



South London Press in partnership with the University of Richmond, Virginia



Picture: Rosalie Hinke

A very diverse cathedral

Southwark Cathedral sits just across the street from the Borough Market, a lively cultural hub in constant flux packed with vendors and shoppers searching for everything from the trendy to the traditional, writes *Sophie Dulong and Kelsey McCabe*.

The imposing cathedral is the oldest Gothic church building in London, with its earliest structures dating to around 1106 AD.

Inside the sanctuary's reverent silence, it's difficult to hear the dense crowds that swarm over artisanal pastries and innovative cocktails a few yards away.

Despite the difference in ambience, Southwark Cathedral fits easily into the contemporary market scene and diverse neighbourhoods in that part of South London.

The cathedral's historic openness to London's LGBTQI+ community has helped to make it a home for those who feel left out in religious and other spaces. This culture of acceptance echoes throughout other aspects of the cathedral.

A sizable display of books on queer history are available for sale in the cathedral gift shop. Retail manager Alife Roche, a resident of East London, discussed the reception of the shop's wares.

"I have literally free reign to bring in anything that I feel, like, fits in with stuff, like the LGBTQI+ books, black history books. You know, stuff like that," he said. "So say next month, for instance, is LGBTQI+ History Month, so we'll have a range for that. It'll be a mix of the history, the religious aspect, you know?"

Pamela Pumfrey, who lives in Bexley but attends Southwark Cathedral services several times a year, discussed the culture of inclusivity. "I suppose that most people that come here sort of think, well, they're coming to a Christian church, so they don't really expect anything else in the shop. Except, what's this?" she said.

"I mean, we haven't got any complaints or anything. We should think it's a lovely place to visit and I'd

recommend it to anyone."

Mr Roche said: "You do get people that will question it sometimes. But we just say, everyone is welcome here. It doesn't matter what religion, background, or anything you have. Everyone is welcome here at Southwark. The doors are open to everybody."

LGBTQI+ inclusion at Southwark is present beyond just the gift shop.

On July 9, 2023, when the Church of England's General Synod met in York to discuss the blessing of same-sex marriages, interim Dean Michael Rawson expressed his support for the issue in a sermon.

"It seems to me that the church continues to lay burdens on people rather than easing their load," he said at the time. "We wait with anticipation to see what proposals the House of Bishops presents to General Synod this weekend and in November to honour and respect our LGBTQI+ siblings."

Mr Roche said the cathedral's progressive approach to social and political issues was amazing.

"I've never worked in an environment like this before," he said.

"So I was completely blind, because I'm not religious, personally. So I was a bit, like, 'I don't know what to expect' when I started here, but it's completely not what you expect at all."

Southwark's history of inclusivity was noted by its recently retired dean, the Very Rev Andrew Nunn, who served from 2012 to July 2023. In a sermon just before he stepped down, Rev Nunn recalled a conversation he had with a bishop at Southwark during the 1990s, just before he took a position as chaplain there. He recalls telling the bishop that he was gay, in case this presented an issue, to which the bishop responded that it was not a problem at all.

"It was the kindest thing that I think had ever been said to me, in the church," Nunn said. "I knew I would be at home in Southwark, and safe, and loved for who I was, for who I am."

Ten second-year students from the University of Richmond, in Richmond, Virginia, US, made a week-long trip to London as part of a specially journalism class that explored the important role of community news in Richmond and South London.

Students in this year-long class, most of whom are 19 years old, are required to publish articles in local news outlets in the United States as part of their coursework, which includes the trip to London and the opportunity to write for the South London Press.

Instructors for the class are Tom Mullen, director of public affairs journalism at the University of Richmond, and Betsy Powell Mullen, visiting assistant professor of journalism.

Kay MacDonald, administrative coordinator at the University of Richmond for new student and transition programming, coordinated all the travel arrangements for the UK strip, which included a visit to journalism faculty and students at the University of Northampton and a talk with South London Press editor Charlie Stong and chief reporter Claudia Lee. Here is some of their work.

Vicious circle of a life on the streets in the capital

BY ROSALIE HINKE
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You can find Cristobal most days midway down the steps to the Tube near Borough Market.

When it's really cold, he'll move closer down into the station, deeper into the stairwell, out of sight of security, out of mind for people who breeze past him on their way somewhere else.

"These are my steps," he said, sweeping his hand as if to show off the place he more or less has lived for almost two years.

Cristobal, who said he is about 50 and declined to give his last name, is one of the growing numbers of rough sleepers scraping out an existence after rent increases and housing shortages plunged them into poverty.

Every rough sleeper has a story and everyone has a situation that has led them to where they are. It's easy to lose sight of the names behind the numbers.

"People see the homeless and think drugs, alcohol or a mental disorder, but most of us are just this," Cristobal said, pointing at himself and his possessions: a cardboard box and backpack.

According to the Housing in London report for 2022, "over 8,300 people were seen sleeping on the streets in London in 2021/22, of which 5,000 people were seen for the first time".

The amount of public housing becoming available cannot keep up with the growing homeless population. Owner-occupied and privately rented homes increased by 135,000 and 64,000 in the past year, respectively, while public housing only increased by 18,000, according to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Additionally, in the past 40 years, the increase in dwellings has increased consistently (about 100,000 each year) while the population has increased at a much higher rate, according to the Office for National Statistics.

Statistics give a big-picture look at the problem. People offer perspective.

Cristobal said he was married for 20 years and, after divorce, fell upon hard times financially.

He moved into a hostel that soon changed its nightly fee to £80, which he couldn't afford.



Rosalie Hinke interviews Cristobal
Picture: Betsy Mullen

For two weeks, he was able to get temporary housing, but afterwards, he moved to the streets.

Now, in the evenings, he sleeps in the Tube station for warmth, with most people acting like he doesn't exist and occasionally tossing drinks at him.

A lack of address causes many problems for homeless people, beyond the assumed one of sitting day and night and dealing with difficult people, according to Cristobal. Because he has no fixed address, he can't have a bank account and, without that, he cannot have money. He receives no benefits.

Cristobal has found other people who have similar stories and similar predicaments.

He has a community of six friends who collect food all day to bring to each other to "share and chill" at the end of the day in a car park, not far from the

gourmet goods and cheerful shoppers at the market.

This community has shown him just how far the housing crisis spreads.

Most people walk past Cristobal as if he's not even there.

He calls them "phone zombies" but quickly clarifies that he would rather them act like that than the people giving him negative attention, or those who pour their drinks on him and treat him like he's dirty.

He says he wakes up in the Tube station from people pushing him, not just the security guards, but average people who just make assumptions about why he's homeless.

Like many rough sleepers, Cristobal has been waiting on temporary housing. In his case, it's been more than 19 months.

When asked how he planned to get out of the situation, he grinned and said, "win the lottery".



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Blackheath look to consolidate in National League 1

Blackheath Rugby Club is seeking to consolidate in National League 1 after being relegated in the 2021-2022 season, writes Sassan Fahim and Nick Mossman.

The team is a semi-professional rugby team that plays against 13 other rugby clubs each season, based in Well Hall.

Last season, Blackheath played in National League 2 East after being relegated from National League 1 in the 2021-2022 season where they finished 14th with a record of seven wins and 21 defeats.

Blackheath quickly bounced back to National League 1 after a run of 23 wins and just three losses in the 2022-2023 season.

Graham Cox, press officer and logistics manager at Blackheath, said the relegation was a shock and pointed to how the team was hit by Covid-19 harder than other teams.

Blackheath had a great team, he said, but it lost multiple players who left the team to play for teams in the Championship.

Even though Blackheath were relegated, the team did not make any major coaching changes, opting to keep head coach James Shanahan.

"They put all their faith in James Shanahan to get us straight back up again," said Mr Cox.

Blackheath seek to eventually be promoted to the



Picture: Andy Wansbury

Championship, but are first looking to reestablish themselves in National League 1.

"We wanted to consolidate ourselves back where we are, reestablish ourselves, and then move forward from there, not get relegated, not going back to where we were last season," said Mr Cox.

If they were to be promoted, Blackheath would want to make sure they could sustain the club both financially and in playing strength to not be quickly

relegated back, he said.

Blackheath Rugby have won seven out of the 16 games they have played this season, ranking 9th of 14 clubs in National League 1, placing them far away from achieving the first-place spot needed for promotion.

With three clubs being relegated from National League 1 this season, Blackheath's record does not yet shield them from relegation.

Once clubs aren't able to reach promotion, teams are incentivised by avoiding relegation and for financial incentives as well, Mr Cox said.

Even if promotion is not a possibility, players are still motivated by their enthusiasm for their team, he said.

"I think every game is important to players, there's passion for playing for your team and for your teammates."

Blackheath are also currently in the process of purchasing its ground, according to Mr Cox.

If successful, it will be the first time in Blackheath's history that they own their own ground as a rugby club.

Ownership of these grounds will allow Blackheath to gain revenue in ways that they were not able to before, according to Mr Cox.



Picture: Ahona Anjum and Alexa Mora

Restaurant surviving amid gentrification

A popular Guyanese restaurant is surviving the changing landscape of Elephant & Castle to bring a piece of South America to South London, writes Ahona Anjum and Alexa Mora.

Faye Gomes, pictured, 62, of Castle Square, Elephant & Castle, is the owner of Kaieteur Kitchen Original, a Guyanese restaurant in the Castle Square Shopping Centre.

The name – "Kaieteur Kitchen" – comes from the falls in Guyana, holding significant meaning of home and culture, as Ms Gomes describes it.

"There were Guyanese people who have lived in the UK for their whole lives but have not tasted Guyanese food. So having found a place for Guyanese food, they would come from parts of London and England," Ms Gomes said.

Before setting up her business, Ms Gomes used to run a caravan of the same name in the Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre.

"University students used to come to my store and loved the way I treated them like a mother. So they wanted to find beautiful names to put into the kitchen. I decided to go with Kaieteur Kitchen Original, since it is a name-brand from Guyana," Ms Gomes said.

Ms Gomes ran the much-loved caravan kitchen for 16 years, before the Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre got demolished in 2019.

After the demolition of the shopping centre, Kaieteur Kitchen Original moved to its current location in Castle Square.

The changes in Elephant and Castle are good, Ms Gomes said, adding: "It all depends on if, when they finish the new shopping mall or whatever they're doing on the other side if we are going to be involved."

Ms Gomes said that developers may give larger spaces to larger businesses or they may offer it to Kaieteur Kitchen Original but they would not be able to afford rent. If this happens, Ms Gomes said Kaieteur Kitchen Original will have to close or relocate to a different area.

"Whatever goes on over there, it can actually tamper with our business," Ms Gomes said. With the development of a new shopping centre, larger businesses can bring uncertainty to small businesses, Ms Gomes said.

With the end of Kaieteur Kitchen Original's lease approaching, Ms Gomes is waiting to hear what happens next.

Traders fell upon food market

BY GARETH WOO
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From food carts to fruit stalls, Borough Market is filled with traders from around the world, including two sellers from Malaysia and Thailand. One thing that brings those two together is that setting up food stalls in London was never part of their plan.

Salina Campbell, 59, runs Joli, known for its use of clay pots to serve traditional Malaysian cuisine.

From beef rendang (slow-cooked beef brisket curry with coconut rice) to noodle dishes, she uses recipes passed down across generations.

"I can't bring the whole Penang to you, but if I can bring even just a little bit (of home), I will be happy," said Ms Campbell.

Despite having a commanding presence in the market and tight bonds with her customers, Ms Campbell never saw herself as a chef.

Ms Campbell always envisioned exploring the world outside her Malaysia-Singapore bubble. She wanted to show that she was equally capable of success as the men in her family.

She left home at 17 to study in the United States at Colorado University.

After she struggled to find a job, she decided to pursue law in London.

Instead, she was introduced to accounting. She spent 20 years in the industry until she was made redundant.

She then helped her husband, Rahim, with his business.

Around Christmas 2009, Ms Campbell brought "mee goreng," a traditional Malaysian noodle dish, to her children's school potluck.

It was a hit, and many asked for her recipe. After a friend unsuccessfully replicated the recipe, Ms Campbell was asked to demonstrate her cooking, with a special emphasis on her secret ingredient: phang ew, otherwise known as fragrant garlic oil.

Since then, Ms Campbell has accomplished much. From establishing a business for her garlic oil called L&alolive, to attending the Le Cordon Bleu London Culinary School sponsored by an anonymous customer, she's made a name for herself. She was also recently shortlisted as a finalist in the BBC's Food & Farming Awards in 2023.

She said she finds joy in her work, especially seeing her customers enjoy her creations, complementing the beauty in each bite.



Worawan Kamana and, inset, Joli

Pictures: Gareth Woo

Worawan Kamana, 44, owns two businesses in Borough Market – Khanom Krok, which sells Thai street food, and Raya, a South-east Asian produce store.

Operating with her husband, Michael, they've become recognisable faces in the area, known for crafting authentic food alongside selling fresh produce aligning with the market's sustainability mission. "I would like to create my own Raya brand, selling South-east Asian ingredients like palm sugar, tamarind paste, and to supply them to a wider audience," Ms Kamana said.

Despite her growing plans to expand her business, coming to London to set up shops wasn't her initial plan.

Kamana is from Bangkok and came to London for graduate school. After moving near Southwark and seeing construction at the market, she applied to be a vendor.

Gradually, she fell in love with the area.

Recognising the lack of recognition of Thai desserts in London, Ms Kamana initially wanted to establish a store highlighting various options.

Her store, Khanom Krok, is named after a traditional coconut pancake, one of the first dishes she sold. However, after seeing the growing demand for hot lunches, she decided to expand her

offerings, selling Thai classics such as pad thai and curries. With weekly special menus and sourcing ingredients from other traders in the market, she developed close bonds with the community through her food.

With Raya, Kamana showcases products from local producers to premium South-east Asian brands. Her store also features interactive elements to attract customers, from cutting jackfruit live to squeezing sugarcane juice on-site.

She stocks up on uncommon expensive ingredients like sawtooth coriander and rose apples, some of which must be sourced internationally.

Ms Kamana said it is a cost she is willing to bear, as quality, flavour and aromatics cannot be compromised.

"If someone doesn't have galangal, and tries to use ginger, you can't because they're totally different (ingredients)," she said.

After living in London for more than 20 years, Ms Kamana said she has experienced the best of the east and the west, which she attributes to the success of her business.

She continues to have aspirations for the future and said: "I would like to continue in Borough Market for generations, like other traders here."