From a rural village outside of the City of London to a bustling manufacturing area to a richly diverse 21st century urban community, Haggerston has reinvented itself many times over the centuries.

The last century has seen a lot of changes in Haggerston. As the once dominant manufacturing industry declined, bombs destroyed a quarter of the homes in the ward during the Second World War and others were marked for clearance and redevelopment. Long-time residents saw the area change: they remember a ‘rough and ready’ industrial area, but by the mid-1980s Hackney Gazette was praising the ‘up and coming’ neighbourhoods in ‘Trendy Hackney’. Some decry the modern ‘monstrosities’ that replaced the old terraced houses and lament the loss of the tightly knit community they remember from days past. Others celebrate the redevelopments and look forward to Haggerston’s place in the 21st century as a vibrant, diverse and creative ward.

In this exhibition, we will look at change in Haggerston and what it was like to live, work and play in different periods of the ward’s history.

Haggerston can trace its history back 1000 years when it appeared in the Domesday Book as Hergotestane.
Haggerston Park

Some local residents may remember when Haggerston Park was the site of the Imperial Gas Light and Coke Company. The company received raw materials on Regent’s Canal and provided gas lighting for the Shoreditch area. In 1944, a V2 rocket hit the gasholder and gas production stopped immediately.

At the end of the Second World War, Shoreditch had only one-fifth of an acre of open space for every 1000 people in the ward. The closing of the gasworks made way for a new park that opened in 1958 to serve the residents in the new estates of St Mary’s and Dove Row.

Haggerston Baths

Completed in 1904, Haggerston Baths was part of a public health initiative that encouraged local councils to provide free bathing facilities for ordinary people. Most of the homes in Haggerston at this time would not have had an indoor toilet, let alone a bath. For Shoreditch Borough Council, Haggerston Baths was seen ‘not as luxury but as a necessity’.

Over the years, as homes were modernised to include their own bathrooms, Haggerston Baths became a space for other activities. In addition to leisurely and competitive swimming, the Baths held darts competitions and dances. However, by 2000 the Baths had fallen into a state of neglect and closed its doors. Despite several attempts at redevelopment, the Council has yet to decide on a plan for Haggerston Baths and residents continue to campaign for its reopening.
Civic Celebrations

Civic celebrations like coronations, jubilees and VE Day are filled with parties and festivities. Haggerston resident Jimmy vividly remembers King George VI’s coronation in 1936 when there were parties in the streets and the local pubs organised collections to pay for food and drink. Rose, another local resident, remembers when the estate’s railings were painted in patriotic colours for Queen Elizabeth’s Silver Jubilee. ‘Those railings,’ she told us, ‘ended up painted red, white and blue until 2000!’

Family Celebrations

Haggerston’s residents also celebrate all sorts of personal events like birthdays, anniversaries or religious holidays. They have similar elements, like sharing food and drink with friends and relatives. Sometimes circumstances add an extra challenge. Rose remembers her family pooled their ration points during the Second World War so they could have special foods at Christmas.

Newer residents to the area have added celebrations to Haggerston’s repertoire. We interviewed residents who celebrate St Patrick’s Day, Ethiopian New Year and Gambian Independence Day.
In 1863, James Mortimer built Hoxton Hall ‘with the specific object of affording the humbler classes an entertainment that shall combine instruction with amusement’. The audiences of largely young working-class men were treated to a variety of entertainment, including performers like Herbert Campbell ‘the popular star comic vocalist’.

Hoxton Hall changed hands after its music hall heyday and was used for temperance meetings and educational programming for decades. In the 1960s, thanks to interest from the British Music Hall Society, the building re-opened as a theatre. Hoxton Hall is now a Youth Arts Hub for Hackney and an exciting venue hosting a lively programme of theatre, music, cabaret and comedy.

Unlike similar rural venues that enjoyed the support of a wealthy patron, Hackney Working Men’s Club in Haggerston Road was organised by the working men themselves. Three years after it opened in 1874, membership was at 1,200. The Club offered entertainment including drinking, games like draughts or cards and bi-weekly musical concerts. Members could also take advantage of weekly lectures, a library and drama or elocution lessons. Haggerston’s Working Men’s Club was a venue for a variety of talks and performances. Sadly no image remains.
Our volunteers trawled archival copies of the Hackney Gazette for a glimpse of the way Haggerston’s residents entertained themselves over the last century.

**A Night on the Town**

In years past, Haggerston’s residents celebrated the end of a hard day’s work by dancing at Shoreditch Town Hall, going to the pictures, or enjoying the company of friends at a local restaurant. In the 19th century, music hall was a popular option and Haggerston’s music halls boasted everything from opera to pantomime.

Pubs were also a prominent part of the community and were important local institutions in the post-war years. They held charity events, outings and later began organising discos.

**A Day Out**

During holidays and at weekends, Haggerston’s residents found other ways to amuse themselves. In the first half of the twentieth century, youth clubs and pensioner’s groups organised outings to the seaside or held fairs. In the 1940s and 1950s, skid racing was very popular. ‘Skid kids’ built a track on a bombsite near Haggerston and organised regular bicycle races. Crowds could top 1500 people for a Sunday afternoon match. Spectators enjoyed ice lollies and the Walter Scott pub supplied power to a PA system via a long cable.

Community trips to the coast were common. Here residents enjoy a coach trip to Margate.

The Mayor of Shoreditch called for bombsites to be turned into ‘playgrounds for children’ as a way of reclaiming neighbourhood spaces. The speedway—located by Regent’s Canal and bounded by Andrews Road, Sheep Lane and Ada Street—was one successful example.
Volunteers working with the Building Exploratory researched and photographed all the listed buildings in Haggerston. Here is a selection.

**Shoreditch Town Hall**

The Grade II listed Shoreditch Town Hall was built in four phases, with the first section completed in 1866 and the last in 1936. It was the centre of municipal administration for Shoreditch Borough until Shoreditch was incorporated into Hackney Borough in 1965. After an extensive renovation project, the building re-opened in 2004 as a new arts centre hosting private and public events. The building was a favourite amongst our volunteers for its beautiful architecture and its rich history of providing services and entertainment to the local area.

**Haggerston School**

Haggerston School’s distinctive concrete structure is hard to ignore. Originally Haggerston Girls’ School, the building was designed by Ernő Goldfinger, an influential modernist architect, and built in 1964–7. Though he designed a variety of buildings in England, including two primary schools, Haggerston School is Goldfinger’s only secondary school and is an excellent example of his style.

**Süleymaniye Mosque**

Süleymaniye Mosque opened in Kingsland Road in 1999. It shares its name with the iconic Süleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul and is also the UK Turkish Islamic Cultural Centre. Members of the local Muslim community can worship at the mosque and use the building for weddings, funerals, classes and other events. Though not a listed site, the mosque is one of the most distinctive landmarks on Kingsland Road and is an important cultural hub in Haggerston.

Süleymaniye Mosque Secretary General, Hakan Yıldırım talked to us about his role organising festivals like Ramadan for the local Muslim community and the difficulties he sometimes faces fitting religious holidays into a busy London life.
Haggerston and the surrounding areas have seen wave after wave of new communities joining its ranks for the last 400 years. There are many factors that influence the journey of migration, but hope and aspiration are key motivations. French Huguenots and Jewish refugees fled religious persecution in Europe; enslaved Africans and Indian servants were brought to England against their will. Thousands of people from the UK and overseas, hoping to build a new and better life have come to London and many found a home in Haggerston.

Haggerston Today

Just as the canal and railway had brought new industries and workers to Haggerston in the 1800s, the break-up of the British Empire and ease of transportation brought new communities to Haggerston in the 1900s. Citizens from the colonies, the former colonies and the Commonwealth, who already held British passports, were amongst the largest groups of migrants to Haggerston.

After the Second World War, Haggerston became home to migrants from the Caribbean, Africa, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In the 1970s, refugees from Vietnam settled in the ward. More recently, Somalis, Bosnians, and Kurds have come to London escaping conflict in their homelands. Today, Haggerston is a richly diverse area with nearly half of its residents born outside of the UK.

Many of the Haggerston residents we interviewed have cultural roots in other countries. They keep their heritage alive with food, celebrations, and home decoration. Many proudly supported their ancestral homelands alongside Great Britain during the 2012 Olympics.

Photograph by Jayne Lloyd

Photograph by Pauline Moon

Photograph by Em Fitzgerald

Photograph by Helen Baird
Regent’s Canal was completed in 1820 and linked London with the manufacturing powerhouses of the north. It also put Haggerston on the map and made the area attractive to industrialists who built their factories, wharves and warehouses here. The canal sustained the 19th century economy in Haggerston, transporting raw materials like coal, timber and ice to local businesses.

As road transportation grew more widespread, the canal’s usefulness declined. When the canal froze for three months during the winter of 1962–63, it was the last straw for the remaining commercial operators and the canal became a gathering place for the community. Residents told us they enjoy taking leisurely walks along the canal path and they remember meeting up under the bridges in summer to play music.

In the 19th century, Regent’s Canal was the most efficient way to transport raw materials to the manufacturers in Haggerston and to transport finished goods to consumers around London. A horse-drawn coal barge in 1954. (above)

Since 1983, Laburnum Boat Club has hosted water activities on Regent’s Canal including narrowboat trips and kayaking lessons for local youth groups.

After Regent’s Canal was completed, there was demand for easy access to the canal from other parts of the city. By the 1860s, the North London Railway had built a railway line that connected London’s northern neighbourhoods with the City and the canal. The North London line included a station at Haggerston, opened in 1867. The line became a popular route not only for freight trains but for passenger trains as well. It enabled Londoners who worked in the City or the Docks to live in places like Haggerston (then a suburb) and commute into work. This would have been impossible fifty years earlier when most people had to live within easy walking distance of their work.

Haggerston station was severely damaged by a bomb during the Second World War and closed in 1940. In 2010, Transport for London re-opened Haggerston station and also built a new station at Hoxton as part of the East London Line extension of the Overground.

The opening of the new Overground stations enable residents to commute to other areas of London more easily and likewise encourages more visitors to Haggerston.

Haggerston Overground Station, interior and exterior views, 2010 (top); Haggerston Station in the late 19th century (above)
In the 18th and 19th centuries, Haggerston was a farming community. It supplied the City of London with dairy products and feed for horses. With the completion of Regent’s Canal and the expansion of the railways, London’s urban sprawl quickly enveloped Haggerston, which became a busy East End neighbourhood. Warehouses and factories sprang up in Dunloe Street and Regent’s Row. New residents poured in from around the country looking for work.

By the early 20th century, Haggerston was a hub of furniture and clothing manufacture. The area was made up of small businesses and independent artisans. In the 1960s, Haggerston followed nation-wide trends as the service industry overtook manufacturing. By 2011, only 2.3% of Haggerston’s residents worked in manufacturing, compared with over a quarter of its residents in 1951.

As shown in the images above, Haggerston’s industries were fairly self-contained, with furniture manufacturers residing in the same street as the sawmills that supplied them with raw wood and the upholsterers that would provide the finishing touches.
The Geffrye Almshouses were built in 1714, using money from the will of Sir Robert Geffrye, a former Master of the Ironmongers Company. Initially they provided homes for retired ironmongers, and later for other ‘respectable’ poor, in a pleasant rural location.

By the beginning of the 20th century, the surrounding area had become a neglected and overcrowded inner city slum. The almshouses were relocated to the Kent countryside and in 1914 a new purpose was found for the buildings as a museum, preserving the gardens for local people to use.

The Geffrye Almshouses

Geffrye Almshouses

Spotlight on Home

Haggerston Estate

Haggerston Estate was built in 1936 by the London County Council Housing Department as part of an improvement project that was intended to clear away London’s slums. The estate featured many shared facilities including washhouses, three pubs and shops. Almost eighty years later, Haggerston Estate is undergoing a multi-phase redevelopment project and the original buildings have been demolished to make way for the new estate.

Our volunteers interviewed some of the estate’s current and past residents. They can tell stories of the estate’s strong sense of community, but they also remember the negative impressions some had of the estate in the 1980s and one resident recalls its reputation as a ‘derelict dead space’. Today, the estate and its residents continue to thrive and adapt during a lengthy and disruptive redevelopment project.

These two prominent landmarks give us a glimpse of what it has been like to call Haggerston home.

Then we knew everybody and everybody knew us, and that was a community.

Rose, Haggerston resident

The ‘I Am Here’ art project has placed portraits of residents in the boarded up windows of vacated homes. As one resident put it, the portraits give ‘a narrative, a face, a voice to us in the community’. The portraits are a reminder of the vibrant community that has always been a part of the estate and that residents hope will continue in the new development.