

East End of London Past and Present



A Guide to Films in the BFI Mediatheque

“ . . . I was brought up in the East End. I’m first generation English, my mother came from Lithuania and my father from Poland. We have been looking at East End markets on the Mediatheque and I had forgotten completely most of the things but seeing **The Vanishing Street** brought back lots and lots of memories and new memories are still coming. When I saw the film there were three people I immediately recognised . . .”

Fremet Riedel, Ilford U3A, a member of the Project Team

Cover

Top: Still from **Petticoat Lane, 1903**

Bottom: Limehouse Basin by Roger Till (2009)

Production & Layout

Sean Matthews, 2010

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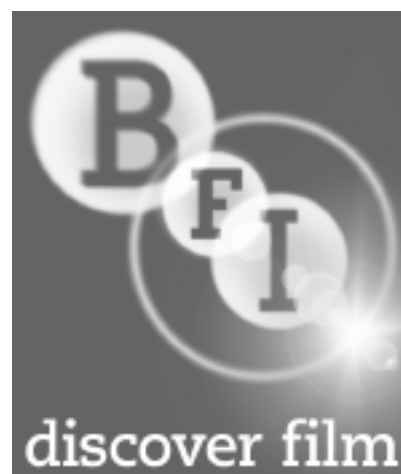
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Photographs – Roger Till, Joan Hardinges

Images courtesy of BFI Stills Library

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About the Mediatheque at BFI Southbank

Using the BFI Mediatheque is easy – turn up on the day or book a viewing session in advance. Check in at the desk inside the Mediatheque and then log on to a viewing station. (Assistance is provided by staff for all users). Proof of age may be required, as only age-appropriate material is made available to younger users.

Further Information:

www.bfi.org.uk/whatson/bfi_southbank/mediatheque/

Opening times

Tuesday - Sunday: 12:00 - 20:00

Not open Monday (except Bank Holidays).

Bank holidays: 12:00 - 20:00

Book in advance: 020 7928 3535

Education and community groups Tuesday mornings.

For group bookings call 020 7849 4451.

BFI Southbank

Belvedere Road

South Bank

London

SE1 8XT

By car

There is ample parking under Hayward Gallery, Royal National Theatre, Jubilee Gardens.

By train/underground

Waterloo (South Bank exit); Embankment and Charing Cross (cross Hungerford Bridge to South Bank).

By bus

Routes 1, 4*, 26, 68, 76, 77, 139*, 168, 171, 172, 176, 188, 211, 243*, 341, 381, 507*, 521*, RV1

(* limited service; call Transport for London Information on 020 7222 1234 or visit www.tfl.gov.uk).

By cab

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Plan your journey

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Mediatheques around the UK

BFI Mediatheques are now open at QUAD, Derby and the new Central Library, Cambridge, with further Mediatheques opening at Wrexham Library, North Wales and Newcastle's Discovery Museum in 2010.

1. Introduction – about the project and guide

The University of the Third Age (U3A) is a self-help organisation that provides educational, creative and leisure opportunities for older people no longer in full time employment. Its approach is learning for pleasure. In 2009, the U3A set up a Shared Learning Project with the BFI Southbank called **East End of London – Past and Present**. The aim of the project was to produce a guide to films relating to the East End of London in the BFI Mediatheque on the Southbank London, Derby and Cambridge. The Mediatheque is a free public facility that allows visitors to the BFI to view a selection of films from the BFI archives. At individual or shared viewing stations visitors can watch any film from about 1500 plus feature films, shorts, documentaries, TV dramas and series, newsreels and home movies. The project team was made up of members from U3As across London – Barnet, Harrow, Hackney, Kingston and Redbridge – although all but one either grew up in the East End or can trace their families back to the East End.

The first task on the project was to define the East End, as there is no universally recognised formal description of the area. The western boundary is the medieval walled City of London and southern boundary the Thames. The northern and eastern boundaries are more debatable. Initially the East End was defined as the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, the southern part of Hackney and the ward of Portsoken in the City of London but it was expanded to include western parts of Newham and more of Hackney so that films with strong visual images and stories that spill into these areas could be included.

The writings of Dickens, the Docks and the international notoriety of the Whitechapel Murders all helped to form the image of the East End in the 19th century. The Docks were the driving force of the area – a major source of employment, crime, goods and people. The area was known for its poverty, poor housing, disease and overcrowding. It attracted social reformers and nurtured the labour movement, trade unions and the suffragettes. Since the birth of cinema, the East End and its population have undergone considerable change. At the heart of the East End were the old boroughs of Stepney, Bethnal Green and Poplar – now Tower Hamlets - and there the population has fallen from about 600,000 at the beginning of the 20th century to an estimated 215,000 today. It is still an area of ethnic diversity, but some groups have moved out and new ones moved in. The Docks have experienced changes in management and working practices, devastation, decline, abandonment and regeneration. Housing has moved from slums to bombsites to dense social housing and more recently to include pockets of gentrification and luxury housing. Trades which once thrived have now disappeared. It has witnessed major events such as the Siege of Sydney Street (1911), the Battle of Cable Street (1936), the Blitz during the Second World War (WW2) and the Anti-Racism Riots of the late 1970s.

From the earliest days of cinema the East End has been the set, star and subject of films located in and around the East End. This group is made up of feature films, shorts, documentaries, TV dramas and series, and newsreels. The earliest of the films, **Petticoat Lane**, was made in 1903 and is a two-minute single 'scene', photographed from one angle by a single static camera. It was made before cinemas were built and the audience might have seen it as an item in a music hall show or as sideshow at a fairground.

The most recent film, **What Have You Done Today, Mervyn Day?**, was made in 2006 and is a documentary about the fringes of the East End just before the bulldozers began work for the 2012 Olympics. In between these films there are a range of features and documentaries that provide a visual record of the social, economic and environmental changes in the East End in just over a hundred years. 'Outsiders' have made most of the films in the collection. Only one film was identified as having been made by a director born in Stepney, **Sidney's Chair, 1995** and one made by a director born in West Ham, **Bow Bells, 1955**.



*In **It Always Rains on Sunday** faithful studio sets and location shooting create 1940s Petticoat Lane and Bethnal Green*

This guide focuses on three areas of East End life – Docks to Docklands – the transformation of the Dock area in the last century; Newcomers – a look at the ethnic groups who have made their homes in the East End; and Markets – the social heart of the East End which tell much about the people and their times. There is, of course, overlap in these topics and some films have things to say about more than one. Also these topics only cover part of East End life. The limits of time and films available mean that topics such as housing, politics, boxing, entertainment and trade could not be covered and the Blitz and crime are only touched upon.

The guide consists of three sections. In the first section there is an overview of the films in the Mediatheque relating to each topic together with a closer look at two or three films. Then there is an index that is a viewing guide to all the films identified as relating to the East End – silent films, war time documentaries, feature films, newsreels, early colour films, forgotten TV dramas, films about the East End of today. Finally there are Appendices that provide some historical background to the films.

2. Films in the Mediatheque

2.1 Docks to Docklands

Although there is a limited selection of films in the Mediatheque, it is possible to trace the transition of the Docks from one of the busiest ports in the world, through devastation and abandonment to the regenerated Docklands of today. The changes in the recurring images of both feature and documentary films - river, shipping, warehouses and cranes - reflect the transformation the area has undergone. The earliest film of the area is **The Open Road, 1927** an interesting travelogue that covers much of the country and includes a few shots of the Thames and the Docks. More detailed is the short **Colour on the Thames, 1935** that presents a busy, bustling river, full of a variety of ships, with men working and cranes moving. The Docks in the 1930s also provided the background for the feature film **Song of Freedom, 1936**.

During WW2, the Thames was a marker for bombers and the London Docks were a primary target for bombing raids. Two documentaries record what life was like during this period for people living and working in the area. **London Can Do It, 1940** shows Londoners going about their daily lives during the Blitz and was made as a morale booster at home and propaganda for the Americans who were yet to come into the war. **Fires Were Started, 1943** follows a single shift of eight auxiliary firefighters in the East End from leaving their homes in the morning until the all clear sounds after a night of heavy raids. Although reconstructed, the scenes at a warehouse fire provide powerful images of the homefront. The nearby cargos the firefighters fight to save are not exotic goods but essential food and munitions.

The Docks had been devastated during the war and this was reflected in the films of 1940s and 1950s. There are no documentaries available for this period but three crime dramas, **Hue and Cry 1946**, **Pool of London, 1950** and **The Heart Within, 1957** use the Docks as settings for their stories. All three films have some location shooting and show the gaps in the landscape left by bombings and the deterioration of the Docks. A very different film **Together, 1956** tells the story of two deaf-mute dockworkers. It combines shots of docks both north and south of the river and a unique visual record of the area at that time. However, there is a little footage of a still working river in the documentary **The London Nobody Knows, 1967**.

There are no films that show the Docks in the 1970s reflecting the lack of interest in the area. **The Long Good Friday, 1981**, however, is a pivotal film for the move from Docks to Docklands. It is set before the London Docks Development Corporation was established but after most of the docks have been closed. It shows both the new St. Katharine Dock's development and derelict areas that once welcomed goods and people from all over the world.

Twilight City, 1989, a film made by the Black Audio Film Collective, looks at the effect of the policies of the 1980s Conservative Government on London and includes significant sections on Docklands and the East End. It relates some of the history of the Docks and the East End through the eyes of Black and Asian people and explores the impact of the rapid expansion of the financial sector, the lack of Planning Permission and the loss of roots for many in the existing community.

Canary Wharf was the centrepiece of regeneration that started in the 1980s and was built to set London up as a global finance centre. It now dominates the East London skyline. **Sundial, 1990** is one artist's view of the tower and its relationship to East London.

The Times of Our Lives, 1994 is a documentary about an extended family whose patriarch left Ireland to find work in the East End in 1930s. It includes brief reminiscences of the Docks and some of the animated promotional material for the London Dockland Development Corporation in which Bob Hoskins, the star of **The Long Good Friday**, supplies the voice for one of the characters.



Canary Wharf from the Docklands Museum, 2009

In 2004 Peter Ackroyd made a three-part series on London based on his book **London: The Biography, 2000**. Included in **Part 3: Water and Darkness**, is a look at the growth of the East End in the 19th century, the expansion of the Docks and their subsequent destruction and abandonment. Ackroyd sees the East End as a savage place where industry has given way to business and where slums have given way to luxury flats.

Finally **What Have You Done Today, Mervyn Day? 2006** is a short documentary that follows a day in the life of fictitious Mervyn Day as he cycles around East London. It pays homage to the industrial wastelands of Lea Valley and ends at the dockside across from the Millennium Dome.

A CLOSER LOOK AT TWO OF THE FILMS RELATING TO DOCKS AND DOCKLANDS

FIRES WERE STARTED, 1943

Films in many forms played an important role during WW2. Churchill, like many politicians, knew the value of the propaganda, information and entertainment that films could contribute to the war effort. This was reflected in the remit of the Crown Film Unit, which operated from within the Ministry of Information. The unit made short information films, documentaries and feature films for the general public, both at home and abroad. These films were not just for propaganda and information but also a way of recording the war and the changes the country was undergoing. They also emphasised the courage of the people and how people from all backgrounds were pulling together.

In 1942, at the request of the Public Relations Committee of the Civil Defence, the unit made a film about the Fire Services during the first phase of the Blitz. Its aim was to show the role of fire fighters, their teamwork and how just survival was a victory. The film took its title from a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News Bulletin phrase "Fires Were Started". The film is set in 1940/1 in the East End and follows one fictional day, during the Blitz, in the lives of seven men and a new recruit in the auxiliary fire service at a substation whose 'ground' includes St. Katharine's Dock. The climax of the film is a warehouse fire in Trinidad Street which the crew prevent reaching a munitions ship moored at Alderman's Wharf.



Fire fighting in the docks in **Fires Were Started**

Although **Fires Were Started** was scripted, had some constructed sets and was shot after the first phase of the Blitz, it is considered a documentary classic. Brian Winston, writing about the film, says *“The claim on the real in these circumstances was not that the camera filmed things as they happened but that it filmed things as they had happened and had been witnessed.”* Meticulous research, location shooting and using firemen and other non-actors to play all the roles in the film results in a believable film about the people and the area at that time. There is no ‘voice of God’ commentary and the only lack of authenticity is the absence of swearing. In this film the director, Humphrey Jennings, does not patronise ordinary people but, arguably, shows a respect for the working class not seen in British cinema before.

THE LONG GOOD FRIDAY, 1981

Although primarily known as a gangster film, **The Long Good Friday** deals directly with the redevelopment of the Docks area. It is set in 1979, at the beginning of the Thatcher era and just before the Docklands Development Corporation is set up. At that time, the area was caught between its world trading past and its global finance future. The Docks which once had tens of ships waiting to be unloaded are silent, cranes are still and warehouses empty.

Harold Shand is a boy from Stepney and his manor is East London. For ten years he has controlled the area, buying corrupt councillors and policemen and disposing of the opposition. Harold has not moved to Essex but lives in a penthouse flat in St. Katharine’s Dock and has a yacht moored along the river. Harold is a crime boss with big business aspirations. He wants to cash in on the redevelopment of the area and is seeking to get backing money from the American Mafia. Coinciding with the arrival of some Americans to close the deal there are a series of violent acts on his manor. Harold is forced to look for the men behind the violence to try and save both his deal and his position as a gangland boss.

Unlike makers of earlier films such as **The Pool of London, 1950**, the makers of **The Long Good Friday** were allowed to film in the Docks area. This location shooting gives a unique view of an area in transition. The flats at St. Katharine's Dock are introduced with a sweeping aerial shot and Tower Bridge is used as a frame for Harold when he is giving a patriotic speech on his yacht to a luncheon party for the Americans. In a short sequence the film presents the historic, the redundant and the vulgar aspirations of the time. There is little other traffic on this once busy river and the docks are empty and the cranes mere decoration. After the lunch, the yacht is moored at East India Dock, close to where the realisation of Harold's dreams, Canary Wharf, has been built. Canary Wharf, however, does not contain the casino of Harold's aspirations.

Two other sequences illustrate the transition caught in this film. There is a meeting on George V Dock between Harold and his corrupt policeman. As the men walk along the deserted dockside the river is a quiet decorative background. There is no sign of either commerce or leisure. This area has now been redeveloped and is full of expensive housing and in places the cranes have been retained as an artistic feature. In the second sequence a derelict warehouse is seen as a place of torture and death. Many such warehouses have now been converted into luxury apartments.

The *Encyclopaedia of British Film* describes **The Long Good Friday** as "*the quintessential London film*" but on its original release BFI critics were less kind. In *Sight and Sound* it is described "*as faceless as any TV cop series*" and "*a mere transplant of contemporary American gangsterism to a British scene*" and the *Monthly Film Bulletin* describes it as "*blunt, lumpish caricature, something produced for the tourist trade*". However, it was always popular with audiences and its reputation has grown over the years, not least because of the unique picture it gives of the time it was made and of an area that has completed the transition of the Docks from thriving world port to the Docklands of finance, leisure and luxury housing.



Bob Hoskyns and Dave King in a desolate dock landscape in **The Long Good Friday**

2.2 Newcomers

In the early 20th century references to newcomers and diversity in the East End were at best patronising and at worst latently racist, with a marked tendency to emphasise the ‘otherness’ of their foreign subjects. Gradually this was replaced by an increasing willingness to tackle the social issues arising from diversity and to examine East End communities with greater realism and respect.



Some of the newcomers who have made their home in the East End including relatives of members of the group

One of the earliest films in the Mediatheque showing ‘newcomers’ in the East End is the 1903 documentary **Petticoat Lane**. The static camera is positioned at various points in this bustling Sunday market, as the predominantly male, rather camera-conscious customers make their way through shops and stalls largely associated with the Jewish-dominated rag trade; the names on the shops are mostly Jewish.

Although cultural diversity was nothing new to London or the East End, the first documentary film in the Mediatheque to recognise and record this is **Cosmopolitan London, 1924**. About half of the film is devoted to the East End, focusing on Chinese, Jews and Lascars. There is editorial comment in the intertitles, the tone and language of which would be largely unacceptable today. Whitechapel, for example, is described as a “*swarming hive of Jewish humanity*” and the Chinese in Limehouse are ‘chinks’. The film is not malicious but it is a good example of a kind of benign racism not untypical of the time.

Chinese Limehouse held a particular fascination for the public and was mythologised in films. The silent features **Broken Blossoms, 1919** and **Piccadilly, 1929** are two such examples. Both were shot mainly on studio sets: **Broken Blossoms** in Hollywood, **Piccadilly** in Elstree. The sets are remarkably similar, and both bear resemblance to

early 20th century photographs of Limehouse. In contrast to **Broken Blossoms**, the Chinese roles in **Piccadilly** are played by Chinese or mixed race actors.

The 1936 feature film **Song of Freedom** is also set in Docklands and stars black actor Paul Robeson as an “*Afro-Cockney*” dockworker. While some of the language that is used in the film would be offensive today, e.g. “*darkies*”, the film does go to great lengths to show interracial respect and friendship. By contrast, racial tension is more overtly acknowledged in the 1957 crime feature **The Heart Within**, in which Victor, a London dockworker from Trinidad, believes that “*A coloured man is guilty until proved innocent*”. Racial prejudice is not the film’s principal focus and Victor is helped by kind, decent, white East Enders. However, racial prejudice is the central focus of the 1959 TV Drama **Hot Summer Night**, also set in Docklands. Jack Palmer is a local working class trade unionist whose liberal views on race are put to the test by his daughter’s Jamaican boyfriend Sonny. Although the graffiti in one of the location shots reads “*Keep Wapping White*” and Jack’s wife uses the word “*nigger*”, the film does not classify all white residents of Wapping as racists. Sonny gives Jack, and thus the viewer, insight into life at the receiving end of racism.

The 1947 feature **It Always Rains on Sundays** is set in Bethnal Green. The Jewish Hyams family are not central to the narrative, but are seen at several points. There were complaints in 1947 that the film’s characters were stereotypes, but there is a range of believable characters in the Hyams family: a spiv, a philanderer and a sympathetic youth club worker. Their father is played by Meier Tzelniker who was a leading actor in the Yiddish theatre of the East End. Old Mr Hyams is an orthodox Jew who insists on staying in the East End rather than joining the trend to move with other Jews to Stamford Hill. By 1947 Jews had been in the East End for a long time; younger Jews were more integrated and affluent than their parents and the move out of the East End was beginning.

Jewish outward, and usually upward, mobility had gathered momentum by the time the documentary **The Vanishing Street** was shot in 1961. It features Hessel Street, Whitechapel, once a lively Jewish thoroughfare that still retains many



Jewish Butcher in Hessel Street in 1961 in **The Vanishing Street**

Jewish community features that are shown in the film. 1962 was a time of transition as Jews were moving out of the area and Asians, shown in small numbers in the film, were starting to move in. The transition from Jewish East End into Bangladeshi East End was virtually complete by the time the BBC shot the 1990 documentary series **The Lane**, about Brick Lane, a stone's throw from Hessel Street. Episodes 2 and 5 feature Bangladeshi and Jewish residents past and present.

Another BBC offering of 1990 held in the Mediatheque is an episode of the popular soap opera **Eastenders**, set in a mythical Albert Square. In this episode the Taverniers are the first black family to move into the square. The impression is given that they were charting unknown territory, which is at odds with the long-established multi-cultural reality of the East End in 1990. It may throw more light on the development of inclusion policy at the BBC than on the development of cultural diversity in the East End.

The 1994 documentary **The Time of our Lives** is a study of an extended Irish East End family. Patriarch Joe emigrated from Dublin in the 1930s in search of work. He still lives in the East End, in a council flat in Poplar, as do a few of his children, but on the whole the film shows how dispersed the family now is. Like the Jews of **The Vanishing Street** many have removed to the suburbs.

Another film shot in the mid 1990s depicts the East End at an earlier time; the locations and period details resonate of the earlier East End films in the collection. This is the short 1995 feature **Sidney's Chair**. Set in a multi-racial Wapping in 1967 at the time when Sidney Poitier was on location filming **To Sir With Love**, the central character is a mixed race boy. His West Indian dad, white mum, mixed race sister, and Irish friend all feature. The film depicts the casual, and not so casual, racist language of white working class people in this East End community at this time but also evidences racial integration.

There is greater conflict, although not interracial, in the 2004 feature film **Elmina's Kitchen**. This is a dramatic depiction of tensions within the Afro-Caribbean community of the East End. The action takes place in Hackney, in the Caribbean café of the title. There are many iconic hallmarks of black British life: patois, calypso, 'bling', gun crime, largely feckless males, which lay it open to charges of stereotyping, but the film does speak with an authentic voice, that of the black British writer Kwame Kwei-Armah. In the same year **Bullet Boy** was released, also set in Hackney and covering some of the same material, i.e. black boys, guns and crime, and also speaking with some degree of authenticity through its star Ashley Waters. He was formerly, on his own admission, mired in gang culture and served a prison sentence in 2002 for possession of a firearm.

While the Mediatheque collection covers several groups of newcomers to the East End, it does not cover the full range. It does however offer some insight into how the East End was perceived on film in terms of ethnicity.

A CLOSER LOOK AT ONE FILM AND EPISODES OF A TV SERIES RELATING TO NEWCOMERS IN THE EAST END

BROKEN BLOSSOMS, 1919

Broken Blossoms is based on British writer Thomas Burke's 1917 story *The Chink and the Child*. The film's alternative title, *The Yellow Man and the Girl*, is marginally less offensive. Neither of these would have aroused any comment at the time although they would not be acceptable today. Like Griffith's epic **Intolerance, 1917**, **Broken Blossoms** rejects racial prejudice. The subject is the doomed love of a Chinese immigrant for a white girl in the face of hostility and brutality.

The Limehouse of **Broken Blossoms** was, with the exception of a few shots, created in a Hollywood studio. It is an impressionistic, brooding, soft-focus swirl, consisting of eerily lit, exterior dockside scenes, cobbled streets, dark alleys and opium dens. In 1879, Charles Dickens Jnr. had described Limehouse as "*this slough of grimy despond ... by devious ways, we penetrate at length to a squalid cul-de-sac, which seems indeed the very end of all things*". The sets reflect this description. Camera work by G.W. Bitzer and H. Sartov heightens the atmosphere. The colour tint of many of the exterior shots seems to match Burke's description: "*...of the Causeway, lit by the pallid blue light that is the symbol of China throughout the world*".



Richard Barthelmess by the Limehouse dockside in **Broken Blossoms**

There are three main protagonists: waif-like Lucy, played by Griffith's muse, the star Lillian Gish, her violent, abusive father, a boxer called Battling Burrows (Donald Crisp) and the Yellow Man who loves Lucy, played by white Hollywood star Richard Barthelmess (casting which would have been normal at the time). The Yellow Man fails to stop Burrows from beating Lucy to death; he kills Burrows and then kills himself.

The film paints a bleak picture of life for newcomers to the East End. They seem stuck and hopeless, with few signs of progress. They are spiritually impoverished in contrast to the life they have left. The opening scenes reinforce this, painting a positive picture of a refined, spiritual people in an idealised China. It is the American sailors who are rough and belligerent. This unflattering portrayal of white people is continued in the Limehouse scenes. They are fighters, gamblers, low lives and prostitutes and they do not interact positively with their Chinese neighbours. The father is described as "*Battling did not like men who were not born in the same great country as him. Particularly he disliked yellow men. His birth and education in Shadwell had taught him that of all creeping things that creep upon the earth the most insidious is the Oriental in the West.*"

Although the film is broadly faithful to Burke's original story, Griffith, who wrote the screenplay, did make some changes. Griffith's "Yellow Man" (Cheng) is shown as a devout Buddhist, intent on leaving his native land to carry "*a message of peace to the barbarous Anglo-Saxons*". Burke makes no mention of Cheng's civilising mission; his hero is press-ganged into the British navy and drifts to London. His presence in Limehouse is explained as: "*He remained for two reasons - because it cost him nothing to live there, and because he was too lazy to find a boat to take him back to Shanghai*". Burke's hero, although not unsympathetic, is an opium addict and frequenter of brothels and gambling dens. Griffith's hero is shown as succumbing to opium only when in London through depression and disillusionment. This difference can perhaps be explained in terms of Griffith's overall anti-racist message, which would surely not be best served by a feckless Chinese hero. Not only did Griffith need a worthy hero, he needed a virginal heroine. In Burke's original, Cheng meets Lucy in a Limehouse brothel; in the film he spies her from his window.

Although Cheng's love for Lucy is described in the original as "*a pure and holy thing*", there is still close physical contact: "*she returned his kisses impetuously, gladly*". The film however shows them to be more chaste, almost but not quite

kissing as the Yellow Man suppresses and sublimates his desire in soft-focus close-up scenes of great tenderness and purity. The film was the first to depict an interracial love story and was therefore already breaking boundaries; Griffith might well have considered an interracial kiss to be a close-up too far.

Some of the techniques used in **Broken Blossoms**, long, wide exterior shots, expressionist lighting, soft-focus close-ups and cross-cutting are so much part of the language of film that they have become clichés, although there seems to be some dispute as to whether or not Griffith pioneered them. Academic debate notwithstanding, there is no doubt that they are used to enormous effect in this film. **Broken Blossoms** is recommended to viewers interested in contemporaneous depictions of a now-vanished East End, as well as to film enthusiasts.

THE LANE, 1990

The Lane is a six part BBC documentary series about Brick Lane and was written and directed by Ron Johnston and John Purdie.

More like art film than documentary it contrasts modernity (shots of cranes, new buildings and concrete jungle) with the conservative religious attitudes of the Bengali community. Each episode concentrates on a particular cultural aspect of life in and around the Lane. The East End, and in particular Brick Lane, is considered by their residents as a part of Bangladesh. There were 40,000 Bangladeshis living in the area at the time of filming and it is known as Bangla Town or Sylhet Town as most of the Bengalis come from this region of North-East Bangladesh.

Episode 2 - Bangla Town concentrates on Bengali daily life. Abdul Ali is a successful restaurant owner, a devout Muslim and a family man. For him "*Brick Lane is a part of Bangladesh*" and he expresses very conservative attitudes: women should wear traditional clothing, should not work or go out shopping, unless accompanied by their husbands; his girls go to religion classes and he intends to send them to Bangladesh to marry. By contrast, the new generation: Rami and Halal, in their late teens, though from traditional families are seen at a snooker club, a Bangla disco and other locations. The collision between East and West can be seen through the two younger immigrants; the non-observance of religious rites as that clash with their work or leisure activities and their rebellion against customs, such as wearing traditional clothing.

This particular episode exposes a range of contrasts: Abdul and his wife are quite stilted on camera while Rami and friend are relaxed and confident. This contrasts with glimpses of non-Bengali women seen smoking and prostitutes plying their trade. No interaction of Bengalis with other cultures or races is shown.

The film maker makes a personal comment on the future of the community at the end of the documentary simply by showing Abdul's three girls watching TV, singing rhymes in English, dressed in western attire, and cranes and a modern building being erected on the background.

Episode 5 – Ghetto opens with a view of a crane and a mosque and the quote: "*Ghetto means a place where foreigners are allowed to live*" with their culture and customs. There is a collage of the different groups (Irish, Jews, Bengalis) living at Brick Lane, focusing on past versus present. The Jewish soup kitchen built in 1902 now distributes groceries mostly to Jewish pensioners. The formerly Jewish rag trade is now Bengali. Footage of the local mosque is used to reinforce the idea of the continuity of the ghetto. This building was originally a Huguenot Chapel, then a Methodist Church, then and a synagogue before it became the mosque it is today. To reinforce the idea of 'foreignness' there is a further montage of brief scenes of contrasting groups: a Jewish furrier and his right hand man for 25 years, Danny, who is black; language barrier problems between white policemen and Bengalis; an Orthodox Jew (nicknamed the "Yid One") speaking with a Yiddish accent, helping the police solve the recent murder of a Bengali, the Christchurch CE school head who says that education has transcended race and religion – his school is full but his parish church empty.

The Lane brings to life the personal stories of people who have made the street their home. While it has been enriching for some, others have only found extreme poverty. Many of the residents predict they will be forced out of their homes because of the Tower Hamlets project for redevelopment of the area, making space for high-rise expensive flats.

2.3 Markets

Markets have always held a central place in the community life of the East End. About fifteen street markets have existed in the East End since the birth of cinema but unfortunately only a few are available on film in the Mediatheque. The films that are available, however, span more than a hundred years and provide a vivid picture of life in some of the markets. They show the goods being sold, the people using the market and the fashions of the times. The films range from **Petticoat Lane, 1903** to **Peter Ackroyd's London, 2004**.

Two black and white silent films provide the earliest shots of East End markets in the Mediatheque. **Petticoat Lane, 1903** provides a vivid picture of one Edwardian Sunday in the market. The crowd is predominantly male and the goods on sale include male clothing and watches. In **Cosmopolitan London, 1924** various parts of London are contrasted and these include a troop ceremony in Hyde Park with an East End market. Pageantry and formality is compared to cheerful disorder.

There are no films available during 1930s and WW2 but in 1947 *Petticoat Lane* provided the background for the drama **It Always Rains on Sundays**. The film follows the events of one day in Bethnal Green and the main plot concerns an escaped convict who looks up his old girlfriend. She is now married with stepchildren. The market was mainly recreated in Ealing Studios complete with the background patter of the sellers. It was done with such authenticity that it is difficult to distinguish between the location and the film sets. It shows early post-war life in the East End, rationing, black-market, people with the life beaten out of them, making do and mending. On its original release it was praised for its documentary look and its attention to detail provides a look at a way of life that has now disappeared. A more cheerful view of the market life in the post-war period can be seen in **A Kid For Two Farthings, 1955** but this is not available in the Mediatheque.

Bow Bells, 1955 offers a picture of the East End still in the shadow of WW2. This short film is best described as a lyrical documentary. It consists of observations and impressions of the East End and its soundtrack is made up of music hall songs. It starts in the old Billingsgate Market and moves to various East End markets selling clothes, furs and pets. Its director came from a working class East London Jewish family and the film can be seen as a poem to the area he grew up in.

The Vanishing Street, 1962 is a documentary about a market that no longer exists. Hessel Street was the main Jewish market in the East End. The narrow street was crammed with small shops and stalls. In 1961 the street was flattened to make way for high-rise flats. Before the bulldozers went in, this documentary captured the hustle, bustle and sounds of everyday life in the market.

The London Nobody Knows, 1967 is a curious documentary about London on the brink of regeneration. The actor James Mason, in distinctive dress with cap and broly, acts as guide to some less well-known sights of the city. About 20 minutes into the film there is a long section on Fournier Street and Artillery Lane, in Spitalfields. Residents in this area can still remember the later Jack the Ripper murders. Mason, a qualified architect, describes Victorian London as hideous and admires the tower blocks being built. This was a view commonly held at the time. 1960s market life can be seen in two non-East End markets in the film. Islington's Chapel Market has food and clothing stalls and in Church Street Market a Salvation Army band can be seen marching down the street.

The Lane was a six-part BBC documentary series about the communities, characters and hidden corners of Brick Lane and Spitalfields. Markets feature in episode 5 and 6. **Episode 5: The Ghetto** features scenes from the Brick Lane Market, pictures of Spitalfields Market, the Jewish Soup kitchen, and market stalls as well as East End pub culture. **Episode 6: Further on up the Road** highlights the context of recent changes to the area and the encroachment of 'The City' on Spitalfields Market. Changes in Planning Regulations have allowed a part of the market to be demolished and replaced by offices and shops.

Seafood, 2004 is structured around a journey – both physical and emotional – of two city workers through 21st century East End. On a Friday night they go from the City through Spitalfields, into the heart of the Bangladeshi community in Brick Lane with its restaurants and on to a Limehouse gay club.

Peter Ackroyd's London, 2004 is a three-part BBC series based on his book **London: The Biography, 2000** and explores the mysterious and enduring personality of London. As well as film it uses old maps and contemporary views from the Metropolitan Police's CCTV camera to build a picture of London. In **Episode 2: The Crowd** Ackroyd looks at Smithfield's Market and Bartholomew's Fair of olden days.

A CLOSER LOOK AT TWO OF THE FILMS AND AN EPISODE OF A TV SERIES RELATING TO MARKETS OF THE EAST END

PETTICOAT LANE, 1903

Petticoat Lane Market is located in Wentworth Street and Middlesex Street on the boundary between Portsoken Ward in the City and Whitechapel. It has been a site for selling clothes for more than 400 years and is one of the oldest markets in the country. The prudish Victorians did not want an area named after women's underwear and changed the name of the original street to Middlesex Street but local tradition won and the market remains known as Petticoat Lane Market.

In 1903 film was very much a novelty and audiences were still curious and by it. Few narrative films were being made and the majority of films being shown were short 'actualities' like **Petticoat Lane**. These consisted mainly of scenes with movement but no dramatic interest. Today these films provide a unique look at everyday life of the time.

Petticoat Lane film shows a very crowded street with stalls in front of the shops. The atmosphere of Petticoat Lane is generated by the crowds, the men shouting and their wares. The demand for 'off the peg' male clothing is obvious by the crowds present in the market. Some of the stallholders are raised above the level of the rest of the crowd and might have been standing on boxes or a platform. There is an auctioneer with his hammer in his hand and a sign for



*The crowds and stalls in **Petticoat Lane 1903***

watches beside him. One man is selling waistcoats, another is selling trousers and there is a soda milk stall. Card gambling is portrayed by a man shuffling cards while watched by a group.

The crowd and stallholders are almost all male and are dressed in the typical Edwardian male working-class dress of dark jackets, light shirts and waistcoats with one or two seen wearing ties. All wore hats - caps, bowlers and one or two boaters or a trilby. A couple of men were smoking elegant slim pipes. The novelty of the camera is reflected in the amazed staring male faces although some wave their hats to the cameraman. Few women are involved in shopping in this market. They were more likely to be shopping in Hessel Street or Watney Street markets.

THE VANISHING STREET, 1963

Although made in 1961, **The Vanishing Street** is very much in the style of the Free Cinema Movement that emerged in England in the mid-1950s. The movement was made up of filmmakers and critics who shared common beliefs and attitudes. They rejected both mainstream British cinema and traditional documentary seeing them both as out of touch with everyday life. Their films promulgated a belief in freedom, making moral observations to be seen as a personal statement and being made outside the traditional film industry so to be free from industry pressures. The films were typically short, used handheld cameras, avoided the use of narration and used sound and editing impressionistically. They rarely used 'voice-overs' or 'talking heads'. The films were shown in six programmes at the National Film Theatre between February 1956 and March 1959. Included in the last programme was **Refugee Britain, 1959** made by the Hungarian Robert Vas, the director of **The Vanishing Street**.

The film features Hessel Street that became the site of the East End's main Jewish market, open every day except Saturdays. The narrow street was filled with small shops and stalls; many of them wet fish stalls. Chickens and other poultry were kept in cages; buyers selected one, which was killed according to kosher ritual and dressed while they shopped elsewhere. There were also general shops, with pans and kettles hanging on strings, and bookmakers.

Hessel Street (previously Morgan Street), and Amazon Street which runs off it, are named after the 'Amazon of Stepney'. Phoebe Smith was born locally in 1713. She led a very interesting life as a soldier and lived to the age of 108. She married twice, her second husband being a fisherman called Thomas Hessel.

In 1961, the day before the bulldozers moved in to replace the old buildings with high-rise blocks, Robert Vas made this 20-minute film showing a typical day in the life of the street and its declining but still vibrant Jewish community. Initially called District for Sale, it was funded by the British Film Institute Experimental Film Fund and the Jewish Chronicle, and was approved by the Council for Christians and Jews before its release.

The film starts with general views of Hessel Street, the bustle of people going about their business and visiting the shops and the market stalls. The atmosphere is cut across by the surveyors with their tools. This is achieved by showing a short section of the film with cross hairs on the screen - as if seen through the theodolite.

The main part of the film then paints a picture of the various trades of the market and the street – fruit and vegetables; kosher poultry; wet fish; toys; textiles, a factory making clothes and a hairdressers' shop. In the centre of this is a strong sequence on the life and hierarchy of the synagogue. All the market scenes develop the concerns about its demise, through overheard discussions in the street and through wonderful close-ups of the many characters in the film.

Two other themes are also developed in the film. Firstly the ethnic changes in the area are just alluded to through the presence of a few Asian people walking in the market. Secondly, the shots of some derelict houses, followed by further scenes with the theodolite cross hairs in view and finally the crude, crashing demolition work herald the sad end to the market, the street and its community. A plangent Yiddish lament accompanies this final part of the film.



Hessel Street, 1961 – **The Vanishing Street**



Hessel Street, 2009

This area off Commercial Road is now a Bangladeshi community as seen in the replacement of kosher poultry shops with their halal equivalents. Today the street is a shadow of its former self.

THE LANE, 1990

The Lane, a BBC documentary series made in 1990, is the most recent of the films in the Mediatheque about East End Markets. **Episode 5 - The Ghetto** concentrates on market life and the communities that live and work in and around Brick Lane and Spitalfields Markets.

The film shows the markets coming to life early in the morning, the market banter and the part both markets played in local life. It is interesting to note that in 1990 the stallholders were mainly white while the shops were mainly run by Bangladeshis.

The local wholesale businesses, which have serviced the manufacturing trades traditional to the area, now service a new generation of artisans while many of these traditional trades are now carried out by members of new immigrant communities. Remnants of the formerly vibrant Jewish community are shown in a sequence about the kosher soup kitchen.

In Spitalfields the work of historical philanthropists is shown as continuing in the local church that now provides refuge for rough sleepers.

Scenes of young people dancing in crowded clubs contrasts with this and with clips of worshippers at the local mosque, Bangladeshi children attending the local church school and the police promoting community cohesion.

The film ends on a note of uncertainty as to what the changes then planned in Spitalfields Market would bring. However, one is left feeling optimistic that the two markets will continue to play an important role in the life of the East End of London.

3. Index of East End Films in the Mediatheque

Some of the descriptions in this section have been compiled with the aid of material from the Mediatheque system at BFI Southbank. It also includes some films that feature the East End but did not fall into the topics that are included in the Guide.

4D Special Agents 1981 | 60 mins | dir. Harold Orton. Made for the Children's Film Foundation, this is a fresh and lively drama set in the docks area that has been stripped of industry but yet to be developed. While playing, five local children overhear a gang discussing disposal of stolen goods. Deciding to investigate themselves, the children become involved in a series of events reminiscent of the classic tales of Enid Blyton but with very different characters and location.

Bow Bells 1955 | 14 mins | dir. Anthony Simmons. A touch of nostalgia featuring East End scenes set to Cockney Music Hall songs. Starts with the fish market, then eels, then caged birds, dogs and cats for sale. Good pictures of the 1950s prefabs (only meant to last for a decade at most) that would have had such a good view "*if it wasn't for the houses in between*"!

Broken Blossoms 1919 | 107 mins | dir. D.W. Griffith. Brilliantly executed silent melodrama set in a Hollywood studio-created Limehouse. It tells of the doomed love of a Chinese immigrant (Richard Barthelmess) for a white girl (Lillian Gish) in the face of brutal opposition from her racist father (Donald Crisp). Although guilty of a certain amount of oversimplification and stereotyping, the film is still a powerful plea for racial tolerance.

Bullet Boy 1986 | 100 mins | dir. Saul Dibb. Ricky, a 20-year-old Black British Hackney resident is released from a rural prison after serving a sentence for stabbing. He returns to his mother's council flat in the Lea Valley area, but is unable to break free of his former gang associations. The story depicts the lack of opportunity, gang crime and violence with which a section of Hackney's young black population has been associated.

Colour on the Thames 1935 | 8 mins | dir. Adrian Klein. This delightful early colour film follows the Thames from suburban Surrey to the sea. It moves from leisure river to the busy London Docks where ships from all over the world can be seen. In this film the Docks are busy working places and it provides a rare view of a way of life that no longer exists.

Cosmopolitan London (Wonderful London) 1924 | 13 mins | dir. Frank Miller, Harry B Parkinson. This is a silent documentary that covers immigrant communities in the capital. The intention of the film is benign but patronising; it tends to view immigrants as strange and exotic. The tone and language of some of the intertitles would be unacceptable to most modern audiences. The East End is featured: Jewish Whitechapel, the "Strangers Home for Asiatics" (mostly Lascars) in Limehouse and the Chinese enclave around Limehouse Causeway.

EastEnders 1990 | 30 mins. In this episode of the popular soap opera set 'somewhere' in the East End the black Tavernier family moves into Albert Square. The Taverniers' noisy gospel-style house blessing is greeted by the exclusively white locals with a mixture of curiosity, suspicion and complaint. Conversely, West Indian grandfather Jules Tavernier obtains immediate, unquestioning acceptance when he plunges himself into the local traders' campaign to prevent 'Walford Market' from being closed.

Elmina's Kitchen 2004 | 90 mins | dir. Angus Jackson. This is a depiction of inter-communal and inter-generational tensions within the Afro-Caribbean community. Apart from the Hackney location shots, this is a studio film of the play, also directed by Angus Jackson. The action takes place in the Caribbean café of the title. Patois, calypso, 'bling', gun crime and a cast of largely feckless male characters lay it open to charges of stereotyping, but the film does speak with an authentic black voice, that of the writer Kwame Kwe Armah.

Fires Were Started 1943 | 63 mins | dir. Humphrey Jennings. Part information, part propaganda and part drama, this documentary follows the single shift of seven East End firemen and their new middle-class recruit. It shows the men and women at the substation going about routine jobs, having a meal and larking around and then a desperate fight at a burning warehouse in which one of the crew dies.

The Heart Within 1957 | 59 mins | dir. David Eady. The film encompasses crime, drugs, the Docklands, the arrival and absorption of West Indian immigrants and prevalent racial prejudice showing a picture of London social realism of the time. A dockworker from Trinidad is a murder suspect on the run who must depend on white strangers (including child actor David Hemmings) to help clear his name. It is an early attempt to deal with racial tensions and argues that the heart within is the same, despite the skin colour.

Hot Summer Night 1959 | 55 mins | dir. Ted Kotcheff. Made for Armchair Theatre ITV, this play by Ted Willis was one of the first TV shows to tackle racial issues head on, both at the workplace and at home. Despite the almost happy ending, the confrontation between the white unionist, played by John Slater and Lloyd Reckord, the Jamaican docker, is uncomfortable to watch, as it emphasises the problems facing racial integration. Another controversial sub-theme regards neglected women, seen only as domestic objects.

Hoxton ... Saturday, July 3rd, Britannia Theatre 1920 | 6 mins. A very busy Saturday showing scenes of Old Street, Hoxton Street, Britannia Theatre and finally more of Old Street down to the London Apprentice past Charles Square. Good atmospheric street scenes.

Hue and Cry 1946 | 82 mins | dir. Charles Crichton. This film was shot mainly on location and with a cast of schoolboys. It tells how a gang of East End kids realise that a comic is being used to plan robberies and how the gang, with the help of the locals, confronts and apprehends the criminals. The use of a BBC News flash foreshadows the current use of mobiles for flash mobs.

It Always Rains on Sundays 1947 | 92 mins | dir. Robert Hamer. On its release this film was seen by some as "*having vitality and humour*", "*a Cockney mosaic*" and it was praised for its realistic portrayal of the 'spiv' culture of the time. Others viewed it as a sordid descent into the low life of the East End. Set in and around Petticoat Lane, it is about one day in Bethnal Green when an escaped convict seeks refuge with a former girlfriend. It follows his attempts to evade the law and the Police's fruitless efforts to get information about his whereabouts from the locals.

The Lane 1990 | 270 mins | dir. Ron Johnston, John Purdie. This is a six-part documentary series, each episode 45 minutes long, about Brick Lane and was made for the BBC.

Part 1 – The Family introduces four generations of the Burns family, the patriarch being a boxer turned trainer and friend of the Krays brothers. It focuses on the tough East End upbringing, where "*you either kick a ball or someone in the nose*", and therefore the noble art keeps the youngsters out of mischief. Several scenes were shot at the famous Repton Boxing Club. The older generation can be seen plying their wares at Brick Lane's flea market.

Part 2 – Bangla Town or Little Sylhet depicts life for the Bengalis in Brick Lane. It portrays Abdul Ali (though economically successful still living in a cramped council flat), conservative and observant as compared to a more 'progressive' attitude by the new generation of Bengali newcomers. An insight into this collision between East and West values and customs is exemplified by the longing of his wife to return to Bangladesh to a more 'comfortable' environment.

Part 3 – The Law shows how law and order are maintained in the Lane is illustrated by the visit of the Bangladesh President in 1985, a robbery that ended in murder of a Bengali man and the riots that followed. While the police is careful to choose officers born at the East End who understand the locals' culture and beliefs, young Bengalis complain of police harassment and tell them "you know the outside of here, not the inside".

Part 4 – The Fight is about two young boxers. Charles is a short blond East Ender who lives in a caravan by derelict buildings with his fairground family and his friend Damian is a tall West Indian with aspirations for success in boxing and a better life. The camera follows them to acid parties and junk food stalls. Shown by contrast, another boxer from the other side of the tracks lives in a house and helps his father with racing pigeons.

Part 5 – Ghetto not only contains scenes of Brick Lane Market but also has pictures of Spitalfields Market. It also includes a Jewish Soup Kitchen, the pub culture of the East End and a building that, since the 18th century has been the site of four different places of worship. It ends with a Jack the Ripper Walk.

Part 6 – Further Up the Road. The final episode looks at changes in the area during the late 1980s and early 1990s. These include the redevelopment of Spitalfields and the improper de-listing of part of the market to allow demolition and subsequent building of shops and offices. The City can be seen to be encroaching more and more on the area with ‘fat cats’ buying converted warehouses. There are interviews with ‘locals’ about the gentrification of the area.

London Can Take It! 1940 | 10 mins | dir. Humphrey Jennings, Harry Watt. This film was made by the Crown Film Unit at the height of the Blitz in London. People were being made homeless. There were food shortages and the Government feared social breakdown. The film had two aims, to encourage people to stick it out and to show the Americans that Britain may need help but that it wasn’t finished.

The London Nobody Knows 1967 | 48 mins | dir. Norman Cohen. This film catches London when the Swinging Sixties of thronging shops, slick new tower blocks and coffee bars co-existed with scenes of poverty and malnourishment. It captures parts of London that are about to be lost and provides a unique picture of the city atmosphere and appearance at the time it was made. A delight for the urban historian.

The Long Good Friday 1981 | 114 mins | dir. John Mackenzie. The action of this film takes place over an Easter Weekend. Harold Shand, an old-fashioned 1960s style gangster played by Bob Hoskins, seeks finance from the American Mafia to realise his dream of redeveloping Docklands. Instead Harold has to deal with the fallout of one of his gang’s involvement with the IRA and the issue becomes more idealistic. Are potential terrorists more ruthless than a traditional East End gangster?

Oliver Twist 1948 | 116 mins | dir. David Lean. This is the classic black and white film of Dickens’ famous novel. In the 1830s a ten-year-old orphan runs away from the workhouse to London and is drawn into the criminal world of the East End. The film clearly shows the social divide of the time – City wealth, Clerkenwell comfort and East End squalor of crime, overcrowding and dark, cramped derelict slums.

The Open Road 1927 | 60 mins | dir. Claude Friese-Greene. This film was something of a novelty when it was made not only for being in colour but the length of the motorcar trip it covers. This causal journey is from John O’Groats to Land’s End and towards the end of it there are scenes of London, including brief shots of Petticoat Lane and the Docks.

Peter Ackroyd’s London 2004 | 48 mins. This is a three-part series made for the BBC and based on his book **London: The Biography**. The East End is portrayed as a savage place that in the last 150 years has moved from industry to business and from slums to luxury flats.

Petticoat Lane 1903 | 2 mins. This early black and white film shows the community of the East End enjoying the bustle and fun of the Sunday market in Petticoat Lane. The film demonstrates some aspects of the social life of Edwardian London including male working-class dress. Few women are involved in shopping in this market.

Piccadilly 1929 | 111 mins | dir. E.A. Dupont. A silent melodrama set in the West End “Piccadilly” nightclub and in Limehouse. The location for the club scenes was the Café de Paris while Limehouse was recreated in Elstree studios. The story is the rise and fall of Chinese femme fatale and exotic dancer Shosho (Anna May Wong). She exerts a dangerous erotic attraction over her boss. This plus the jealousy of her Chinese boyfriend is the trigger for the tragedy that ensues.

Polish Your Shoes 2003 | 11 mins | dir. Sam Huntley. The children of an East End ‘spiv’ describe his life in the economic depression of the 1930s. Always impeccably turned out in hat, suit and polished shoes, their father ensured they were “*more well off than anyone else down the street*” by street trading, ticket touting, horse race tipstering/illegal bookmaking, fare dodging and general wheeler dealing. They are proud of their father’s skills whose borderline criminal entrepreneurial activities were widely respected locally.

Pool of London 1950 | 85 mins | dir. Basil Dearden. This is a crime drama with an authentic London Docks feel. It tells the story of two merchant seamen, one American and one West Indian, who get involved with a gang of diamond smugglers. The West Indian sailor asks out a local girl who works in the shipping office. It is one of the first films to deal with interracial relationships in post-War Britain.

Seafood 2004 | 10 mins | dir. Robin Baker. Seafood is structured around a journey – both physical and emotional – that two men make one evening after work. The film moves through the City and Spitalfields into the heart of the Bangladeshi community in Brick Lane and its restaurants and then on to a Limehouse gay club. This is a gay version of the traditional ‘beer and curry’ Friday evening after work when City workers diffuse into Brick Lane, with a gentle twist of humour at the end.

The Sidney Street Siege, aka The Great East End Anarchist Battle 1911 | 4 mins. On 16 December 1910, during a burglary at a jewellery shop in Houndsditch, Latvian anarchists killed three unarmed policemen. Two weeks later a tip-off from a local landlady led the police to 100 Sidney Street. At 7.30 on 3 January the police, later supported by the Scots Guard, laid siege to the house for over six hours. This short film was recorded by one of the five newsreel companies who sent cameras to the scene.

Sidney’s Chair 1995 | 21 mins | dir. Robert Bangura. Robert Bangura, the writer and director of this film was born in Stepney and has mixed race parents. He has lovingly recreated the East End working-class community at a time when mixed marriages were still unusual and where the presence of a black star, Sidney Poitier, was a major event. It realistically shows how minor exchanges can quickly escalate to racial abuse and the pride a young boy feels when his black father stands up to a white man.

Song of Freedom 1936 | 80 mins | dir. J. Elder Wills. It was unheard of in 1930s Hollywood for a black actor to be given the lead in a feature film but Britain offered a number of leading roles to Paul Robeson. This one tells the story of a black dockworker who traces his roots to Africa. The scenes in the East End show interracial harmony and co-existence that never would have appeared in a Hollywood film of the period. It is possibly the first example of openly expressed Black pride in an English language film.

Sparrows Can’t Sing 1962 | 94 mins | dir. Joan Littlewood. This is based on an improvised play first performed at Theatre Royal Stratford. An East End sailor returns home after two years at sea to find his house demolished and his wife with a baby and living with another man. It is supposed to be a slice of East End life but can be seen as romanticised but charming or somewhat condescending and phoney. It was shot almost entirely on location in Stepney.

Sundial 1991 | 1 min | dir. William Raban. In this short film, artist William Raban collapses one day in the life of Canary Wharf into a minute. Built in the late 1980s, it is for many the symbol of aggressive capitalism and Raban emphasises how it both physically and metaphorically dominates the Docklands and surrounding areas.

The Times of Our Lives 1994 | 81 mins | dir. Mike Grisby. This is a documentary about an extended family that uses the birthday of their Irish patriarch as a framing device. Punctuated by auditory comments on historical events, it weaves scenes of the East End in 1990s with reminiscences by members of the family and their comments on the political and social changes they have seen in their lifetime.

Together 1956 | 52 mins | dir. Lorenza Mazetti, Denis Horne. This short feature tells the story of two deaf-mute dockers and is set against the bombsites, narrow streets, warehouses, pubs and markets of Docklands. It shows the isolation experienced by the dockers and the working-class life of the time. The film has a poetic quality and is clearly influenced by Italian Neo-Realism. It mixes shots of north and south of the river and captures a landscape and way of life that no longer exists.

Twilight City 1989 | 52 mins | dir. Reece Auguiste. This is a docudrama that looks at London mainly through minority eyes – Blacks, Asians, Gays. It explores the social and political changes initiated by Margaret Thatcher's governments in the 1980s. It raises a number of topics rather than develops a coherent argument and includes some footage of Chinatown in the 1920s, the bombed out London of the Blitz and the history of the 19th century Lascar community.

The Vanishing Street 1962 | 20 mins | dir. Robert Vas. In the spirit of the Free Cinema this film celebrates "*the poetry of everyday life*". It observes the East End Jewish Community at a point of change. Old houses and shops will soon be demolished and the market will disappear. Newcomers, West Indian and Asian, can be seen in the market. But it does not merely observe, it communicates a sense of nostalgia and deep affection for the community.

What Have You Done Today, Mervyn Day? 2006 | 45 mins | dir. Paul Kelly. This film records the Lower Lea Valley shortly before preparations began for the 2012 Olympics. A newspaper boy cycles through a virtually unpopulated landscape. Voiceovers tell of the proud past of the area together with residents' concerns about the changes the Olympic Games will bring. However, shots of dereliction leave the viewer with the impression of an area in much need of regeneration. The pop group Saint Etienne provides a soundtrack.

4. Appendices

This project was a collective project and the team brought different skills and areas of knowledge to it. All but one member of the group had family roots in the East End and some had grown up in the East End. These appendices include some of the background history to the topics that were looked at and some reminiscences of a member of the group.

4.1 Docks to Docklands

For centuries the riverside hamlets of Ratcliffe, Wapping, Shadwell and Limehouse were occupied with overseas trade. Until the building of the Docks all the trade of the Port of London was carried out by ocean going ships that moored in mid Thames waiting for their cargos to be moved by lighters upriver to the legal quays. Much pilfering went on. It is estimated that importers were suffering losses of £500,000 per year and nearly a third of the river workers (11,000) were known criminals. River pirates and night plunderers would steal cargos from the ships and lighters moored in the river. In an effort to counteract this the Thames River Police was founded in 1797 in Wapping High Street.

Therefore, the Docks depicted in the Mediatheque films were built in the early 19th century surrounded by giant walls with carefully guarded small gates in an effort to prevent the pilfering. The first to be built were the West India Docks in 1802, to cater for imports from the West Indies, followed by the East India Dock in 1803. East India Dock Road and Commercial Road were then built to accommodate easy transport of goods from the Docks to the City. The London Dock occupying 90 acres in Ratcliffe, Shadwell and Wapping followed a few years later. All these could accommodate large ships.

Thomas Telford's St. Katharine's Dock was built in 1828 on the site of the Royal Foundation of St. Katharine that had stood there for 700 years. It housed a wide variety of goods, including carpets, indigo, opium, marble, shells, rubber, wines, fragrant spices and perfumes and was the centre of the country's stocks of ivory, from which billiard balls and piano keys were made. Although this was a smaller dock and could not accommodate the larger ships, it was said that the vast wealth of the country could be found at St. Katharine's.

Henry Mayhew in 1851 in his **London Labour and the London Poor** and **Mayhew's London** gave a detailed description of the docks. Describing the London Dock he stated that "*the courts and alleys round about the dock swarm with low lodging-houses; and are inhabited either by dock-labourers, sack-makers, watermen or that peculiar class of the London poor who pick up a living by the waterside*". He went on to say that the air was pungent with tobacco, the fumes of rum and the stench of hides, and then afterwards the air was fragrant with coffee and spice. This continued to be the case throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Millwall Dock was the last to be built in 1868 to accommodate cheap corn from North America following the repeal of the Corn Laws.

Despite the building of the docks, wharves and warehouses continued to be built along the riverside. Wapping Wall still retains an impressive group of warehouses, some complete with iron cranes, the most significant being the six-storey Grade II Listed warehouse dating from the 1890s belonging to Metropolitan Wharf. Today the concept for the wharf is to retain its Victorian appearance whilst comprising office units and retail outlets.

The Royal group of docks (Victoria 1855, Albert 1880 and King George V 1921) were built to provide berths for large vessels that could not be accommodated further upriver. They were a great commercial success, becoming London's principal docks during the first half of the 20th century. The major feature of King George V Dock today is the London City Airport.

Discontent and Strike

The London Dock Strike of 1889 was a major event, which laid the foundations for modern trade unions and the Labour Party. The dockers were poorly paid and they and their families lived in wretched conditions. They demanded the end of casual labour and a wage of 6d per hour.

The loading and discharging of ships was highly labour intensive. It was difficult to predict when ships would arrive as the trade was seasonal and bad weather could delay a fleet. West India Dock could accommodate 400 ships, 200 loaded and 200 unloaded. More than 42,000 ships arrived at the Dock over a period of four weeks in 1861. On some days there would be many ships in dock, on others very few.

Second World War

London's docks were the main target during WW2. The Luftwaffe intended to paralyse the commercial life of the capital by bombing the docks, warehouses, wharves, railway lines, factories and power stations of the East End. More than 25,000 bombs fell on Docklands, including Surrey Docks on the south bank, during the war. Even small incendiary bombs caused havoc due to the combustible nature of the goods in the warehouses. St. Katharine's Dock lost all but one of its main warehouses in the Blitz. 10,000 tons of sugar was lost at West India Dock and it is said that this turned into toffee and was eaten by the East Enders.

The extensive damage suffered by St. Katharine's Dock during WW2 was never fully repaired. The North and East Quays and the northwest corner remained out of use. One of the few survivors within the London Dock Group was Tobacco Dock at Wapping.

The Port of London Authority (PLA)

Despite the opening of Tilbury Docks in the 1880s accommodating large steam ships, trade continued to flourish on London's docks, but towards the end of the 19th century the increase in both the amount of trade handled by the port and the size and draught of the ships using it meant that improvements were desperately needed. After several years of negotiation the PLA was established and began work on the 31 March 1909.

Amongst its first activities were the provision of new quays and sheds at the London, West India, East India and Millwall Docks, the erection of new cold storage warehouses for imported meat and the extension of Tilbury Docks. It became responsible for the whole of the Thames and its Docks from Teddington to the Nore, a distance of 70 miles. The PLA controlled its duties from a large stone building in Trinity Square overlooking Tower Hill, which is still prominent today. The building was sold in 1971 and the Authority moved to smaller offices in the World Trade Centre at St. Katharine's Dock. It is now based at London River House, Gravesend. Amongst its activities today the Authority is responsible for safety on the river with launches patrolling 24 hours a day, 365 days a year between Southend and Putney.

Decline

During the 1960s and 1970s, the PLA began to move most of its activities downstream to Tilbury in Essex. Most of the London upper docks emptied and fell into decline. St. Katharine's Dock continued to be active into the 1960s still handling a wide range of goods, but by 1965 they were operating at a loss. Containerisation finally closed the dock in 1968 together with East India Dock. West India Docks on the Isle of Dogs, one of the busiest docks in the world, had declined by the 1950s but survived until 1980.

Development

In 1968 St. Katharine's Dock was sold to the Greater London Council for redevelopment. In 1979 the Maritime Trust transferred its most important vessels to the Dock to form the Historic Ship Collection. The Dock was the flagship for the redevelopment of Docklands. Sited close to the City of London and Tower Bridge, it is now a delightful marina surrounded by housing, office accommodation, restaurants, shops and other recreational facilities. There is always a large range of yachts moored in the marina with a lock that leads to into the Thames.

London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC)

In 1981 LDDC was established by the Government under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, to secure the regeneration of docklands. For nearly 17 years until March 1998 the Corporation worked to regenerate an area of eight-and-a-half square miles stretching across parts of the boroughs of Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Newham, and in this time transformed the area.

The Docks

In 1982 Billingsgate Market, which had existed in Thames Street from the 16th century, was relocated to a new 13-acre building complex at West India Dock.

Construction of Canary Wharf, the large business and shopping development centred on West India Dock on the Isle of Dogs began in 1988. Canary Wharf contains the UK's three tallest buildings, One Canada Square which is Canary Wharf Tower and can be seen for miles around; 8 Canada Square and the Citigroup Centre. The Museum in Docklands was opened at West India Quay in 2003 in a Georgian sugar warehouse built in 1802, which was one of the few dock warehouses to survive the Blitz.

Shadwell Basin, west of Limehouse is the most significant surviving body of water in Docklands and is now used for sailing, canoeing and fishing, surrounded on three sides by a housing development of four and five storeys, with facades echoing the 19th century warehouses.

Limehouse Basin lost its Victorian character with bomb damage and slum clearance. In 2004 it was converted into a delightful yacht marina surrounded by luxury flats, restaurants, etc., leading into the Limehouse Cut and access to the River Lea.

Millwall Dock on the Isle of Dogs is mostly a commercial development of printing works, technology and finance companies. There are several housing developments and the Docklands Sailing and Water Sports Centre is located at the far west end of the Dock.

East India Dock has mostly been filled in with only the entrance remaining as a wild life refuge. The surrounding area is mainly residential with several ongoing developments.

Docklands still retains some of its 'olde worlde' charm with its Thames side pubs. At one time there were 36 pubs on Wapping High Street alone. Now just a few survive.

The Prospect of Whitby at Wapping claims to be the oldest Thames side pub in existence, dating from 1543. In the 17th century it was known as the 'Devil's Tavern' and was the meeting place for smugglers and villains. One notorious customer was Judge Jeffreys, the 'Hanging Judge'.

The Town of Ramsgate believed to be the pub where Judge Jeffreys was captured attempting to flee to the Continent.

The Grapes at Limehouse was built in 1720, on the site of a previous pub. It was a working class tavern serving the workers of the Limehouse Basin. There are unsavoury stories of watermen taking drunks from the pub, drowning them in the river and then selling their corpses for medical dissection. Charles Dickens knew this pub well. Both his uncle and godfather lived here. The latter, Mr. Huffman, was a well-to-do mast maker and rigger. As a child, he was made to stand on a table in the pub and sing to the customers. As an adult, he immortalised it as the *Six Jolly Fellowship Porters* pub in his novel, **Our Mutual Friend**.

4.2 Newcomers: A Short History of Immigration in the East End

The cultural diversity of the East End as portrayed in film is nothing new. Between the 17th and 19th centuries the London docks had been the scene of the arrival of newcomers from abroad. These groups tended to settle in places where their compatriots had already settled, not too far from points of arrival, where there were employment opportunities and cheap housing. Sephardic Jews from the Netherlands, French Protestant Huguenots, and then Irish, Chinese, Indians and Africans all came. Some already had a connection as merchant seamen. Some were refugees from religious or racial persecution, some were economic migrants.

The Irish

The potato blight and subsequent famine of the 1840s was probably the biggest single impetus for immigration from Ireland to the mainland. In the East End many found work as dockers. By 1900 there was already a significant Irish presence in London. An article in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* for 1901 emphasised the importance of the docks of East London as a source of employment and settlement for the Irish; "*The whole of Tower Hamlets is thickly populated by them.*"

In the same source there is evidence of inter-community tension: "*They are being ousted by the Jews . . . despite such forcible arguments as broken Semitic windows. But Wapping has a solidly Irish quarter; so has Limehouse, between Commercial Road and the Thames . . . so has Poplar.*"

During the depression of the 1930s, more Irish jobseekers came to the East End. Earlier tensions were dissolved when Mosley and his fascists tried to march through the East End in 1936, for Irish dockworkers played their part alongside Jewish East Enders in turning them back.

Post-war reconstruction brought a renewed need for workers, and the 1950s saw a wave of Irish builders coming to London, although only some to the East End. With the decline of the docks many Irish East Enders moved away.

The Chinese

The first Chinese to come to the East End were merchant seamen in the late 18th and 19th centuries. The 1881 Census shows that out of the 109 listed as 'Chinese' in London, 69% of them lived in Limehouse. While the figures cannot wholly be relied upon they still show the extent to which Limehouse was becoming a Chinese enclave. George Sims reported in 1905 "*There is no mistake about the Chinese element. The Chinese names are up over the doors of the little shops.*"

This domination of Limehouse was to be short-lived; by 1931, although the Chinese population of London had increased to 1194, only 15% of them were in Limehouse.

Their numbers may have been small but there were instances of hostility from those who regarded the Chinese as cheap labour who undercut their wages. In 1908 and 1919 there were violent demonstrations by British merchant seamen to this effect (also directed against African and Caribbean seamen).

The Chinese community in the East End was mostly concentrated in a small number of streets and alleys around Pennyfields and Limehouse Causeway. In 1934 the Causeway was widened and many of the side streets were demolished. This had the effect of catalysing the movement of Chinese out of the area and into the West End's Chinatown, a process which the Blitz all but completed. Today there is little trace of Chinese Limehouse.

The Jews

The Jewish presence in Britain has a long history. Expelled in 1290, they had been allowed back in the 17th century. In London they were required to dwell outside the city; hence many settled initially in the adjacent areas of the East End. These were mostly but not exclusively Sephardi Jews (descendants of the Spanish/Portuguese and Middle Eastern communities) and by the 19th century there was already a thriving Anglo-Jewish community.

The most concentrated wave of Jewish immigration occurred between 1881 and 1914. Ashkenazi, Yiddish speaking Jews from Eastern Europe came to escape systematic persecution by the Czarist government, which reached its peak in the pogroms (destruction of Jewish settlements) of the late 19th/early 20th centuries. The steamships that were giving employment to the Irish were also a source of cheap passages for these Jewish refugees.

The established Anglo-Jewish community, although alarmed at the “foreignness” of their co-religionists and fearing that this would lead to greater anti-Semitism, nevertheless worked actively to give aid to the newcomers; the Jews’ Temporary Shelter was established in Leman Street while help was given to find work and accommodation, mostly in the East End.

East End Jews rapidly established a community with a flourishing infrastructure. There were businesses, markets, schools, hospitals, restaurants and even Yiddish newspapers and Yiddish language theatre. In 1901 there were 15 kosher butchers in Wentworth Street alone.

Parliament, perceiving a problem of ‘influx’, passed the Aliens Act in 1905, legislation which made the Home Secretary responsible for immigration control and gave him the right to deport any immigrant “...if he cannot show that he has in his possession or is in a position to obtain, the means of decently supporting himself and his dependants”. This was subsequently defined as £5 per immigrant male plus £2 for each of his dependants.

It is no coincidence that this legislation was passed when Jewish immigration was at its height. Further legislation was passed later in the century as a response to the growing numbers of immigrants from the Indian sub-continent, which included many who settled in the East End.

In the period after 1945 many Jews moved out to the suburbs of Northwest and East London. Today there is a tiny number of very elderly Jews left in the East End.

Caribbeans

The urgent need to rebuild the country after WW2 led to a temporary loosening of immigration controls. To fill the skilled and unskilled gaps in the British workforce, workers were actively recruited from the British Commonwealth, and nowhere more so than from the West Indies. Job opportunities were not their only reason for coming. Many West Indians had seen active service during the war and had been stationed in Britain; they now wished to settle in what they had been educated to regard as ‘the Mother Country’.

Many of them settled in London, many in Notting Hill and Brixton. A significant number settled in Hackney. The descendants of these post-war immigrants represent a significant portion of the Hackney population today. The 2001 Census shows ‘Black Caribbean’ as the second largest ethnic minority group in Hackney, comprising just over 10% of the total population in the borough.

Bangladeshis

The first Bangladeshi migrants were merchant seamen of the British Empire, known as Lascars. They came in the 19th century from that part of India then known as East Bengal.

The next wave of migrant workers from Bangladesh came in the 1950s and 1960s as a result of political turmoil in the area. This had started in 1947 with the end of British India, when the largely Muslim East Bengal was called East Pakistan. Tensions culminated in a battle against West Pakistan, after which independence was achieved in 1971 with the creation of Bangladesh.

Many Bangladeshis, especially Sunni Muslims from rural Sylhet, migrated to London, in search of stability and work. There was a concentrated period of further Bangladeshi migration to London in the early 60s in a frantic attempt to gain entry before the proposed legislation, passed in 1962, would make this almost impossible. There was then a period of very steady secondary immigration, with dependants still arriving in the late 60s and early 70s.

Most of the first immigrants settled in the Whitechapel/Spitalfields quarters. Job opportunities were initially limited to low paid jobs in small factories and the textile trade, often taking over from the disappearing Jewish community. A close-knit community developed; a network of Bangladeshi restaurants, shops, businesses, banks and mosques became established in and around Brick Lane.

The Bangladeshi community has grown rapidly. Where, in 1991, the Census showed that Bangladeshis were 23% of the population of Tower Hamlets; in 2001 the figure had risen to 33%.

Update

The Jewish, Chinese and Irish working people, who settled in the 20th century, have largely left. Economic change and aspiration fuelled their upward mobility. The Bangladeshi working community currently dominates the Whitechapel/Spitalfields area, but at the time of writing there are some signs of mobility there as well.

In the latter part of the 20th century, one of the most significant waves of immigration into the East End came from Africa, to escape civil war and political uncertainty. It is estimated for example that about 10,000 Somalis are living in Tower Hamlets, building on a core community that came as seamen in the 19th century. There are many West Africans in Hackney, where 'Black African' was the largest ethnic minority group recorded in the 2001 census - 12% of the total.

Today the East End is being developed and to some extent gentrified, but it is still an area where many displaced people make their home.

4.3 History of East End Markets

Peter Ackroyd in his **London: The Biography** notes that *'the first markets were upon the streets. In fact it is possible to envisage the central axis of twelfth or thirteenth century London as one continuous street market from the Shambles at Newgate to Poultry by Cornhill'*. Some of the capital's 100 modern markets, mapped and reviewed recently by the London Assembly, continue to operate from the street. They are public places where a wide range of items, from fresh fruit and vegetables to household goods and clothes are sold by groups of traders. They are a key part of London's economy and a daily feature in many Londoners' lives. Most remain on the sites where they first flourished centuries ago. Markets have provided a focus for many communities that have populated the East End of London since the Middle Ages. At the beginning of the 20th century the population of the area was made up of the indigenous community as well as Irish, Chinese, Lascar and a large Jewish community of mainly East European origin. By this time the latter had put their mark on several of the markets in the area.

Brick Lane

Winding through fields, the street was formerly called Whitechapel Lane, but derives its current name from former brick and tile manufacture, using the local brick earth deposits, that began in the 15th century. By the 17th century, the street was being built up from the south. Successive waves of immigration began with Huguenot refugees spreading from Spitalfields, where the master weavers were based. They were followed by Irish, Ashkenazi Jews and, in the last century, Bangladeshis. The area became a centre for weaving, tailoring and the clothing industry, due to the abundance of semi- and unskilled immigrant labour.

In 1742, La Neuve Eglise, a Huguenot chapel, was built on the corner of Brick Lane and Fournier Street. By 1809, it had become The Jews' Chapel, for promoting Christianity to the expanding Jewish population, and became a Methodist Chapel in 1819 (John Wesley having preached his first covenant sermon at the nearby Black Eagle Street Chapel). In 1898, the building was consecrated as the Machzikei HaDath, or Spitalfields Great Synagogue. In 1976, it became the London Jamme Masjid mosque to serve the expanding Bangladeshi community. Brewing came to Brick Lane before 1680, with water drawn from deep wells. One brewer was Joseph Truman, who is first recorded in 1683, but his family, particularly Benjamin Truman, went on to establish the sizeable Black Eagle Brewery on Brick Lane.

The Brick Lane Market, developed in the 17th century for fruit and vegetables, sold outside the city. The Sunday market, like the ones on Petticoat Lane and nearby Columbia Road, dates from a dispensation given to the Jewish community.

Regeneration

In the 20th century the Brick Lane area was important in the second wave of development of Anglo-Indian cuisine, as families from countries such as Bangladesh (mainly the Greater Sylhet region) migrated to London to look for work. Some curry houses on Brick Lane will not sell alcohol as they are mostly run by Muslims. More recently the area has also broadened to being a vibrant art and fashion student area, with considerable exhibition space. Each year most of the fine art and fashion courses exhibit their work near Brick Lane.

Since the late 1990s, Brick Lane has been the site of several of the city's best known night clubs, notably 93 Feet East and The Vibe Bar. Both are built on the site of The Old Truman Brewery, once the industrial centre of the area and now an office and entertainment complex. In her book about Brick Lane, Rachel Lichtenstein suggests *"Brick Lane is transforming itself for its next phase . . . During the last ten years the market has shrunk dramatically. Former bombsites where the market once spread have now been built upon. In a few years it may not be there at all."*

Petticoat Lane

The East London History website points out that *"visiting tourists looking for the East End's most famous market could be forgiven for being confused. In fact, you will sometimes see them outside Aldgate East station, or at the foot of Middlesex Street, scratching their heads as they pore over their A to Zs. Because, of course, there is no such street as Petticoat Lane – and nor has there been for around 170 years"*.

Hog's Lane

Back in medieval times, Middlesex Street, the hub of the modern-day Lane, was a pleasant, tree-lined country road called Hog's Lane – probably because it was used as a path to drive pigs from the nearby fields to market. As early as 1590, its rural nature was changing, and Hog's Lane meandered through a residential suburb of tidy country cottages, nestling outside the City walls. Only a few years later, in 1608, it had changed again, to a commercial district. A map of the time shows the Lane was now being referred to as 'Peticote Lane', named after the used garment vendors who plied their trade there.

It was still considered a fashionable address in the country, and during the reign of James I. The Spaniards who came to the English court settled here. But like so much of London, the Great Plague of 1665 altered Petticoat Lane forever. The rich fled the dangers of London, and property prices plummeted. As so often in Spitalfields, a new wave of immigrants replaced the old. This time it was Huguenot and Jewish weavers, carrying on the tradition of garment workers in the area. It is astonishing to think that this thread of tradition is unbroken – though the faces, clothes, names and nationalities of immigrants have changed – more than 300 years later.

The market was always unpopular with the authorities, being largely unregulated and in some senses, illegal. As recently as the 1930s, police cars and fire engines were driven down The Lane, with alarm bells ringing, to disrupt the market. The rights of the market were only finally protected by Act of Parliament in 1936. As late as the 1990s, if Christmas Day fell on a Sunday, many of the local Jewish traders would assert their right to open on a Sunday. The market remains busy and vibrant, reflecting both its immigrant history and its continuing popularity with locals and tourists. 'The Lane' was always renowned for the 'patter' and showmanship of the market traders. Some, selling crockery, would pile an entire setting onto a large plate, and then send the lot high into the air, catching the construction of crockery on its way down. This was to demonstrate the skill of the vendor, and the robustness of the porcelain.

The prominent businessman, Alan Sugar (of the BBC's **The Apprentice** fame) got his start as a stallholder, in this market.

Hessel Street

Hessel Street, which became the site of the East End's main Jewish market, opened every day except Saturdays. The narrow street was filled with small shops and stalls. Many of them were wet fish stalls. Chickens and other poultry were kept in cages. Buyers selected one, which was killed according to kosher ritual and dressed while they shopped elsewhere. There were also general shops, with pans and kettles hanging on strings, and bookmakers.

It was declining in importance in the late 1950s, especially as Bangladeshi people were moving into the area. The market came to an end in 1961, as much of the street was demolished to make way for new blocks of flats. It is sad to note that parts of it still remain derelict today.

One of the team grew up in Hessel Street and remembers it when it was a thriving market. She was also able to identify some of the people that were featured in **The Vanishing Street**. Here are some of her memories of that time.

*"I am Fremet Riedel. I was brought up in the East End. I'm first generation English, my mother came from Lithuania and my father from Poland. We have been looking at East End markets on the Mediatheque and I had forgotten completely most of the things, but seeing **The Vanishing Street** brought back lots and lots of memories and new memories are still coming.*

When I saw the film there were three people I immediately recognised. There was the butcher Issie Robotkin, and he was a man for the ladies. He was always an old man and used to pinch their bottoms when people weren't looking. Then there was Jinny, the lady selling the chickens and thirdly there was somebody called Tilly and she had the sweet shop in Amazon Street, just round the corner to Hessel Street.

I didn't like going to the market. My mother used to meet all her friends there. And at first I used to be in the pushchair as a small child and I can remember the bakers Kossoff used to give me a biscuit. But that didn't really keep me happy. My mother talked and talked for hours. She met all her friends, it was the height of the social life. She didn't meet people otherwise - and I used to get pretty fed up.

That was the first market. The second market was Petticoat Lane when I was in my early teens my friends and I were a bit bored on a Sunday morning, one of us would say: lets go down Petticoat Lane. We liked listening to the auctioneers - they were great actors and they told lots of jokes. We never bought anything - we were sure everyone was getting fiddled down there. But it was good fun and a good hour's entertainment. Also down the far end of the market they sold little animals and we liked to see the puppies and the kittens and the rabbits - and it was generally good fun.

The third market I know about is Spitalfields. I walked through the market square every day as I went to and from school and sometimes I can remember the mornings one of them would say - here love, here is a nice juicy peach, have it for your lunch. Also I remember the cabbages coming over the wall when we were playing netball in the garden in the school playground. I think we looked a bit odd wearing our green knickers and the men used to stand outside on their lorries and laugh at us. We were very embarrassed - we didn't like that at all.

*The other interesting thing I found doing this project is that in the film *The Lanes* we saw the artists in Spitalfields going out to the schools to teach the children art. We as children at the Central Foundation School were taken out into the market for art lessons because it was such a lively place and so much action and we had to sketch out there and go in and paint what we had seen.*

*I remember the filming of **The Vanishing Street** - in fact I didn't know what it was called. But when I came home from work one day my mother said they were filming in the market I said - filming who? and she said - I think Jinny, the lady with the chickens, dunno why."*

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