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Child playing in a tenement block courtyard, Whitechapel or Wapping around 1972 © David Hoffman

A World Apart

Photographing change in London's East End 1970-76

Opening at Four Corners Gallery this October, *A World Apart* captures a unique moment of change in London's East End.

Brought together for the first time, these rarely seen photographs document a now-disappeared world. Bengali migrants live side-by-side with elderly Jewish shopkeepers and artisans, dockers socialise in Wapping's clubs and pubs, neighbours and children celebrate at a raucous, multicultural Stepney festival.

But the images reveal streetscapes and communities in upheaval. Desolation hangs over the soon-to-be demolished streets, dock cranes stand lifeless over empty quays awaiting speculative redevelopment. Amid this apparent wasteland a different East End was coming into being. New migrant communities were creating a space for themselves as economic decline displaced earlier neighbourhoods.

A young generation of photographers were drawn to record ordinary people's lives at this moment of rapid transition and advocate for social change. Their exhibitions at the Half Moon Gallery attracted people to view images of themselves and their neighbours. At a time when photography was largely unrecognised by the art world, these photographers mounted 'guerrilla' exhibitions in launderettes, on estate walls, and even on portable sandwich boards. They were part of a flourishing community arts scene that gave a voice to local people, including at pioneering shows at the Whitechapel Art Gallery.

A World Apart features photographs by Ron McCormick and the Exit Photography collective of Nicholas Battye, Diane Bush, Alex Slotzkin, and Paul Trevor, alongside work by Ian Berry, John Donat, David Hoffman, Jessie Ann Matthews, Dennis Morris, Val Perrin, and Ray Rising.

These remarkable photographs celebrate the people of the East End, an area whose identity has been defined by centuries of migration. In an age of increasing social division and intolerance, its strong community history is ever more important today.

A World Apart: Photographing Change in London's East End 1970-76

Friday 24 October - Saturday 6 December 2025

Free admission

Exhibition opening hours 11am - 6pm Wednesday – Saturday

Four Corners

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[Website](#) | [Instagram](#) |

A World Apart is made possible through a National Lottery Heritage Fund project, which is helping build Four Corners' archive collection and opening up its history to new audiences. The exhibition celebrates the history of the Half Moon Gallery, Britain's second independent photography gallery, as part of Four Corners 50th anniversary programme in 2025.

Acknowledgements

With grateful thanks to Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, the RIBA, and Hackney Museum for kindly loaning material for the exhibition, and to Ian Berry, Diane Bush, Valeria Carullo, Isabelle Chalard, Jessie Goodison Burgess, David Hoffman, Jessie Ann Matthew, Ron McCormick, Dennis Morris, Val Perrin, Paul Trevor, Ray Rising, and Richard Wiltshire for their support.

Four Corners

We are a creative centre for film and photography, based in east London for fifty years. Our exhibitions draw on our history of radical, socially-engaged approaches, exploring hidden and marginalised stories. [Four Corners Archive](#) comprises the early work of Four Corners and its neighbour the Half Moon Gallery/Half Moon Photography Workshop, later known as Camerawork after its iconic magazine.

About the National Lottery Heritage Fund

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Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives holds outstanding and unique resources for the study of the history of London's world famous East End. The collections cover Tower Hamlets and its former Metropolitan Boroughs of Bethnal Green, Poplar and Stepney. Through a range of original documents, images and reference books the collections document the changing local landscape and lived experiences of individuals and communities in Tower Hamlets. You can find out more on our [collections](https://www.ideastore.co.uk/collections) page.
<https://www.ideastore.co.uk/local-history>

Photographers

Ron McCormick has exhibited and published for fifty years. His early photographs of Whitechapel were first shown alongside poems by East End schoolchildren in the controversial book *Stepney Words* produced with teacher Chris Searle. He taught at the School of Documentary Photography in Newport, where he ran the NEWPORT SURVEY, an annual record of the community life. A dynamic contributor to the revitalisation of British photography of the 1970s and 1980s, he was the second director the Half Moon Gallery, and the founding director of Side Gallery, Newcastle on Tyne. He runs [Communimedia](#), a community design and production enterprise in South Wales. He has exhibited widely at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Serpentine Gallery, Photographers Gallery, Barbican, MIT Cambridge USA; La Photo Galeria, Madrid, among others.

Exit was a collective of four photographers, Nicholas Battye, [Diane Bush](#), Alex Slotzkin, and [Paul Trevor](#). Their first project, *Down Wapping*, focused on Wapping's working class community that was threatened by the closure of the docks and imminent redevelopment. After some changes, Paul Trevor, Nicholas Battye and Chris Steele-Perkins went on to create *Survival Programmes* from 1974-79, a significant study of social and economic poverty in Britain's inner-cities. [Find out more](#)

Ian Berry is a Magnum photojournalist who worked for *Drum* magazine in South Africa, where he documented the Sharpeville massacre in 1960. In 1972 he was commissioned by the Whitechapel Art Gallery to photograph the changing local community, creating work which contributed to his book *The English* (1978). He has worked internationally, covering the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Irish Troubles, famine in Ethiopia, and conflicts in Israel, Vietnam, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. His work is represented in *Black and Whites: L'Afrique du Sud* (1988) and *Living Apart* (1996). His project *Water* focused on the disaster of climate change, and was published by GOST in 2023.

John Donat (1933-2004) was one of Britain's foremost architectural photographers of his generation. After studying architecture, he took up photography full-time. His early images can be seen in *Crete 1960* (Crete University Press, 1999). Donat captured the built environment with a social documentary, almost photojournalistic approach. He was commissioned by the Whitechapel Art Gallery to capture change taking place in the area for the exhibition *This is Whitechapel* in 1972, although the focus of the show became the work of another important photographer, Ian Berry.

David Hoffman is a documentary photographer of protest and social issues. Living in a squat in Fieldgate Mansions, east London in the 1970s, he recorded homelessness, anti-racism and protest. In particular, he documented homeless people at St Botolph's refuge in Aldgate. He has covered many of the key moments in contemporary British protest – from Brixton in 1981 and Broadwater Farm in 1985, to the poll tax riots and the Occupy movement. Recent books are *A Place to Live, Endurance and Joy in Whitechapel*, published by Spitalfields Life Books and accompanied by a exhibition at The Museum of the Home in 2024; and *Protest!*, published by Image and Reality, 2025. [Find out more](#)

Jessie Ann Matthew studied photography at the Central School of Art and Design, London, during which she took part in the exhibition *Inside Whitechapel* at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1973. She contributed to *Men Photographed by Women* at Half Moon Gallery in 1975, and *Gaining Momentum: 8 women photograph women*, a Half Moon touring show in 1981. Other exhibitions include *The Quality of Life*, National Theatre, London, 1976; *Seven Scottish Poets*, Third Eye Centre, Glasgow, 1980; and *Light from a Dark Room*, RSA, Edinburgh, 1995. Matthew lives in Scotland where she now focuses on painting.

Dennis Morris is a British-Jamaican photographer who is world-renowned for his images of music icons such as Bob Marley and Marianne Faithfull. Growing up in Dalston, east London, he started his career aged just eleven. His early documentary photographs include powerful work such as *Growing Up Black, Southall* and *This Happy Breed*, images that show everyday life and Black British culture which capturing the pride and resilience of London's communities. While still a teenager, he showed his early work, *Dalston Photographs* at the Half Moon Gallery in 1973.

Ray Rising is an ex-docker and self-taught photographer, whose exhibition *Redundant River* was shown at the Half Moon Gallery in 1973. He went on to be a reportage photographer for Report Digital, covering issues such as the 1984 miners' strike, the death of Colin Roach in police custody in 1983, anti-racist protests, CND campaigns, among others.