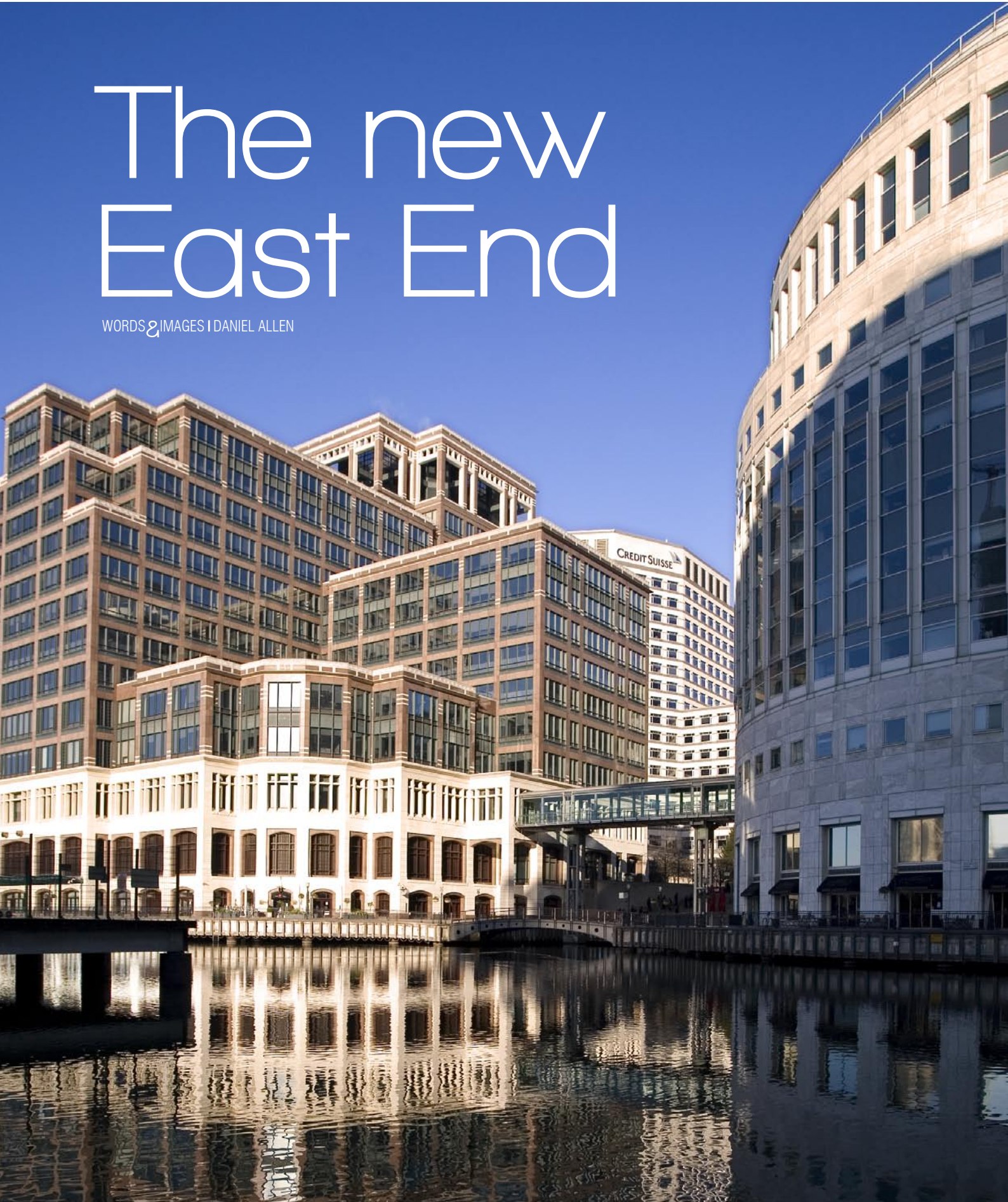
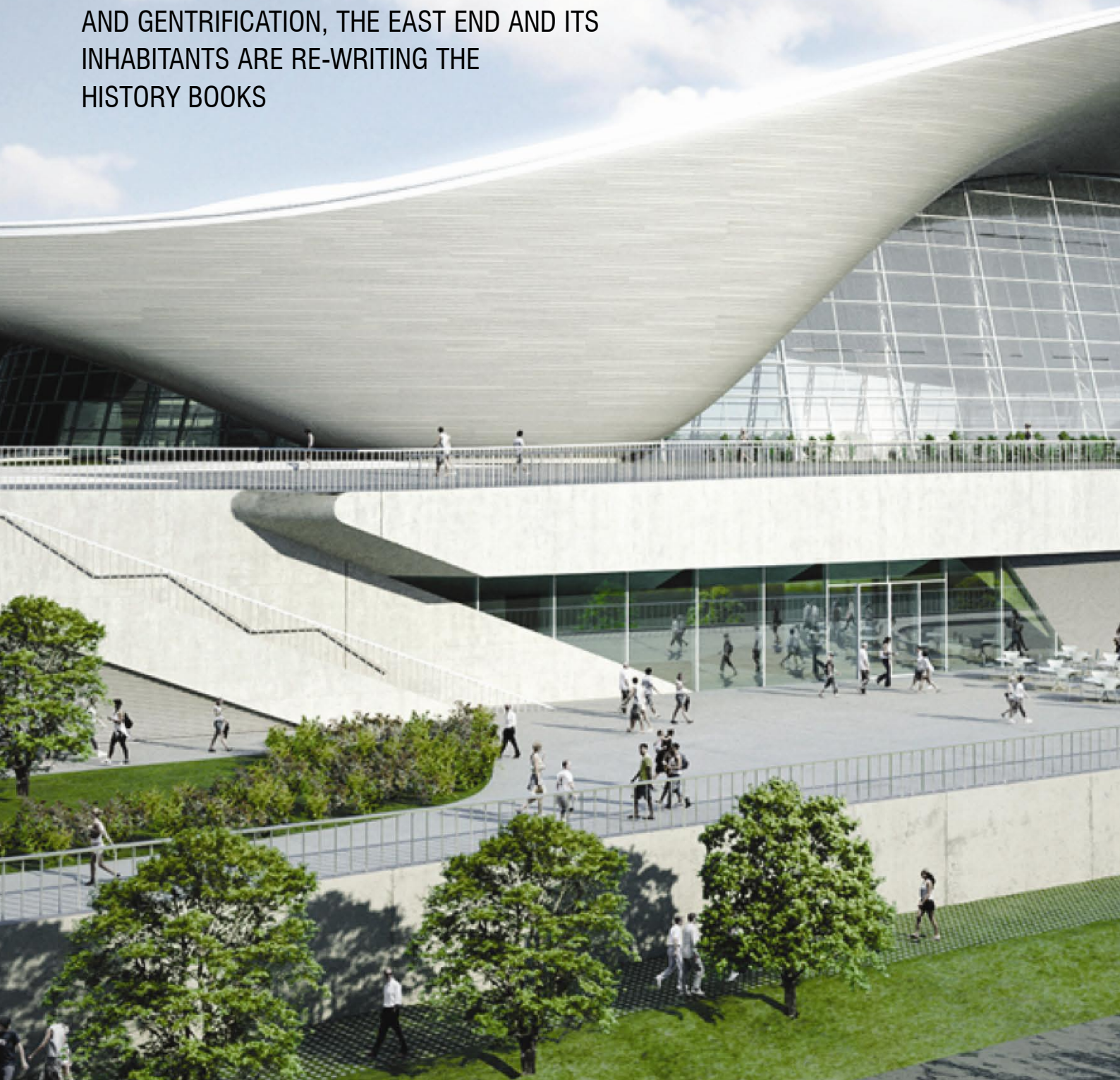


The new East End

WORDS & IMAGES | DANIEL ALLEN



IN LESS THAN FOUR YEARS, LONDON'S EAST END WILL HOST THE 2012 OLYMPICS. CONTRASTING SHARPLY WITH WEST LONDON, THE TRADITIONAL HANGOUT OF THE CAPITAL'S BON VIVANT, THIS AREA'S HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION WITH DICKENSIAN POVERTY, DERELICTION AND CRIME PRE-DATES JACK THE RIPPER. TIMES ARE CHANGING THOUGH, AND WITH ACCELERATING INVESTMENT AND GENTRIFICATION, THE EAST END AND ITS INHABITANTS ARE RE-WRITING THE HISTORY BOOKS





As London's docks collapsed in the second half of the 20th Century, it looked as though the eastern half of the city was destined to become a permanent ghetto. Having endured floods, poverty and Second World War bombings, time had been called on East London and its residents. By the early 1980s, a huge expanse of land adjoining the Thames had become a rust-laden graveyard, unemployment was rife and a bleak future loomed on the horizon.

If there's one thing that London's Eastenders are famed for, however, it's their ability to endure. The combination of concerted mid-80s regeneration campaigns and local never-say-die optimism resulted in a revolution. Shiny skyscrapers rose from amongst the scrap metal and designer apartments began to replace warehouses. Today, with the Olympics providing a timely boost, East London has become an entrepreneurial and cultural hotbed as artists and capitalists unite in an ongoing urban transformation.

Looking back in time, the East End's current development is just one step in a singular cycle of change. "From the Middle Ages until now, East London has always been a place where the city expanded, both in terms of its population and economy," says Dave Jones, an Eastender living in Whitechapel. "Dirty industries, such as the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, had to move beyond the city walls. Thriving seaborne trade meant new dockland areas. People of all nationalities seeking shelter and safety settled here."

No other area of London, or the UK, has experienced the extreme demographic dynamism of the East End. French Huguenots, Germans and Irish, West Indians, Indians and Bangladeshis – each successive wave of immigrants has enriched East London's unique, multi-cultural character, adding colour and vibrancy to every facet of life.

East London's ethnic diversity was a major factor in helping the city win the 2012 Games. Sir Robin Wales, elected mayor of Newham, one of East London's Olympic ⇒

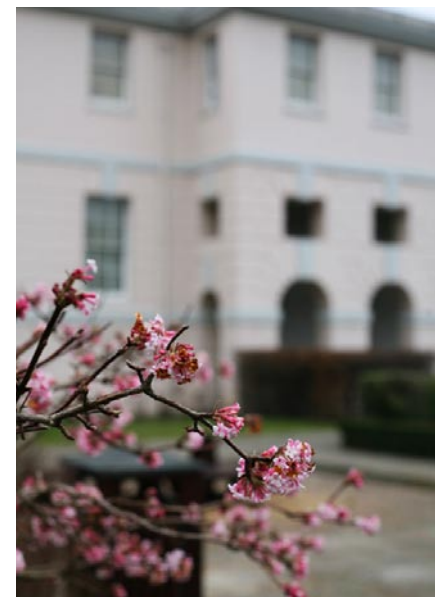
PREVIOUS PAGE: Canary Wharf's sleek modern front
THIS PAGE: The new Olympic Aquatics Centre



and Europe,” explains Sir Robin Wales. “Stratford is already served by two subway routes, the Docklands Light Railway (DLR), the London Overground network and National Rail, and will shortly be on the High Speed 1 Route linking London to the Channel Tunnel. London City Airport will be directly accessible from Stratford on the DLR.”

Fiona Fletcher Smith, Hackney Council's Corporate Director for Neighbourhoods and Regeneration, is also upbeat about the impact of the Olympics on East London. “The Games will regenerate Hackney and East London,” she says. “Hackney will host the media centres for the Games. These will be transformed into high quality spaces, with the potential to create thousands of jobs after 2012. They will sit at the heart of a vibrant new neighbourhood in Hackney Wick, providing new homes, restaurants and shops, alongside indoor sports facilities and green space.”

While the Olympics are undoubtedly a major catalyst for re-intensified urban growth, the East End's varied attractions already provide a solid base on which to build. Those who visit the area today will experience sights, sounds, smells and tastes that are as stimulating as they are eclectic. “From the Hackney Empire Theatre to the White Cube Squared Art Gallery in Hoxton, this is an exciting area full of culture, new hotels, bars and restaurants,” says Ms Smith.



boroughs, comments, “Newham has the world at its heart – we are the most ethnically diverse borough in the UK; 110 different languages are recognised in our schools. Virtually every Olympic team that competes, no matter where they're from, can be sure they will have supporters right here in Newham.”

Five East End boroughs – Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Newham, Waltham Forest and Greenwich – will stage the Olympics. Centered on Stratford, the first four of these will share the Olympic Park. The largest urban green space created in Europe for more than 150 years, the park will contain the Olympic Village, Olympic Stadium and Aquatics Center. The Olympic zone will extend from the ExCel Exhibition Centre in Royal Victoria Dock to the Millennium Dome in north Greenwich.

Spanning 500 acres of the Lower Lea Valley, the Olympic Park is expected to attract up to 180,000 spectators each day. Encompassing a number of venues, it will involve visitors

closely with the sporting action, whether they're inside the Olympic Stadium or watching one of a series of giant LCD screens dotted throughout its leafy confines. Construction of the stadium began in May last year and its slowly growing metallic exoskeleton can be viewed from a network of public footpaths that criss-cross the site.

In addition to widespread aesthetic improvements, the development of Stratford and its environs will bring other benefits, both for residents and visitors. Regional investment that was set to take place over the next 20 years has all been fast-tracked, creating much-needed jobs, housing and transport infrastructure. The London Development Agency estimates that 9,000 new homes will be built in the Olympic Park alone, supported by new hospitals, schools, family health services and other community facilities.

“Our borough is fast becoming a transport hub connecting England with central London

The Theatre Royal in Stratford, a heritage-listed structure opened in 1884, is a cultural beacon for the multi-ethnic community it serves. "We aim to be relevant to East London with our performances," says Barry Burke, the theatre's head of marketing and sales. "Our work has been appealing to Afro-Caribbean and British Asian audiences for the last 20 years. While the population around here could swell by up to 50,000 after the Olympics, we'll still be a platform for young and exciting writers from all walks of life."

While much of the Lea River Valley lay derelict before the recent Olympic work began, there are now a growing number of areas around Hackney Marshes where it's possible to get away from it all. Ducks, geese and other waterfowl are on the increase, with well-kept riverside footpaths providing access to a little piece of green heaven for dog walkers, hikers and tourists alike.

Southwest of Stratford across the River Thames lies the fascinating borough of Greenwich, with a range of cultural and



RIGHT: A woman playing fetch with her dog in Greenwich park; the Greenwich Maritime Museum
 ABOVE: A jellied eels shop; a bowl of jellied eels with sauce



No other area of London has experienced the extreme demographic dynamism of the East End. Each wave of immigrants has enriched East London's multicultural character

architectural attractions including the Royal Observatory, the Queen's House and the National Maritime Museum. Home of Greenwich Mean Time and the Meridian, the line which separates the world into East and West, the Observatory offers stunning panoramic views of the Royal Park, the towering office blocks of Canary Wharf and in the far distance, Olympic Park. Greenwich market and the nearby range of specialist shops are a big draw for keen shoppers.

To the east of the Olympic Park lies the borough of Newham, home of Premiership

football team West Ham. "The Hammers", as they are popularly known, may even upgrade from their current stadium at Upton Park to the Olympic Stadium after the Games are over. Those who take in a match there may like to wander the length of adjacent Green Street before kick-off, browsing the ethnic merchandise of nearby Queen's Market and the area's multi-cultural mix of shops.

In the borough of Tower Hamlets, at the westernmost edge of the East End, lie two of London's most pre-eminent landmarks: the Tower of London and Tower Bridge. The former, tied up with nearly 1,000 years of

British history and famously guarded by the Beefeaters and ravens, is an ancient fortress founded by William the Conqueror. The beautifully engineered Tower Bridge, which was completed in 1894, offers lovely views over the River Thames.

No review of the East End would be complete without mentioning two of its most legendary associations – Cockneys and jellied eels. The former is a 150-year old term originally used as an insult to distinguish London's refined city dwellers from their less civilised country cousins. The label soon turned from critical to complimentary, however, and the defiant, =>



ABOVE: Stratford's heritage-listed Theatre Royale

EXPERIENCE EAST END LONDON

FOR EATING

New Tayyab's

Started by Mohammad Tayyab over 30 years ago, this family-run restaurant situated in the East End's Whitechapel area near the East London Mosque is growing in popularity. The reasonably-priced Pakistan Punjabi menu is a cut above those offered in nearby Brick Lane – favourites include the mixed grill, seekh kebabs and masala fish.

WWW.TAYYABS.CO.UK

FOR CULTURE

Whitechapel Bell Foundry

With a production history dating back to 1570, the Whitechapel Bell Foundry is Britain's oldest manufacturing company. Originally established near Aldgate, growing demand for the foundry's bells saw the company move to its present location on Whitechapel Road in 1738. Some of the company's most enormous bells to date include the renowned Big Ben in London's Houses of Parliament and the Great Bell of Montreal.

WWW.WHITECHAPELBELLFOUNDRY.CO.UK

FOR SHOPPING

Burberry Factory Store & Petticoat Lane

Bargain-hunting Burberry fans will be pleasantly surprised by the savings at the company's factory shop on Chatham Place (Hackney), where flawless jackets, sweaters, wallets and bags sell at a huge discount. Petticoat Lane is East London's world famous Sunday market which sells mainly clothes for men, women and children. Operating since the 1750s, the market is named after the petticoats once sold there by the French Huguenots.

WWW.BURBERRY.CO.UK

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When David Beckham moved to Madrid in 2003, it wasn't the fish and chips or a Sunday roast that he missed the most; it was the jellied eels

self-reliant, working class London Cockney was born, together with the peculiar Cockney rhyming slang that is still used today.

"Originally Cockneys were people born within the sounds of Bow Bells," explains Whitechapel resident Dave Jones. "These are the bells of St Mary-le-Bow Church in the City of London, and not Bow Church in the East End, as many people think. Nowadays London is a far noisier place, so the bells are virtually inaudible. Many people have moved away from East London, but are still proud to call themselves Cockneys."

When David Beckham, one of East London's most famous sons, moved to Madrid, it wasn't the fish and chips or a Sunday roast

that he missed the most; it was jellied eels. This East London delicacy was first cooked up in the 18th Century. This slippery snack is no longer as commonly consumed as it once was, but there are still many jellied eel shops and stalls strewn across the East End. Tubby Isaacs near Aldgate East subway station is a particular favourite.

Like the ever-cheerful Cockney, East London today is in a state of change. Changing faces and changing landscapes bring fresh opportunities and challenges. In such an evolutionary process it's hard to pinpoint a beginning or end, but one thing's for sure – the world's fascination with all things East End is about to reach Olympic proportions. 🍷