often drunk.

In an era before germ theory and the importance of antiseptic hygiene was understood, hospitals were often dirty places that spread, rather than



Sarah Wardroper



Florence Nightingale

prevented, disease. This changed in the mid-Victorian period, in large part, due to the Crimean War (1853-6).

The Crimean War was one of the first wars to use modern technology, such as high-explosive shells, railways and telegraphs. But technological advances in health care lagged far behind those on the battlefield. Hospitals were understaffed, the staff were overworked, supplies were short and hygiene was poor. As a result, wounded soldiers faced horrific conditions and infectious disease. Cholera accounted for far more deaths than battle wounds.

It would be women, trained in the pre-Reformation tradition of religious nursing, who stepped into the breach. And one woman in particular.

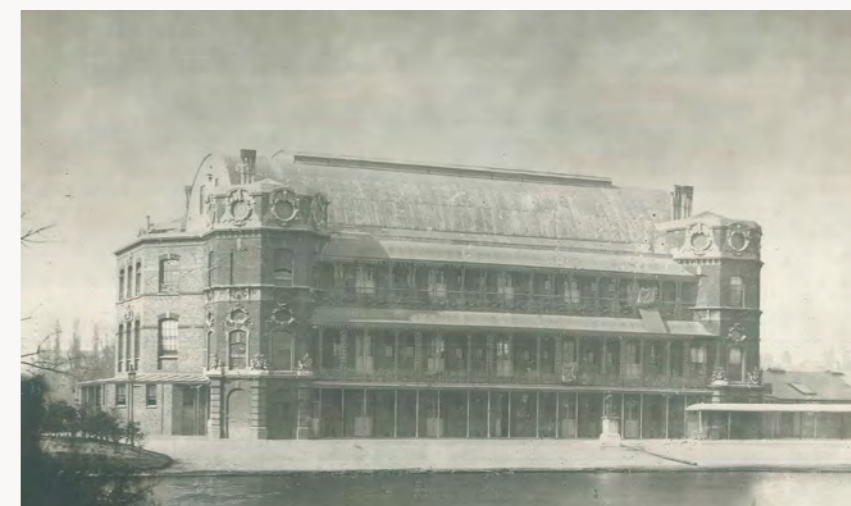
Florence Nightingale was a wealthy and well-connected British woman. She had studied nursing at a Lutheran religious community in Düsseldorf which trained nurses in the pre-Reformation tradition. She was also a close friend of Sidney Herbert, the chief administrator of the British Army, who requested that she lead a team of nurses to the Crimea to care for the troops.

She arrived in 1856 with 38 volunteers she had trained in Istanbul. These were soon followed by another group of 15 nurses from the Sisters of Mercy convent, Bermondsey. Led by their Mother Superior, Mary Clare Moore, they had been nursing Southwark's poor at Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals since 1839.

Moore took charge of the stores, kitchens and orderlies, and she placed her nuns at Nightingale's disposal. The two remained close friends until Moore's death in 1874.

In the Crimea, Nightingale improved hygiene practices (introducing regular handwashing, for example). She collected valuable statistical data and pressured the army to make other improvements. These included the introduction of a prefabricated hospital (designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel) that increased the survival rate of patients thanks to better ventilation and hygiene.

In 1855 the Nightingale Fund was established which raised £45k (equivalent to more than £4m today). Nightingale used this money to open the Nightingale Training School at St Thomas' Hospital. It was the first secular nursing school



The music hall, used as part of the temporary hospital at the Royal Surrey Gardens, Walworth

in the world and the oldest one attached to a fully fledged hospital and medical school. It still exists today as the Florence Nightingale Faculty of Nursing, Midwifery & Palliative Care (now at King's College London in Waterloo).

Nightingale possibly chose St Thomas' because of its connection with Mother Mary Clare Moore but also on account of the hospital's matron, Sarah Wardroper.

Born in 1813, Sarah married a physician, Woodland Wardroper in 1840. Sadly, Woodland died just nine years later, leaving Sarah with four children to support.

Although she had little nursing experience (outside of her family), she had a good general education as well as excellent organisational skills. Possibly combined with some experience gained in her husband's medical practice, it was enough for Wardroper to be appointed matron of St Thomas' Hospital in 1854.

At that time, matrons were the most senior nurses in any hospital. They were responsible for overseeing patient care, management of nurses and domestic staff (such as cooks and cleaners) as well as overseeing the budgets.

Nightingale admired Wardroper's ability and efficiency, describing her as a 'hospital genius' and chose her to be the first superintendent of her new training school.

Wardroper was much less interested in nursing education than in cementing nursing as a profession and improving standards. To this end she hosted tours of St Thomas' Hospital, to showcase professional nursing, and visited other hospitals to professionalise their care.

The original St Thomas' Hospital was founded in St Thomas Street, Borough. In 1862 it had to move to make way for the expansion of London Bridge Station. It would eventually relocate to the Albert Embankment, Lambeth, where a new hospital would be built in accordance with Nightingale's theories on hygiene.

In the meantime, St Thomas' needed a temporary site.

Luckily, the Royal Surrey Gardens in Walworth had closed that same year. This former zoo, music hall and public pleasure garden had more than enough space to host the hospital until the Lambeth site was completed in 1871.

The music hall, alone, could accommodate 100 beds, while the giraffe house became a cholera ward and the elephant house was used for dissections. Nothing remains of the temporary hospital but Pasley Park marks the site today.

Wardroper died in 1892. Her memorial, in the chapel at St Thomas', was created by the Walworth sculptor, George Tinworth.

More recently, Sarah has been remembered in the name of Wardroper House on St George's Road, one of the early rehousing schemes built as part of the regeneration of Elephant and Castle.

For more local history visit the Southwark Local History Library and Archive at 211 Borough High Street

[www.southwark.gov.uk/libraries](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/libraries)



# SOUTHWARK HERITAGE CENTRE & WALWORTH LIBRARY



Thousands of new books and more study spaces



Exhibits from Southwark and across the globe



The Faraday Room

Southwark Council's new heritage centre and library on Walworth Road opens soon.

20,000 New books

22 Study spaces

1 Activity workshop

300 Artworks and artefacts

1 Temporary exhibition

13 Public computers

1 Lounge / Community Meeting Room

50 Person event space

1 Permanent exhibition

1 Experiential copper-lined Faraday Room



## An Icon Returns

The Elephant statue was removed from its plinth in January and is now being refurbished.

The Elephant and Castle Town Centre team hopes to unveil the statue in its new, temporary location, in Castle Square later this year.



The Elephant Magazine is produced by Southwark Council. We would love to hear your feedback and welcome suggestions for future features. Drop us a line at [councilnews@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:councilnews@southwark.gov.uk)

Email [info@elephantandcastle.org.uk](mailto:info@elephantandcastle.org.uk) to be added to our mailing list for digital updates: use the word UPDATES in the subject line, followed by your postcode.

Read more about the regeneration programme at [www.elephantandcastle.org.uk](http://www.elephantandcastle.org.uk)