

Transcript of Podcast 051: London (North-East of the River)

{Intro - Natpacker v1

I absolutely love London. It's got to be one of my favourite places to visit. Although whenever I go, it does take me a few hours to kind of get a feel for the city, so to speak. Whenever I arrive, it's so different to what I'm used to. It's a massive fast-paced city, it's actually quite scary in a way. But after just a few hours it transforms into a vibrant beautiful city that's full of life as I, I dunno, tap into the rhythms, so to speak I suppose. It's just a great place just to walk around, you'll find something somewhere, you don't have to be looking for anything, you just turn a corner and find a park you didn't know was there, or an amazing view. It's just a great city.

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{intro music - jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:

Hello. Thank you for tuning in. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a fortnightly series looking at unfamiliar places across the world, and aspects of travelling you may never have thought of. I'm your host, The Barefoot Backpacker, a middle-aged Brit with a passion for offbeat travel, history, culture, and the 'whys' behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.}

{Music fades. Podcast begins}

Hello :)

Well, this podcast is a week late. Let's blame Christmas and New Year. Mostly that's a lie, of course, since as I'm sure you know me well enough by now, I'm not the sort of person who celebrates it.

In fairness, I did have an excuse. As you know from my last episode, Laura spent the holiday period with me, and much of the time she was here we were either chatting in the living room, or out exploring places in and around Glasgow. And by 'exploring places' I mainly mean the Scotia Bar on Stockwell Street, or the Wetherspoons in Shawlands. We did have two marginally disappointing trips, too be fair - one to the West End of Glasgow to look at the Christmas Lights in the cloisters of Glasgow University which, er, weren't switched on at the time we visited, and one to Edinburgh to look around the Christmas Lights there and visit the Christmas Market; the former was underwhelming and the latter looked both underwhelming and had a huge queue to get inside, so in both cases pubs were the satisfactory outcome.

We did have an enjoyable visit to Stirling though, despite the weather. I've almost certainly been to Stirling before, but it would have been a long time ago, when my age was a single figure, and I had no recollection of the place at all. It used to be the capital of Scotland and it has a large castle, which is interesting to have an exploration of. It's a(nother) damning indictment of History lessons at English schools that much of what was on the information boards is nothing we ever learn about. One could argue - well why would we, it was a different country then - but one could counter-argue that as we're not taught about Scotland (or Wales, for that matter), that explains a lot of English attitudes towards those states.

Ireland is a whole different issue. For another pod. Probably with a different host.

I also met up with my friend and ex-landlady from my Sheffield days. She's originally from a small village near Dumbarton, and she was up visiting her family for New Year. It made sense thus to meet up and, er, as it happens, go to the pub. Not that she's a drinker at all, by the way, but like I need any excuse to drink beer. I'd actually never been to that end of the Glasgow conurbation before (well I'd passed through it on a train but it was raining that day so wasn't paying attention), so it was quite interesting to see. Especially as we walked around the marina at the end of the Forth & Clyde canal, which I'd walked much of the length of on my Hike Across Great Britain in the summer of 2019.

What else have I done? Well, if you follow me on Instagram, you'll know I've recently been buying new clothes. Specifically, dungarees. This is something I clicked with in Autumn last year, so it's a quite recent

thing, but I'm really taken with the vibe and style. I have two new pairs; one which is a speckled paint design from Locket Loves, who I get all my funky running leggings from, but I may have overestimated how fat I am so they're really baggy. Very, very, comfortable though, and they have these waist pockets you could hide a badger in. They're also really long - like, I'm not the standard market for these leggings but they reach to my ankles, which is pretty awesome. The other pair are from Run&Fly, via Minimum Mouse, and they fit better because I didn't overestimate, they have a nice blue daisy motif, obviously, and they have a chest pocket as well as the side pockets. These though, and I bought them specifically and despite this, call it an experiment on my part, they're 'shorts', so the leg ends are just above the knee. I'm really body dysphoric about my legs, but my theory was that by buying them, I could force myself to get used to how they look, and get over that internalised issue. Or I could just wear them with leggings. While not the weather for them at the moment (have you ever *been* to Glasgow?!), I have worn them 'in public' a couple of times and I've felt surprisingly more comfortable than I expected in them.

We won't yet talk about the tertiary feelings I had when I was wearing them. My identity is very ... shall we say, flexible, it appears.

I've also discovered the existence, related, sort of, of an LGBTQIA+ running group in Glasgow, as they're acting as the marshals and volunteers at my local Parkrun's most recent race. I haven't had the social nerve to actually go visit them yet but I'm working on that. Indeed I'm in a pub writing the introduction to this episode on the evening that they meet up. But I have time. Also, I'm slightly unfit, because, you know, not done a lot over Christmas and New Year, because I got distracted by someone who's a bad influence.

Anyway. This is the third episode where I talk about London. It's strange to think this was only going to be one. Who knew there was so much to say about London's suburbs? Not me. Well, I mean, given the paucity of contributions, almost none of you either, but that's another story. Or maybe I just waffle too much.

This episode will look at those boroughs north of the River Thames and east of an arbitrary line I created because I figured my last episode was too long. The logical boundary would have been either the A1 or the River Lea, but neither turned out quite suitable. But we begin this episode with a borough that's kind of Inner City, one that's very often visited, but which is mostly only ever really passed through. Ladies, Gentlemen, and Esteemed Friends, I give you ... Islington.

{section-dividing musical ident}

I wasn't sure whether or not to include Islington, given that it's a fairly central borough and once which, like Hillingdon from the last episode, sees an awful lot of tourists pass through given that the King's Cross St Pancras rail terminals lie right next to it. But they're in Camden. And I'm going to use this opportunity to vaguely rant about Camden Borough for a moment. Not for the same reason as Laura in the first London episode though, no this is much more geographic. Camden is a very odd shape, and it's bigger than you think. Most people when they think of Camden, think of Camden Town, the markets, that sort of thing. But no. When walking through central London, when going 'oh where's that', the answer seems to be invariably Camden. Euston and King's Cross stations? Camden. British Library? Camden. Fitzrovia and Bloomsbury? Camden. Gray's Inn Court (posh buildings, posher lawyers)? Camden. Jewish Museum? Camden. Hampstead Heath? Camden. Primrose Hill? Camden. BT Tower? Camden. Highgate Cemetery? Camden. Of course it is. Because everything's in feckin' Camden. Even Drury Lane, famous for being in theatreland, it's partly in Camden. If the border were one street further south, it'd be touching Covent Garden.

I could probably do an entire podcast on Camden Borough. But I probably won't.

Anyway. Islington.

Now I said at the start of my first of these London episodes, I wanted to track London outside of the Monopoly board. But here we have an exception. Because I'm fond of exceptions, and breaking my own rules.

Now, in case you're lucky enough to not be aware, Monopoly is one of the standard board games beloved by families, especially at Christmas or on long Winter Sunday evenings. It's a weird choice for a family favourite, in the sense that its whole gameplay seems to be to cause as much harm to your competitors as possible - it's a regular cause of arguments and fallings out, and very often the game ends not when someone wins as when

someone loses so badly that they fling the board off the table, the small plastic houses and hotels being buried in the carpet until the next time someone walks barefoot to the television.

The board is divided into 40 squares, 22 of them represent streets, and the idea is to buy properties on them so that your competitors land on those squares and give you all their money. Cut-throat capitalism at its finest (the reason the game was made in the first place, incidentally). Though the original game is based on somewhat random streets in Atlantic City, USA, for the UK version the streets were chosen carefully and structured accordingly (for example the orange set are 'law and order', the yellow set are 'fun nights out' and the green set are 'shopping streets', and all the stations were operated by the same company at the time, the LNER – London & North Eastern Railway. Not to be confused with the current train operator on similar routes, also called LNER. Someone who'd come in a time machine from 1930 might get very confused by this. Before they died of some random disease we're all now immune to.

Anyway. As it happens, two of the blue squares (the second cheapest) are in Islington. One is Pentonville Road, which runs east from St Pancras. It does not go to Pentonville prison, which is to the north, but still just about on the correct side of the Camden border. Islington might not have the main railway stations but it does have the main prison. I don't think they got the better of that deal. But Pentonville Road's eastern end is at a crossroads, where we find the other Monopoly square, and is one of only two property squares on the board that isn't a road (ignoring the fact that Marlborough Street technically doesn't exist, as it's actually Great Marlborough Street), the other being Mayfair. Neither of which are in Camden, but Great Marlborough Street runs it close. It's currently in use as a bank, somewhat ironically.

This building was The Angel, Islington – originally itself a pub and hotel (meaning it's the only place on the board map that is itself the point of the game), but by the time of the board game had become a Lyons Tea Cafe. Had Lyons kept hold of it it would probably have become a Wimpy – at least this way it's had a better fate. Possibly. It's believed the couple who were tasked to find locations for the game, Victor and Marge Watson (Victor worked for Waddingtons Games, who were set to release it) took tea in there and put it in the game as a result.

The Angel, Islington still exists though, in spirit. The nearby tube station took its name, and next door to the old building, occupying the stables of the 17th Century coach-house, is a Wetherspoons pub; this particular pub chain have a habit of calling their pubs names that reflect local history, so it's no surprise to learn this one is called “The Angel”. Unfortunately it's not one of their Lodges; you can't stay overnight there. I did have a drink in it though. And it does have a blue vibe.

Despite, as stated earlier, most of the well-known stations being 'elsewhere', Islington does have a couple of interesting points of note regarding transport. In the very south of the borough is Farringdon, one of the lesser known but incredibly important stations in London; once the crossrail project is complete it's touted to be one of the busiest stations in the country. However, you may be interested to know it's also one of the oldest underground stations in the world.

The world's first underground railway, as we know and understand them today, was a short section of line built from Paddington to Farringdon, in 1863, by the Metropolitan Railway. The route still operates now, but it's under the guise of the Circle and the Hammersmith & City lines of the London Underground; what is now the Metropolitan Line disappears into Metroland at Baker Street.

In the west of the borough, at the border with but for once not actually *in* Camden, is the London Canal Museum. It stands on the Regent Canal, that connects Limehouse Basin and the River Thames in London's docklands with the Grand Union Canal that meanders up to Birmingham and The North. This means it's possible to walk to London avoiding pretty much every road, although it would take ... a while. Not gonna lie, I've been tempted. Or at least I was when I lived in Nottinghamshire. From here ... not so much.

Anyway. The museum looks at the history of the English canal network, why they were built, etc, and also what life is like on the canals, both in the past when they were a vital part of industrial and commercial life (in its day the Grand Union Canal did what the M1 Motorway does now, albeit it's less straight than I am), and in the present day; there are narrowboats on site that you can take trips up and down the canal on.

If that's not niche enough, one part of the museum is given over to the ice industry. Yes. Ice. The museum is

built in a former ice warehouse, and ice would have been one of the many things shipped along the canals in the cargo barges. To be precise, the ice here was used in the manufacture of ice-cream by Carlo Gatti, a Swiss-Italian who around 1850 pretty much invented the concept of take-away ice-cream – prior to this ice-cream was only really available to you if you had your own ice-house. Mr Whippy, and all those ice-cream vans that when I lived in Sheffield kept interrupting my podcast recording, owes him a huge debt.

{section-dividing musical ident}

From Islington we go east, into Hackney, and our first port of call is literally on the border. Between Canonbury and Dalston we find Newington Green Unitarian Church. This is the one of the oldest Unitarian churches in the whole of England that's still in regular use, having been originally founded in 1708.

Now, (Universalist) Unitarians have long been at the radical end of Christianity (if loving your fellow human can be considered 'radical'), and were themselves ostracised (even to the point of being executed as heretics in the middle ages) for centuries. Following a series of controversial Acts of Parliament in the 1600s, many moved to Newington Green (where their Dissenting theories were at least tolerated) and, eventually, built this church (now a listed building).

Unitarianism in general has been at the forefront of liberal movements, from abolishing slavery to anti-fascism. This particular church has been especially notable; one of its early active members was author, philosopher, and equal rights activist Mary Wollstonecraft (who one could call the 'godmother of feminism'), and since her time the church has been at the forefront of campaigns around domestic violence and human trafficking, whilst they are also notable in the forefront for LGBT rights; in 2008 they took a stance of refusing to conduct any weddings until gay couples were legally allowed to marry.

There's a mural of Mary Wollstonecraft on the wall of the church. Her grave is in St Pancras Old Church graveyard which is, no, you can guess where, though her remains are in Bournemouth. She died at the disappointingly young age of 38, of septicaemia, just after giving birth to her second child, also called Mary, who later went on to, if not invent, then certainly be at the forefront of founding, the genre of science fiction with the novel *Frankenstein*.

As a borough, I'd never been quite sure where Hackney was, in the sense that I knew it was kind of 'Inner London, somewhere vaguely east, but not as far east as Brick Lane'. I'd mainly heard of it because of the Hackney Empire theatre, where stand-up comedians would regularly perform and their shows televised or aired on the radio. Interestingly, what is now the Borough of Hackney has a tradition of theatre; in 1576, in Shoreditch (now in the south-east of the borough) there are records of two theatres very close to each other, one called "The Curtain Theatre" (it stood near Curtain Close), the other taking naming lessons from the way my mother names her cats, being called "The Theatre". These two, plus one in Southwark at Newington Butts, were probably the earliest permanent theatres (as we'd know them today) constructed in England. None of them survived that long; only the Curtain Theatre lasted beyond the end of the century.

Oddly, "The Theatre" (which at one point was home to the company of actors of which Will Shakespeare was a part) seems to have been the subject of a lawsuit and a bit of a tiff between the landlord, the leader of the company of actors, and the people who originally built it, which ended when in the middle of the night on 28 December 1598 the entire theatre was dismantled and moved, pretty much wholesale, firstly to a storage yard, and then, a couple of months later, across the river into Southwark where it was rebuilt and renamed "The Globe". Yes. That Globe Theatre. Most of those involved are buried at St Leonard's Church in Shoreditch, famous for being 'the bells of Shoreditch' in the children's singing game *Oranges and Lemons*, the one with the weird last two lines that don't fit the rest of the rhyme and I'm sure were added in just because children are ... very strange.

Anyway. Having now been to Hackney a couple of times, including spending a couple of nights there late last year when I went down to London for the Traverse Creator Awards, I'm still not entirely sure I have a handle on the place myself anyway. Partly this is because my travel twitter friend Curious Claire said her and her boyfriend would meet me in Hackney for drinks. Seven minutes before we were due to meet I found out that their definition of Hackney was Hackney Wick, two stations down the overground from my definition of Hackney, the centre of town and where my hotel was. I was only seventeen minutes late.

So, Hackney Central. It's dominated by the church of St John-at-Hackney. The current church building was built in 1792 to replace a previous church close by that was deemed to be too small for the growing population. Little remains of this old church, barring the tower. St Augustine's Tower was originally the bell tower of the old church, and was preserved after that church's demolition because the new church didn't yet have one. Which is, you know, fair enough. It was later designated a Grade I listed building so they couldn't demolish it now even if they wanted to.

Around the tower is the old church's graveyard, which is the final resting place of, amongst others, Francis Beaufort. Although now largely deprecated, his claim to fame is creating the wind speed scale bearing his name that defined breezes/gales/hurricanes etc, and which is still used in many press releases and, of course, Radio 4's Shipping Forecast. The gardens around the both the church and the tower are landscaped, with a number of larger family graves, as well as a memorial to the Czech town of Lidice, razed to the ground in WW2.

Another graveyard in Hackney, albeit much bigger, is Abney Park Cemetery. This is one of the "Magnificent Seven" cemeteries I alluded to last time when I talked about Nunhead Cemetery in Southwark. These were seven large areas which were then on the outer edges of London that were expressly designated as large burial grounds; this was to prevent what you might call 'overcrowding' in the small local churchyards that were dotted around London. The idea seems to have come from Paris' Pere Lachaise cemetery, although it's interesting to note that Paris's own solution to the same problem of 'too many deaths, not enough space' was to utilise old mineshafts (the Paris Catacombs) rather than create out-of-town graveyards.

Apart from Abney Park and Nunhead, the other five lie in what are now Inner London boroughs (Kensington has two, while Tower Hamlets and Lambeth have one each). The last is Highgate, which lies on the borders of Islington, Haringey, and, of course, where else, Camden.

Abney Park itself is 12½ hectares in size and holds about 200,000 people. It's interesting as from the very start it was non-denominational (the first such designated in Europe I believe), so pretty much anyone could be buried in it. Indeed it proved a popular resting place for many non-conformist Christians (especially Methodists), and it is here that the founders of the Salvation Army are buried - not just William and Catherine Booth themselves, but many of their early brethren. However, people as varied as missionaries, anti-slavery activists, radical publishers, and of all people, William Calcraft, the last public executioner in the UK. The layout of the cemetery is such that there are no dividing lines between groups of people; everyone is deemed as being equal in death.

It appears the cemetery can still be used for new burials, but generally isn't, aside from hyper-local requests. What's more emphasised now is the ambient nature of the place - while designated as a cemetery, it was created with nature in mind; indeed it was the first combined arboretum and cemetery in Europe, complete with trees and plants from all around the world, and it still very much has that natural feel. This has been especially true since the late 1970s when burials more or less ceased and nature took even more, uhm, root than it had been.

If you like your nature a little less morbid, on the eastern side of Hackney is the River Lea. This is a river that rises near Luton and flows down to the Thames near Bow. For much of its London length it is canalised, to make navigation more consistent and possible along its length for the promotion of trade, and, these days, pleasure navigation.

The landscape here is, well ... in the SE corner of Hackney, close to Hackney Wick, is an area known as Hackney Marshes. It lies between the river and the navigation canal. The name might bring to mind some kind of wild, damp, flat country, and indeed one of those is still true. Much of the marsh was drained from mediaeval times and it's now mostly open common land - over 130 hectares of it. Both the river and the canal have paths along, or at least close by, them, and both are lined with trees, making it quite a pleasant walk.

However, Hackney Marshes themselves are noted specifically for one pastime above all others. It is the biggest site for amateur and Sunday-league football. There's almost 100 pitches laid out, which even though they're right next to each other, gives you some idea of the scale of the place. Many famous London-based footballers started or developed their careers here, including John Terry, David Beckham, and Bobby Moore. Oddly, there also seems to be an Australian Rules Football pitch marked out too. I mean it could be a cricket pitch, but it has goalposts on it, so that's a bit of a giveaway. There's also a Parkrun here. I'd imagine it'd be a great

one for a PB.

On the upper edge of Hackney Marshes is a small nature reserve, called the Middlesex Filter Beds. Back in Hounslow I mentioned about filter beds and reservoirs; the nature reserve here is on the site of, and contains some ruins of, another set of filter beds, and the River Lea was a vital way of providing fresh water for this part of London.

Filter beds essentially work by channelling water out of the river, and running it through large pits of gravel or sand which have the effect of filtering all the impurities out. What's left over is fresh water which can be stored in reservoirs until needed and pumped away. Or back into the river further downstream.

Some of the filter beds can be quite huge and deep, at least a couple of meters. At Middlesex Filter Beds there were six beds in all, which at their peak handled over 40 million gallons of water per day. The beds can still be seen, mostly overgrown but the shape and sense of them are still there, as are remains of some of the infrastructure used to control them.

There are still reservoirs in the area that perform the same function, but on a much grander scale. Indeed they line the Lea Valley pretty much all the way to the northern edge of Enfield borough. They begin just north of here, slightly beyond Walthamstow Marshes, where the Lea marks the boundary between Hackney and the next borough along, Waltham Forest.

{section-dividing musical ident}

The Walthamstow Wetlands form part of the Lea Valley Country Park, which taken as a whole cover an area several miles long and up to a mile wide. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and along the northwestern edge of the borough of Waltham Forest it takes the form of several reservoirs which you can walk amongst, do a bit of birdwatching, and visit a couple of the interesting historical locations on site, including an old copper mill and an engine house.

Further south, towards the Hackney Marshes, are the Walthamstow Marshes, flat grassy land to the east of the River Lea, bisected by two railway lines and a footpath that marks one of the major water pipelines heading into London. It's a nice area to wander through – you don't feel you're too close to major civilisation until a train goes past.

The centre of Waltham Forest is Walthamstow. This is most notable for someone of my vintage for its postcode: E(ast) 17. *{a dog barks}* Given when I'm recording/releasing this podcast, I'd like it on record that one of the hills I'm prepared to die on is "Stay Another Day" is not a Christmas song. It does not mention Christmas, nothing related to snow, festive greetings, new year wishes, nor births of messiahs. "But it's got bells on" so do Good Vibrations by the Beach Boys and Tom's Diner by Suzanne Vega. "But it was released at Christmas" so was the Beatles' Hello Goodbye and Pink Floyd's Another Brick in the Wall. Muppets.

Anyway.

I'd always imagined Walthamstow as a lively but very working-class area; it's famous for its old, iconic, greyhound stadium (used in publicity by not only the eponymous boyband but also indie-darlings Blur on their 'Parklife' Album), and to be honest it didn't disappoint. Well, I mean the greyhound stadium itself isn't there any more but you know what I mean.

Within 10 minutes of arriving in the town centre, I'd bought an absolutely fantastic spinach/feta bread from a Jewish bakery, browsed vibrant material at an Indian sari stall on Walthamstow market (at around a mile long, it's one of the largest street markets in Europe), and walked passed a stereotypical 'cockney geezer' on his mobile phone talking about his need to be somewhere else very quickly to seal a deal. I've always found it hard to love London, because I've always found it too expensive, too crowded, and too 'unfriendly', but I think I could learn to love Walthamstow; it feels like a more 'inclusive' and genuine version of the area I grew up in. There's even a small local museum in the centre, the Vestry House Museum, that looks at the history of the whole borough and how life in it has changed. Hyper-local museums are the bizz, because they show how real people lived in real places; they feel more 'real' as well as showing a side of history that rarely gets mentioned at a larger level. Everywhere is interesting, partly because everyone is interesting, and without museums like that, we won't know how people lived.

Another thing I noticed about Walthamstow that fits with the vibe is the preponderance of street art. Even just a walk along the very western edge, near the reservoirs, revealed several huge local murals on the sides of buildings, full walls in height. Waltham Forest is a place for artists and creatives. This extends even to officially-sanctioned 'street' art; at Leytonstone Tube Station are several mosaics on the wall commemorating the life and works of Alfred Hitchcock, who was born in the area (though he didn't stay very long). According to Google Streetview, where his house stood is now a petrol station and shop, though there is a blue plaque on the wall.

This artistic vibe seems to have been the case for a while. On the north side of Walthamstow Town Centre is a museum dedicated to William Morris, who I mentioned in my first London episode as having briefly lived in a country house in Bexley Borough.

William Morris himself appeals a little to me, as the kind of man I could have been. He died aged 62, the doctor allegedly quipping his cause of death being that he was William Morris (that he never sat still, was always busy, that sort of thing). His main career was in, of all things, interior design – his company Morris & Co designed furniture, carpets, & wallpaper that, while quite chintz by modern standards, are still popular even today – but he was also a poet and writer, campaigner for preservation of historic buildings, and a firebrand socialist orator who was once arrested during a socialist protest (that the charge was dismissed he said proved his exact point that the rich were treated differently to the poor). He tended to prefer working with objects rather than people, and seems to have had a bit of a random temperament. Sounds a little familiar.

One quote associated with him is “Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful”, and indeed it's written on a wall close to his museum. I'm not saying he was the Marie Kondo of his time, nor am I saying that I take his belief as my own, but when I think about my minimalist tendencies it's certainly something I can relate to.

The museum itself is a small two-storey building in a large parkland where he lived during his teenage years. It's quite an in-depth museum however, complete with interactive exhibits and examples of original tapestries, as well as giving a good overview of his life. I'm not sure we share similar tastes though, to be fair. I'm going to call it "Grandmother Chic". That much flower representation in those colours would probably do my eyes in after a while.

North of Walthamstow is Chingford. What might be unexpected about an area that screams sitcom suburbia is a quiet corner of contemplation. The Old Church at Chingford has one of the largest and most spectacular graveyards I've ever been to. I guess nothing says 'I love and remember' like a gravestone.

See, most British churchyards are filled with row upon row of graves with similar dedications, the only difference being newer grave tend to be shiny marble rather than dull grey granite. But here ... it feels more reminiscent of graveyards in Ukraine, in Timor-Leste, in Chile, than here in the UK. Each gravestone seems to have a personality; a unique style; and of course the surrounding décor says more about love than any dedication to the living. Some graves even have benches sat in front of them, so the ones left behind can sit and think about the loved ones they've lost. Maybe this is the modern way of remembrance in the UK; maybe I'm just used to going around mediaeval churchyards with inscriptions barely visible, worn down by centuries of bad weather and forgotten about by distant descendants.

The churchyard is huge – around the size of 140 rugby pitches, or approximately one third the size of the entire City of London area. It's divided into numbered sections, apparently, though signage is quite limited. This is a shame as it means I never found the most famous graves there – those of the legendary East London gangsters the Kray Twins. However, it was a lovely way to spend the best part of an hour, just wandering around the rows, lost in quiet contemplation.

{section-dividing musical ident}

South of Waltham Forest is the Borough of Newham, a borough it always takes me a while to remember exists, despite having overnighted in it once. It's not a terribly large borough, and by far its most famous and identifiable spot is also one of its newest; it is the home of the London Stadium and Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. This is a landscaped area mostly made up of ex-industrial land, although some of it was built on a part of

Hackney Marshes, much to the irk of many in the local communities. It's obviously, as the name implies, where the 2012 London Olympics were based, and the stadium is now used by the local football team West Ham United, in a relatively rare example of a club moving to a large new stadium but still remaining not just within the borough, but in fact within walking distance of many of its supporters (the distance between here and their old stadium, the Boleyn Ground, in Upton Park, is 5km). There isn't a Parkrun here though.

Completing the link from the Boroughs to the north, Newham is where the River Lea joins the Thames - well it marks the border with Tower Hamlets to the west so it's right on the edge. Between the Olympic Park and the river's mouth lies Three Mills Island. Crossed by cycle pathways, and containing a small parkland, this is the site of old mills powered by tidal flow along the River Lea. There have been mills documented here for over a thousand years, making these the oldest recorded tidal mills, though earlier ones are believed to have existed both in Ireland and, indeed, in the City Of London itself. The buildings that exist on site now date from either side of the turn of the 19th Century, and consist of the House Mill, Clock Mill, and Millers House. I am fully aware that's only two mills. There used to be eight; there haven't been three since the late 1500s. But this is England; we don't like change, and the name stuck. The mills stopped operating just after world war two, and are now used for a variety of purposes, including a small museum, a TV production studios, and an educational college.

Parts of Newham and Tower Hamlets are quite similar demographically - in a sense Newham is the borough where the melting pot of Inner East London fades into standard suburbia. According to the 2011 census, only 8.4% of residents of Newham expressed they had no religion - the lowest in the UK excluding Northern Ireland. Unsurprisingly, data on religion in Northern Ireland is a specialist area, with quite different census questions. For completeness, the highest authority with this characteristic, at 46.3% of the surveyed population, was Blaneau Gwent in Wales (an area I could potentially have moved to had I not ended up in Glasgow); the highest in London was Lambeth at 39.3%.

With regard to specific religions, at 37.0%, Newham had the second highest percentage of population in London who were Muslim, second only to neighbouring Tower Hamlets (at 45%). Both hold 10.6% of London's entire Islamic population. If I calculate correctly, estimates for 2018 put the Islamic population as the highest religious grouping, at around 42%. In related stats, Newham has the lowest percentage of White British residents of all of London's boroughs - 16.7% in 2011. Indeed the local council wards around Green Street, one of the main streets in the centre of the borough that links Forest Gate to Upton Park, have a White British population of 4.8%, the third lowest behind two in Southall in Ealing. Disappointingly, none of the railway stations have dual-language signage in Urdu.

And yes, for the football fans listening, *that* Upton Park, *that* Green Street. West Ham United football club have had a 'reputation' in the past for hooliganism and racism (for reasons we won't go into right now, the film Green Street, about this sort of thing, and rather oddly starring Elijah Wood of all people, is one of the few films I've seen more than once), and they literally fight with nearby Millwall fans for the white working-class support, so that their old football stadium was in such a non-white area is kind of ... interesting.

I realise so far I've not painted much of a picture of Newham. It is, however, a bit like Luton, a fairly easy borough to get to and from, as it's the location of the closest airport to the centre of London - London City Airport. It's not a very big airport - it's in the high teens in terms of passenger use for UK airports, fighting for position with regional airports like Liverpool and East Midlands, and its available destinations aren't terribly large. Due to its location in regenerated dockland and surrounded by heavy residential and commercial areas, and the river Thames, it's only accessible by smaller planes and it's not an easy place to expand. Indeed there's a body of opinion that the airport should be abolished and the land used more usefully, for housing and businesses. I've never flown into or out of it so I can't comment. Apparently there are direct flights from Glasgow though, which is useful if I ever wanted to go to London with a small bag.

Newham is also the site of Stratford International railway station, because apparently Kent is an international destination now. It lies on the Eurostar route but no International trains stop here, as it's seven minutes from St Pancras so it was felt there wasn't a lot of point - the only trains using the station are high-speed trains to exciting places like Ebbsfleet and Ashford, from where you can pick up Eurostar. It was supposed to be used for international trains heading north to equally exciting places like Birmingham and Leeds, but ... this is an ongoing argument that's beyond the scope of this pod. Though I do mention it in passing in Episode 48 when I rant about the UK rail service.

Close to Stratford, just north of West Ham, is another railway station, Abbey Road DLR. Abbey Road? London? Hah. Well not only is it Not That Abbey Road, there is amusing signage on the platform and surrounds that refers to it. For instance there's a sign on the platform that gives directions to That Abbey Road in NW London, the one with the famous zebra crossing, with no less than eight Beatles puns on it. Who says town planners and rail engineers don't have a sense of humour. I guess they could have avoided it all had they called it Abbey Gardens or Baker's Row (the other road that goes there), but, you know ...

As an aside, the name Abbey Road is significant, but in a different way. Although there's nothing there now, Abbey Road DLR station and the area around the nearby Baker's Row are pretty much on the site of an old Cistercian Abbey. Called the Abbey of St Mary's, Stratford Langthorne, it was built in the late 12th century and became one of the largest in England, until its demise under Henry VIII. A representation of the abbey is pictured on the crest of Newham Borough Council.

Specifically, the Abbey Road station area was the site of the gatehouse of the abbey. This is now the location of a 'community garden' created by the Somewhere artistic collective. The website of the gardens says they provide an "open-access harvest garden in the East London borough of Newham where anyone is welcome to participate in the communal growing of flowers, fruit and vegetables. Unlike the traditional allotment system, no one has their own patch and everyone gardens together at regular gardening sessions led by an experienced gardener.". The abbey itself covered a large area north and west on a site that's now mostly a huge rail depot. Much less apt.

I'm aware I've not talked a lot about unexpected and lesser-known things in Newham much, as compared with the other boroughs. This is largely because I didn't find a lot, and it's not an area I know well. However, compared with the borough that lies directly North-East, I could probably go on Mastermind with what I know about Newham.

{section-dividing musical ident}

As you know by now, London is made up of 32 Boroughs. And The City. Before I started work on these podcasts, it would have been an interesting question to ask how many of them could I name in one minute. It's hard to think about this in hindsight, but I think I could have listed 26, 27 of them off the bat. Of the others, Bexley I always forget what it's actually called other than it begins with a 'B', one of Merton or Wandsworth would escape my initial thoughts as for some reason in my head I always think of them as being the same place, Ealing I know but always forget it's a Borough - I either think it's called Acton, or I assume Hounslow and Hammersmith are bigger than they are and, and after 59 seconds I'd remember where Newham is and that it's west of, and therefore not part of, Barking.

31 out of 32 isn't bad. But what on earth is that elusive 32nd Borough? Redbridge? Never heard of it. Oh, Ilford. Isn't that still in Essex though? Is it near Romford? Oh, Romford's in Havering. So ... where? My only real experience with the name Redbridge was in a short-lived football team in the early 90s, Redbridge Forest, who merged with Dagenham Town to form Dagenham and Redbridge, which tbh sometimes I think is a London Borough itself, one that also includes Barking. When I don't equally think of Barking as having annexed Newham, as previously discussed.

East London is a blank space to me, evidently.

However, I have found a way to picture Redbridge. It's basically that bit on the London tube map where the Central line is depicted as turning northwards and then forms a loop to Hainault. It's ... 'up there' somewhere. One of the stations on that loop line is Roding Valley, which lies right on the border between Redbridge and Essex. It's notable in rail circles for being usually the least used tube station on the whole London Underground network, with 450,000 passengers in 2019 and 190,000 in 2020. Which is still a reasonable amount for a suburban station, but London is big.

I say 'least used'. That is if you don't count Kensington (Olympia) which is only open on weekends and special occasions. Or, apparently, in 2020, Heathrow Terminal 4. Because it was closed due to Covid. In fact, of all the regular stations, all three on the north side of the Hainault Loop (Chigwell and Grange Hill) are the lowest used on the network. Partly because few people live up there, partly because I guess those that do don't want to

go into central London, but also partly because most of the day to get to anywhere outside the north part of the loop, you have to change trains.

And no, not That Grange Hill either. Though the long-running TV series was set in North London, it was filmed more in the Brent/Barnet areas than anywhere else. Disappointing, I know.

The majority of sites in Redbridge that might appeal to the tourist seem to be in the realm of parks and outdoor spaces, which I guess is in keeping with many of the other boroughs around London to be honest. It's possibly going to be a surprise to Londoners in general just how much green space there is in the suburbs.

Redbridge has Hainault Forest Country Park and the tail-end of Epping Forest. These are all that remains of a much larger 'forest' (Royal Country Park, but yes there were trees in it) that covered this side of Essex. The whole thing was called Waltham Forest, and yes, the neighbouring borough to the west is named after it. Hainault Country Park covers about 1.3km², a far cry from Hainault Forest's 12km² back in the mid-16th century. Anyway it's now a protected open space with footpaths and a lake.

Just to the southwest is Fairlop Waters Country Park, which is basically, a big lake and a golf course. Although much smaller than Barnet's Welsh Harp reservoir, this is equally a place to take to the water. They describe themselves as "the only place for sailing lessons in the Redbridge area" which, I mean, but certainly its marketed as being a water (pause) sport paradise. On site is also a designated rock-climbing area and an inflatable water park, one of those kinds of things most famously seen in the UK on the TV Programme Total Wipeout. Which today I learned was filmed in Argentina. I kinda always assumed it was filmed from some dodgy English seaside resort, like It's A Knockout from my youth (a programme we no longer talk about, for, uhm, 'reasons'). It'd've been more fun had it been filmed in Redbridge.

Between the two, by the way, and in keeping with this 'we're just a smaller version of Barnet really' vibe, are a couple of large related cemeteries. These are both parts of the Gardens Of Peace, and make up apparently the largest dedicated Islamic cemetery in the UK - indeed a third site across the Havering border in Romford is scheduled to open later in the year because the sites in Redbridge are getting close to capacity. Research hasn't brought up exactly what the capacity is, although a figure of 10,000 graves has been bounded around the internet. This might be just for the original site on Elmbridge Road though, which is now only used for interment of children.

Just like other religious burial sites, you're allowed to visit and wander, as long as you're respectful. This includes no food or drink, no loud voices, no taking photos or videos, no leaving of goods on the graves (and their website has a whole section on 'what to do with unwanted or donated Islamic literature'), and, uniquely, they specifically point out it is forbidden to feed the geese.

The southwest of the borough has more open spaces to enjoy; Redbridge definitely feels like the borough to go to to get your One Hour Outside. Here we find Wanstead Flats and Park. The Flats are similar to those found along the River Lea around Hackney and Walthamstow; flat areas of gorse and shrubland with the occasional water course and lake. And, again similar to Hackney in particular, some of the area has been designated for sport - football pitches and the obligatory parkrun.

Wanstead Park is a Grade II* listed Historic Park and Gardens. It used to be the deer park of the old Wanstead Hall and Manor, which later became Wanstead House. The original Wanstead Hall was built sometime in the 15th century and was for a time owned by the monarchy. It was replaced in the early 1700s by Wanstead House, a hugely impressive neo-Palladian edifice, similar to how somewhere like Woburn Abbey looks, and in fact parts of Buckingham Palace, with a long rectangular design, square windows, columns, and two external staircases zig-zagging up to the large entrance. It would have been a pretty awesome building to still have, except that it was demolished not much more than a hundred years later due to the then owner, William Pole-Tylney-Long-Wellesley, 4th Earl of Mornington, and nephew to Arthur Wellesley, *The* Duke of Wellington, being in rather a lot of debt, at one point fleeing to Belgium to avoid arrest. His death notice in the Morning Chronicle newspaper was quite damning: "A spendthrift, a profligate, and a gambler in his youth, he became debauched in his manhood... redeemed by no single virtue, adorned by no single grace, his life gone out even without a flicker of repentance". Lifegoals there, methinks. Due to a technicality in the deeds of the house, it wasn't possible to sell it to recoup the debts; all that could be done was sell off the fixtures & fittings, then get rid.

Despite all this, the park has been mostly kept as if it were the gardens of a manor house, rather than becoming a 'natural' park. It has a more formal layout than you might expect from a park, with a couple of lakes, a temple, a grotto, and, for some reason, an amphitheatre. It may also hold something else, much older. It's believed the park stands on the site of a Roman Villa. A mosaic was found on-site in 1715, some foundations believed to date from the Roman period were recorded, and even some coins and burial remains were noted. Of course, in the intervening years, details have been lost so no-one quite knows exactly where it was. There's been a limited amount of archaeological research since, most recently in the early 2000s, but while findings have been consistent with a Roman building, no further action has been taken to discover how big or what sort of building it was that lies there.

Wanstead Flats and Park have been cited as being the inspiration behind the song 'Itchycoo Park' by 60s psych-rock band Small Faces, the name coming from either stinging nettles or wasps. However another park in the borough (and another with Grade II listed status) has also been suggested as the inspiration for it. This is Valentine's Park in Ilford, voted as one of the ten best parks in the UK in a 2019 poll by Keep Britain Tidy. It was 'created', if that's the right term, in 1899 when the then Municipal Borough (Ilford) bought up some land from the old Cranbrook Estate to ensure the town retained some green space in the onset of huge residential expansion.

The park contains a boating lake, walled gardens, a tennis court, a county-standard cricket ground (because cricket doesn't require huge stadiums), and of course is host of the obligatory Saturday Parkrun. There's also an old manor house - Valentine's Mansion - built at the end of the 17th Century and now owned by Redbridge Council, and home to a museum that acts as a kind of a time capsule, showing what the house would have looked like during the Georgian and Regency period. You can also get married there, for as little as £280 including registrar fees, though only if you have six guests - larger rooms with up to 50 guests cost up to twice as much. I'm not sure I know six people I could invite to my wedding who would actually be able to come - such is the problem of having mostly virtual friends. It also requires someone to marry, which, let's face it, is unlikely to happen this side of the heat-death of the universe.

{section-dividing musical ident}

South of Redbridge is one of the few boroughs made up of two town names. It was originally created, along with all the other boroughs, in 1965, with the name 'Barking Borough', the 'and Dagenham' being added in 1980, for reasons as yet unclear to me.

It's ... well, you might recall, from my first London episode, comedian Linda Smith saying about Erith, in Bexley Borough, that it wasn't twinned with anywhere but it had a suicide pact with Dagenham. In addition, poet Billy Bragg wrote a song about the main road through the area, called "A13: Trunk Road to the Sea", one of the lyrics being: "By-pass Barking and straight through Dagenham".

I can kind of see what they both meant. It's mostly identikit, boring, suburbia. One of the reasons for this is a large part of Dagenham is made up of the Becontree Estate. This is often cited as the largest public housing estate in the world. It was built in the inter-war period to serve the rapidly expanding London population, and by 1937, just under 27k houses had been built, containing a population of just over 115k. I'm not saying you should visit it, unless walking around endless streets filled with suburban semi-detached and terraced townhouses appeals to you from an architectural standpoint. It doesn't to me, and I have often lived in houses exactly like that. It does, however, give a feel of what the borough of Barking & Dagenham feels like as a whole, especially given around 45% of the entire borough's population live in it. Many of them probably, at some point, ended up working at the huge Ford Motor Plant on the banks of the Thames. At one point it was such a notable employer it's pretty much the only thing people elsewhere in the country knew about Dagenham - Wikipedia tells me since opening in 1931 it's produced nearly 11 million cars and 40 million engines, and at its height employed 40,000 people. It now employs less than 2,000. Mainly building diesel engines. Mmmh.

For some older architecture, Barking town centre has the ruins of the old Barking Abbey, set in a reasonable town green square called, unsurprisingly, Abbey Green. Built in the 7th century, in its day it was one of the most important nunneries in the country, and in fact had a reputation for being one of the most significant places for women's education in the early middle ages.

It closed (like St Mary's at Stratford Langthorne in Newham) when Henry VIII decided he was bigger than God. So, not much actually remains of the abbey itself, though its walls are laid out on the grass of the green; virtually the only part still standing today is the Curfew Tower (which features on the borough crest, again just like St Mary's does for Newham). What does stand though is the neighbouring St Margaret's Church, itself dating from the 12th Century so for a few centuries the two ran in parallel. It's a typical stone-built building that wouldn't look too much out of place in an English country village. Which is exactly what Barking isn't.

As an aside, Dagenham village has a conservation area where it would suit, and it has a church, but apart from that, and a large pub, it's not terribly big, or indeed noticeable. It used to be bigger. Town planners didn't approve.

The Borough has a couple of museums. One is Valence House, once a large manor house and the only one of the several in the area that still exists. There's been a house on the site from as early as 1280, and was extended down the ages. It served for a while as the head office of Dagenham Urban District Council in the early 20th Century. These days it serves to show the history of the area and of its people (in 'exciting' galleries according to its website) – yes it's another one of those hyper-local-interest museums that every area needs. It's also home to the archives and local studies centre, which makes sense. In addition, the museum seems to be noted too for its portrait gallery of many members of the local influential Fanshawe family who owned nearby Parsloes Manor, which was pulled down in 1925 and replaced with an eponymous area of parkland. Without a parkrun.

Valence House is set in a small garden area. Another old manor house set in small gardens that's now a museum is in Upney, part of Barking. This is Eastbury Manor House, formerly known as Eastbury Hall. Built in the late 16th Century, it was commissioned by a member of the gentry, out of brick and partly with bits nicked from nearby Barking Abbey. These days it tells the story of the house, the people who lived here, and the times they lived in. Or would do if it was open – it's currently closed for admin reasons related to Covid. The gardens have secret bee-boles apparently; these being a way to keep bees, in the days before beehives were A Thing. Interestingly, it was the first property taken on by the National Trust within London.

For something more modern and artistic, there's a couple of things around the Borough that are worth standing in front of and going '... okay then'. Just north of Barking railway station is a roundabout with a weird sculpture in the middle. Looking closer, you can determine it's a representation of a couple of fishing nets containing fish. It was designed by Loraine Leeson, it's called "The Catch", and it's a throwback to when Barking was noted for its fishing industry.

Just south of the station, on the way to Barking Abbey, is the town square. This area contains two very different things that act as a weird juxtaposition. One is an odd modern building that looks like someone has tried to build with Lego but with no instructions nor vision; lots of windows, lots of flat white panels, lots of yellow panels, some of both of which stick out from towers as if a giant could use them as stepping stones. Nearby is the remains of an old stone wall that looks for all the world like it belongs to a ruined church or official building (there's a faded bronze crest-type statue at the top of one corner). There are alcoves where windows once stood, that contain small representations of animals, and at the top, on the remains of the eaves, is what looks like a ram. The wall dates from (checks notes) 2007, and was designed by the local artist collective called muf. (muf, nothing rude). They say it's designed to be "a fragment of an imaginary lost part of Barking".

More modern art can be found in the south of the borough, in a somewhat unlikely place. The aforementioned A13 is a fast, somewhat soulless, dual carriageway, separating the borough from the River Thames. However, at the start of the 21st Century, the road was turned from a drab highway into one of London's largest outdoor art installations. For about 3.3km, the road (mainly the junctions and the subways) been turned into the A13 Artscape, with interesting lighting schemes, better landscaped surrounds, striking sculptures at the intersections, and other things to make the road less, well, boring. One of the artists involved in its creation, Tom de Paor, gave a typically artist-centred description, saying it was designed as: "a journey through interlinking, imaginative landscape on a grand scale, with ideas, themes and connections set up to fire your curiosity and make a whole new road experience". Or something.

Because much of it is light-specific, it looks better at night than it does on google maps.

A more traditional landscape can be found in the east of the borough. Separating it from neighbouring Havering is the River Rom, additionally known downstream as the Beam River, and previously called the river

Markditch, reflecting its boundary status (between Dagenham and Hornchurch, which in a sense it still is. It was renamed the Rom because of the town of Romford – the wide ford - , not the other way round. See also Cambridge for a similar change). Anyway. The river passes along the edge of several country parks and nature reserves, including Eastbrookend Country Park, The Chase Nature Reserve, and Beam Valley Country Park. The whole area covers just less than 300 hectares.

It's quite a modern creation – it had been wasteland and derelict ex-industrial land until the mid 1990s (mainly gravel pits) – but was landscaped and covered with small trees, some of which are quite unusual due to the area's dry, acidic, soils. It's a very popular area for birds, and therefore birdwatching, but there's also evidence of human habitation stretching back to the Roman age.

Just before we leave this place, a couple of other small points of interest. Firstly, Barking was the site of the worst ever shipping disaster in territorial waters. This was in September 1878, when the SS Princess Alice sank with the loss about 600 deaths. It was returning to London from a coastal trip with 800 passengers when, just off the coast at Barking, it collided with a cargo ship carrying coal, broke in two, and pretty much sank there and then – you can infer the vast majority of people on board ... didn't survive. The fallout was an improvement in the way the river was policed and in the way events with mass deaths were handled. There's a mural commemorating the event on River Road, a fairly ugly road with industrial and warehouse type complexes, but the mural itself is close to the entrance to Barking Creek Park, a small area of grassland on the edge of the River Thames and one which provides interesting views over the mud banks, the Barking Creek flood barrier, and over to the boroughs of Greenwich and Bexley on the far side of the Thames.

The other concerns music. I've mentioned other boroughs with iconic music venues, and this one is no different. Between Barking and Dagenham stands the Roundhouse public house. It's got a very apt name, having been built in the mid-1930s on a road junction, and the walls of the pub curve around in line with the junction rather than being sharply square. It's got a very art-deco type feel, with otherwise plain cream walls and a small tower.

However it was in the 1960s and 1970s (obviously) when the pub came to the fore as a notable music hotspot. Here, though, the genre of music in question was rock, and associated subgenres. Bands such as Deep Purple, T Rex, Status Quo, and Queen performed here, as did Led Zeppelin, presumably when Chislehurst Caves were unavailable.

The pub is still used as a venue today, although it's diversified from rock music and now plays host also to, amongst other things, boxing shows and comedy nights. And, hooping back to the start of my commentary on this borough, the road just behind it used to be the car park but is now a small housing association street named after local poet and musician Billy Bragg.

There's very definitely a strong musical heritage in the outer boroughs of London, from Croydon's dubstep to Enfield's blues, to here. And while I'm only going mention it in passing, we can continue the theme in the last borough on the list, with a different genre entirely. As they say: **[rave beats]** "Mega mega white thing, mega mega white thing. So many things to see and do in the tube hole true blonde going back to ..."

{section-dividing musical ident}

Now. If we're going to be absolutely picky and semantic about this, the tube, the London Underground, doesn't actually go to Romford. The end of the District Line is in the London Borough of Havering, yes, but it goes to the southern side, to Upminster. But I'm guessing that as the electronic dance act Underworld, the ones responsible for the track "Born Slippy .N.U.X.X" which was an inescapable tune in my early 20s, come from Romford, it was just a bit of poetic license. And as the lyrics are alleged to have been written as a testament to what happens when you go out on the lash in London, I guess you should be grateful you even end up in Havering, and not, say, Hillingdon. Both large boroughs that begin with an H, on the edge of London, no-one'll notice the difference ...

Anyway.

Havering is the most easterly of the London Boroughs. Indeed only four boroughs have any land at all east of its westernmost point (in Hainault Forest) – Redbridge, Barking & Dagenham, Bexley, and Bromley, and Redbridge's is only very marginal. It's also the most ... uhm, how shall we say this ... Jess from Jess Travels will

put this more succinctly in a moment, but, for example, of all the London Boroughs, Havering has highest proportion of residents born in the UK (at about 90%), and stats on the Hidden London website state the Upminster ward specifically is over 90% White British, one of the highest (although still lower than places like Kirkby-in-Ashfield in Nottinghamshire, where I used to live), and 75% of people in the ward profess to being some flavour of Christian, which is the highest anywhere in London.

I don't know if I've ever been to Havering. Sometime in the early 2000s I remember going with my old social group to a house party somewhere down there, and I'm sure we got off the M25 at J28. However I don't recall much about the specific details. The home-made punch packed quite a bit of punch. I know this because I saw it being made. And still drank it.

One person who knows more than me is Jess, from Jess Travels. Because she lives there.

{Jess - Jess Travels}

Hello, I'm Jess, and since 2003 I've lived in the London Borough of Havering. Havering is in East London, it has a population of about 260,000 and it's mostly suburban. It's also predominantly white, and Conservative. I used to live in the London Borough of Redbridge, which is one of the neighbouring boroughs, and that was much more diverse. That's not say that Romford and Havering doesn't have some diversity. Romford especially, which is the main town, has a good mixture of different cultures, but yeh, not the same as its two neighbouring boroughs: Barking & Dagenham, and Redbridge.

So. Romford is a historic market town. The market was established in 1247, so it's very old, and it's not one of these little quaint, cutesy markets that you might get in a cute country village, it's a much more brash, in-your-face, people shouting at you to buy their apples and pears type of market. So, you know, it's worth visiting I think if you're in the area.

Romford is also famous for its nightlife, although that's something I enjoyed when I was a teenager, and not so much now. But it is something that people travel to Romford for; is its nightclubs and bars and there's quite a few pubs as well. There's a couple of nice pubs but the clubs are not the places that I really hang out any more, but it might be, you know, something some people enjoy.

I'd say my favourite place in Havering is Bedfords Park. Havering in general has quite a lot of green spaces. I'm actually kind of on the edge of Havering in Romford, so it feels more like a city here, whereas the majority of Havering is actually quite green and quite suburban. Bedfords Park is definitely the best park, in my opinion. It's a nature reserve, and there's wild deer, and it's just very pretty, and you can get some really great views of London, so there's a lookout point and you can see The Shard, and Canary Wharf, all the way into Central London basically, so that's pretty cool.

Another thing that I'm going to mention that's a bit more niche, but it's one of my favourite things actually, there is a place called Romford Garden Suburb, and this is actually in Gidea Park, which is not far from Romford, and this is a housing development that started in about 1910, and about a hundred different architects worked on the homes, and basically each home is different. They're all really lovely houses. Each one is different, and there was like a competition at the time for like 'best architecture', 'best detached house' things like that. There's a lot more to it, which I won't go into now, but if you google 'Romford Garden Suburb' you can find out about this housing development. At the time, the homes were sold above asking price, for about £250 to £500, which was obviously a lot more than the normal asking price at the time, but seems measly today. A lot of these homes will be worth near a million, if not more. So, because I'm quite nosy and like looking at people's houses, this is perfect for me. I like going on walks around that area. Every time I go on a little walk that way I spot a new house that I hadn't quite noticed before, or a new detail on a house. So it's great if you like, if you're interested in architecture. And being nosy at people's homes. {giggles} And there's a nearby park called Raphael's Park that is also a nice park in Havering. So if you want to see that you need to go to Gidea Park, and if you Google the Romford Garden Suburb, all of these homes are called exhibition homes, even though people do live in them now, and there's a good Wikipedia entry that tells you some of the names of the streets that have some of these homes on, and particular houses that won prizes. Some of them are, like, Grade II Listed buildings now.

So yeh, that's my kind of niche Havering Thing To See, and I hope that's given you a few ideas of things to do

here. It's not the best borough in London I'm sure, I'm sure there's better ones, I'm not going to big it up too much, but there are interesting things for sure.

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Okay, so Jess has taken you round the parks and the, uhm, houses, what else can we find. Well, there's a couple of interesting bits of street art. At Rainham, on the shore of the River Thames, is an interesting statue about 4½ metres tall, and made of a framework of steel. It's in the form of someone wearing a full diving suit – it's even called 'The Diver: Regeneration' – and at high tide it gets partially (or even completely, depending on the tide) submerged. It's by a local sculptor, John Kaufman, and was created and erected in 2000. It represents working men, especially those in difficult environments. He chose a diver to honour his grandfather, who in the early 20th century had worked at the London docks as a diver / engineer.

Harold Wood has two minor artworks of intrigue, and yes that's a suburb name, not a bloke. In the centre of town, just on the other side of Hilldene Avenue from the main shops, is a small mural that encourages recycling. It's 8 metres long by around 2½ metres high, made from 70% recycled or re-salvaged materials, and was designed in 2003 by local collective Living Space Arts. It's here because at the time, the area was reported to have the lowest recycling rate in London. It's quite a stark mosaic, featuring on one side an industrial landscape, the radioactivity symbol, and representations of smoke and pollution, while on the other a much greener and more natural landscape complete with a large fern, clear skies, fish, and a starry night.

Continuing the environmental theme here, across the country, Sustrans (a walking and cycling charity who are noted for the creation of long distance cycle-routes, often along dead railway lines) have installed trios of sculptures of local personalities near to park benches. The idea being you go for a walk, stop to rest on a bench, and ponder the legacy of the people depicted. While there's several across London as a whole, the ones in Central Park, Harold Wood, include a rare physical appearance of King Henry VIII, who used to go hunting in the area and owned property here. He probably did both in a lot of what are now the London suburbs, but Havering seem to want to claim him as their own. Here, his neighbours are Harry Eccleston, who lived nearby and who designed the first banknotes in England (1970) to feature people, and Dick Bouchard, who founded Romford Drum & Trumpet Corps, a youth military-style marching band. Quite an eclectic mix.

Off the A13, again, there's four slightly odd metallic towers across two successive junctions, about 12m high, lined with LEDs. These are the Litmus Towers, designed by Jason Bruges, a London-based artist, designer, and architect. They show numbers, and while they may appear random, they do have a purpose. One shows light levels at Tilbury, its neighbour shows the tide levels. At the other junction, one stands next to a wind turbine and reports its generated power, while the other monitors traffic numbers entering Rainham. The idea behind these towers is to allow people driving past, people walking past, to get more of a sense of the environment they're in, rather than just passing through. So now you know.

For a different sort of entertainment, Romford is home to one of the last two surviving greyhound stadiums in London (the other's in Bexley, but I'd say there was more to do in Havering!). I mention this fact partly because I've talked about two now-demolished ones elsewhere in London (in Walthamstow and Wimbledon), and this kind of demonstrates how popular greyhound racing used to be – there used to be 33 in London alone, now there are only 24 in the whole of Great Britain. I also mention it because, remember I started by talking about Underworld? They said that some of the tracks from their wonderfully-titled fourth album 'Second Toughest In the Infants', including the referenced Born Slippy, were named after dogs who ran here on one of Underworld's visits to the stadium. I guess when you make electronic dance rave type music, you can call your tracks whatever you like, it's not that it matters. Not sure what New Order's excuse is, though.

If you fancy something gentler, Upminster is noted for having a traditional windmill. Built in 1803, it's a listed building that served as a corn mill until the 1930s before being somewhat gutted and left to rot. Fortunately for historians and visitors, it's now owned by a preservation trust, who are currently trying to restore the mill to working order. It's just under 16m tall, with four sails, each individual sail being around 10m in length. The windmill, like Havering itself I guess, is mostly white. Curiously, it stands in a large lawn, almost otherwise completely surrounded by residential housing, just outside Upminster town centre. In researching this podcast I also found out the music video to one of the songs that I listened to a lot when I was at University, 'Never Never' by The Assembly (Vince Clarke and Feargal Sharkey, both of whom have done other, bigger things), was filmed there. This struck me as odd until I realised Vince Clarke was born in what is now Redbridge

Borough and grew up just over the current Essex border in Basildon, literally the next town along from Upminster.

Also agricultural, and also in Upminster, is the Upminster Tithe Barn. The building was built in the middle of the 15th century, and is 18x12m in area, and 45m high. It's a wooden box frame (oak, mainly), with a thatched roof, and is a very dark coloured structure. It's unclear what it was originally used for, probably the storage of grain, corn, and hay by its owners (originally Waltham Abbey, then the manor at Upminster Hall), but it seems to have remained in some kind of agricultural use even after the local council took ownership in 1937.

These days it's another one of those hyper-local museums, called, confusingly, the Museum of Nostalgia. To be specific, it's a museum dedicated to the history of domestic life, focusing on agriculture. Their website says they believe they hold around 14,500 artefacts of domestic and agricultural use, ranging from Roman times to the present day. Niche.

My final observation about Upminster is its name. The 'up' could either refer to high ground, or be a hierarchical component to the other element - 'minster'. The Church of St Lawrence, the minster in question, was built in the 13th Century, though there had been a notable religious building here since at least the Norman Conquest, and the town is named after it. Apart from its age, and churches that old have a tendency to be pretty cool places, in more than one way, it's notable for being the location of the first accurate measurement of the speed of sound.

In 1709, scientist and local rector William Derham (so it may well have been 'his' church) stood on the church tower here, and with the aid of a telescope and regular pendulum, tracked how long after seeing a distant gun being fired he heard its blast. Given the guns were fired from specific places whose distances were known pretty accurately - including other churches -, he used the same triangulation skills used over half a century later in Hounslow (see kids, maths is useful in the real world) to calculate the speed the sound had travelled. He calculated the speed at 1,072 Parisian Feet per second (a distance I was not previously aware of, and one I trust I never hear of again); one Parisian Foot is (not on OnlyFans) 325mm, so this works out at 348.4 m/s. Modern calculations state the speed of sound is 343.2 m/s. So, that's pretty close. Also, this assumes standard temperature of 20°C. It's not clear from the references what time of year he did this - the speed of sound is quicker on a warmer day, so 348 m/s is the speed at around 29°C. Assuming perfect conditions. Terms and conditions apply. The value of your speed of sound may go down as well as up with market conditions.

So, Havering. Jess said "It's not the best borough in London I'm sure, I'm sure there's better ones". Well, it's not my place to rank the boroughs, but Havering doesn't seem that bad. I mean, it's obviously not Camden. Your Mileage May Vary on whether that's a good thing. Equally, it's not, I don't know, Sutton or Bexley.

{standard section separation jingle}

Well that's about all for this pod. Which is just as well as I've had so many issues recording it. And it's time to bid farewell to this whistlestop tour of those boroughs of London people don't generally go to. What have we learned? There's a lot more open space than perhaps you realise, also some very large manor houses. Every borough has something cultural and historic to note, and every borough is interesting, and most of them have a Parkrun, although I'll grant you some boroughs are evidently less ... worthy of an overnight stop than others.

But what would I say is the most underrated borough? Good question, but probably overall I'd have to say **{some kind of tense music}** Bromley. It just seems to have a lot more of interest in it than you might expect. Other boroughs worth the journey I'd say include Hillingdon, Brent, Ealing, and Waltham Forest. I don't wish to incur the wrath of Londoners by talking about the borough I found least reason to visit, but let's face it, Wandsworth was never in the running for Most Underrated Borough.

A bit of housekeeping: I'd like to give a shoutout to Steph and Ange, the hosts of the 'All The Shit I've Learned Abroad' podcast, ostensibly because they gave me a shoutout in their recent 2022 Travel Resolutions episode. Also they suggested they should be exploring their hometowns more. Well, here you go. :D I'd also like to mention two tweeps: SGSwritereditor and Orangelic, for subscribing to my Patreon, details of which are in my end credits. I know I don't offer much in return for your faith, but I really appreciate it. I would say it pays for my beer, but let's be honest, it doesn't.

Join me next time when I, to be honest I don't know. It's planned to be a pod about packing mistakes but we'll see just how that goes. Until then, don't argue over board games, and if you're feeling off colour, keep on getting better.

{Outro theme tune, same as intro, just a different bit of it}

{Outro voiceover:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure. I hope you enjoyed it; if you did, don't forget to leave a review on your podcast site of choice.

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Until next time, have safe journeys. Bye for now.}