

# **The Newham Story**

## **A Short History of the London Borough of Newham**

### **Introduction**

Newham Leisure Services is delighted to publish this booklet, an introduction to the history of the part of East London known since 1965 as the London Borough of Newham. It concentrates on the last 150 years during which the area was transformed from a rural backwater to a major manufacturing centre, suffered decline and deprivation and is now in the process of regeneration. The booklet is aimed at past and present residents, teachers and students, and those who have come to work in the borough and who would like to know something about its past.

Newham's key location as the gateway to London has shaped its past and will influence its future. Five miles east of the City of London, Newham is bounded by the River Thames in the south, by the River Lea in the west, the River Roding in the east and Wanstead Flats in the north.

Farming was the most important way of making a living until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some industries emerged along the River Lea between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries but communities did not grow into towns. Real change came in the 1850s with the building of the Royal Docks for the new large steam ships. At that time they were the largest docks in the world and the first directly linked to the railways. Other industries were attracted to the area which grew to be the most important manufacturing centre in southern England. Thousands of people moved in to take up the jobs that were created. New residents included those from other parts of London and Britain but also Indians, Chinese, Africans, Jews and Italians.

Within a generation these industries declined bringing unemployment on a large scale. Some left to seek work elsewhere. When war broke out in 1939, others joined the armed forces. Heavy bombing brought devastation to the south of the borough and so after the war many new council houses were built. From the 1950s new families, many from Asia and the Caribbean, were recruited to help with post – War reconstruction. They have been joined by those escaping persecution in Africa and other parts of the world. Newham now has one of the most diverse populations of any London Borough.

Several themes occur over and over again throughout Newham's history over the last 150 years; changes in industry, unemployment and settlers. This booklet sets out to examine these themes and explain the ups and downs of Newham's history, providing a context for the vibrant, modern and multicultural place it is today.

If you would like to find out more:

Places to visit

Newham Archives and Local Studies Library in Stratford Library, 3 The Grove, Stratford tel 020 8430 6881

North Woolwich Old Station Museum, Pier Road, North Woolwich tel 020 7474 7244

The Old Dispensary, 30 Romford Road, Stratford  
tel 020 8430 6393

Resources

**London Borough of Newham website [www.newham.gov.uk](http://www.newham.gov.uk)**

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Timeline**

### **440,000BCE**

Old Stone Age (Palaeolithic) people living near the Thames using stone tools

### **8000-4000BCE**

A Middle Stone Age (Mesolithic) temporary camp excavated at the Royal Docks Community School

### **3000BCE**

A New Stone Age (Neolithic) timber trackway leading down to the Thames found at Fort Street, Silvertown

### **2400BCE-43CE**

Evidence of Bronze and Iron age settlements along the River Lea and Roding

### **43-450CE**

Stratford lies on the Roman road from London to Colchester

### **958**

First written reference to "tall thorn" later Stratford Langthorne

### **1086**

Domesday Book records the Manor of (West) Ham with a population of 130

### **1247**

King grants Richard de Montfichet a Tuesday market at West Ham

### **1308**

First recorded Woolwich ferry

### **1555\6**

18 Protestants are burnt at Stratford and Bow

### **1666**

About 160 killed by the Great Plague

### **1681**

Abbey Mill toll gate set up

### **1723**

First parish school, West Ham Church School, opens

### **1749**

Bow Porcelain factory opens in Stratford

### **1809**

Elizabeth Fry, prison reformer, moves to Plashet House, East Ham

## **Victorian Period**

Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837 and reigned for 64 years. The era was characterised by rapid change and nowhere more so than in East and West Ham.

The coming of the railway in 1839 began an explosion of industrial growth in the area. West Ham was particularly attractive. It was close to London with river and rail links and there was space for growth. Land and rates were cheap and there was a large, untapped workforce. Most importantly the area was not governed by the laws in London which restricted the setting up of dirty and dangerous industries. Soon the area was attracting trades like oil boilers, varnish makers and chemical manufacturers.

*((Ref. Eastern) An engraving c.1837 of the Eastern Counties Railway passing close to the Bow Back River. Newham Heritage Service)*

## **New Industry**

In 1846 CJ Mare & Co (later the Thames Ironworks) opened a shipyard at Bow Creek. This was followed in 1852 by the rubber firm SW Silver & Co. Small townships like Canning Town and Silvertown (named after the firm) were thrown up to house new workers. The houses were jerry built and the towns grew up without roads, gas supplies and with open sewers running through the streets. In 1855 Albert Dickens, brother of Charles, published a Board of Health Report about the area. He wrote:

*"It was impossible to describe the miserable state Canning Town was in: there was neither drainage nor paving; in Winter the streets were impassable; the cholera raged very much in this district."*

A ready supply of coal became available after the building of the Royal Docks between 1855 and 1880. By 1875 1.5 million tons of 2.75 million tons of coal transported to London were unloaded in West Ham. This encouraged more industries to set up in the area. Firms included Henry Tate & Sons who built their sugar refinery in Silvertown in 1878 and Abram Lyle & Sons who built their works at Plaistow Wharf a few years later. The two firms combined in 1921 and became a household name.

East Ham largely escaped massive industrialisation and the jerry building of the slum towns in West Ham. The area became more residential, occupied by clerks and professionals travelling to London.

*An open sewer at the bottom of Grange Road, Canning Town in 1888.  
Newham Heritage Service*

*A view of Thames Ironworks published in the Illustrated London News in 1854. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

*Partially completed Beckton Gasworks in 1869. Named after the President of the Company, Simon Adam Beck, it was the largest gas plant in the world when it opened in 1870. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

### **Expanding Population**

The explosion of industries brought a huge growth in population. In 1851 the population in West Ham was 18,817 and East Ham had a population of 2,858 in 1861. In 1901 there were 267,903 people living in West Ham and 96,018 in East Ham. People settled in the area from all over the British Isles. The docks brought people from all over the world.

The growth of industry and the working class population saw the area become a hot bed of the early labour movements. Will Thorne formed the Gas Workers and General Labourers Union in 1889. Keir Hardie was returned here as the first Labour MP in the country in 1892.

By the end of the Victorian period the area was described as the industrial heartland of the South.

*St John's, Stratford Broadway c.1835. The church was built to accommodate the growing population of Stratford. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

*This advert from the Herald Almanack in 1898 shows the hostility some felt to settlers from Europe. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

### **The Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

In 1900 East and West Ham were still separate boroughs. West Ham had become a borough in 1886 and East Ham in 1904. The boundary between the two ran along Green Street and down Boundary Road to the Thames. East Ham was bounded by the River Roding in the east and West Ham by the River Lea in the west.

Despite their closeness the two areas had developed in different ways. West Ham was heavily industrialised throughout the borough. Industries lined the River Lea as far as Stratford in the north. Heavy industry in East Ham was largely confined to the Royal Albert Docks and Beckton Gasworks in the south. The differences in this development were reflected in the types of housing most common to both areas too.

*Typical East Ham housing between Katherine Road and Green Street.  
Newham Heritage Service*

*Beckton Road - jerry built housing c.1890. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

*John Knight opened the Royal Primrose Soap Works in Silvertown in 1880. This photograph shows the box making room c.1910. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

### **Libraries and Leisure**

East Ham felt like a residential suburb. It had more and bigger open spaces than West Ham, for example Central Park, Plashet Park and Wanstead Flats. By 1900 Wanstead Flats was famous for its fairs

*“There is no other fair like Whit Monday’s on Wanstead Flats....shows, shies, swings, merry-go-rounds, fried fish stalls and donkeys are packed closer than on Hampstead Heath.”* Arthur Morrison writing in 1901.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century both boroughs had begun to develop good public services for residents. Both boroughs had town halls and several libraries like those at Canning Town opened in 1893 and Manor Park opened in 1905. In an age when many left school at the age of twelve the opportunities for self-education provided by the libraries was important. East Ham was particularly proud of the Technical Institute which ran trade and scientific courses. It was opened with great celebration by the Prince and Princess of Wales in March 1905.

Many less learned entertainments were on offer too. Forest Gate Public Hall had a roller skating rink opened in 1909 and West Ham Memorial Park had a circular track used for both cycle and motor cycle racing. Both areas were well served by the newest craze - the cinema. By 1917 West Ham alone had 17 cinemas!

*The sundial in Central Park, East Ham at the turn of the century. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

*East Ham Town Hall. The area became a borough in 1904. Newham Heritage Service*

*West Ham Football Club team in 1900\1901 in the year it was formed. The team was originally the Thames Ironworks team. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

## **Early Industrial Decline**

The period between 1900 and the outbreak of the First World War was difficult for workers in the area. Increased use of machinery meant fewer workers were necessary and the jobs they did do became more repetitive and boring. As so many workers were available it was often easier and cheaper for employers to take on workers by the season or day. This was particularly true in the docks. Men would line up at the gates at "call on" time and hope to be picked out by the foreman. Many only got work a couple of days a week and this put enormous strain on family life.

*"I can remember as a kid, five or six years of age, they used to take dockers on at the top of my turning and on the way to school of a morning the place would be full of people, and half an hour later there wasn't a soul there. It was a hard life. If your face didn't fit you didn't get picked."* Gus Webb remembering the call on in the 1920s.

The high levels of unemployment led West Ham to become the first borough to introduce the Unemployed Workers Act in 1905. This allowed the borough to set up a Distress Committee. They set up schemes to try to solve unemployment but most were short-term ways to get the figures down. The most controversial scheme encouraged the unemployed and their families to emigrate to Australia or Canada. In 1906\07 the number of those taking up the offer reached 224 men and over 800 dependants!

*Laying the keel of HMS Thunderer. It was the last ship built at the Thames Ironworks before it closed in 1912. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

*Scenes from the 1912 Dock Strike. There were port wide strikes in both 1911 and 1912 over pay and working hours. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

*The Stratford Co-operative Shop on the junction of Falmouth and Maryland Streets sold food at fair prices. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

## **Labour Yards**

Labour yards were set up by charities so that unemployed men could earn a few shillings a day by chopping firewood for tinder. The West Ham Central Mission paid 2 shillings a day in 1910. It was not very much but helped keep families out of the workhouse. Sometimes the yards operated soup kitchens for women and children too.

Unemployment was so bad at Christmas 1904 that *The Daily Telegraph* set up a fund to collect money for the poor of West Ham. With the money raised the Church Army opened the Labour Depot in West Ham. Before the Depot closed in 1906 it had provided temporary employment for 864 married men and others.

### **Plaistow Landgrabbers**

At this time there was still the view that if you were unemployed it was your own fault. Then in July 1906 a group of local men occupied some waste ground in St Mary's Road, Plaistow. They were led by Councillor Ben Cunningham. They cleared the site and laid it out in four triangle shapes and planted vegetables. It became known as Triangle Camp.

The men had two aims: to show that waste ground could be put to good use and to show that the unemployed were willing to work.

The Council saw things differently and served the men with an injunction. Eventually the men were removed but they had made their point. Locally at least attitudes started to change towards the unemployed.

*The Plaistow Landgrabbers pictured in 1906. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

### **Settlers**

The 1911 census records that 1.5% of West Ham's population and 1.9% of East Ham's population were not British. Most were Europeans with a smaller number of people from Asia, Africa and elsewhere. In 1901 the company of Moore and Nettlefold in North Woolwich alone was employing 150 immigrant workers. Other settlers set up their own businesses. By the 1920s most of the shops in Barking Road were owned by Europeans.

*Italian immigrants who started businesses with the help of Guiseeppe Amato, an ice cream seller. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

*A German Butcher shop on High Street North, East Ham 1911. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

### **First World War**

The Great War began in August 1914 and was to last until November 1918. East and West Ham, like elsewhere in the country, were to suffer from food shortages, deprivation and the fear of attack from the air. However, the war

gave unemployed people in the area the opportunity for work. From West Ham alone 100,000 men served in the armed forces.

*A local ration book from the First World War. Newham Heritage Service Tank Day outside Stratford Town Hall in 1918. Displays like this encouraged people to buy war bonds to help fund the war. Newham Heritage Service*

### **Jack Cornwell VC**

Amongst those who joined up was Jack Cornwell. From Manor Park, he joined the Royal Navy aged sixteen in October 1915. He died less than a year later. He was on board the HMS Chester during the Battle of Jutland on 31 May 1916.

His commanding officer wrote of him,  
*"..the instance of devotion to duty by, Boy(1<sup>st</sup> Class) John Travers Cornwell who was mortally wounded early in the action, but nevertheless remained standing alone at a most exposed post, quietly awaiting orders till the end of the action, with the gun's crew dead and wounded around him. He was under 16 years old. I regret that he has since died, but I recommend his case for special recognition in justice to his memory and as an acknowledgement of the high example set by him."*

Jack was awarded the Victoria Cross after his death and is buried in Manor Park Cemetery. He was among only 634 people to be awarded the Victoria Cross during the First World War.

*Jack Cornwell VC - detail from a painting of Jack at his station during the Battle of Jutland 1916. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

### **At Home**

On the Home Front people were dealing with the realities of war. In May 1915 the American ship the Lusitania was sunk. Many were shocked by the attack on a civilian ship and anti German feelings ran high. Shops and homes belonging to Germans or those with German sounding names were attacked. Public houses with German names changed them.

Other settlers who had lived in the area for many years and considered it their home were forced to register as Enemy Aliens by the government. The most notable local example of this was Gustav Pagenstecher, the son of a West Indian woman living in Germany. At the outbreak of the war he had been living in West Ham for over forty years. He was instrumental in

securing West Ham Park as a public open space. He died in 1916 whilst still having to report his movements to the police.

*The King of Prussia on Stratford Broadway changed its name at the beginning of the war to the more patriotic Edward VII. Newham Heritage Service*

*Headlines in the Stratford Express describing the riots following the sinking of the Lusitania. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

### **Silvertown Explosion 1917**

Both East and West Ham escaped largely undamaged from air raids and the biggest disaster to strike on the Home Front was the result of a fire.

The Brunner Mond Chemical factory was in the Silvertown area. It had originally produced caustic soda. After the outbreak of the war and with pressure from the government it switched production in 1915 to TNT, despite the fact it was in a heavily built up area. So in 1917 the factory was producing TNT for use in high explosive bombs.

On the night of 19<sup>th</sup> January 1917 the factory exploded at 6.52pm. It is believed the explosion was caused by a fire in the “melt pot” room. The explosion was heard 100 miles away. It devastated the area and damaged thousands of homes. The factory itself, the local fire station and other local factories were completely destroyed.

69 people died in the explosion with 4 others dying later. The death toll might have been much worse. The time of the explosion meant that many workers had already finished their days work.

*Remains of 2 Fort Street after the explosion on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 1917. Newham Heritage Service*

### **End of the War**

The war ended on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918. Thousands of men had died serving their country. There are memorials around the borough commemorating them: at West Ham bus garage, St Mark’s Church, Silvertown and East Ham Memorial Park to name a few. Those who did return had been promised “a land fit for heroes”. They were to be disappointed.

*Peace tea at New Providence Street celebrating the end of the First World War. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

## **Interwar Years**

### **Votes for Women**

The war helped the cause of the suffrage movement. Women took on the jobs usually done by men during the war and their efforts had helped to win it.

Locally women had been active in the suffrage movement for many years. Mrs Pankhurst had sent Annie Kenny to set up a London branch of the Women's Social and Political Union in 1906. She stayed with local suffragette Minnie Baldock in West Ham and the branch was set up in Canning Town. The East London Federation of Suffragettes attracted many local women too. It was different from the WSPU because its members did not agree with the war. The Federation offered practical help for local people by providing mother and infant welfare clinics and cost-price restaurants.

Women were rewarded for their support during the war with limited suffrage in 1918. East Ham North was one of the first boroughs to return a women MP, Susan Lawrence, in 1923. Then in July 1928 women were given equal rights to the vote.

*A page from the "Women's Dreadnought" 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1914 showing several meetings in Canning Town. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

### **Unemployment**

Unemployment dominated the period between the wars. Many workers had to turn to "outdoor relief" to survive. Poor relief was paid out by a body called the Board of Guardians. They ran the workhouses too. In West Ham the Board of Guardians stretched their rules to include unemployed men and women as "deserving poor". By 1925 over 70,000 people in the borough were receiving poor relief.

The money raised from the local poor rate did not cover these payments. So the Guardians had to borrow money from the Ministry of Health to keep the payments going. In the summer of 1926 the Guardians owed the Ministry £2,000,000 and had an overdraft of £300,000. The Guardians argued that the Ministry should pay more because unemployment was a national and not a local issue. The Ministry eventually removed the West Ham Board of Guardians in July 1926. Government people administered the poor law until all Guardians were abolished in 1929. Unemployment had finally become a national issue.

*The Guardian's dispute attracted national press attention. Sections of the press and many Tory MPs accused the West Ham Guardians of waste.*

*Schemes to help the unemployed came in all shapes and forms! Eastside Community Heritage*

### **Riots on Romford Road**

Local unemployed people were very active in demonstrating throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Some people joined the hunger marches organised by the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. Others became involved in more local demonstrations protesting against cuts in benefits and the means test. In October 1932 one of these demonstrations turned into a riot.

*The General Strike 1926 was well supported in the area. This is a view showing chaos on Stratford Broadway. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

### **Coloured Men's Institute**

After the First World War more black and Asian people began to settle particularly around the docks in Canning Town. Some black troops were demobbed here and decided to settle. Many more were sailors particularly from India and the West Indies who met and married local white women. In 1921 1000 people of Indian birth were registered on the census as living in the area. By the 1930s the black community in Canning Town was the largest in London.

Although unemployment hit settlers too, some had secure jobs at sea. Often white, unemployed people blamed settlers for their situation rather than the Government. It was for this reason that Kamal Churchie campaigned to open the Coloured Men's Institute. Churchie was a Methodist Pastor originally from Ceylon (Sri Lanka). He saw the need to provide the black community with a centre they could call their own where they would escape the hostility and bigotry they faced in everyday life.

The Institute opened in 1926 on Tidal Basin Road, Canning Town. Although it had to close in 1930, Kamal Churchie continued his work right up to his death in 1953.

*A group at the Coloured Men's Institute c.1927. Eastside Community Heritage*

### **Blackshirts on the Broadway**

There was a small but close-knit Jewish community in East Ham. A synagogue opened in Barking Road in 1923 and many of the shops in the

Barking Road area were owned by Jewish shopkeepers. The Jews suffered some of the same hostility as the black community particularly from Oswald Mosley's Fascist party which held street meetings in West Ham in the 1930s.

Despite the hostility of some to Jewish and black people there was also great opposition locally to the fascist movement. In July 1935 Mosley spoke at a meeting at Stratford Town Hall when several hundred protesters turned up. The protesters were very vocal and Mosley found it difficult to speak. The Fascist Party was later famously defeated in East London at the battle of Cable Street in 1936.

## **Sport**

The 1920s and 1930s were a difficult time for the area but there were some positive events. In 1928 West Ham speedway stadium opened. The West Ham team became one of the best in the country. West Ham Football Club won through to the FA Cup Final in 1923. It was the first to be played at the new Wembley stadium. So many fans managed to gain entry to the ground that the pitch was nearly overwhelmed by spectators. Unfortunately the Hammers lost to Bolton Wanderers 2-0.

*Streets built on the site of the stadium are named after famous West Ham speedway riders like Arthur Atkinson and Johnnie Hoskins. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

*A liner in King George V docks in 1929 illustrates how the docks dominated life in Canning Town. The Museum in Docklands*

## **Second World War**

War was declared at 11.30am on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939. The nation immediately went on to a war footing. In anticipation of shortages newspapers like the *Stratford Express* made their sizes smaller to save paper. Within days of the war being declared 9,000 people had volunteered in East Ham for civil defence duties. Air Raid Precautions were introduced including the blackout and provision of air raid shelters.

Air raid sirens sounded that first day but on the Home Front a period of relative calm followed, the 'Phoney War'.

*This image shows the devastating effects the air raids were to have on the area. Taken on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 1941. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

## **Gas Masks**

There was a real fear of gas attacks and everyone in the country was issued with a gas mask. It was meant to be carried all the time. Within days of them being issued the ARP in East Ham reported that people were already losing them. West Ham ARP reported that they had issued 1700 respirators for children under two in September 1939. They were already worrying about how they were going to keep track of new-born babies!

*Upton Cross ARP Post c.1940. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

## **Evacuation**

By the 15<sup>th</sup> September 1939 the *Stratford Express* reported that evacuation of children and expectant mothers had been completed successfully. Nearly 16,000 people had been evacuated from East Ham and 32,000 from West Ham. The evacuees had been sent to villages all over the Home Counties and some as far away as Norfolk to escape the expected air raids.

As the year went on and there were no air raids children started to return to London.

*The Dolan children being evacuated in 1940. Approximately 48,000 people were evacuated to the country in the first few weeks of the war. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

## **The Blitz**

The first bomb fell in West Ham on the 28<sup>th</sup> August 1940 in the Beckton Road area. The Blitz proper began in earnest on the 7<sup>th</sup> September. The day became known as Black Saturday locally. On that night 300 German bombers, escorted by 600 fighters, dropped 300 tons of bombs on the East End of London. The docks and war industries were obvious targets.

You could read a newspaper in Shaftesbury Avenue in the West End from the light of the fires in the docks that night. Some fires, fuelled by goods stored in warehouses, burnt for a week. It was said that tobacco leaves from the warehouses settled all over the area that first night. Firemen battled against huge odds to get the fires under control but successfully kept the docks open for business.

*“On that Saturday night, that we were first bombed, I walked from Walthamstow to Maryland Point and got on a train home. Nobody was there to take your money or anything. I got off at Manor Park because I lived at*

*East Ham. All along the High Street was on fire. Woolworths had been bombed on Station Hill and a furniture shop was on fire.” Iris Warren remembers the first night of the Blitz.*

*A photograph taken by a German bomber on the 7<sup>th</sup> September 1940 over Silvertown. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

### **Custom House**

During those first days of the Blitz, on the 10<sup>th</sup> September, South Hallsville School was hit by a bomb. The school was housing bombed-out families waiting to be evacuated. The buses arranged to transport them out failed to arrive. Many now believe that the buses had gone to Camden Town not Canning Town. The delay meant that the school was full when the bomb hit. The official estimate of people killed was 73. Locally it is believed that as many as 400 died. This made it the worst civilian disaster of the war.

*Bomb damage to South Hallsville School which received a direct hit on 10<sup>th</sup> September 1940. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

### **Shelters**

The Blitz lasted until May 1941 but bombing lasted throughout the war. Remarkably only just over 1700 civilians were killed in the area. This was largely due to the provision of air raid shelters. On the 6<sup>th</sup> September 1940 the day before the Blitz started the *Stratford Express* reported that West Ham had space in shelters for around 200,000 people.

Although some had their own Anderson shelters in the back garden much of the area was prone to flooding. This meant Anderson shelters were unsuitable so new public shelters were built or spaces converted into shelters. One of these was the crypt of St John’s Church on the Broadway in Stratford.

*“ There was a woman down there and she sold pies and cheese and cakes you see. All the cakes were laid out and all the bodies were buried in the walls! There was signs on the wall saying here lays...these old fashioned names you know. And people had bunks down there and they’d go to sleep on them all night”* Len Shingler remembers sheltering in St John’s crypt.

*The remains of an Anderson shelter in a garden of Lonsdale Avenue. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

## **The Docks**

Although the Docks were heavily bombed throughout the war they were never completely put out of action. The destruction of the surrounding areas had presented dock workers with a problem. It was difficult for them to get anything to eat during the day. As heavy workers they needed nourishment. The Women's Legion set up a mobile canteen to get over the problem. Some of its members were amongst the 65 port staff who were killed during the war.

The Docks played a vital role in supplying the country with food, especially meat. Many boats were converted in the Docks into hospital ships and troop carriers.

A massive amount of military equipment left through the Docks too. Just leading up to the D-day invasions 2,332,000 tons of stores left the Royal Docks. This included 190,000 tanks and vehicles. Many of the invasion troops left from the Royals too. They had been waiting in makeshift camps at Silvertown and Canning Town throughout April and May 1944.

*Tanks being loaded at the Royal Albert Docks. Imperial War Museum*

## **End of the War**

The war ended in Europe in May 1945 and against Japan in August 1945. As elsewhere around the country spontaneous celebrations broke out as people took to the streets. Nearly every street in the borough organised a street party.

The cost of the war had been high. Nearly 3,000 locals had lost their lives. Approximately 16,000 homes had been destroyed with many thousands more damaged.

*A Victory Party in Baxter Road, Custom House. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

## **Post war to 1980**

The period after the Second World War was a time of rebuilding. The area had lost about a quarters of its homes. The population declined too. Many who had been bombed out or evacuated chose not to return to the area. In West Ham the population in 1939 had been 294,278 but in 1951 it was only 170,993.

*A street party to celebrate the Queen's coronation in 1953. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

## **Incorporation**

It was in the post war period that the two boroughs of East and West Ham were incorporated to form Newham in 1965. Gradually services like education and health were brought together. Older hospitals like Queen Mary's and East Ham Memorial closed and were replaced by Newham General in 1983.

The incorporation year coincided with the introduction of the Government's idea for comprehensive education. In 1972 Newham eventually adopted a scheme which provided sixteen comprehensives. During the debate on comprehensives that ran between 1965 and 1972 a group of parents formed a vocal committee. They eventually went on to form the well known Parents' Centre Bookshop.

## **Housing**

Building programmes were set up across London and many new houses were built first by the London County Council and then by the Greater London Council. One of the biggest schemes was the Keir Hardie estate. But by 1959 only about one third of the houses destroyed during the war had been replaced.

The 1960s saw the introduction of the tower block which was believed to be the answer to London's housing problems. In 1961 the first tower blocks in the area were built in Canning Town. Many more followed. Cranbrook Point and Dunlop Point in Silvertown were opened in 1967 and won a Civic Trust Design Award in 1968. Other tower blocks took their names from firms that had been in the areas where they now stood, such as Albion and Brocklebank tower blocks in North Woolwich.

Then in May 1968 disaster struck as Ronan Point, Canning Town partially collapsed after a gas explosion. Five people were killed in the blast. The disaster at Ronan Point and social studies carried out in the 1970s began to question whether the tower block was the answer to city living. However the building did not stop and by the 1980s Newham had one of the highest concentrations of tower blocks in Britain.

*A view across Barking Road in 1964 clearly showing the growth in tower blocks. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

*Ronan Point, Canning Town after its partial collapse in May 1968. The Daily Telegraph*

## **Docks and Industry**

Between 1951 and 1975 40,000 jobs were lost in the borough. Even though the population had declined many were still out of work. In the 1980s unemployment reached 20%, similar to rates in the 1930s.

During the 1970s several long established, large local employers closed down. This included Trebor Sharpe, Standard Telephone & Cable and Scrutton Maltby. However, the biggest impact on jobs was the running down of the docks from 1966 and their final closure in 1975. This accounted for the loss of 20,000 jobs alone.

Although some new firms, particularly in the finance and service industries, set up here they did not make up for all the jobs lost.

*Tate & Lyles in 1967. For many years the company was one of the largest employers in the area. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

*Trebor Sharpe, the famous sweet factory, closed in the 1970s. Newham Heritage Service*

*Unofficial shop steward, Jack Dash, talking to dock workers in 1968. The Museum in Docklands*

## **New Settlers**

The post war period saw an increase in settlers from abroad. In the 1960s Britain was suffering from a labour shortage in some industries like health and transport. Government Ministries ran campaigns inviting people from the Commonwealth countries to come and work. Others came fleeing persecution and conflict. In the mid 1970s several hundred East African Asians settled in Newham after being thrown out of Uganda by the dictator Idi Amin. As in the past, some people were hostile to the new black community and blamed them for the high unemployment.

The National Front targeted the area looking for recruits. In the 1970s and 1980s racial tension was high and there were a series of high profile racist murders.

The black and Asian population fought back against the rise of fascism, becoming politically organised, with some success. Organisations like the Newham Defence Committee and the Newham Youth Movement led eventually to the foundation in 1980 of the Newham Monitoring Project which still exists today.

## **To the Present Day Regeneration**

Over the last twenty years Newham has had a huge amount of regeneration investment mainly through government schemes. In 1981 the London Docklands Development Corporation was set up to regenerate Beckton and the Royal Docks. They worked in the area until 1998. New housing was built in areas like Cyprus and community facilities developed like the Beckton Children's Centre and most recently a multiplex cinema. In the Royal Docks the impressive ExCel Exhibition Centre opened in 2000.

In the 1990s other regeneration schemes have centred on particular areas like Stratford Town Centre and Green Street. In Stratford the Cultural Quarter has been developed and includes the Theatre Royal, Stratford Picturehouse and Stratford Circus. In Green Street many of the shops have been refurbished. The area is vibrant, bustling and multicultural with a focus on Asian shops and restaurants.

The borough has redeveloped as a transport hub too. The new Stratford Station links rail services with the Docklands Light Railway and the Jubilee Line extension which opened in 1999. The London City Airport built in the former docks and opened in 1987 links Newham with the rest of the country and Europe. It serves more than a million passengers a year.

The borough is developing culture, leisure and transport industries to replace the old heavy industries it relied on in the past. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century unemployment has been reduced to under 10%.

*Beckton Gasworks in 1984 after closure. The area was regenerated by the London Docklands Development Corporation. Newham Archives and Local Studies*

*Stratford's new look station in the late 1990s. Eastside Community Heritage*

### **The 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

About 250,000 people live in Newham in 2002. The borough is recognised as the most ethnically diverse local authority in Britain. About half the population belong to ethnic minority groups. Regeneration plans for the borough continue into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the aim being to make Newham a place where people will choose to live, work and stay.

*A group enjoying the Bangladeshi Mela, 2000. Eastside Community Heritage*