

# THE ELEPHANT

MAGAZINE

Issue 16 / Autumn 2019



## THIS ISSUE

### HOUSE OF MAGIC

Is this mysterious world of illusion Elephant and Castle's best kept secret?

### LOW LINE

Get the lowdown on the Low Line: the new walking route alongside Southwark's railway arches

### BE ENRICHED

The Elephant canteen that's connecting communities through cooking

# THIS IS THE ELEPHANT

And this is the Elephant Magazine.

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



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**Photography from left to right:**  
Kate and Mary, Drawing Room; university buildings; Imperial War Museum; East Street sign; School of Historical Dress; Cinema Museum sign; pizza, Golazio; Emily, Hotel Elephant; young dancer, Superarts; Carnaval del Pueblo; breakfast, Louie Louie; worker, Elephant and Castle pub; Beehive pub; Castle Centre; Stephen, LSBU graduate; Mercato Metropolitano; London College of Communication; Castle Centre sign; St Mary's Churchyard Park; elephant statue

# WELCOME TO

# SAYER STREET

*Sayer Street is a newly-opened retail street connecting Elephant Park to Walworth Square.*

Receiving both the name and the route of an old Elephant and Castle thoroughfare (demolished after the war) Sayer Street is set to become London's newest neighbourhood destination.

Following the opening of the street's first business – the beauticians, Dima Beautiful – earlier this year,

Sayer Street will see a whole range of new independent restaurants and bars opening this autumn.

They will be joined by long-established Elephant and Castle favourite, Mercato Metropolitan, who are set to open their first MM Factory on Walworth Square in November.

## THE TAP IN

A brand-new bar concept from the founders of Six Yard Box and Hop Art. The Tap In will be a place for visitors to enjoy some of the best craft beers in south London. Its extensive range of drinks, including locally brewed specialities, can be enjoyed onsite, or bought to drink later from the bar's bottle shop. The Tap In will also feature a Latin American-inspired food offering, provided by Cubana, who will be taking the first kitchen residency at the bar.

## TASTY JERK

Former Artworks Elephant tenant, Tasty Jerk, will bring an authentic taste of the Caribbean to Sayer Street when it opens in November. They'll be serving a range of Jamaican favourites including jerk chicken, curry goat, and ackee & saltfish. Jamaican national, Rayon Johnson, together with his wife Linda, will combine his grandmother's traditional recipes with his own creative flair and use locally-sourced ingredients from East Street Market together with imported items from the Caribbean.

## POT & RICE

Fusion pan-Asian restaurant, Pot & Rice, will serve rice pot selections, rice pastry (cheung fun), mochi, yuzu cheesecake, fruit tea, bubble tea and milk tea; bringing modern Asian food cultures together under one roof.

## BEZA

Traditional Ethiopian restaurant, Beza, has evolved its much-loved concept to become exclusively vegan, and will bring an exotic range of unique and inspiring dishes to Sayer Street when it opens in early September. Starting off at Camden Market in 2006, Beza moved to Elephant and Castle in 2016 to take space at Artworks Elephant and has attracted a strong local following.

## KOI RAMEN

This Japanese ramen noodle bar, which currently has sites in Brixton and Tooting, specialises in tonkotsu ramen – a rich and creamy pork soup noodle from the southern regions of Japan. Diners will also be able to enjoy three other ramen specialities, including a vegan miso with fried tofu, shredded carrot and spring onion, as well as three types of gyoza. Koi Ramen's drinks offer continues the Japanese theme, with a selection of Japanese beers, whisky and sake available.

For more information visit [elephantpark.co.uk](http://elephantpark.co.uk)



### KRISTY LANSDOWN, PROJECT DIRECTOR OF ELEPHANT PARK, LENDLEASE

"We're keen that our mix of retailers meets the needs of visitors and locals alike, as we continue to deliver on our commitments for providing affordable spaces for local businesses, whilst working with our partners to create much needed jobs.

These young, local, independent brands are all bringing something different and special to Sayer Street, and contribute to Elephant Park's evolution as one of London's most exciting mixed-use destinations.

We're looking forward to announcing more new retailers and operators over the coming months, ahead of Mercato Metropolitan and others opening in the autumn."



### SEBASTIAN O'DRISCOLL, CO-FOUNDER OF THE TAP IN

"We are so excited to combine our two proven concepts to create The Tap In and will soon open a brand-new site at Elephant Park. The Artworks provided the perfect platform for us to trial Six Yard Box and then launch Hop Art to develop our brand. For myself and my two partners, Eoin and Harry, Elephant and Castle is home and we're grateful that Lendlease recognised how important being a part of this local community is for our growing brand."

POT & RICE



THE TAP IN



TASTY JERK

# Simon Drake's House of Magic

“ A bit of  
escapism  
that doesn't  
take itself  
too seriously

»»

If one dark autumn evening you think you hear the distant howl of wolves near Elephant and Castle, it's just possible you've stumbled across one of London's best kept secrets: Simon Drake's House of Magic.

“Walking past, you'd never guess what lies behind these doors” says Simon Drake, stood outside his magical home and party venue.

The renowned magician and entertainer has hosted theatrical parties at this secret address, in a quiet Southwark backstreet, for more than 20 years.

“From the outside it looks quite modest, but inside it's massive” says the illusionist who first rose to fame with his cult 90's TV show *The Secret Cabaret*. Simon bought the building, a 200 year-old former pub, in 1995 and immediately set about restoring the venue to its former glory.

“I originally bought it simply as somewhere to live” he recalls. “It was in quite a state and we had to remove more than 20 skips of rubbish before we could even start on the building work. Then we gradually returned the pub to how it would have looked in more glamorous times.”

“After *The Secret Cabaret* I did an American TV Special called *Raising Hell*” Simon explains. “Iron Maiden was the house band and this led to a big tour. But after a while I just got fed up with TV. I wanted to do my own thing, instead. So I decided to revive this beautiful building and start hosting my own, unique magic events.”

Simon Drake's fledgling House of Magic soon took flight and, ever since, Simon has held monthly parties for up to 150 people at a time. Some are private events while others are open to the public. Either way, the exact location is only revealed to the participants once they've received their tickets.

Guests arrive at the house via an eerily lit Enchanted Garden, where they're greeted by the sound of howling wolves. On entering what appears to be a gothic mansion they find themselves surrounded by all manner of creepy

curios, mystical props and mechanical automata (many of which are built by Simon himself). Most of the parties are a six-hour experience and they include dinner (with entertainment from roaming magicians) and a musical comedy act followed by Simon's Magical Extravaganza. There are also tours of The Haunted Cellar, created with the help of friends in the movie industry, which Simon describes as a “Mickey-take of things like the London Dungeon.”

Simon began performing when he was a small child. “I had hearing problems when I was younger and I was late speaking so I used to express myself visually instead” he reveals. “I liked to clown around, a bit like Buster Keaton or Charlie Chaplin. Today, I end my shows with a dancing cane routine that I actually began when I was eight years old.”

Simon went on to perform at Royal Variety shows at the London Palladium and worked as a magic consultant on music, theatre, TV and film productions. He co-devised the visuals for Kate Bush's 1979 *Tour of Life* and even played several of the characters featured in the show. He was magic and effects supervisor for the West End production, *The Witches of Eastwick*, and he taught Oliver Reed sleight-of-hand for the film *Castaway*. “Reed had a reputation as something of a hell-raiser, himself, but he was actually a gentleman and a kind, lovely man” says Simon.

The House of Magic attracts visitors from far and wide. “Because my TV show was shown all over the world, people regularly visit from other countries” Simon explains. “We've had guests from Germany, Norway and Holland and we once had an American who brought 40 people with him – all the way from Boston.”

With its sumptuous red velvet interiors and cabaret style

entertainment, the House of Magic has an air of decadence that's proved popular with the music industry. Past visitors include Kate Bush, Eric Clapton, Annie Lennox, Lady Gaga and Katy Perry. “Katy Perry had an X-Factor after-party here and posed for selfies with the staff at the end of the night which was lovely of her” says Simon. “Celebrities seem to like it. It's hidden away and they don't get flash bulbs in their faces all the time.”

Despite a sprinkling of stardust, Simon says his House of Magic is actually rooted very much in family and the local community.

“We're everything the West End isn't” he says. “It's a bit of escapism and friendly fun that doesn't take itself too seriously. I've got an eight-year-old daughter and an 11-year-old stepson and they love it. They don't stay around for the shows but they're often here at the beginning. We've also got a small magic shop and my daughter loves showing magic tricks to the customers.”

“My wife, Abby, plays a spoof lascivious vampire in The Haunted Cellar and many of the bar and waiting staff are mums from our kids' school” he adds. “We like to employ local people and we do discounts for local businesses that want to book parties at Christmas – although they have to book early as it's our busiest time of the year.”

The House of Magic is also becoming popular with couples looking for somewhere a little bit different to get married. “If you want a posh hotel with seat covers on the chairs, then we're probably not for you” Simon chuckles, “but if you want a venue where you can sit back and watch while your best man has his head chopped off – then get in touch.”

# A NEW COMMUNITY HUB FOR ELEPHANT AND CASTLE

A new, temporary Community Hub has opened in the shopping centre offering free wellness activities, fitness classes, arts and crafts workshops and much more.

Elephant and Castle Town Centre opened the new Community Hub in the shopping centre in June.

Open Monday to Friday, the Hub provides free wellness activities, fitness classes and arts and crafts workshops for all ages. Classes range from Afrobeats dance, chair yoga and over 60s cheerleading, to upcycling classes,

meditation sessions and salsa lessons – plus much more.

Since the Hub's launch, the classes have been well attended, with local people enjoying the opportunity to learn new skills whilst making friends and keeping active.

The activities are aimed at encouraging people of all ages to get

together and have fun. The over 60s cheerleading and the positive aging social club are particularly popular, with many new visitors taking it up each week.

See the website for the full details of all the activities and when they're happening.



Eddie, Silverfit  
(activities for older people)

"We're living longer and it's clear that more of us are intending to stay active and enjoy the extra time we have as the years go on. The Community Hub has helped in getting these free activities for older people off the ground, and we hope that local people continue to visit and enjoy the sessions."



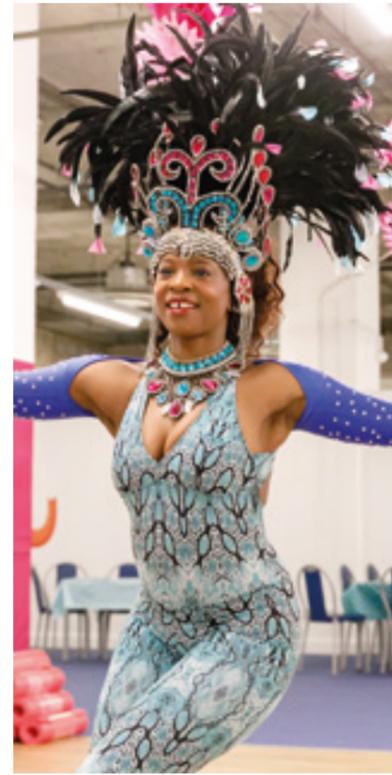
Krystal, Afrobeatz dance instructor

"I'm excited to be part of such a great movement; helping all ages and all different abilities get a taste of professional classes – and all for free. Teaching dance for the Community Hub has pushed me to work deeper in the community. Come together and great things will happen!"



Diana, Community Director,  
Elephant and Castle Town Centre

"The Community Hub provides the perfect space to bring people together through a variety of free activities for all. The Hub is already being used for some great initiatives and we invite other organisations to get in touch if they'd like to hold an activity here and be part of the timetable. We look forward to welcoming as many people from the community as possible."



Elephant and Castle Community Hub  
Unit 227-230 (opposite Jenny's Burgers)  
First floor, Elephant and Castle  
Shopping Centre, SE1 6TB

[www.elephantandcastle.org.uk/  
communityhub](http://www.elephantandcastle.org.uk/communityhub)  
FB: @whatsonatelephant

# TWO NEW COMMUNITY SPACES FOR WALWORTH

Southwark Council wants your thoughts on two new community spaces for Walworth – how they should be used and what your group could use them for.



## COMMUNITY SPACE AT WALWORTH TOWN HALL

Having been damaged in a fire in 2013, Walworth Town Hall and the library next door was put out of action. Earlier this year, General Projects was selected by Southwark Council to restore the buildings and bring them back into use.

As part of this work, a new community space will be created in the former library. The space will be used for a wide range of community events and activities.

Over the summer, General Projects engaged with more than 300 people in Walworth on how the new space could be used. In particular, the team tried to give a voice to local people who weren't familiar with the project by using the council's specially trained Southwark Young Advisors to conduct the interviews.

The first phase of face-to-face consultation is now complete but you can still feedback your initial ideas and opinions online.

Find out more about the project at  
[www.walworthtownhall.com](http://www.walworthtownhall.com)  
Take part in the consultation at  
[www.surveymonkey.com/r/WTH\\_Engagement](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WTH_Engagement) until 31 October.



## LIBRARY AND HERITAGE CENTRE

AOC architects have been appointed to develop designs for a new library and heritage centre, which will open near the town hall at 145-147 Walworth Road.

The new facility will include a Southwark heritage centre, which tells the story of Southwark alongside a new library. It will run a rolling programme of temporary exhibitions with space to display items from the borough's heritage collection. There will also be a programme of community activities.

AOC designed the popular Wellcome Reading Room in Euston, as well as many other projects that demonstrate a flair for really getting to grips with the needs of local communities. At the time of going to print, an update was planned for the September multi-ward forum (run by local councillors) and local residents were to get a first chance to visit the site as part of the Elephant Says Hi Street Party.

You can find out more and contribute your own thoughts on designs for the new centre – and how it might be used – at a 'Chalk & Talk' event on 24 September, 145-147 Walworth Road, 3 to 8pm. And, remember, the new centre will need a proper name; so if you've got a good suggestion, email [WL&SHC@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:WL&SHC@southwark.gov.uk)

Find out more about the project at  
[www.southwark.gov.uk/WL&SHC](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/WL&SHC)

# THE ELEPHANT CANTEEN THAT'S ENRICHING OUR COMMUNITY



*Every Monday at the Castle Canteen, local people get together for a freshly cooked vegetarian lunch made with surplus fruit and veg from nearby Borough Market.*

At brightly coloured tables, in the Crossway Christian Centre hall, dozens of people are chatting over a three-course meal that has been cooked by a team of volunteers from community charity, Be Enriched.

Everyone has already enjoyed a Mexican-style vegetable soup. Now they're tucking into vegetable curry with fragrant rice, cauliflower and celeriac salad.

In the kitchen next door, the volunteer chefs are putting the finishing touches to today's dessert of homemade lemon meringue pies with a selection of stewed fruits. There's an audible "mmm" around the room as the puddings are brought in.

"Food is such a great way to bring people together" explains Lily Walpole from Be Enriched, which also runs community canteens in Battersea and Tooting.

The charity launched the Castle Canteen in 2016 and everyone, including students, can enjoy a delicious hot meal for a suggested donation of just £1.

"It's for anyone who needs a nice nourishing meal and a chat" says Lily. "Maybe they're not able to cook for themselves or perhaps they feel a bit isolated. Whatever the reason, people come together from all backgrounds and enjoy a delicious lunch; all cooked with food that would otherwise have gone to waste."

The fruit and veg for the Castle Canteen comes from Ted's Veg, a family farm in Lincolnshire which sells produce at Borough Market. They put aside any non-saleable but edible produce for charities to take. Every

Monday morning, the Be Enriched volunteers arrive to see what's available.

"We never know what we'll get. It's always different" says Lily. "We bring it all back here and then lay it out on the tables so that our chefs can work out a menu for the day. Once that's decided, everyone gets to work and prepares the food."

They also have a collecting box at Sainsbury's on Walworth Road. "Again, we never know what we'll find until we visit but people often give biscuits, so we'll serve those with a cup of tea when people first arrive."

The charity uses the money from donations to buy any basics they need such as flour, rice and eggs. The meals are all vegetarian although they do cook some special Christmas lunches during December, usually with turkey provided by a local butcher.

"The project's been running for a while, so lots of people have already got to know each other. But there are always a few new faces" explains Lily.

Mark is here for the first time with a friend after seeing the Castle Canteen mentioned on a local website. He particularly likes the idea of eating food that would otherwise go to waste.

For single mother of two, Bridie, it's a great way to give her teenage daughters a good, cheap, healthy meal during the school holidays.

Martin, a retired musician, is a regular visitor and enjoys chatting to people he might otherwise never have met.

Maria stresses what a tremendous help it is for people on benefits to have access to good healthy food. She says that when her benefits were stopped recently, Be Enriched provided a lifeline.

Volunteers often sign up via the Be Enriched website or from Team London (Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan's volunteering programme). Companies also send groups of volunteers on charity days.

"We have about half a dozen volunteers every week and we're always looking for more" says Lily.

The current lead chef is Ruth Weldon who has recently been cooking on a retreat in Ibiza. "It's a great project and it's lovely to do something that's so entrenched in the community" she says.

Peter Brazier, who has been volunteering for about six months, is in charge of desserts. "I'm retired and was looking online for volunteering opportunities. This is perfect, as I love cooking and puddings are a passion. I recently made a Bakewell tart that was very popular and we did a cream tea the other day with scones and strawberries."

In keeping with the ethos of the project, as the meal comes to end, any leftovers are shared.

"People bring their own tupperware or we have some containers they can take away. Nothing is ever wasted" says Lily.

*The Castle Canteen  
Crossway Christian Centre,  
18 Hampton Street, SE1 6SL  
Monday 12.30pm-2.30pm  
07397 288160*

*[www.be-enriched.org.uk](http://www.be-enriched.org.uk)  
Insta: @be.enriched  
Twitter: @be\_enriched*

# DRAPER TOGETHER

*Local charity, Draper Together runs a packed programme of activities and events on the Draper estate and they're not just for residents.*

“Draper Hall was built for the local community in the mid 70s but lots of people don't realise it's here as we're a bit hidden away” says Luisa Pretolani, Director of Draper Together. “Although – once they find us – they come back again and again.”

The 80 seat hall (accessed via a gate near the junction of Hampton Street and Newington Butts) was fully refurbished in 2015.

It hosts everything from film screenings, theatre shows and history talks to weekly children's activities and monthly Sunday family shows with a meal included.

“I'm Italian – we like to feed people's stomachs as well as their minds” smiles Luisa, who has lived on the Draper estate for a decade and is passionate about fostering a sense of community.

The estate has always had a tenants and residents association but in 2016 they decided to do more to bring neighbours together, from the estate and beyond, by setting up a charity too.

“There's only so much you can do as a TRA” explains Luisa, “creating the Draper Together charity has enabled us to do lots more. Some of our activities are just for residents but most (90 per cent) are open to the general public.”

“Our theatre director, Stefania Bochicchio is a strong believer in the power of the arts to bring people together. Every year she goes to

Edinburgh and finds amazing five star shows to bring to the estate.”

Previous shows have included an immersive version of *Hamlet* by Brite Theater, where members of the audience were involved as players, and the London premiere of *Maupin*, a new play about a 12th century opera singer by Margo MacDonald.

Keep an eye on their website for news of upcoming shows.

Draper Together's events programme also includes screenings by North African film club, Maghreb Ciné, and recent talks have included such topics as gentrification and ancient African history by the collective Black History Walks.

Five years ago, Luisa helped set up the Draper Film and Music Academy for local children aged 7 to 12.

“We wanted to involve children in what we do. As I'm a filmmaker, it seemed like a good way to go about it. We write songs and develop choreography and animation and are currently working on a short musical for Black History Month in October.”

The children also have an ongoing documentary series in which they interview residents with help from professional filmmakers and photographers. “It's a great way for everyone to learn about each other” says Luisa.

Sporting Draper sessions take place on Thursday afternoons which gives children (under 10) the chance to have a go at different sports and activities in the sports ground next to Draper House. The sessions are free for residents, £4 for non-residents.

Due to restart soon on Saturday mornings, is the Digital Draper programme which provides adults

with computer lessons and has a crèche so parents can study while their children are looked after.

The hall is also available to hire for birthdays, weddings auditions, rehearsals and company workshops etc.

“I had my wedding reception here five years ago. It's a great space and very welcoming” says Luisa. “There's an outdoor area too and Hugh our volunteer gardener always makes sure it looks lovely” she adds.

Since Draper Together was set up, Luisa says she can see a marked difference in how people feel about where they live.

“Things have definitely changed for the better. There's a real buzz about what we're doing and everyone is getting more involved.”

«

*It's a great way for everyone to learn about each other*

»

Draper Hall  
Hampton Street,  
At the junction with  
Newington Butts  
SE17 3AN  
[www.drapertogether.org](http://www.drapertogether.org)

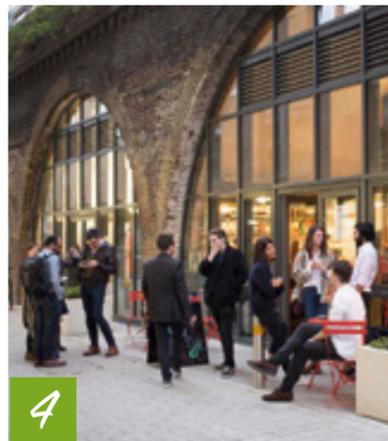
Luisa Pretolani



*The Low Line is a new walking route for London. It runs alongside the mighty Victorian railway viaducts from Bankside and London Bridge through to Bermondsey and Elephant and Castle.*

Slowly but surely, the new route is being pieced together, opening up new pathways for pedestrians; creating exciting new destinations and breathing new life into the railway's arches.

The first contemporary sections of the Low Line opened in 2016 at Old Union Yard Arches and Flat Iron Square – linking these new foodie venues to established Low Line destinations such as Borough and Maltby Street markets. These were swiftly followed by a number of new sites in Elephant and Castle and here are eight of the best...



4

### *Spare Street*

Spare Street was created in 2016 from a row of disused railway arches. Named after local artist Austin Osman Spare, this stretch of the Low Line is home to local not-for-profit arts and enterprise company, Hotel Elephant. The company packs a lot into its five arches, including hot-desks and co-working; events and meeting space; a gallery and popular lunchtime pit-stop the Sidecar Coffee Bar. At just 17 years old, Spare had his work accepted for the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition. So it's fitting that Spare Street is all about nurturing and encouraging young, creative talent.



5

### *Elephant Road & Castle Square*

Elephant Road incorporates a number of railway arch businesses, including Corsica Studio – famed as London's best small nightclub. Since 2017, this busy stretch of the Low Line has opened onto the new Castle Square (built as part of the first phase of Delancey's town centre development). Beyond that lies the green expanse of Elephant Park. Castle Square is set to house many of the traders from the shopping centre while the site is redeveloped. Ahead of the expected increase in footfall, a new pedestrian crossing is being built to help people reach Elephant Road safely from Rockingham Street on the opposite side of New Kent Road.

1

### *Borough Triangle*

Borough Triangle is a 2.5 acre site, due to be developed by Peabody housing association.

Located on a triangular plot bounded by Borough Road, Newington Causeway and the railway line, it's currently home to the popular, albeit temporary, food and drinks venue, Mercato Metropolitan. Peabody plans to build up to 700 homes on the site (including at least 35 per cent affordable). The scheme also includes a large, new public space, Arch Plaza, opens-up a passage along this section of the Low Line and restores a lost street, Amelia Row.

6

### *Walk Elephant: Newington Estate*

Walk Elephant is a community initiative which pools ideas for better walking routes and ways to make them happen. One idea that's already borne fruit, is a new pathway along the Low Line that opens up a passage from Amelia Street through to Marlborough Close and the Newington estate. Conceived by the Walworth Society, this modest intervention (which removed a fence and created a small path) is a good example of how a small change can make a big difference.

2

### *The Kite*

A new pedestrian route along the Low Line – linking Newington Causeway with Tiverton Street and the Rockingham estate – will be created as part of the Kite development.

Being built on the site of disused garages, this 25 storey tower on Newington Causeway includes a new hotel and 48 new homes, 16 of which will be affordable apartments.

7

### *Angel Lane, Manor Place*

A former council waste depot and Manor Place public baths have been redeveloped by Notting Hill Housing to create 270 new homes. As part of the development, the housing association and their partners, Durkan, have created a new street along the railway line named Angel Lane which connects Manor Place to Penrose Street. The scheme, which also preserves the historic facade of the old bath house, is almost complete and tenants are moving into their new homes this year. Durkan is also working with the council to convert nearby Manor Place terrace into 56 new homes.

3

### *Maldonado Walk*

Maldonado Walk is a small street running alongside the railway from the Strata to Hampton Street.

Originally known as Eagle Yard, in 2018 it was renamed in honour of Pedro Vicente Maldonado, the eminent Ecuadorian scientist who died in London in 1748. The street is home to a number of Latin American businesses, which operate from the arches, and its new name gives recognition to the huge contribution that the Latin American community has made to this part of London.

8

### *Jewell Street*

At the southernmost end of the Elephant and Castle stretch of the Low Line, 17 railway arches have recently been refurbished and brought back into use for light industrial purposes. In the process, a new street, Jewell Street, has been created. It runs parallel to Crown Street and opens up a new route through to Wyndham Road.

Visit the new Low Line website at [www.lowline.london](http://www.lowline.london)

# La Barra

Colombian restaurant, La Barra attracts customers from across London with its array of Latin American dishes including stews, soups and its hugely popular pica pollo.

« It's called La Barra as originally it was just a long thin bar with a few stools »»



It's not that easy to find La Barra, which is tucked away in the railway arches on the Low Line next to the Strata. But it still gets packed out, especially at weekends.

"On Saturday and Sunday, we sometimes have customers waiting outside, as every table is full" says Jennifer Riascos who helps her mum, Maria Luisa, manage the bustling restaurant.

"It's called La Barra as originally it was just a long thin bar with a few stools. But gradually, as other businesses moved on, we took over more space. Now we have seating for 60 people" explains Jennifer.

"My mum is the best cook. People come from all over the city to eat her food. We get lots of Colombians, Bolivians and Ecuadorians, but also English, Polish and Indian. We've got some customers who come from Essex every few weeks and, last month, we had some New Yorkers who said it was the best Colombian food they'd ever had. They said we should open a restaurant over there."

Twenty years ago, Maria Luisa moved from Buenaventura, on the Pacific coast of Colombia, to London with Jennifer and her two brothers. As well as doing various cleaning jobs, Maria Luisa rented a stall to sell Colombian coffee, empanadas and combread at Vauxhall Market every Sunday.

"My mum always liked cooking for people. She would wake us up at 5am and we'd go to the market and help her to set up" recalls Jennifer. "People loved her food so she started doing some other markets too. But in the end she just wanted to find a place of her own so she didn't have to move around all the time."

"I remember the day she told us that she'd found a space in this arch. We were all so excited."

La Barra opens at 8am for breakfast and a firm favourite with the customers is calentao with red beans and rice, pork belly, fried egg, chorizo and yellow plantain.

"It's massive and will set you up for the whole day" says Jennifer.

"Recently, a customer asked why we couldn't open at six so she could come straight here for breakfast after clubbing. But we're already open seven days a week. We need some rest!"

Throughout the day, there's an extensive menu that includes traditional Colombian favourites such as arroz paisa (a meat dish with corncake and red beans) as well as a vegetarian platter with rice, beans and lentils and cassava and avocado salad.

They also serve a freshly made soup everyday. "People say our soup tastes like their grandma's. It's made with a lot of love and we try to make customers feel at home as they often miss it so much" says Jennifer. "My mum loves everything to do with the seaside, so she often makes fish soup although she always puts other things in it, such as coconut, to make it a bit different."

The meat and fish is bought daily from nearby East Street Market and they get fruit and veg from the shopping centre across the road. "When we started out, we used to carry everything back ourselves but now that we're bigger, they deliver" says Jennifer.

They recently had to increase their order for chicken after a food blogger praised their version of the traditional Dominican dish, pica pollo (chicken, marinated overnight and deep fried). "We used to prepare half a pot but now we make four big pots and even that's not always enough" says Jennifer.

"We had a Dominican chef who tried to make the dish but she kept saying that something was missing. So mum experimented with different seasonings until she felt it was perfect.

She won't tell anyone what's in it though. Not even me! I know there's lemon and garlic but the rest is her secret" she smiles.

## La Barra

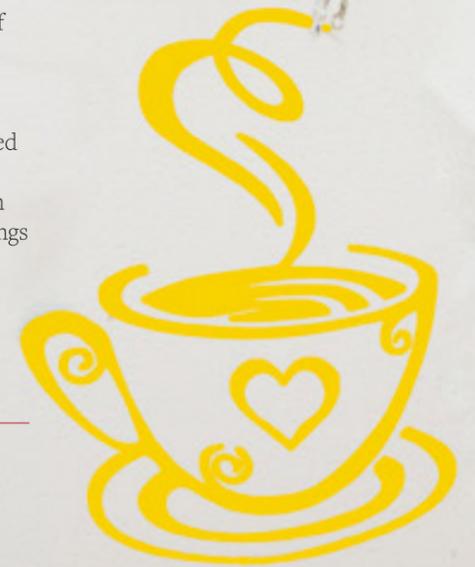
Maldonado Walk SE1 6SP

Open Mon–Thurs 8am–8.30pm.

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# SHELTERED LIVES

*Elephant and Castle was once home to workhouses, dosshouses and even one of London's six Rowton Houses. Dr Patricia Dark delves into the history of these bygone institutions.*

In 1750 Elephant and Castle was a genteel, middle class suburb. By 1850 it had become a poor, working class neighbourhood, notorious for overcrowded housing and slums.

In an age before affordable homes and council housing, people had limited choice when it came to putting a roof over their heads. For some, the answer was house-sharing (lodging, sub-letting and flat-shares). But for people on the lowest incomes; those with irregular work or those who lived

life on the road, this wasn't an option. Instead, they turned to commercial, common lodging houses (dosshouses), charity shelters or the local workhouse, especially its casual ward known as the spike.

A 'fourpenny doss' provided a bed, but this was often simply a mattress, a hammock or a coffin-like box with a leather bag full of seaweed to sleep on. Usually you'd have to share the bed, either sleeping side-by-side with a stranger or via shifts, where two or even

three people would sleep in the same bed at different times.

If you couldn't afford the fourpenny doss, you could try a 'tuppenny hang' instead. This was a place on a bench, in an otherwise empty room, with a rope to lean on as you slept. At the lowest end of the scale, a 'penny sit-up' would provide a place on a bench but normally you weren't allowed to sleep.

Clearly, none of these places were a home. In most cases, the sleeping areas were rooms packed with people and

your fee didn't guarantee access to a kitchen or a safe space to keep your belongings.

The author, Jack London stayed in dosshouses while researching his book *The People of the Abyss* (1903). He savaged them for being unhygienic, gloomy and utterly lacking in privacy. He described life in the dosshouse as "degrading and unwholesome."

Compared to the dosshouse, charity shelters had their own particular drawback: they usually required you to attend a religious service or a lecture in return for your shelter. Most patrons resented this imposition as well as the time it took from their day (a major consideration for people chasing work on a daily basis).

As for the workhouse? This wasn't even considered an option for working people. Victorian and Edwardian Londoners often viewed going into the workhouse in the same light as going to prison. Workhouse conditions were harsh and regimented, on purpose, to ensure that only those with absolutely no other option went there. Families were split up on entry; staff confiscated personal belongings and inmates couldn't come and go at will – making it impossible to both live there and hold down a job.

There were no home comforts in the workhouse either. Well into the 20th century, the common areas consisted of unheated rooms; empty except for a few benches or wooden chairs. Nonetheless, workhouses were still regularly overcrowded and were often unhygienic.

The workhouse 'spike' was slightly different. It served to provide temporary housing for anyone in need, especially those on the move. However, to discourage vagrancy, the conditions were deliberately made worse than the workhouse proper. A spike was usually a large, unheated, barn-like room. Getting a place involved queueing from late afternoon until it opened in the evening. Those claiming shelter were then locked in for two nights, spending the day in-between labouring to earn their keep. Spikes also had a strict policy forbidding a second stay within 30 days.

There were two workhouses near Elephant and Castle. One was on Westmoreland Road, Newington and the other Renfrew Road, Lambeth.

The Newington workhouse was built in 1850. It was originally intended as an orphanage but it opened instead as an adults-only facility in 1852. A women's casual ward was added in 1866. The Lambeth workhouse was built in the early 1870s. A casual ward and a water tower (which still stands today, albeit converted into a private home) were added in 1877.

Both of these workhouses sheltered a young Charlie Chaplin for brief periods when his mother Hannah's ill-health made it impossible for her to support the family.



By Chaplin's time, children would only spend a few weeks in the workhouse before moving on to a poor-law school. In spring 1896, the Chaplins entered Newington workhouse before Charlie and his brother Sydney moved to Hanwell School. Weeks later, Hannah checked the boys out of Hanwell and herself out of the workhouse to give them all a day out at Kennington Park. This became one of Charlie's fondest childhood memories. It appears in his autobiography and it heavily influenced the opening scenes of his 1921 film, *The Kid*.

Two years later, the family entered the Lambeth workhouse before Charlie and Sydney moved to Norwood school.

The Newington workhouse was renamed Newington Lodge in the 1930s and after the war it housed elderly people and homeless families. In 1966 it featured in the closing scenes of *Cathy Come Home*, a ground-breaking teleplay about homelessness. It was eventually demolished in 1969 to make way for the Aylesbury estate.

The Lambeth workhouse later became a hospital. Part of it survives to this day and fittingly, given its role in Charlie Chaplin's life, it's now home to the Cinema Museum.

None of these facilities – private dosshouses, charity shelters or the workhouse – were good options for working people on low wages. The philanthropist, Lord Rowton (Prime Minister Disraeli's private secretary) identified this critical gap and decided to do something about it.

He used £30,000 of his own money to create 'working men's hotels' known as Rowton Houses. He oversaw every detail of their design, build and furnishings and they were much better ventilated and lit than workhouse or dosshouse buildings.

Parkview House, which overlooked St Mary's Churchyard, was one of six built in London. When it opened on 23 December 1897, this grand new building could house 800 men.

For sixpence per night, Rowton Houses provided a private cubicle with bed and storage, as well as use of the kitchen, dining room, recreation rooms and bathing and laundry facilities. Moreover, there was no requirement to work or to attend religious services.

Rowton Houses had their own barbers, tailors and shoe shops on-site which allowed the men to keep themselves and their clothes clean and tidy.

The Houses were particularly valued for the positive communities they fostered. Because the patrons had books and board games, as well as privacy, they had less incentive to spend their non-working hours in the pub. In fact, all the Rowton Houses quickly became popular and oversubscribed and many patrons went on to make them a permanent home.

Parkview House was later renamed the Parkview Hotel and eventually became the London Park Hotel. It was demolished in 2007. Today, the Uncle building stands on the site, alongside more than 75 new council homes on Churchyard Row.

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

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



Rowton House, Newington Butts, 1903

# MY ELEPHANT AND CASTLE

Locals tell us what they love about the Elephant



**Iva**

I used to visit Elephant and Castle about a decade ago and it didn't feel very safe.

But now the vibe is totally different. I moved here recently to live with my boyfriend and I've never been so comfortable living anywhere. Things have very much changed for the better. London is a busy place and some parts don't have any community feeling but there is here. We feel part of it and everybody helps each other.



**Elowen**

I was born here, I lived here when I was little and now I've come back! It was such a

great place to grow up and it means a lot to me. I love the variety of people and all the places to go. I love the parks – Burgess Park is amazing now – and I enjoy shopping in all the charity shops on the Walworth Road. I do worry about how expensive it is for families to live here though. The house where I grew up has been done up and sold for lots of money and my family could never afford to live there now.



**Nina**

I love this part of London as it's so diverse and the people are really nice. I'm from Germany and I enjoy just walking around, looking at all the old brick buildings and visiting local shops and cafes. I particularly like Louie Louie as they make good strong coffee and they have lovely cake too.



**Delaram**

I work in Peacock Yard and I like the creative atmosphere and the mix of people. I love the fact that Elephant and Castle is so diverse. You have all kinds of shops and places to eat and nice parks too – plus it's so easy to get here by tube or bus.



**Karim**

I like going to Pasley Park at lunchtime and seeing all the people gathered together,

enjoying the outdoors. I love the sense of community here but not the new, towering buildings that hover over us. I worry that older businesses are being pushed out and I wish that things could change in a more natural way.



**Andreas**

I moved to Elephant and Castle from Sweden to study for an MBA. I like the area because

everyone's very friendly. The street where I live is nice and quiet but just five minutes away you can buy everything you want. We don't have Argos in Sweden but I like it; it's a great place to buy things for my flat. I've just joined the gym and I'll probably buy a bike so I can cycle everywhere. I like English pubs, especially The Old Dispensary in Camberwell.



**Eduardo**

I came here from Venezuela two years ago and I love the Latin American food at La

Barra. We visit the restaurant about twice a month and I always have the Pavellon Venezolano which is meat with rice and beans and fried plantain. It's as good as it is at home. They also have really good fresh fruit juice and I love the passion fruit.

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

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