



Our Stories of

Newington Green



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DANCE SPACE

 heritage
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LOTTERY FUNDED

The background image shows a park scene with several large, leafless trees in the foreground and a brick building in the background. The building has a gabled roof and a red door. A person is walking on a path in the foreground, and several pigeons are on the grass. A green banner is overlaid at the top of the image.

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About

NEWINGTON DANCE SPACE IS A COMMUNITY ORGANISATION BASED IN STOKE NEWINGTON. IN 2015 WE RECEIVED A GRANT FROM THE HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND TO SUPPORT OUR PROJECT: "OUR STORIES OF NEWINGTON GREEN". DURING THE PROJECT WE RAN STORYTELLING WORKSHOPS FOR LOCAL OLDER PEOPLE. WE ALSO SPOKE WITH THE LOCAL RESIDENTS AND COLLECTED SOME OF THEIR MANY STORIES OF NEWINGTON GREEN. HERE ARE SOME OF THOSE MEMORIES.



A Lot of Fog and Smoke

50'S AND 60'S

I've been in this area since 1956. I come from Barbados and when I arrived I thought there is a lot of fog and smoke here. I remember lots of skinheads in London, more in west London than here.

In 50's it was full of teddy boys here, you know lots of swagger and greasy hair.

It wasn't much of a family here at Newington Green. There were lots of single guys like me in 50's. I lived at Poet's Road over thirty years. The house was comfortable, one bedroom flat, had hot water, own toilet and bath and everything.

I worked in Middlesex hospital for 14 years and then I went into force and worked there for many years until I retired.

All my memories are fun memories, because I never had any troubles with anybody.

It's a very strong community here, but you still get that feeling sometimes... Well, I won't tell you what feeling.

I know a lot of people here- other shopkeepers, customers, people living in the area. It's a nice feeling of being able to recognise your local area.



Street Festivals

70'S AND 80'S

Newington Green used to be an alternative area.

My neighbor at Beresford Road was an old lady who worked in circus and musicals. I think her name was Mary Brett?

When she was 80 years old, she very famously rode a horse in a body stocking at Newington Green festival.

There used to be lots of festivals and street things going on in 70's

People used to take things for granted. We used to have 3 days street festivals funded by local authorities with lots of live music.

Local authorities provided funding and there were lots of grassroots grants.



People's Republic of Islington

Talking about 70's and 80's at Newington Green; we are talking about The People's Republic of Islington days. They called us 'loony left'.

It was famous with lots of scandals, for example there were claims about some grants towards lesbian self-defence classes etc.

Islington used to be a really bad borough at that time with lots of housing problems. But the whole community was very supportive; it was a lot easier to know people back then.

Left Wing and Socialist Bookshops

When I was living at Newington Green we had lots of left wing socialist bookshops and anarchist cafes on Upper Street. I was also helping out in a vegan anarchist café. My favourite alternative bookshops were Sisterwrite, first British feminist bookshop and Red & Roses. It was part of the whole cultural scene in the 70's. It was actually good to spend your day like this: drift through left wing bookshop, do a poetry reading, catch a punk band, walk home, cook something late. It was great! It was really great fun!





A Place to Enjoy all the Things Happening in Islington

I was incredibly happy and excited to be living in the area as a teenager in the 80's. Newington Green was a place to enjoy all the things happening in Islington

It used to be a bit postcode, but it wasn't dangerous.

There were lot of bands.

I was squatting, and it seemed compulsory to have a drummer in the basement.

Every night I would go out to a gig and have a free ticket.

I didn't have to go far, I would stay in the area- Islington, Camden, Hampstead Heath, Tottenham Marshes.

My teens were about going out, with a bunch of friends, with a bag of weed and a bag of chips.

I got a motorbike when I was 18. I was lucky to be part of that generation. Things like seeing Madness playing at Camden, they were local lads.

There were lots of well known musicians living in the area in the 80's.

Once there was a party in one of the local squats and Annie Lenox and Dave Stewart turned up there.

It was a really interesting time to be young!

SHOE REPAIRS

A Place to Run to...

60'S AND 70'S

I moved here from Cyprus in 1963. Back home there was a war, London was somewhere to run to. We had to pack up and leave. I was 10 years old and I came with my parents, two brothers and three sisters.

We moved to Clissold Crescent, two bedroom place. It was all right for us, we were all kids. Me and my brother used to go to the small park behind there, he was 8 I was 10 and we would play football there, people would shout at us. The area was very quiet, hardly any cars, we also played football on the roads.

One of my earliest memories is walking down Winston Road on the way from our house to a barber, looking at those houses, I was so envious. They looked so immaculate, so clean, so quiet. And I came up to Green Lanes, had my hair cut and went back home.

It was very strong Turkish Cypriots community in the area, but we integrated really well. I went to the Grasmere primary school; from there to Clissold Park School; it changed name to Stoke Newington School now.

32 years ago I got this shoe repair shop; my father opened it. He originally used to be a shoemaker back in Cyprus; but here he started as a shoe repairer. If anybody wanted shoes, he would've made them, but i don't think in those days anybody wanted handmade shoes. My father is still alive. He is 82 years olds, and he still comes here to tell me what to to.

Childhood Memories

I remember turning again and again into the side streets to come to the High Street for Saturday morning pictures, there used to be three or four cinemas there. Rio is still there, but we used to have ABC and Odeon further up the street. I used to go with my younger brother, one and a half years younger than me.

I used to like the buses, i'd get on the buses just to travel on buses. I've forgotten how much they were. Even for kids they used to take money, not like today. In those days you had to pay.

My uncle had a transport caf at the bottom of Newington Green Rd and he used to do breakfast and so on you know, I was 13 -14 when he used to call on a Sunday and say "come down and help me wash these chair and tables" I used to go there as a boy and wash them down. Sometimes when I didn't have school he would call me and I would help him out.

This Newington Green Park you couldn't go in it because the bushes were so high and so dense. It was a different type of park, you'd be scared to go in it. They used to have toilets along there and I'd be scared to go down, you would go underneath.

It was very dangerous when I was young; lots of drug addicts and prostitutes over there. You had the four gates on each corner of the park, it wasn't in the middle like it is now, and the set up on the inside was like the old Victorian system. I don't know if you understand but it wasn't practical, the park wasn't practical, you couldn't sit down with people and have a chat. Kids getting drunk, prostitution, drug addicts. I never went in, I went in once, actually through it.

There used to be three butchers, all shut down. When I was a boy one of the butchers used to do a roaring trade, I mean there always used to be a big queue. Three people working in it. Why they shut down I don't know. The second one shut down a few years later and they turned it into a house; and the last one, next to the pub closed about 8 years ago. There used to be a photographer in the building where is now the ladies hairdresser. I don't think he did any work, he was an old man. The betting shop shut down and Midland bank shut down and that used to be a bank (corner of Albion rd and Newington Green).



A Run Down Place

I've been in this area for 25 years, running a shop. Since I've been here the area hasn't changed much. Except the buildings, for example there used to be a BT warehouse, they knocked it down and built a surgery and flats.

They've done improvements to the green, it wasn't looked after. It used to be a drunks dump, they used to sit there drinking beer all the time. The grass was so tall, you couldn't see what is inside. A lot of shops down the Green Lanes used to be cafs, gambling cafs Turkish owned. They used to be about six seven of them, but now we only have one left. They were full of older people normally, passing time, drinking tea, playing cards the whole day.

Student accommodation wasn't there before, it used to be a petrol station.

Now we have students home and Tesco underneath. It improved the area, we have new people, students, lots of new customers.

GIRLS

Education

LITTLE SAUSAGES 70'S

My daughter went to the small school off the Petherton Road, its still the same. It used to be like a prefab, they never put any money into it. The deputy headmistress was a punk, and everybody was a bit put out, pink hair, really great woman. Really lovely teachers actually, they were smaller groups 15 to 18 in a class, and she (the deputy headmistress) used to call them her little sausages "Come on then little sausages", not alright if you were vegan. We'd never heard the word vegan then either.

EAT YOUR GREENS 60's

I went to Grasmere school, its an experience, I loved it there. When I look at the other schools Grasmere was sort of compact. You have the upstairs and the downstairs and then you have the halls. On one side of the playground is the infants playground and in the front used to be the juniors playground. When my brother would be playing on the other side of the entrance I used to go and look after him, and there used to be a teacher who used to come to me and say "what are you doing on this side? Go to the other side!"

Mr Tuffin I remember, big teacher Mr Tuffin, a lovely man, a very nice teacher.

I didn't like my greens but I was forced to eat them, that was the bad thing about the school, there was a bad teacher there, she used to try to force us to eat it, she used to say you're not going into the playground until you eat it, I forced myself a few times!

1976

I was living in a one parent family house, for single parents in Arundel Square at Highbury and Islington. When I moved in from the upstairs flat to the downstairs flat, I found a piece of paper, and it said New Islington and Hackney Housing Association. I didn't know who they were or what they were, but I kept it and I kept it and I kept it for years. Then there was a snowy year and the walls in the house started to crack, so we had to move. The council said would you like a place? Well, we've got a place for you with New Islington and Hackney Housing, and I still had the same bit of paper, and they were the same people who came and asked me if I wanted a place.

I went from there and I saw 3 places, one was a tiny little flat upstairs, narrow pavement, no good for baby, this was in '76. Then they showed me to this place I've got now, this huge place, but nobody wanted to take it because it wasn't near a bus stop, and the buses didn't go past, and it wasn't near enough to the tube station and people didn't want to walk. So I didn't go back with the keys, I said I'll take it. No furniture, no cooker, no covering for the floor, but I said it's fine, I don't need to give you the keys back, I'll move in. The electricity wasn't even turned on, and 2 weeks later I moved in with a few pairs of shoes and a bed, we slept in the corner of the room.

And I'd never been down here (Church Street) never, till about 15 years later, more than 20 years ago now, and it was all car spaces, no restrictions and its gradually got more busy. It's like cotton before the reel, and now it's on a reel and it's all just getting tighter and tighter round the cotton reel.

So yeah I'm on Green Lanes (near Clissold Park), it's always been Turkish. Green Lanes was safe cus everybody sort of knew each other and if anybody interferes with someone else's business the Turks would come out with their big knives. If anybody was bugging a kid they'd come out with their knives. I remember seeing a guy once, somebody stuffing somebody in a trunk of a car and these Turkish guys came out and said, "what are you doing, who's that?" So it was a community, I've always felt safe, people don't like those areas but I always felt safe.

Newington Green had nothing, it was just a bit of green, there was a men's toilet on the green and I don't even think there was a woman's, just a men's. It should have been the other way round. No cafes, it wasn't very nice down there at all, nothing going on.

A Car Is a Necessity

I've been here for 30 years. The shop was for sale, so I decided to give it a go. It's been a car spares shop for at least 60 years. I bought it from Mr Kabai, he left because he had a garage elsewhere. Across the road there used to be a petrol station and a well known garage. They were our very good customers, two brothers who owned it. It was a very popular garage, and one of the owners, his name was Dino was also very popular guy in the area. He used to buy a lot of parts from us. At the end of each week he was paying, and the next week he would send his mechanics to buy more parts and go and fix the cars. He was very good, paying every week, never said a complaint. They sold the property for couple of millions. Dino's done a very good investment in buying a property, and he doesn't have to get his hands dirty from the oil anymore.

It was good for us to have all the mechanics around here, coming to get the parts. But lately, last five years, we have these problems with resident parking, people don't come down and we lost a lot of customers. It used to be very very busy in our shop before. In old times, when Dino sent his mechanics, he used to ring me up: 'Are you holding my boys like hostages?' Because I couldn't find their bits straight away, as I had other people in front of them. At the same time, it was very stressful for us. If it was them days now, I couldn't handle it. I am old now, I can't do it. I don't think I will stay longer, the lease is coming for renew and i don't think I will renew it. We've been long enough here, everything has an end.

My wife thinks I deserve a medal from the queen for helping the community (laughing). I know a lot of people in the area, and many times I don't charge them when I go out and help them. A car is a necessity nowadays really; and I help to fix everybody's cars round here; well I supply the parts, and I give them advice where to go.

This is a great way how to know local people, because they come down and ask for help. We've got lots of regulars that we know by face, some by name, and we get on with everybody really.





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