

THE ELEPHANT

MAGAZINE

Issue 3 / Spring 2014



**THIS
ISSUE**

**IMPERIAL
WAR MUSEUM
LONDON:**
BACK THIS
SUMMER

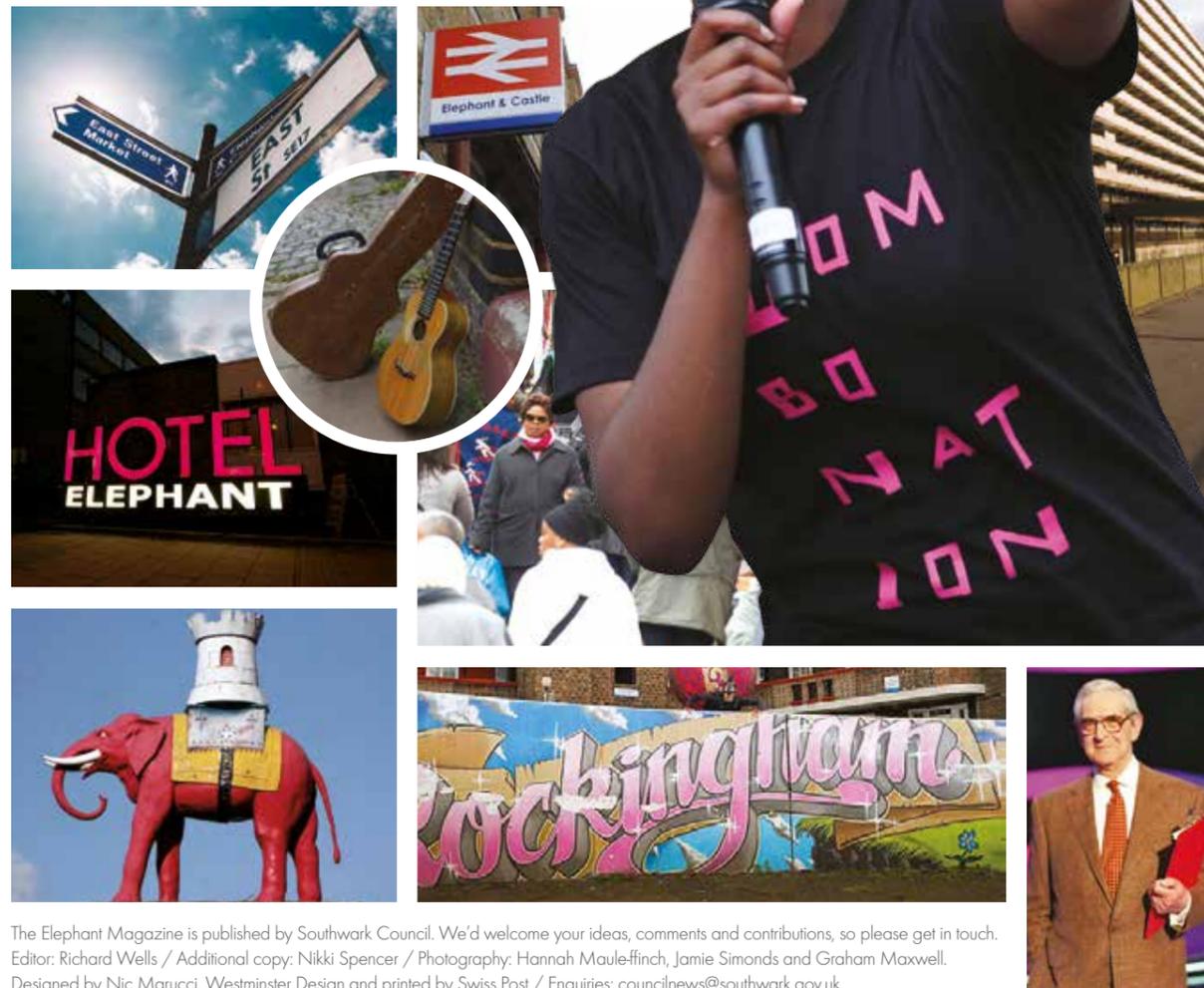
**PEABODY
HOUSING:**
BOROUGH
TRIANGLE
DEVELOPMENT

**BEST OF THE
ELEPHANT:**
ARMENTS
PIE AND
MASH

THIS IS THE ELEPHANT

This is the Elephant.
And this is the Elephant Magazine.

The Elephant Magazine is the quarterly 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.



The Elephant Magazine is published by Southwark Council. We'd welcome your ideas, comments and contributions, so please get in touch.
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Photography from left to right: Bert Hardy (Getty Images); Musician, Elefest; The Strata; George Dyer, Walworth tailor; Mary Wollstonecraft (© National Portrait Gallery London); East Street; Station; Combanation performer, Elephant and the Nun; The Heygate estate; Metropolitan Tabernacle; Difference engine (Carsten Ullrich CC-BY-SA-2.5); Elephant pendent, Carol Mather; Siobhan Davies (Rachel Cherry); Hotel Elephant; Ukulele; East Street Market; Eugen Sandow; Ministry of Sound; Elephant statue; The Rockingham estate; Denis Norden; The Coronet; Young performers at Azucar festival; Dancer at Azucar festival.



REBUILDING WALWORTH TOWN HALL

It's been a year since the fire at Walworth Town Hall which gutted the building and put the library next door out of action. Now the council has approved plans for rebuilding the town hall and announced a new, temporary library for Elephant Road.

For many people in the Elephant, Walworth Town Hall and its neighbouring library have been flag-bearers for local heritage. With this in mind, the council began a consultation with local residents (in October last year) over proposals to rebuild the town hall as a new world class civic centre for the community. Over 90 per cent of those taking part in the consultation agreed with the council's vision for the town hall and, in March, the cabinet approved the first high level brief for the project.

The plan includes space for both a new library and a museum to house the Cuming collection. It also includes a café, new community space and a registrar service - meaning marriage,

civil partnership and citizenship ceremonies can be held there.

The vision is for a town hall which will offer local groups space and facilities to grow and prosper and to provide better ways for people to do business with the council. At this stage, it's just the outline proposal which has been approved and there's still much more work to do, including further consultation with the community, in order to flesh-out the plans.

The town hall is a Grade 2 listed building and throughout the remedial work, undertaken over the past year, the council has been careful to salvage as many original features as possible and has worked closely with English

Heritage on the project. Much of the interior of the building was destroyed but, where possible, the remains of the facade and those key historical elements from the interior, which have survived the fire, will be preserved and restored. A design competition, incorporating public consultation, will be at the heart of the council strategy for appointing a lead architect to the project.

The first phase of consultation indicated that provision of an improved library space was a priority for local residents. The Newington Library building (next door to the town hall) was already in a poor condition and sustained further water damage during the fire. The council wants to retain both buildings and so the architects will be asked to

consider how to make best use of both buildings when drawing-up their plans.

ARTWORKS, CUMING MUSEUM AND THE TEMPORARY LIBRARY

While plans for the future of the town hall site are being developed, the council will open a new temporary library, this summer, at the Artworks site on Elephant Road. Parts of the Cuming collection will also be back on display in a new, temporary home at Chumleigh Gardens in Burgess Park.

Artworks Elephant is a new venture which consists of forty recycled shipping containers which are being converted to provide low cost studio and retail space for creative and start-up companies in Southwark. Currently being built as part of efforts to ensure productive use is made of what would otherwise be vacant space, during the redevelopment of the Heygate estate, Artworks is due to open in the late spring with the library following a couple of months later.

Artworks promises to bring new life and activity to the Elephant during its redevelopment and to act as an 'incubator' for entrepreneurs. It's hoped that many of the retailers and businesses that join the Artworks will eventually take permanent space along the brand new high street on Walworth Road and Heygate Street created as part of the regeneration.

The purpose-built Newington Temporary Library will provide services to the local community, including study space, while the old library remains out of action and while a decision is made on how the town hall will be rebuilt, including the permanent new and improved library space.

Find out more about the operation to save the town hall in the aftermath of the fire and what's coming next in the new video just published on the council's youtube channel: www.youtube.com/southwarkcouncil

Find out more about Artworks at theartworks-uk.com and the town hall at www.southwark.gov.uk/wth



Top: Stabilising the interior of the town hall. Middle: How the new library at Artworks will look. Bottom left: Drying out. Bottom right: Council officers inspect the building



When it reopens on 19 July this year, Elephant and Castle's Imperial War Museum London will be at the centre of the nation's First World War centenary commemorations.

This summer, for the first time, visitors will be able to see the ground-breaking new First World War galleries and a newly designed atrium where iconic objects – including Harrier and Spitfire planes and a V2 rocket – will be suspended dramatically from the ceiling.

With building work nearing completion and exhibits starting to take their place, it's a time of eager anticipation at the Lambeth Road museum, particularly for James Taylor, Head Curator of the new galleries. "It's very exciting to go on site and see it all taking shape" he says enthusiastically. "The big new atrium space designed by Foster + Partners is stunning and I mean stunning" he beams.

James has spent the last four years, working with his team to decide exactly what items from the museum's extensive collection will go on display in the new galleries. "It's been a tough job as there's so much good material" he explains. He's keen to point out, however, that those objects which aren't on show don't just "lie around and gather dust". "It's very much a living collection, we have a website viewing programme and other museums to exhibit at too".

The new galleries will be split into 14 areas which will explore the story of the First World War through the lives of those who experienced it, both on the front line and on the home front. Personal testimony

will be a key part. Diaries, souvenirs and letters will sit alongside weapons and uniforms, photographs, art and film – many of which have never been seen before.

"We've got 1,100 square metres of space and 1,200 physical objects – so that gives you an idea of the scope. There will also be over 60 different interactives and audio visual projections".

One interactive, which might strike a chord with the locals, features a monumental oil painting by Walter Bayes, who taught at Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts (below). It depicts a familiar scene of civilians sheltering at Elephant and Castle Tube Station – albeit in 1918.

"It may surprise people that air raids were happening in the First World War" says James. "The first ones were by Zeppelin and while in terms of devastation, the impact was not the same as the Blitz, the psychological effect on people was significant".

Feeding the Front, a four-metre interactive table, will allow visitors to discover the unprecedented scale of production required to keep the troops fed and fighting. "It wasn't just shells and bullets" explains James "but also the hay for the horses and the supply of tinned food as you couldn't live off the land".

Life at the Front will recreate a trench,

complete with a soundscape to evoke what daily life was like for the troops. "A lot of trench life wasn't about fighting but was about waiting, being with your mates, playing cards, all those small human things" explains James.

The WW1 galleries are just one part of the museum's major revamp. New terraces have been installed above a dramatic new atrium; Level 1 of which will present key stories from the Second World War. While further up the museum, visitors will be able to explore contemporary conflicts from 1945 though to the present day.

There are also three new shops and two museum cafés, run by Peyton and Byrne, the larger of which has an outdoor terrace overlooking Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park.

Come 19 July, there will be so much to see that James' number one tip for visitors is to take their time. "It's an incredible amount to get around in one visit. Much better to dip in and out" he recommends. "Look around the atrium, have a coffee, maybe do half of the new galleries this time and half another".

And of course that's a whole lot easier if the museum just happens to be on your doorstep...

For more information visit www.iwm.org.uk



The Underworld: Taking cover in a Tube station during a London air raid (Walter Bayes 1918)

DEVELOPMENT PICKS UP PACE AT ELEPHANT PARK

Lend Lease developments account for roughly half of all the investment going into Elephant and Castle. As their projects gain momentum, more opportunities for local people are becoming available.

NEW HOMES, NEW JOBS AND A NEW NAME

The regeneration of the former Heygate Estate has taken another major step forward with the council approving detailed planning proposals for the first 360 homes on site.

The homes will be built along the south-eastern part of the estate and represent the first phase of the Masterplan (for which outline planning consent was granted last year).

Construction begins in the autumn and will create a number of job and training opportunities for local people, including 20 apprenticeships and at least 44 full-time jobs.

The homes will showcase the latest sustainable building practices and innovations. There will be a strong focus on urban nature, including green roofs and green walls, which will attract new wildlife to the area and create a greener environment.



Lend Lease has named the new development Elephant Park, reflecting the fact that the regenerated site will house central London's largest new park for 70 years. You can see how the Elephant Park project will look when complete above.

Lend Lease will be asking local people to suggest names for the new buildings, streets and parks to be built on site. For more information about how to get involved, email: ele-ask@lendlease.com

JOBS AND TRAINING

Well over a hundred Southwark residents have already gained employment on Lend Lease construction sites in the Elephant, more than 70 of whom were previously unemployed.

Local Southwark resident, Michael (pictured) has been working on Lend Lease's Trafalgar Place site since November as a traffic and fire marshal, having been recruited through Be Onsite.

Michael said: "I live ten minutes away in Rotherhithe but used to come to this area a lot when I was a kid so it's good to be back. Working as a traffic marshal means you're part of a team, which is enjoyable because you have to work together and your teammates rely on you. I also get to talk to local people walking past the site and it's great when they take an interest in what's going on and I can explain what we're doing".

Find out more

If you're looking for work and would like to find out more about the opportunities available, get in touch with Southwark Works, which will provide you with all the support and advice you need.

Tel: 0800 052 0540

Email: info@southwarkworks.org.uk

Or visit Unit 239, Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre, London, SE1 6TE

CALLING ALL LOCAL GARDENERS

Situated on the former Heygate Estate, at the corner of Wansey Street and Brandon Street, is Mobile Gardeners' Park - a temporary space created by and for the community, whose name reflects the fact that the garden can move as the redevelopment of the estate progresses.

The Park is a space for growing, relaxing, for learning and entertainment. It offers free tenancies for container gardening so local residents can grow their own plants and come and go as they like.

Growing season is now well under way so contact paul@mobilegardeners.org for more details or to get involved in one of their events.



YOU HAVE TO WORK TOGETHER AND YOUR TEAMMATES RELY ON YOU

A NEW HOARDING FOR TRAFALGAR PLACE

Eagle-eyed locals may have noticed a new hoarding which has been installed around the Trafalgar Place building site. But it's not just any hoarding - local school children from Victory School, which neighbours the site, have worked with local artist Reuben Powell to design their own artwork for the installation.

Construction workers on the site modelled for the young people - check out the drawings next time you're passing.



The next event will be the Elliott's Row Transformation on Sunday 27 April 2pm. Help transform the little pocket park on the corner of St George's Road and Elliott's Row with new planting. Supported by the Co-op Bank.





THE CREATIVE SPACE THAT'S PULLEN THEM IN

With silversmiths and ceramicists, fashions designers and florists, artists and architects, (even a lute maker) Pullens Yards is a unique creative community.



Katie Spragg, artist

Turning off the busy Walworth Road, heading down Amelia Street and into Pullens Yards, with its cobblestones and handsome brickwork, feels almost like walking onto a film set.

It's not difficult to see why it caught the eye of Tom Hooper, director of the Oscar winning film *The King's Speech*. Back in 2009, Hooper, drawn to the well preserved buildings and the nostalgic character of the area, used the yards to evoke a small slice of 1930s London complete with giant Bovril ads and fake smog.

The Yards were purpose built for crafts people and small traders in the 1870s by local builder James Pullen. They were saved from the threat of demolition in the 70s and are now home to a thriving artistic community, one of only a few places in London with such a concentration of creative talent. The three remaining original yards, Clements, Peacock and Iliffe provide space for an amazing range of artists and designers with studios at ground level and workrooms above, accessed via steep wooden staircases.



One of Pullens Yards' longest serving tenants is abstract artist Frank Bowling (below), a contemporary of David Hockney whose work can be found at the Tate, the V&A, MoMA in New York and at countless other museums and galleries. In 2005 he became the first black British artist to be elected to the Royal Academy and an OBE followed.

Frank has had a studio in Peacock's Yard for over 30 years and despite having just turned 80 he still visits every day, weekends and Christmas included, to paint, describing it as "my happiest time". He's just put the finishing touches to a huge colourful canvas called *Across the Wadi* for this year's Royal Academy Summer show.

"It's a nice place to come and work" he says, adding that one consequence of sharing pretty basic facilities (central heating is not an option here) is that everyone gets to know one another. "There's no running water in my studio so I go into the yard to get water, which means I bump into others and pass the time of day" Frank explains.

When he needs a cup of tea he heads for *The Electric Elephant* on the corner of Iliffe Yard. The café, which opened six years ago, has become a focal point for the yards and "they're very generous with their portions of bread and butter pudding" reveals Frank.

Next door to Frank are lute makers Stephen Barber and Sandi Harris who,

since 1980, have been hand making up to 25 lutes a year for customers from all over the world. Many choose to visit Pullens Yards, personally, to pick up their finished product. "If you've had a lute made for you, you don't want to be reliant on air freight" Sandi points out.

A few years ago, the pair made a baroque guitar for Keith Richards. "He played one in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* film" explains Sandi. "We didn't make that one, but playing it gave him a taste for the real thing and by all accounts he still has it".

More recent tenants of Pullens include 26 year old Katie Spragg, who describes herself as "a ceramicist and illustrator, re-teller of stories and general creator". She moved into a shared studio on Iliffe Yard a year ago and particularly likes the camaraderie that working together on their twice yearly Open Studios creates. "At my old studio you shut yourself behind your door and didn't see anyone all day but here it really is a community". "It's so beautiful and picturesque" she adds, although she's discovered that the cobbles do have one drawback "they're a nightmare when you cycle over them".

Summer Open Studios
This year's Summer Open Studios take place at Pullens Yards from 13-15 June.

Visit www.pullensyards.co.uk for more information.

TAKING CENTRE STAGE

Southwark Playhouse is enjoying its new home in the Elephant, although if Chris Smyrnios hadn't spotted a 'To Let' sign on his walk to work things may have turned out differently.

To say that Southwark Playhouse's Artistic Director, Chris Smyrnios, has had a challenging few years is an understatement.

Back in 2010, Network Rail announced that, due to the redevelopment of London Bridge station, the popular fringe theatre would have to move from the Tooley Street railway arches that had been its home since 2006.

A huge protest campaign was launched, backed by Stephen Fry and Andy Serkis, with 1,500 written objections to Network Rail's plans. The national press took up the story and finally the theatre was promised space in a designated leisure area in the new development. The only snag? This wouldn't be until 2018.

So they had to find somewhere else to go. Far from an easy task, as Chris explains "The places we found didn't have enough space and if they did, they were too expensive. If there was enough space and they were affordable we found we just couldn't get a long enough lease". Then one day he spotted a building to rent on his way into work.

"It was nothing very glamorous" he recalls. "It was used by a firm who made ignition systems for classic cars" but with offices at the front and workshops and a

huge warehouse at the back, it had real potential.

In just four months, Chris and his team transformed the space into a fully functioning theatre with two auditoriums; the 240-capacity space known as "The Large" and "The Little" which holds 120. They also had space to include rehearsal rooms and vastly improved backstage facilities.

"When we were in Tooley Street, one of our dressing rooms was actually a tent, so it's great to finally have really nice, clean dressing rooms with central heating. The fact that I no longer have to unblock the toilets is just a bonus" declares Chris.

They moved to Newington Causeway last May and Chris says it feels good to be back in this part of the borough as it's their "spiritual home".

The theatre first opened on the Southwark Bridge Road in 1993 with the aim of providing a space for emerging young actors, directors and producers. Over the past 31 years it has built a strong reputation for producing high quality cutting edge theatre south of the river, putting on about 20 shows a year and attracting visitors from across the capital.

Hollywood icon and one of the Elephant's most famous sons, Sir Michael Caine, is a patron and the theatre has strong roots in the local community. Every year they engage with more than 5,000 school pupils through free school performances and in school support. The Playhouse also has YoCo, a vibrant youth-led theatre for ages 11-25. "We help people who want careers in theatre" says Chris "but we also help build people's confidence and skills for life".

There's an all day bar/café and Chris and his team have clearly worked hard to make Southwark Playhouse's new home inviting with comfy sofas, rich red velvet curtains and a couple of theatrical touches including a few stage props and bar tables made from staging.

"When you walk through the door you're guaranteed a nice warm welcome from friendly staff and a great show" he enthuses.

Southwark Playhouse
77-85, Newington Causeway
London SE1 6BD 020 7407 0234
www.southwarkplayhouse.co.uk

The bar/café is open from Mon to Fri, 9am to midnight, Sat 1pm to midnight, closed Sundays.

WHAT'S ON

The Large

Three Sisters by Anton Chekhov.
A new version by Anya Reiss
3 April - 3 May

The Little

A Study in Scarlet by Arthur Conan Doyle
Adapted for the stage by Lila Whelan and Greg Freeman
19 March - 12 April

Debris by Dennis Kelly
23 April - 17 May



PEABODY: BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO THE ELEPHANT

Peabody has provided affordable homes to Londoners since Victorian times. Now in the 21st Century, and with their new plans for Borough Triangle and Newington Butts underway, the Elephant and Castle based charity is still going strong.

Peabody was established in 1862 by the American banker and philanthropist, George Peabody, with a gift of £500,000 - the equivalent of many millions of pounds today. The Peabody mission was to provide much needed housing for poor Londoners and this continues to be a central part of their work today.

The Group now owns and manages around 27,000 homes for more than 70,000 residents in nearly every London borough. They're building new homes too, and with millions spent on community investment programmes each year, Peabody is extending their mission of providing 'a good home, a real sense

of purpose, and a strong feeling of belonging' to thousands more Londoners.

Peabody and the Elephant

Elephant and Castle is undergoing a huge transformation and Peabody is to play a major role in this regeneration. They've signed up to build 188 affordable homes at Newington Butts on the site of the old London Park Hotel. And this year they unveiled new plans to build a new head office, another 500 homes and new public space for the community at Borough Triangle on the corner of Borough Road and Newington Causeway.

The Borough Triangle scheme will serve as a gateway from London Bridge to the Elephant, breathing new life into the neighbourhood. The plans promise more jobs, homes and community space for local people. New cafés, shops and office spaces at the ground floor of the buildings will complement and enhance existing businesses and a new public courtyard will provide green spaces and areas for children to play.

Peabody in Southwark

Peabody and Southwark go way back. It's almost 150 years since Peabody built its first homes in the borough. Constructed on the former site of The Magdalen Hospital in 1871,



the Blackfriars estate was amongst the first social housing to be built in Southwark. Demand for homes in the area was high and the estate was expanded from its original 16 blocks to 19, providing low-cost homes for 384 families. New estates followed at Stamford Street (1875) and Southwark Street (1876).

The association continues to this day. Peabody employs over 500 people at their Walworth Road and Westminster Bridge Road offices and works for the benefit of nearly 5,000 local residents. They continue to build good quality, affordable homes in Southwark too. This includes their partnership with the council

on the multi-phase redevelopment of the Coopers Road estate and several other local projects which will produce around 500 new affordable homes in total.

Community investment

Much more than a housing provider, Peabody has substantial experience in community regeneration too. Last year they delivered over 14,000 hours of community work in areas as diverse as literacy workshops, parenting programmes and youth-led projects. They supported more than 320 unemployed people into jobs, got over 850 young people involved in community programmes for the first time and led a consortium of businesses

to create hundreds of apprenticeship opportunities for young Londoners.

Peabody is carrying out a period of public consultation on their plans for Borough Triangle and would welcome feedback from everyone in the area.

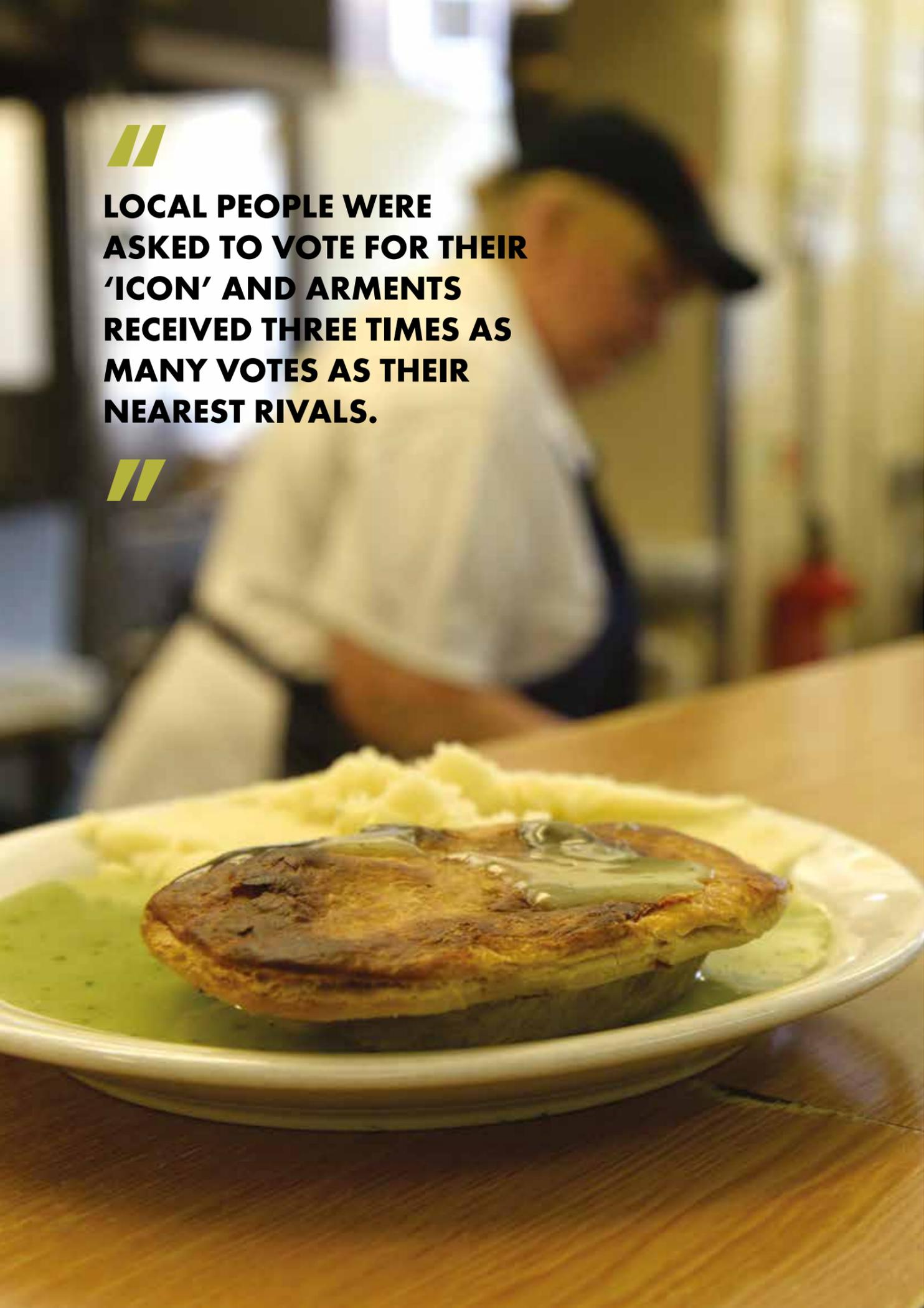
Find out more and have your say on the plans at www.boroughtriangle.co.uk

For more about Peabody and the opportunities they provide visit www.peabody.org.uk

Top left: Site of the Borough Triangle development. Top right: Gateway centre. Middle: Stamford Street estate. Bottom left: Participants in Peabody's Threads fashion project. Bottom right: Coopers Road Estate



LOCAL PEOPLE WERE ASKED TO VOTE FOR THEIR 'ICON' AND ARMENTS RECEIVED THREE TIMES AS MANY VOTES AS THEIR NEAREST RIVALS.



THE BEST OF THE ELEPHANT: ARMENTS PIE AND MASH

Customers come from far and wide to tuck into freshly made pie, mash and eels at Arments, the third generation family business celebrating its 100th birthday this year.

Roy Arment started working as a Saturday boy, cleaning the pie moulds in his parents' pie and mash shop when he was 12 years old. He joined the family business properly when he left school and eventually took over the company when his parents retired in 1982. A year later he got married to Cheryl and together they've run Arments ever since.

"It's in Roy's blood" says Cheryl as we sit and chat around one of the formica topped tables on a bustling Tuesday lunch-time. "He grew up with it. He's lived it and breathed it".

Arments is celebrating its centenary this year and the couple attribute their enduring success to "tenacity", "hard work" and offering "good quality food at a good price". "We won't compromise in ingredients, we use the best meat and everything is freshly made" explains Roy.

They've been at their current address in Westmoreland Road for 35 years, having moved from premises just opposite, where once it had been "all marble top tables and sawdust on the floor". "We refurbished it in the 80s and that's the way it's stayed" says Roy. "It's still very old school". It was this quality which caught the eye of producers from the classic retro TV series, *Life on Mars*, who used the shop as one of their locations. The shop has also featured in several of episodes of *The Bill*.

Earlier this year, the shop was awarded a blue plaque for their contribution to the borough of Southwark. Local people



Roy and Cheryl



Two of the regulars

were asked to vote for their 'icon' and Arments received three times as many votes as their nearest rivals.

They are clearly delighted at the accolade but it was the comments that people sent in with their votes that particularly struck a chord with Cheryl. "One person wrote that she used to come with her dad as a little girl and now she's bringing her dad as an old man. It's lovely how Arments is a part of people's lives".

The customers who are in the shop today clearly feel the same way. There are family groups and friends who have travelled from Kent, Essex and beyond; a nan who has been bringing her granddaughter since she was small and a man who reveals poignantly that he comes every year on his late mum's birthday as a way of remembering her.

People often turn to Arments for a family celebration. They regularly cater for parties, including pie and mash wedding breakfasts, and they're especially popular for golden weddings. "We have a few booked in where we reserve a corner of the shop. People can put up decorations and bring their

own champagne" says Cheryl. Visitors to London also love Arments and their visitor's book has messages from people all across the globe.

While the décor may be old fashioned, Arments has moved with the times in other ways. They've recently added two kinds of vegetarian pies to the menu (a Quorn soya mince pie and a cheese and spinach version) and have introduced gift vouchers. They've also got a 'Pie in a Box' delivery service - which means that wherever you are in Britain, you can still enjoy a traditional taste of London.

Arments
7-9 Westmoreland Road,
London SE17 2AX
020 7703 4974
www.armentspieandmash.com

Open 10.30am-5pm Tues & Weds,
til 4.30pm Thurs, 5.30pm Fri and 6pm
Sat. Closed Sunday, Monday and
Good Friday.

To mark their centenary, Arments will be putting on a day of celebration on 12 April.



THE ELEPHANT'S UNDERBELLY

THE ONLY WAY TO HAVE THAT KIND OF LUXURY - WAS TO TAKE IT

The Elephant and Castle junction around 1900 with the Elephant and Castle pub

A century ago, the Elephant was enjoying its heyday as a shopping and entertainment district; 'the Piccadilly of the South'. But there was another, less glamorous, lawless side to the area too. Local historian Dr Patricia Dark takes a closer look.

Elephant and Castle's 'destination' status came at a cost. Building the transport infrastructure, particularly the railways from the 1860s onward, which made the Elephant the hub for all of south London, meant losing significant housing stock (sacrificed for the viaducts, bridges, stations etc) which, in turn, led to overcrowding.

During the previous century, as the new bridges over the Thames were built, the Elephant had evolved from a sleepy mediaeval farming village to become a fashionable Georgian commuter suburb. But, as time wore on, industry and transport increasingly claimed space from housing. The elegant Georgian townhouses were repeatedly subdivided and began to decay. By the Victorian period, the theatres, cinemas and shops of the area now stood side by side with a working-class neighbourhood notorious for its overcrowded housing and the toughness of its residents.

This unglamorous Elephant was a very different place. For a lot of people, life was hard: work was strenuous and often

difficult to find, housing was unsanitary and scarce and money was almost always tight. But perhaps more than that, and certainly beyond the bright lights, life in the Elephant could be demoralising. For a lot of people, education had to take a back seat to getting a job, earning a wage and helping to support their family. Economic necessity often robbed bright, ambitious residents of the opportunity to expand their horizons.

Some of those residents rebelled against the narrowness of their world and set out to use their talents on the wrong side of the law. Others crossed the line simply to fulfill their need for excitement and adventure. For many a young man or woman from the neighbourhood, the lure of the glamorous lives as seen in the media and the local world of entertainment and celebrity proved too much temptation. It seemed that the only way to have that kind of luxury - was to take it.

For all these reasons and more, the Elephant became one of London's criminal centres. The Elephant Gang,

first mentioned by the newspapers in 1873, was a confederation of criminals who controlled much of London's underworld until the 1950s (when east London's Kray twins brought a new level of savagery to criminal life).

They had specialists in smash-and-grab raids, cat burglary, safecracking and fencing. Other members worked racecourses, either running protection rackets for bookies or simply conning bookies and punters alike.

The Elephant Gang also had another arm, the Forty Thieves, an all-female gang which specialised in shoplifting. In an era before CCTV, and one much more prudish than our own, they took full advantage of the privacy afforded women in large department stores. The Forty Thieves came to run what was probably the single largest shoplifting operation in UK history - so prolific, in fact, that the mere appearance of a gang member near a smart West End shop caused total panic.

In the 1920s, the Forty Thieves were

led by Alice Diamond, a big, physically imposing woman whose punch was enhanced by the diamond rings studding her fingers - as Brian McDonald notes in *The Gangs of London*, they were "enough to put out an eye". Alice was also a tactical genius with a flair for leadership. She organised the Forty Thieves into cells of four or five, each with their own function. A group of cells would either descend on a single store - causing chaos and aiding their escape - or on a number of stores at once, thwarting a co-ordinated response from the police.

Alice, her Forty Thieves and the Elephant Gang, were (as McDonald notes) generally accepted by their neighbours and some of the criminals were even celebrated. We might not condone this but it's easy to understand why. First of all, successful criminals (ones who didn't get caught) were considered a living, breathing slap in the face to the system that blighted so many chances. They were locals made good, the only way they thought they could. The criminal gangs also tended to inter-marry and to marry other locals, so law-abiding

citizens may well have had friends and family on the other side of the law. Alice and her girls were also free with their money; neighbourliness and generosity in times of trouble were more important to a lot of people than a clean criminal record. And finally, the criminal fraternity of the era had rules and generally stuck by them. Violence was frowned upon and considered especially unacceptable when turned against bystanders or 'civilians'.

Small comfort it might be, but when we consider the problem of crime today, perhaps we should reflect that every generation has faced the same challenge. For, along with its kings and queens, commerce and culture, threaded throughout London's history is a strong criminal seam which stretches back centuries.

To find out more about the area's criminal past visit the Local History Library, 211 Borough High St and start with *The Elephant Boys or Gangs of London*. www.southwark.gov.uk/libraries

Locals tell us
what they
love about
the Elephant

MY ELEPHANT AND CASTLE



Naciye

Everything I need is here: cinemas, bars, restaurants and everything I need for

uni. I moved out of London with my mum when I was younger but I came back to study film and media at LSBU. I've always liked the area and I especially like the Coronet. I've been to some great parties there.



Jennifer

I've lived around here for over 20 years. Everyone is very friendly and it's very good for shopping.

I go to East Street Market, mainly to get meat, then there's everything you could need on the Walworth Road as well as the shopping centre, which has Iceland and Tesco.



Will

I work as a technician in the theatre and it's great that we have Flints, the theatrical

chandlers, on our doorstep. They have had a place just off the Walworth Road since the 80s and people from all over the UK go there for anything to do with scenery.



Rodrigo

I like it because there's such a big Colombian community and lots of people from all over

South America. It makes it easier being so far from home.



Sebastian

I like Elephant and Castle. For the Latin American community, it's the place where

the party starts! You come here to meet up and everyone enjoys themselves.



Kate

I love the oriental supermarkets around here, especially the enormous one on the

Walworth Road where there's a whole aisle just for noodles. I get lost in there in my lunch break! I'm also intrigued by the vibrant citrus coloured shipping containers next to Newington library. I've heard they're going to be space for artists and creative businesses, which is great.



Gary

Baldwins, the herbalist on the Walworth Road is wonderful. I used to be taken there by

my mum when I was a boy in the late 60s. I particularly like their homemade Sarsaparilla - they sell it on draught so you can buy it and drink it in there. It comes out all frothy and my nieces love it. They've been drinking it since they were babies.



Diego

The London Palace Superbowl in the shopping centre is a good place to go with

friends and you can book parties. The market outside is good too. I buy fresh fruit and you can also get accessories for your mobile there. I'm originally from South America and it's great that I can meet up with other people from our country and socialise here. La Bodeguita is a good place for food and a beer. They do live music as well.



Jess

The doughnuts at The Electric Elephant café on Iliffe Yard are absolutely

scrumptious and they also do fabulous, super-frothy coffee.

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

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