

Whitechapel STORIES

Final Evaluation Report



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INTRODUCTION

This document is the final evaluation report of the Whitechapel Stories: Exploring the Sidney Street Heritage Mural project (referred to throughout as Whitechapel Stories). The project was delivered with funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and reflects NLHF evaluation requirements and guidance, exploring outcomes for heritage, people and communities. The report was prepared by Kristina Nilles (Back Row) as an independent evaluation of the project using a multi-method approach to gathering and articulating the learnings across the project.

Whitechapel Stories was delivered by the local community, for the local community

in and around Sidney Street, Whitechapel in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Whitechapel Stories was a community-led project that provided a focal point on Sidney Street to broaden and deepen bonds between residents and local groups. Together, the project uncovered shared heritage and created an engaging piece of public artwork celebrating the local area.

John's Place Tenants' and Residents' Association (JPTRA) were awarded £29,773 by National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) to deliver this project. In-kind support was provided by numerous organisations and individuals, explored further in this report. JPTRA worked in partnership with Walk East

(Graham Barker) to design and deliver the project. Together they engaged with other local residents, schools and community groups, along with Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives. The team collaborated to deliver history workshops, a Community Heritage Day, and outreach to explore local heritage. Artist Frank Creber was then commissioned to design and paint a new heritage mural for Sidney Street inspired by the research and further workshops with local schools and community groups. Evaluation activities took place from June 2024-May 2025.

This report covers:

- **How the project met its desired outcomes**
- **The strengths and weaknesses of the project**
- **Its contribution to a growing evidence base to inform the development of future projects in the local area and for others looking to develop a history mural.**



THE PROJECT CONTEXT

The Covid-19 pandemic gave rise to John's Place Tenants and Residents Association (JPTRA), with an aim of improving residents' housing services and promoting community cohesion. Through regular meetings, the JPTRA provides an opportunity to meet and check in on neighbours, to get involved in the local community and ensure the voice of all residents is considered in how their neighbourhood engaged with each other and the Council. JPTRA encourages all residents to take part, advertising meetings with posters and flyers and use of Trello (online portal) for residents to communicate varied needs and concerns around maintenance, safety and community. JPTRA is also keen to promote the well-being of res-

idents and tackle social isolation through meaningful activities. Its first large event was a Summer Fun Day in 2022 with 75 residents taking part.

It was at this Summer Fun Day that the project team (led by JPTRA members, Jane Austin, Vernon Hunte and Jason Pietra) first gathered feedback around the idea of having a mural on a large beige wall on Sidney Street which would provide an excellent opportunity to showcase the heritage and vibrancy of the local area. Through the varied conversations there was a desire amongst older generations to remember and memorialise important historical events, particularly given that the local area has changed considerably over the last 10 years.



The JPTRA members continued to consider how this idea of a mural could best be brought to fruition. There was plenty of local inspiration; Tower Hamlets has a tradition of murals, with many reflecting the rich history and vibrancy of different communities. Diverse murals across the borough have been commissioned as part of regeneration projects, to celebrate local icons and events, and reflect on the contributions of local people.

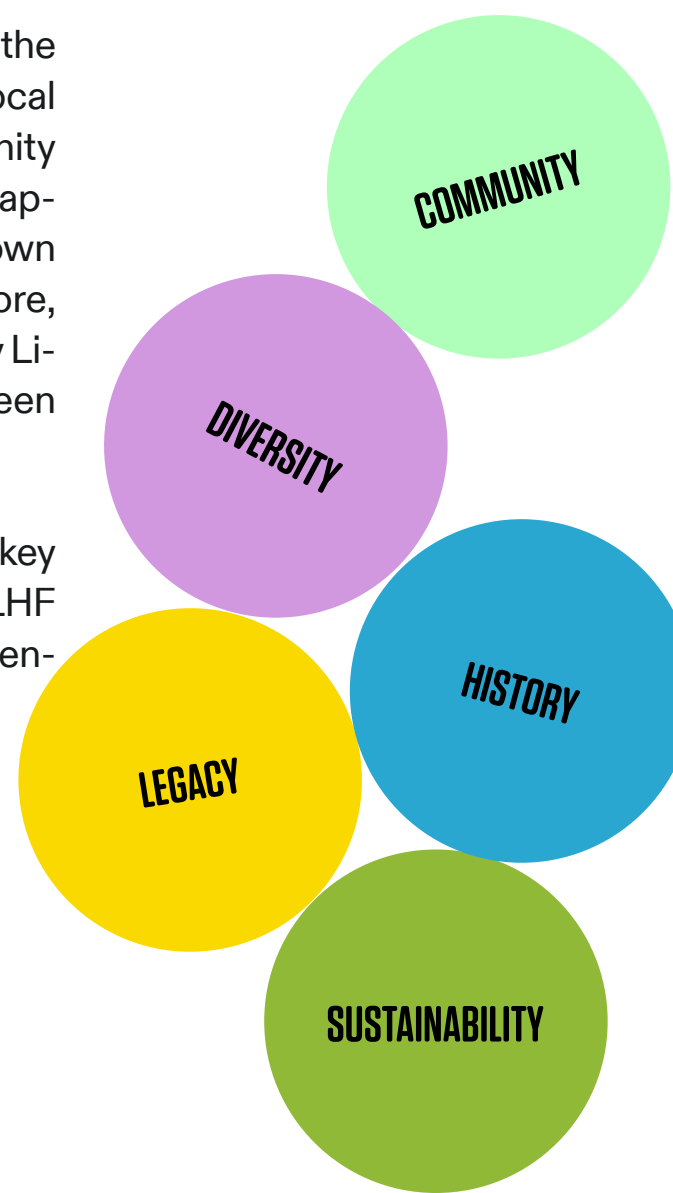
Thanks to grant funding provided by the NLHF, this idea for a community heritage mural became a reality. With permission granted from the landlord of the Sidney Street building, Massey Group, the project took shape, with implementation of activi-

ties spanning 15 months (March 2024- May 2025).

The project benefited from the expertise and support of local organisations and community centres including Whitechapel Gallery, Tower Hamlets Town Hall, Watney Market Idea Store, Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, and Queen Mary University of London.

The project centred on five key values and embedded NLHF intended outcomes around engaging with heritage.

Values



Embedded NLHF Outcomes

- A wider range of people are involved in heritage
- Heritage will be identified and better explained / people will learn about heritage, leading to change in ideas and actions
- People will have developed skills

These key values and NLHF outcomes were embedded in all aspects of the project from the recruitment of history researchers, the Community Heritage Day, commissioning of the mural, community outreach sessions and the final sharing event.

PROJECT TEAM

The project was managed by:

Jane Austin

Secretary of John's Place Tenants' and Residents' Association

Graham Barker

Heritage lead (Walk East)

Vernon Hunte

Chair of John's Place Tenants' and Residents' Association

Matt Claridge

Treasurer of John's Place Tenants' and Residents' Association

The team nurtured relationships with local organisations and individuals to enhance the reach and depth of the project:

Richard Wiltshire

Genova Messiah and Sanjida Alam from Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives

Mural artist, **Frank Creber** and assistant, **Margy Creber**

Richard Martin

Whitechapel Gallery

Julia Miranda

visual minutes artist

A Mural Panel comprised of local residents
Tower Hamlets Councillors
Staff and students at Stepney

All Saints School, Blue Gate Fields Junior School, and St Mary & St Michael Catholic Primary School

Sonali Gardens
ESOL and coffee morning groups

InCommon intergenerational project

Tower Hamlets Town Hall

Watney Market Idea Store

Queen Mary University of London

The wider catchment of John's Place neighbours and residents



WHAT HAPPENED

The overarching aim of the mural project was to broaden and deepen community cohesion by involving local residents in discovering shared heritage and creating a public artwork that celebrates 'who' the local area is. A variety of activities took place across the project.

Heritage Workshops:

8 weekly workshops that explored local landmarks, sought out historical resources at Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, and a review of mural in the borough for inspiration. Participants then worked on their own research interests.

Community Heritage Day:

An exhibition of 120 historical images presented in the gardens at John's Place, attended by 60 people. Four students from Stepney All Saints School took part as young evaluators, gathering feedback from attendees about their interest in the project.

Mural Panel actions:

The panel was comprised of 11 people with a wide range of expertise and perspectives who assisted in reviewing the ten mural proposals and selecting Frank Creber as the artist and signing off the final design.

School and Community Workshops:

Led by Frank Creber, these workshops gathered ideas and inspiration for the mural with each group focusing on a specific theme and creating their own artworks. These artworks were displayed at the Town Hall and Watney Market Idea Store.

Unveiling of the Mural:

A celebratory event was held to unveil the mural, led by East London resident and renowned actor, Sir Ian McKellen. It was attended by an estimated 325 people who had an opportunity to view the mural, get a copy of the Whitechapel Stories booklet and mingle with friends, old and new in the gardens. Food, music and an exhibition rounded out the event.

Tangible Assets:

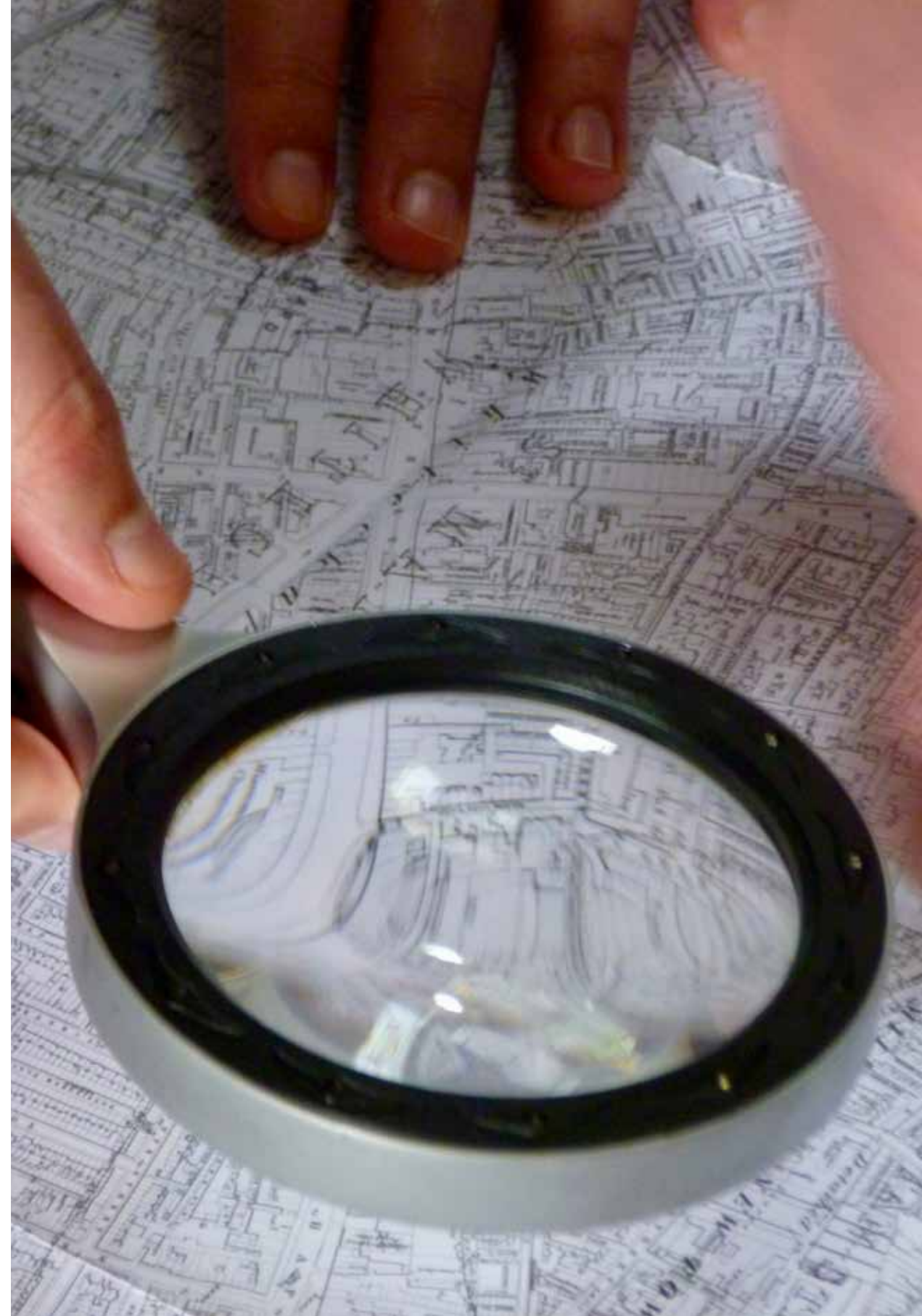
A vibrant 10 x 7m mural, a dedicated website and Instagram feed, and 64-page booklet of the project were produced.

EVALUATION

Kristina Nilles (Back Row) was contracted as an independent evaluator to carry out the evaluation of Whitechapel Stories with the assistance of the Project Team. A multi-method evaluation approach was employed to ensure all aspects of the project were considered. The project team were diligent in recording the project as it happened, making the website an excellent source of documentation.

Evaluation methods included:

- Desk research: review of documents and photographs provided by the project team on the development and delivery of the project.
- Review of outputs (booklet, website and mural)
- A series of reflective meetings with the project team
- Participatory observation and reflections of six workshops/events
- Informal engagement with attendees, participants, students
- 31 responses to a Community Heritage Day survey delivered by the young evaluators
- 8 responses to an online survey (Heritage Workshop participants)
- A reflective semi-structured interview with a project participant



OUTPUTS

EVENT/ACTIVITY/ENGAGEMENT

PARTICIPANTS/ ATTENDEES*

Heritage Workshops

14

Community Heritage Day (with Young Evaluators)

60

Mural Panel

11

School workshops Stepney All Saints School (14),
Blue Gate Fields Junior School (27)

41

Intergenerational workshops at Sonali Gardens (16)
with St Mary & St Michael Catholic Primary School (11)

27

Display of artwork at Watney Market Idea Store
and Tower Hamlets Town Hall

320

Mural Unveiling Event

325

Project Team, TRA Committee, Volunteers

25

Visits to see the mural by walking groups (52)
and intergenerational group (18)

70

Total

894

Volunteer Hours

The anticipated number of volunteer hours was set at 215 by the project team. The total number recorded of over 1,600 hours, has way surpassed this. It must be noted that this was due a passion for the project and a desire to do more. This reflects the professional, organised and meaningful engagement across the project.

*numbers are estimated for the large event, where counting of attendees was difficult.

There is crossover between total numbers above and the total number of people reached, as often they overlapped, with some attending the Heritage Workshops, Community Heritage Day, Mural Panel and other events. It is estimated that the total number of people actively engaged in the above activities was 800.

OUTCOMES

The following articulates key outcomes for the project. These are explored in further detail in the subsequent section.



Bonds between local residents have been strengthened

- Participants and attendees relished the opportunity to engage in conversations.
- Neighbours got to know each other beyond the obligatory greetings in the stairwell.

People feel a sense of pride and celebration for the local area

- Participants spoke with pride about what they had achieved during workshops and in seeing the project reach its end with the unveiling of the mural.
- Attendees also highlighted pride in their local community and enjoyment in being able to celebrate the project's success.

A wide range of people are involved in heritage

The project engaged audiences, participants and volunteers with heritage in the local area. The workshops and drop-in events were developed in ways to allow engagement with a diverse range of people, from those that had a vested interest and knowledge of the local area from lived experience and those that were new to the idea of being involved with heritage.

Heritage will be identified and better explained and people will learn about heritage, leading to change in ideas and actions

- The Heritage Workshops, schools' workshop, outreach and open days all contributed to heritage being identified.

- These touch points encouraged the community to work together to better explain heritage in the local area. The mural, booklet and website/Instagram are all tangible outputs that reflect the learnings across this project.

People will have developed skills

There were a variety of skills developed across the project. These are articulated in the following section and include history research skills developed in searching physical and online archives as well as sharing heritage learning skills for wider participants during the Schools/Community Workshops, Mural Panel and Community Heritage Day.

HERITAGE WORKSHOPS

14 participants took part in the weekly workshops in May-June 2024 led by Graham Barker. Participants were recruited from Tower Hamlets, with priority given to Whitechapel (E1) residents, and all held a keen interest in the local area. They spanned in age from early 20s to those in their 70s, and also represented the cultural diversity of the borough including those of Bengali, Italian and Spanish heritage. The workshops investigated local heritage by way of two walks (one based around resources, one based around murals), four hands-on history sessions at Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, and two IT sessions at Queen Mary University of London.

- Workshops were designed to be open and welcoming of

all participants, regardless of their prior experience in historical research. The format of the workshops truly met people 'where they were at' - inviting them to build their skills at a pace that worked for them.

- Each session focused on one or two particular resources, such as old maps, photos and illustrations, trade directories, local history books and pamphlets, and websites such as Layers of London, London Picture Archive, British Newspaper Archive, and the Survey of London (Whitechapel). Case studies were used to 'model' ways in which such resources can be used to build a research file and develop a storyline.



- Each session also included opportunity for conversations during tea breaks, with refreshments provided. This was a welcomed opportunity for participants to engage in conversation, share their research and learn more about each other. Connections between people began to emerge, as they highlighted particular buildings on walks and recalled former owners or stories from their youth. Indeed, some participants had knowledge of the local area going back 50+ years and others holding an interest but much ‘newer’ knowledge of the local area.
- Each participant was encouraged to identify a research interest. These small research projects saw participants undertaking research in the dedicated sessions with the help of the Library and Archives Team, often finding old newspaper articles, maps, photos and illustrations. They continued to research their desired topic outside the sessions. All participants then had the opportunity to write a short piece on their research for publication in the Whitechapel Stories booklet. Six participants submitted research that is featured.
- Participants reflected on the workshops, highlighting new knowledge and skills.

Enhanced Knowledge	
The rich history of Whitechapel	Historical events in the area and how we ‘still have similar problems.’
Breadth of charitable institutions across East London throughout its history	Histories of the resistance in Tower Hamlets
Who and how green spaces are looked after	Knowledge of resources offered by the history archive
Types of industries that have thrived in Tower Hamlets	The challenges of the communities in previous years

“The workshops gave me a tangible understanding of the many layers of social history in our area and a heightened conscience of it when navigating the area.”

Participant

“I’ve gained greater understanding of links, influences, changes and adaptations between the many different communities that have occupied the same area.”

Participant

“It has made me use a computer for the first time!”

Participant

Skills Developed

Archival research in person (Tower Hamlets Archives)

Archival research online

Finding and interpreting a range of historical resources including maps, photographs and illustrations, trade directories, books and pamphlets, and newspapers

Searching a range of heritage websites including British Newspaper Archives, Layers of London, and Survey of London (Whitechapel)

Building stories of the past using archival evidence

Disseminating information through different media

“We’ve been shown a massive variety of easily accessible and endlessly useful local history resources. It’s set us up well for any future research.”

Participant

“The workshops have let people discover and explore local history for themselves and gave us the skills to do so effectively. Its taught us to be conscious and appreciative of local history and people’s history.”

Participant

“Even the smallest things can be useful in research (adverts, photos, name changes).”

Participant



When asked to think about what 'heritage' means to them, the participants made connections to their current research and locality whilst also considering the wider framing of the question.

"I have appreciated how heritage can be derived from more recent events as well as the past." Participant

"Heritage is what one has without choice, that makes them who they are." Participant

"Treasures to be cherished are absolutely everywhere." Participant

"It's where we have come from and how we have arrived where we are now." Participant

"Understanding heritage gives me an awareness of different cultures and why we all are similar rather than different."

Participant

The participants valued the experience of working with the archivists, with Graham Barker (who holds excellent knowledge of the local area), and with each other.

"This project has been a brilliant experience! I was really impressed with the breadth and depth of [Graham's] knowledge, and the quality of [the] work. [Graham's] expertise showed in each and every mode of delivery of the different sessions." Participant

They commented on enjoying meeting 'like-minded people' and of it being a rewarding and enjoyable experience.

"Meeting regularly with the lovely bunch of people who participated was great, I really appreciate having spent some quality time with them... it was good to see each of them happily lost in their research projects in the last few workshops!" Participant

Overall, participants were enthusiastic about the workshops, proud of the work they had done and appreciative of the opportunity to learn and explore together.

"Incredibly engaging and inspiring and has made me ap-

preciate my area so much more. I feel equipped to do further research with the skills I developed." Participant

"The community building, learning new skills and knowledge has been wonderful whilst also planning how to make a mark in the community." Participant

"It has been like uncovering hidden treasures and has connected me to my community." Participant



COMMUNITY HERITAGE DAY

A Community Heritage Day was held in July 2024 with over 60 people attending. Held in the John's Place Gardens, attendees were encouraged to view images of the local area which were presented as a thematic timeline strung between the trees. Graham Barker was on hand to provide context for the different images, leading a mini 'walk' through the exhibition. Attendees were

also encouraged to consider what themes, events and people they would like to see featured in a mural of the local area.

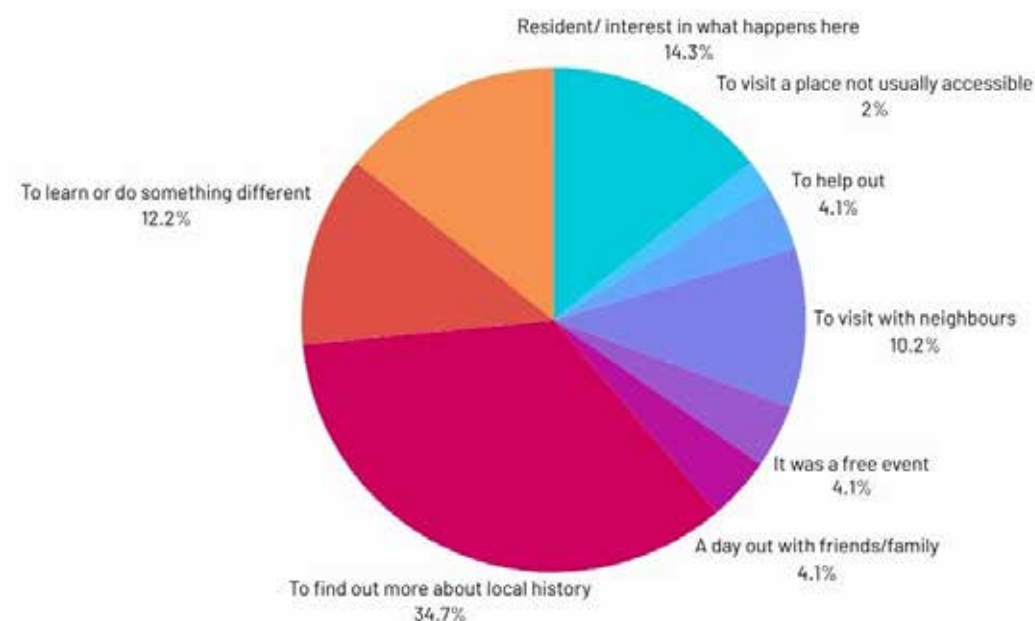
- A spread of homemade cakes, samosas (deemed the 'most delicious samosas ever' by one attendee), and wonderful pastries from Rinkoffs Bakery were provided.
- The weather was not at its finest, with rain and wind. Despite this, volunteers stayed cheerful, and attendees engaged in conversation, interested to find out more about the local area and what this mural may explore.
- Four students from Stepney

All Saints School engaged with the attendees as 'young evaluators,' interviewing 31 attendees and finding out more about their connections with the local area.

- The majority of the respondents were from the local area

(61% from E1 postcodes) and had heard about the event through word of mouth. Many were John's Place Residents, were part of the heritage group or contacts via Walk East. Others came after hearing about the event on local websites.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO COME TODAY?



- Attendees noted the investment in organising the event and how welcoming the volunteers were. Some also noted enjoying speaking with the young evaluators.
- Attendees commented on learning about local heritage through the pictures and conversation.

“We really enjoyed the Heritage display. We met [a local resident] who imparted a lot of local knowledge too.... Thanks for inviting us to the Whitechapel Stories.”

Attendee

“It was lovely to see .. the mini exhibition of around 150 photos and other resources, reflecting the history of Whitechapel.”

Attendee

“I did enjoy seeing all the materials, and it reminded me of all the extraordinary experiences [Walk East] helped create with the previous projects I was able to join. The rain will make it all the more memorable. The Whitechapel Mount will stay with me...!”

Attendee

“It was an interesting and factual event. Really nice to meet people.”

Attendee

“I learned about local historical characters who have clearly left their mark on the location.”

Attendee

- Similarly, the young evaluators enjoyed the experience, gaining confidence in speak-

ing with diverse people in the specific role as ‘evaluator’ and engaging in discussions about the local area. This experience added to their cultural capital and widening understanding of the world around them.

“It was interesting to learn more about the local area. I wasn’t sure I would be good at interviewing people but everyone was really nice and it became easier. We got to talk to people as well and tell them what we knew about the area.”

Young Evaluator



COMMISSIONING THE MURAL

Having never commissioned an artwork before, the project team spent time developing a call for artist proposals and considering what was integral to the design.

A Mural Panel was established to review proposals, comprised of JPTRA residents and representatives from Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, Whitechapel Gallery, Watney Market Idea

Store, and the Massey Group (freeholder of the mural site).

The call-out and mural briefing pack attracted 10 proposals. Informal soundings were taken on all of these proposals via three community sessions at the Brady Centre (Heritage Workshop participants), John's Place gardens (residents) and Sonali Gardens (older people's coffee morning group). The

Mural Panel then met to scrutinise and debate them. A shortlist of 3 artists was invited to a second Mural Panel meeting to talk about their proposals in further detail. The Mural Panel ultimately decided to appoint Frank Creber as the artist. They were especially drawn to his lively style, the scope to flex the content within the mural design, and his track record of working in the community.



MURAL WORKSHOPS

Connecting with Local Schools and Community

The project team worked closely with artist Frank Creber to develop a series of 6 workshops in the community.

- Workshops were held in each of the locations listed below, with groups focused on a specific theme that would be explored in the mural. The groups created their own artwork as part of the process, working from templates designed by Frank.
- Visual artist Julia Miranda attended the sessions, bringing the conversations overhead to life in a series of visual minutes which can be found [here](#).



Enhanced Knowledge

Community and Heritage Workshops

Working with local residents the workshops focused on community and heritage, articulating ideas through visuals and group discussion, using a Monopoly board template.

Sonali Gardens ESOL group and St Mary & St Michael Catholic Primary School

During two intergenerational workshops, community members shared stories with the children of the local area. They then worked to create a visual map of the area. This group later visited the mural in May and saw some of their ideas depicted within it.

Stepney All Saints School

A workshop exploring creating characters featured in the mural. Working with Secondary School art students, the sessions focused on different approaches to creating both abstract and realistic characters.

Blue Gate Fields Junior School

During two sessions children used paints, felt tips and coloured pencils to explore textiles and foods of the local area. They visited the mural site in a separate outing.

The workshops provided opportunity for participants to identify heritage and learning about it through hands-on activities.



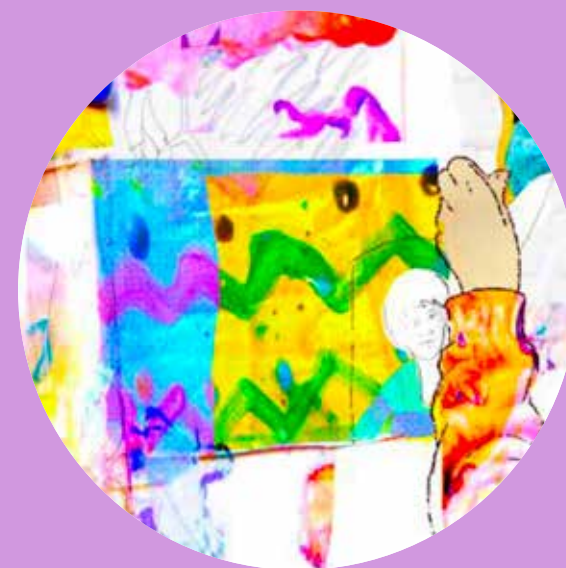
"It's important for our children to be given opportunities like this. To work in small groups and take an active part in creating something together."

Teacher

"The children were thoroughly engaged in the activities, taking care to follow the directions but also to explore their creativity as they did some still life drawing of fruits, vegetables and breads from the local area. They were proud of what they achieved and wanted to continue working on the display board which was left behind for them to finish."

Evaluator Observation Log

Following the workshops, the group work was then displayed at Tower Hamlets Town Hall and at Watney Market Idea Store where people could view the artwork and engage with the Project Team at a dedicated session. An estimated 40 people each day would have had opportunity to see the displayed artwork over the 8 days, reaching 320 further people.



UNVEILING THE MURAL

The unveiling of the mural and celebration of the project took place in April 2025 with an estimated 325 people attending. The mural was unveiled by **Sir Ian McKellen** who helped to lead the celebrations of the great work achieved by the Whitechapel Stories team.

Present at the event were Tower Hamlets Councillors, the Whitechapel Stories team, John's Place residents, other local

residents, friends, family and others that had followed the excellent social media campaign of the project.

- Following a series of short speeches from Cllr Kamrul Hussain, Tower Hamlets Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation, Vernon Hunte on behalf of JPTRA and Sir Ian McKellen, the crowd counted down to see the mural unveiled as a large tarpaulin was raised.
- Attendees were invited to take copies of the Whitechapel Stories booklet to learn more about the mural.
- The unveiling was followed

by performances from Udi-chi Shilpi Gosthi in the garden area, and a viewing of the 'Walk Along Whitechapel Road' exhibition.

- The event was supported by volunteers from John's Place. They could be found preparing and serving plates of delicious food all sourced from the local area, filling up water glasses, moving chairs around and handing out the booklets.
- **Attendees engaged in conversation with neighbours**, said hello to fellow project participants and had chats with people visiting from further afield.
- The event had a joyous quality to it, with everyone celebrating together and sharing stories with the wider attendees.



The mural provides a focal point for the spirit and community in and around John's Place and Sidney Street.

- The team reflected on how it has **brought the immediate community together**, providing opportunity to speak with people they may have not engaged with before.
- Project Manager, Jane Austin noted how the coordination of the mural meant having to **get buy-in and support from many residents whom she had never had opportunity to meet before**. The time and investment made in making these connections and

engaging in meaningful conversations early on in the process led to more support later on, exemplified in the Mural Unveiling Day, with tables and chairs sourced from a local provider, a resident offering to plug in the microphone system through their window, and another allowing a Go Pro camera to be fitted to their window to record the process of the mural being painted.

- The mural features some of the John's Place residents alongside historical figures. The **pride shown by families in seeing their family members featured as part of the mural was palpable**. Indeed, as the evaluator engaged in informal conversations with attendees to gather feedback about the event and the mu-

ral, one resident showed photos on her phone of the mural in progress, featuring her husband; another resident had her daughters and grandchildren present to see her up 'on the wall'.







POST PROJECT: ENGAGING WITH THE MURAL

This evaluation report was compiled in the month following the unveiling of the mural. The project team has reported 6 groups were engaged with the mural as part of walks with Walk East (5) and one school visiting. These walks saw 70+ people engage with the mural in April/May 2025 as part of organised tours.

The Project Manager has also witnessed passersby stopping to

taken in the mural and photograph it. Whilst the number of people passing by can't be quantified, it is hoped that with a link to the website now present on the mural, there is opportunity to see the number that continue to engage in this way.

Sustainability

The Project Team were continually conscious of the environment in the planning and delivery of workshops

and the final artwork.

- Workshops were held at locations in Tower Hamlets, promoting walking to sessions or taking public transport
- Eco-friendly paper and printing was used, with the printer using vegetable inks and renewable electricity
- Food and drink provided at sessions was sourced from local providers
- The paints used for

the mural were eco-friendly and sourced from a local provider.

- The preservation of the mural has also been considered. The lower part of the wall has been painted with anti-graffiti paint and JPTRA have graffiti remover if needed. The team noted that in the month since the unveiling there has not been any fly-tipping against the wall, which is unusual.

LEGACY:

WIDENING THE REACH OF THE PROJECT

Website

The project team went beyond expectations on reaching wider audiences through a dedicated website.

- The website is much more than a landing page, with 25+ blog posts, a gallery of images from the project, key information on the project and a link to the final booklet.
- It is an excellent resource that holds a wide range of perspectives and documents the process organically.
- In 2025 to date (five months), the website has attracted approximately 1400 visits, from 1300 unique visitors, taking in 1700 page views.

Instagram feed

The project team also shared progress throughout the project by way of an Instagram feed (@whitechapelstories). To date, 113 posts have been made and it has attracted 272 followers. The most popular post – a collaboration with Tower Hamlets Council, showing images from the mural unveiling event – has so far drawn 734 likes and 33 comments.

Booklet

The Whitechapel Stories booklet is a 64-page document that acts as a **directory for the mural** with information about key figures and events, **disseminates the research findings** from the history research sessions, and

documents the main activities across the project.

Attendees at the mural unveiling commented on how professional and in-depth the booklets were.

“I’m looking forward to sitting down with this booklet properly and learning more about the mural. It looks so professional!”

Attendee

“I love the map of the mural and finding the corresponding information. It’s like you chose your own adventure book!”

Attendee

“Looks absolutely beautiful, a wealth of history at our fingertips.”

Richard Wiltshire, Borough Archivist

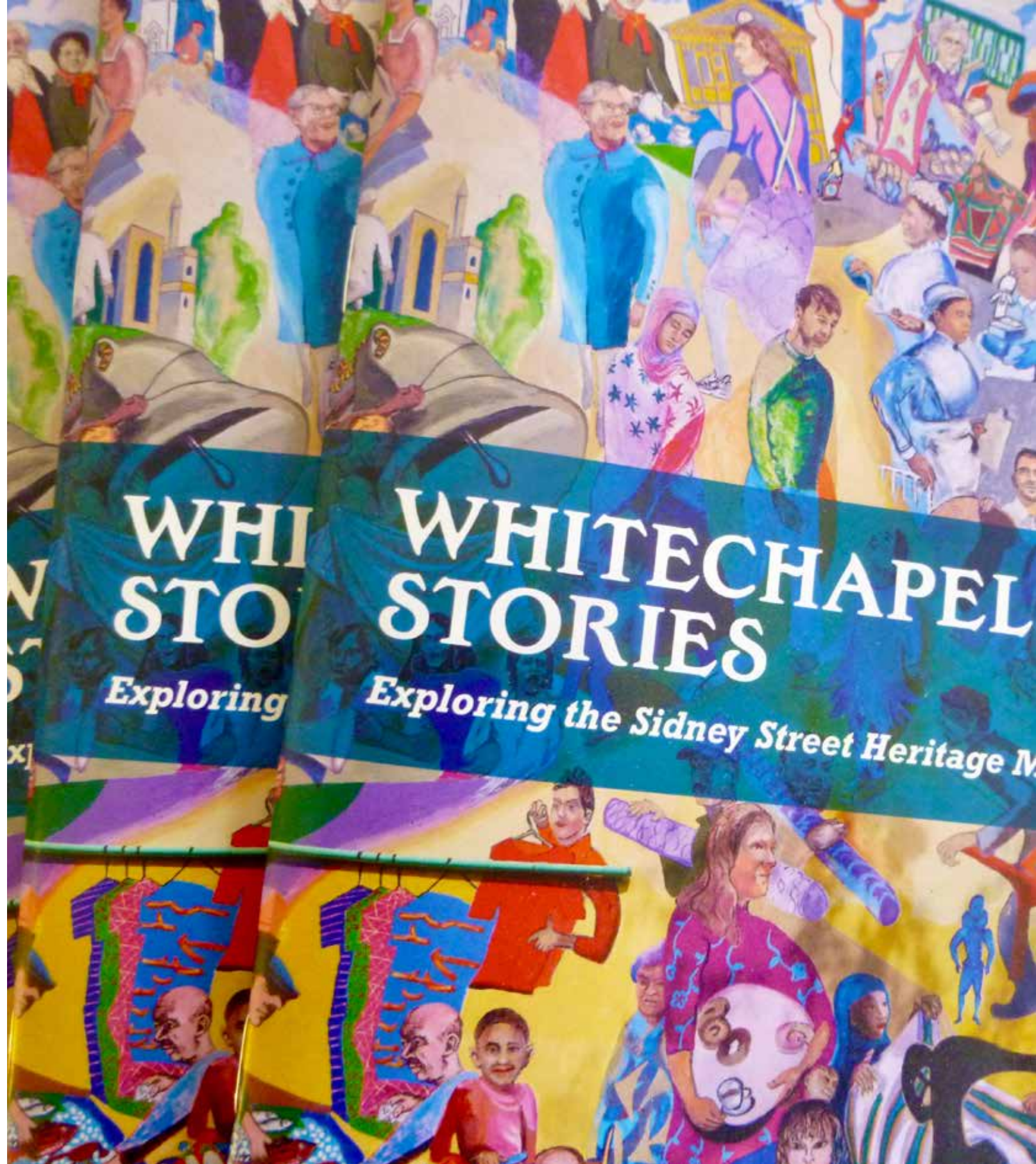
“What a triumph! I think this is your best one yet. Epic read. Fantastic work.”

(Tamsin Bookey, Heritage Manager)

- 2500 copies of the Whitechapel Stories booklet were printed, with over 1700 of them already distributed in the local area.
- The project team considered how best to share the booklet. This was done with care and attention to legacy, ensuring the ‘right’ people had access to the booklet. This spanned from organisations that took part in the project to local groups that may wish to visit the mural and Tower Hamlets Councillors.

Copies were distributed at the following locations/people

Location / People
Artist, Frank Ceber
Blue Gate Fields Junior School
Brady Centre
Brick Lane Bookshop
East London History Society
East London Mosque
Genesis Cinema
Incommon
John's Place TRA
Sonali Gardens ESOL and Coffee Morning Group
Stepney All Saints School
St Mary & St Michael Catholic Primary School
Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives
Tower Hamlets Town Hall (for Councillors and staff)
Toynbee Hall
Walk East (Graham Barker)
Watney Market Idea Store
Whitechapel Gallery
Whitechapel Idea Store



CASE STUDY: LORAIN

Loraine, a lifelong local resident, joined the newly formed Tenants' and Residents' Association where she met other residents. She then got involved in the development of the Whitechapel Stories project, working with fellow residents to make connections and research how they might commission a mural. The wider project grew from this research.

"Because Jane and myself are retired, we did some of the work in the beginning. I'm no good on tech, so she would do that part and then call me. She'd say, 'We've got an appointment at the local history museum to speak with someone. You'll come, won't you?' So, we went up there and she gave us lots of information on who to

apply to for a grant, for permission and she also gave us Graham's name (Walk East). Jane applied to a couple of places for grants, and we talked with a local artist, but we were really in the dark. Sort of seeing what we could find out. And then, we got the grant from National Lottery Heritage Fund.

We had to prove that we were involved in the community, not just 5-6 people wanting to commission a mural. We said, oh we're already doing this, we are involving the community. And we have done lots! We've handed out leaflets, gone around, not just on this estate but in the surrounding area, knocking on doors. Sometimes you're a bit surprised when the door opens. You think, 'Oh, I know you! I didn't realise you live here.' You

meet people and then see them out shopping and can say hello. I've lived in the area all my life and it really has got us talking to each other."

Loraine enjoyed the History Workshops, Community Open Day and researching the local area. She did find some aspects difficult, especially the research sessions using the computer. *"I was always thinking, I'm not coming next week, but I did."* Ultimately, Loraine completed her research, developing a piece around the rag trade which connected to her personal history, with both her nan and mother working as seamstresses. Loraine has many stories of the work that they did and the pride they had in making high quality coats. Loraine

has a coat made by the company her mother and nan worked for, hanging in her closet as a memory of them.

She also enjoyed being a part of the Mural Panel and learning about different artists' approaches. *"We had to really think about the submissions, if the idea would tell the story of the people and the area. It's more than just walking down the Whitechapel Road."* Recalling the mural development, Loraine said, *"I think it was brilliant. Frank gave us different ideas. He'd say, 'that depicts Winston Churchill and the Siege of Sidney Street' or 'this is Edith Cavell'. It was all explained to us."* Frank and the Mural Panel were keen to include historical events and figures alongside

local people in the final mural. At one meeting they asked Loraine, "Would you mind being in the mural?" And I thought they were joking! I said, "Yeah, only if you have me wearing my nan's coat." I mean, I don't even like having my photo taken. I was a bit unsure, but I am glad I did it." Loraine reflected on the legacy of the project, "It's given us something special, something to talk about and an experience we did together. I've got to know more people through the mural and to share it with others."



CONCLUSION

The project has left Sidney Street a more **vibrant location** with a mural on display for people to visit at their leisure. The Project Team was an **exemplar in the development and implementation of the project**, taking care in how best to proceed, and being mindful of preserving and sharing heritage that reflects the local area in its entirety.

What went well

The project was successful

- In fostering a sense of pride in the fabric of the local community and its rich culture and heritage.
- Being inclusive of all people regardless of ethnicity, culture, faith, age, gender and ability
- Sharing and uncovering histories of local people, events and buildings
- Leaving behind an outstanding and engaging artwork that preserves community heritage and provides a focal point for community identity
- Considering the environment and embracing sustainable best practice.
- Providing opportunities for new and improved relation-

ships between individuals and to build community

- Widening access to heritage opportunities and resources in the borough
- Giving space for participants to develop a better understanding of heritage and develop skills

Skills development:

The Heritage Workshops were well considered and encouraged both collaborative and independent heritage engagement. This ensured the workshops were accessible and enjoyable. The project team members also developed their skills taking on the delivery of a community project in this capacity.

Community engagement and cohesion:

The Community Heritage Day and Mural Unveiling offered opportunities to engage through a variety of activities, reaching an audience from various ages, ethnicities, and genders exploring both the tangible and intangible heritage. The dedicated workshops also enhanced community cohesion through sharing of experiences. Importantly, the mural provides a focal point for discussion among local residents.

LESSONS LEARNED

As developed throughout this report, the project was well managed and considered. On reflection, the project team highlighted a few areas that could be refined for future iterations or as learnings for others embarking on similar projects:

- The time between the History Research Workshops and commissioning of the mural was too long. This led to a bit of 'down time' where participants did not have something active to do as part of the project. As such, it took a while to get them re-engaged in the second phase of delivery and for the group to really see how outputs of their earlier work was reflected in the final outputs.
- The mural call-out was sufficient for this project but the team reflected on a need for a refined brief in future, based on the desired working relationship in addition to the quality of the artwork.
- The planned schedule for the painting of the mural was not ideal as it would have fallen dur-

ing the dark and damp months of Jan-March. With permission from NLHF, the painting of the mural was held off until late March/April to ensure better weather conditions, the use of eco-friendly paints and the safety of the artist.

The significant achievements made across Whitechapel Stories, delivered through the dedication of volunteers, supported by Graham Barker (Walk East) **deserves commendation for its blend of professionalism and community-focused efforts.** Indeed, the project was recognised with an award at the May 2025 InCommon Age-Friendly Awards Ceremony.

Whitechapel Stories exceeded its expected delivery, making

heritage engagement accessible to residents in the local area. This project successfully demonstrates how community can come together through heritage and artistic engagement. The mural will serve as both a focal point for conversation and as a reminder of the meaningful collaboration led by John's Place Tenants' and Residents' Association.





Whitechapel STORIES