WALTHAMSTOW MARKET

MOVING MARKET PLACES

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SUN ON
MARKET NEWS


JUMBO


SUPER GROWS FOOD
AFRO CARIBBEAN ASIAN
Proudly African
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TO LET
AFRO COSMETICS

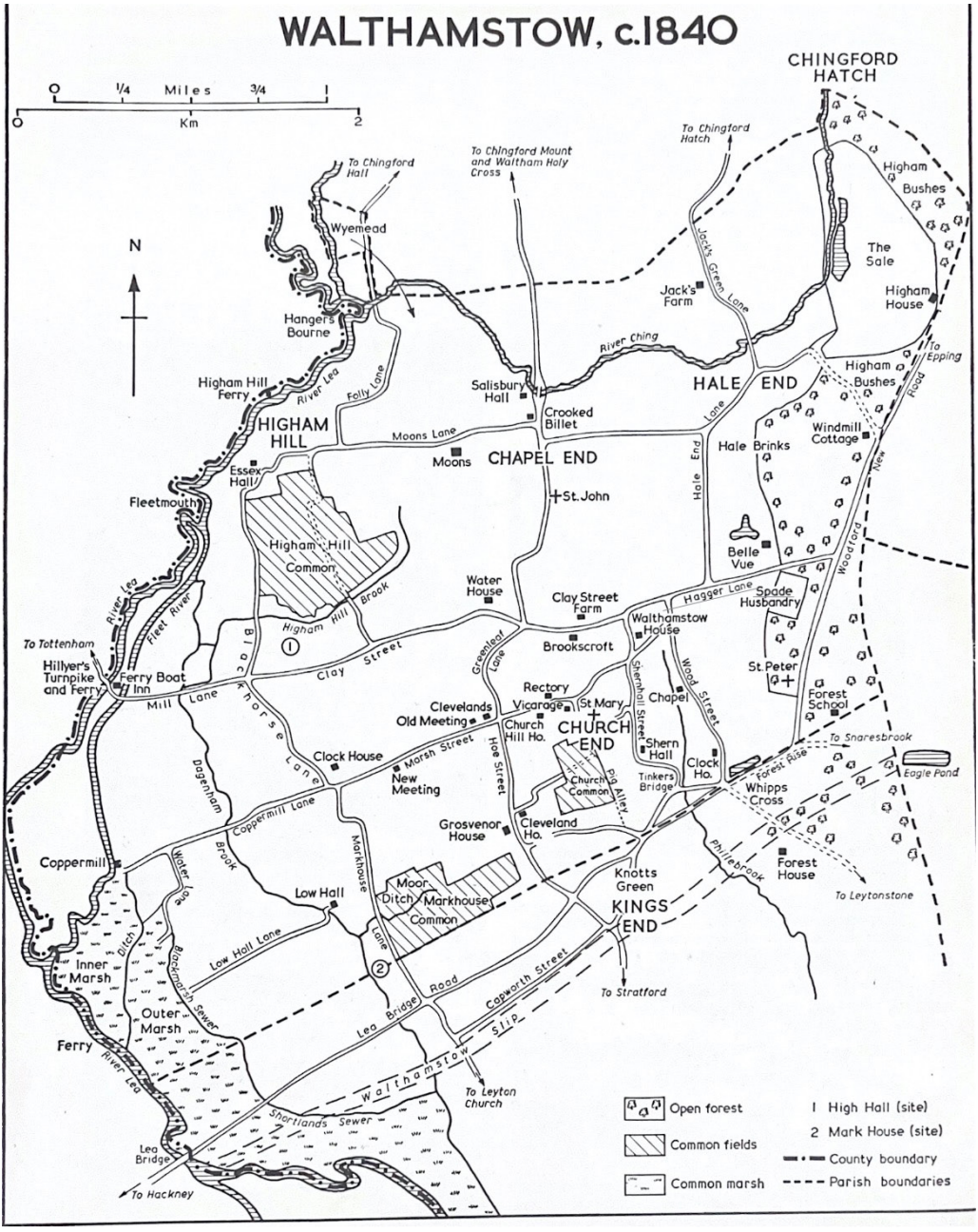
THE HISTORY OF WALTHAMSTOW MARKET

Until the mid-19th century Walthamstow was a country parish, noted for its woodland and its fine view across the marshes to London (see the 1840 map of Walthamstow with 'Marsh Street' in the centre and open forest on the outskirts). Marsh Street, which is now High Street, ran from the higher ground around the older Walthamstow village area down to the damp and remote marsh along the banks of the river Lea. Before the arrival of the railway it was never an important road, the main roads to and from London being Lea Bridge Road or Mill (later Ferry) Lane. During the 17th century, land at the eastern end of the road – well away from the marshes – was purchased by wealthy city merchants seeking sites to build 'country retreats' in the then rural quietude of Walthamstow, which was in daily reach of the City by horse coach (Stuchfeld 1991: 1). In the late 16th and 17th centuries Walthamstow traders were buying butter, cheese, eggs, and poultry, at Brentwood, Romford, Epping, and Waltham Abbey markets, to sell later by retail. There was no market in Walthamstow until the early 1880s (Powell 1973: 269). Walthamstow remained an agricultural parish with a couple of thousand residents, until the open arable fields were enclosed, and the railway was built in the mid-19th century (Powell 1973: 1).

In 1871 Walthamstow's population had increased to around 11,000 and began to double in each decade. During the 1890s Walthamstow was growing faster than nearly any other town of its size (Powell 1973: 241). In 1882, the Board of Health had changed the old historic name of Marsh Street to High Street after a petition by local shopkeepers who were eager it should become recognised as Walthamstow's main shopping area (Diamond 2018: 96). The dominance of the High Street was confirmed with the coming of the 'costermongers', who began to set up stalls in Marsh (now High) street (Mander 2001: 118). 'Costermongers' refers to traders who sell from a handcart in the street, especially fruit and vegetables ('monger' is a seller). The first mention of stalls comes from the year 1885, and so it's probable that they began to appear a few years before that date (Law 1975).

The street market, with costermongers' barrows and stalls, had started below Erskine Road and grown up along St James Street and into the High Street. It began to compete with the shopkeepers to supply foodstuffs to working people. As a result there was increasing antagonism between the shopkeepers and the stall traders and costermongers, whom they regarded as pests, as Walthamstow's street market spread up from St James Street to the High Street (Diamond 2018: 99; cf. Law 1975). Stalls could generally offer cheaper wares than the shops; but were regarded with suspicion by some sections of the community (Law 1975). According to historian James Diamond, the well-to-do viewed the market as another symptom of social decline of the area into something resembling the East End and were disturbed by the ponies, carts and barrows, and the traders selling late into Friday and Saturday night who left rotting rubbish. The High Street was also a place for popular musical entertainment such as barrel organ players. Sometimes large crowds gathered to listen to a steam organ or watch a circus performance in a field nearby (Diamond: 96-97).

What has developed into the longest street market in London was not regulated until the early 1890s (Mander 2001: 11; Powell 1973: 269). Fights between the costers over who was to have the best site led to regulations for stallholders being drawn up by the local board, which thus tacitly accepted their presence by granting them official permission. No stall could be put up before 8am and the rivals had to wait in side streets with their barrows for the rush for the best pitch (Mander 2001: 118). Stallholders often had to race – and even fight – for the best sites (Law 1975). Public houses could be open from 4.30 in the morning until midnight, and the stalls and shops were there to accommodate the public. It was said that one could leave the pub at midnight and buy the food for the following day on the way home. The High Street was not alone in the possession of stalls, although it was by far the biggest street-market in Walthamstow and is now the sole survivor. Stalls also existed in St. James Street, in Wood Street, and possibly in parts of Hoe Street (Law 1975).



1840 map of Walthamstow (copy of image reproduced in Powell 1972: 242).

The early stalls were simple 'coster' barrows, carried or pushed onto the market. Later stalls were built on flat topped hand carts, which eventually evolved into the traditional market stall, often with twisted brass rods supporting a framework onto which a canvas cover could be fitted. The wheels were brightly painted and sometimes carved, while there would also be a large sign board displaying the name of the trader above the stall (Stuchfeld 1991: 11, cf. Mander 2001: 118). As dark evenings drew in, lights were needed to allow the customers to see, and prevent theft, and stalls were initially illuminated by crude naphta flares. One resident recalled the scene before the First World War: "Naphta lighting shed a fitful stinking spluttering glow until at least midnight on Saturdays. You could, within a few yards, buy a pet, have a tooth pulled, fill your market bag with shopping for sixpence, adorn yourself with a 'genuine' Indian scent, safeguard yourself with a bottle of 'wonder cure all', be weighed, be measured and be robbed" (Stuchfeld 1991: 12). All this activity came with shouts from the traders, the patter of the quick talking medicine salesmen and the cries of delight or outrage from shoppers. There were smells from "rubbish piled ankle deep in the gutters, spoiled eggs, discarded fish, smelling salts, cheese, second hand clothing, saveloys, faggots, hot potatoes, hokey pokey ice cream, cough candies, hot fritters and jars of pickld fish"' (ibid). It was only in 1932 that the Borough Council introduced a licensing system for the costers, using the money to help pay for cleaning up the aftermath of the markets, and at the same time ending disputes over the best sites (Stuchfeld 1991: 15, cf. Mander 2011: 121).

Licensed stallholders of High Street were allowed to trade from 8am-6pm, with extension to 7pm on Saturdays. The Second World War, with its black-out restrictions, made the public accustomed to earlier closing times for shops and stalls, and when the war ended, there was no reversion to the later closing times – even though these were still legally permissible (Law 1975). Walthamstow was severely damaged by bombing in the Second World War. After the war its appearance was much altered by the scale and variety of municipal housing schemes. From the late 1960s tower blocks of council flats began to dominate the landscape. Walthamstow's business centres were also transformed (Powell 1973: 245). The trend towards the supermarket idea had started earlier in the twentieth century but gathered momentum from the 1950s (Law 1975). In the early part of the 20th century the High Street, once it was established as a market, had soon attracted so-called 'chain stores' including Woolworths and Marks & Spencer, together with Sainsbury's, which still has a High Street branch (Stuchfeld 1991: 15).

In the book "Memories from the High Street" (Howes 1977) older residents from Walthamstow recall some of the original stallholders from the 1920s and 30s, including 'The Cough Drop Man', 'The Bicycle Man', 'The Razor Man', 'The Silver Man' and 'The Bookstall Man'. Even a 'Medicine Man', dressed as a Wild West marshal, kept a stall for some years, selling cures based on rhubarb plants (Stuchfeld 1991: 13). Over the years, ever stricter controls and pressures from the Borough Council has driven out some of the more outlandish characters from the market (Mellor et al 1985). Meanwhile, the present-day stall holders are no less unique, interesting and entertaining.

Today the market is the centre of Walthamstow, with the main rail and tube station, bus station, post office and Central Library, and most of the commercial development and activity located around the High Street. The present-day High Street area has a diverse, ethnically mixed population and the market traders and shoppers reflect this diversity. The market complements the many shops that line the High Street, attracting more customers into the shops on the days when the market is running. The market stalls sell a great variety of items, including food, clothes, and household goods. The market is run by Waltham Forest council and is open five days a week, Tuesday-Saturday, from 8am until 5pm. Saturdays are the busiest, with the most stalls open.

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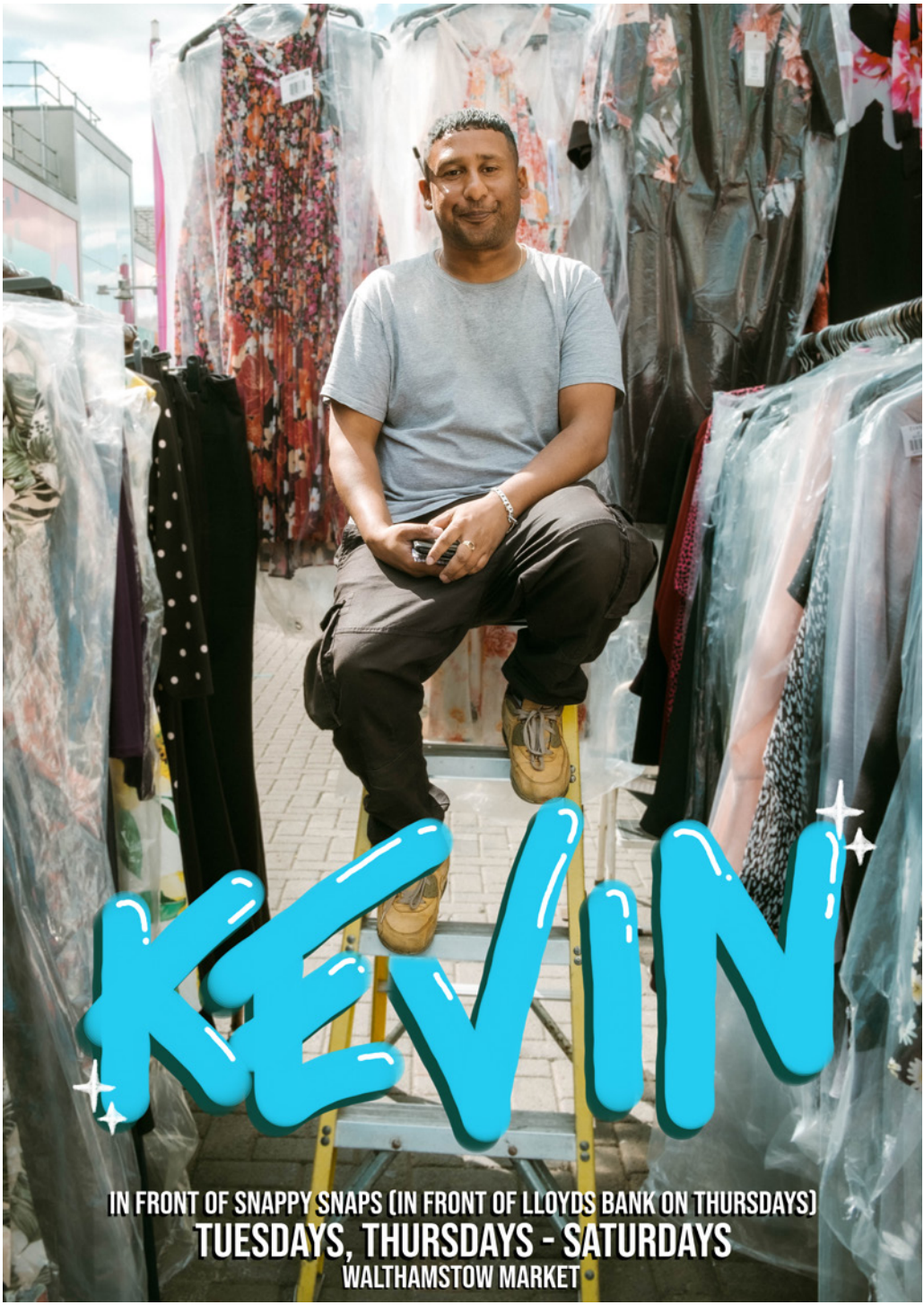

KEVIN
IN FRONT OF SNAPPY SNAPS (IN FRONT OF LLOYDS BANK ON THURSDAYS)
TUESDAYS, THURSDAYS - SATURDAYS
WALTHAMSTOW MARKET


£15


99

INTERVIEWS WITH MARKET TRADERS

Farook, textiles and bedding

"My ancestors were from India, but they had moved there from Burma. My great-great-grandfather was then very rich, he made a very big business empire in Burma, what they call Myanmar now. But in the 1960s, everything they had, they lost when the Communist military government took over. My dad, God rest his soul, used to tell us that they had to run away because the military just came, rounded up the offices and the warehouses they had, put a gun to their heads, and forced them to sign a piece of paper to hand over the business. You had no choice. It had belonged to you and now it belonged to the military and the government. And then they said you could leave the country with what clothes you had on, and that's it".

"The British government gave them British passports and they came over to this country. This was the 1960s. My dad came over like a week before my mum. My mum was heavily pregnant when she flew here and the very next day from when she landed, my older sister was born. So that's how badly they had to run away from that country".

“The wheeling and dealing it’s in our blood, from our parents and grandparents”

“The only jobs that were available for immigrants at that time were labouring jobs. So, my dad started working and eventually he got a job in Ford’s and he was a supervisor there for many years. Then he applied for a market stall and he sold stuff in the market at the weekend. And he always told us, no matter what, educate yourselves and get a degree. So, I went and studied, got my degree and then came back and then he said, ‘Now you can do what you want, you’ve got your degree. Now it’s up to you what you want to do.’ So I said, ‘Look, I wanna work. I love wheeling and dealing, I don’t want to sit in front of a computer screen and be writing out programmes for ten hours’. I wasn’t comfortable. I like going out and about and travelling and meeting people and stuff. I mean, the wheeling and dealing, it’s in our blood, from our parents and grandparents”.

“I started working on the stalls and then I set up my own stall, and later doubled the stall. Then I got married, had kids, a few more stalls. And I went wholesaler and bought a warehouse and started importing my own goods and working on the markets at the same time. I had about six markets running, and I had people working for me – I ended up having about twenty people working for me. I had about half a dozen different shops, and stalls in different areas. Took me about ten years to build up the business. And it’s continued from there”.


HECTOR
OPPOSITE TOAST
TUESDAYS - SATURDAYS
WALTHAMSTOW MARKET


HARRY'S
TRIMMINGS
IN FRONT OF ROOSTERS
TUESDAYS - SATURDAYS
WALTHAMSTOW MARKET


LARRY
OPPOSITE THE MALL ENTERANCE
FRIDAYS - SATURDAYS
WALTHAMSTOW MARKET


ERA
GOLD

Joseph, Lady's Fashion

Joseph was born in Walthamstow and has been at the market for thirty-two years, since 1991. Aged five his parents moved with him back to Jamaica, where he lived from 1972 -1984. Returning to the United Kingdom aged seventeen, he started trading as an apprentice with his older brothers in London to learn the business. He shadowed his brothers, following them to different factories to learn and get hands on experience in the clothing fashion trade.

In the 90s many factories were closing down or moving abroad, and it was becoming difficult to get good workers at competitive prices. Joseph's brothers were running a clothing factory and decided to use this opportunity to relocate, to stay competitive in the marketplace.

Joseph explains: "We started to visit other countries within Europe, Canada and even considered China to see if we could relocate there. Then one of my older brothers suggested Africa. As a young boy I had heard of Africa while living in Jamaica but, in my naivety, it seemed like a very distant place. However, my two older brothers visited and returned with positive feedback, so I accompanied them when they went back to Africa. It was an enlightening, enjoyable experience and I felt at home there".

"The next step was to set up a clothing factory over there, but that was a huge challenge since we were based here and didn't know anyone over there to start with. We put out word that we were looking for persons to go abroad and train staff in a new start-up factory, and we were successful in finding them here in Walthamstow. This is why I've always highlighted that one of the advantages of Walthamstow is that you meet people from all over the world, from different walks of life".

"That's the advantage of Walthamstow, there are people from all over the world here".

Nadeem, Bedding

"I'm actually originally from Pakistan. I worked there in the Colgate and Palmolive USA Company as a representative, for eight years. When I came to England around 1999, I knew what businesses should do. But I didn't know what to do at the start, so I applied for a job in a supermarket. Morrison's said to me, 'You can start from tomorrow'. So I went the next day and they said, 'Are you from the marketing department? You used to be in a big company. Why do you wanna work in a supermarket?' And I said, 'I wanna start somewhere, because this is the job I can get at the moment'".

"I used to go to Morrison's at two o'clock in the night and work till nine in the morning. When I finished work, I travelled by bus back home to Walthamstow and then I used to see this massive market - you know, this is a one mile market, it's the biggest market in Europe - so I used to walk all the way from the bus stop through the market, and I'd see the businesses booming and it was packed, and I said to myself, 'Oh, why don't I start a business from here?' I asked around and I found out how to get a license. I waited for a long time to get a pitch, there were many people applying. When it was my turn they asked, 'OK, what would you like to sell?' And I said, 'Oh, household bed linen.' They said, 'OK'. And there you are, I'm here!"

"The main thing about a business is you have to work hard. In the market you ask anybody about me, they're gonna say, 'Oh, he's a worker!'"

“I was down the bottom of the market, and them days people used to say that this is a graveyard. They used to call out, ‘Oh, they gave you a pitch in the graveyard?’ I said, ‘What do you mean “in the graveyard”?’ And they said, ‘Down at the bottom, nobody goes down there!’ And I still took it! I said, ‘I’m gonna work in the graveyard, at least a few people are gonna come down!’. Otherwise, I would still be working in the supermarket, I don’t know where I would be. So here you are. You have to take steps, you know, in life.”

“The main thing about a business is, you wanna gain some experience; it’s not like something was given to me from inheritance. You have to work hard. In the market you ask anybody about me, they’re gonna say, ‘Oh, he’s a worker!’ Sometimes people say, ‘Are you mad to do this?’ In 2009 I took on the shop, and I remember some of the market traders said to me, ‘Are you mad?’ And there you are, I’m still running the shop and my stall. Well, I’m not gonna say that I’m very good at it, but I’ll just carry on, I don’t listen to anybody. I only do what my experience says, and my intention is good, and that’s why we’re still here. I got a shop because of the market, and I don’t want to give up my stall. The market is my base. I still sit in my stall every day, facing the people in the market.”

Andrzej, Leather Goods

On 23 December 1987 Andrzej left communist Poland for Germany and, a few years later, he moved on to South Africa. “In South Africa I was a refugee, I didn’t have any papers” he explains. He sold watches in South Africa. His wife is South African. They have a daughter, who is working in the stall just behind Andrzej, selling cosmetics and makeup.

After South Africa, Andrzej came to the UK. He built up his stall little by little. His wife is at home running her own business, she’s doing beauty treatments and is also teaching others how to do it. Andrzej’s daughter is going to make a website for the three of them: the beauty treatments and training, the cosmetics sale, and the belts. Andrzej doesn’t like dealing with online business and all the questions people ask you about this and that, he wants someone else to deal with that.

Andrzej likes his work, it’s varied. If he’s not selling, he will make some belts. He has a work-top in the stall with all the tools and spare parts. He never attended any training to learn his craft. It was just his supplier who at one point suggested he makes the belts himself, instead of buying them ready-made from him. “I used to work in an Italian restaurant making pizzas; I even trained other people to make pizzas, even though I didn’t have any training myself. This is like a restaurant: you make the things on the spot, and when you’ve sold them, you make some more. Sell, make, sell, make, like pizzas… Some customers want things cheap. I sometimes get offended. I tell them to go and buy something from China. This stuff is good quality”.

“This is like a restaurant: I make the things on the spot, and when I’ve sold them I make some more. Sell, make, sell, make, like pizzas”


RAW.

Nicky, Flowers

Nicky has been selling flowers since the age of twelve. He learnt to arrange flowers by doing it, and not from his parents. His dad did have a market stall for a little while, at the market in Greenwich in South London, where Nicky grew up. The stall next to his dad's sold flowers, and Nicky used to help set up that stall when he was young, so that's how he learnt. He's been selling flowers ever since. "It just stuck! I did go to school. But I sold flowers before and after! I had done the flowers for so long, so that's why I ended up working with them. It's all I knew how to do properly".

The trader that Nicky was helping didn't know how to do the floral displays for funerals, so Nicky decided that he had to teach himself how to do it. Once he had learnt it, they started selling those as well. Nicky continued to help out in the flower stall until the age of twenty-four, when he could afford to set up on his own. "It took a long time, but I managed".

"I did go to school. But I sold flowers before and after!"

Safwan, Perfume

"When I was younger, I worked in a five-star hotel as an apprentice, and I also worked in a hair salon. So, working in these two places I gained a lot of experience in customer service. I was very good at customer service. In the five-star hotel I was doing an apprenticeship as a receptionist. So, you know, in five-star hotels there are all the high-class people, and you have to really be good with your English. You have to be really presentable, and you have to talk very well; so I was very good at that. And in the hair salon, I was dealing with the customers, washing their hair and things like this, yeah. So, I learned those skills during that time, and when I used them here, when I was on the market stall, I was able to benefit in communicating with customers. I got a lot of sales and I started to realise: 'Wow, this can be done! I don't have to be selling other things, I can sell perfume!' So, from there, I took it on full time - boomf!"

"So, I learned those skills during that time and, when I used them here, I was able to benefit"

Sunny, Caribean Fruit and Veg

Sunny was born in Pakistan. He chose to sell Caribbean veg because there is not a lot of variety so you can have a small stall, unlike Asian veg where there are lots of different things. Also, the types of veg he sells keep for longer, whereas the Asian veg is mostly fresh produce that goes off quickly. Sunny started selling Caribbean veg when he was working for another trader, Kim Lambert. One section of Kim's stall was for Caribbean produce, and the other side of his stall was fruit. Sunny was in charge of the Caribbean section of Kim's stall. Kim taught him many things.

Sunny fills some water in a small plastic bucket and adds some lemon powder. He then cuts a yam in half and dips one end of it in the water, before selling it to an older man who has been patiently waiting. The lemon powder keeps the yam nice and white and stops it going brown, Sunny explains. He learnt this trick from his teacher, Kim.

While we are chatting, Sunny stacks the plantain. They're going off in two days, he tells me. Customers want the big ones, so he places the smaller ones at the bottom of the box. He also cooks these things at home for himself, and he asks his customers for recipes. Cooking is his passion, he loves food. He has a customer from Mauritius, who cooks really well. Her son loves bread fruit so one day Sunny gave her one for free. He told her to cook it, half for her and the other half for Sunny. She made a delicious sauce to go with it, and Sunny asked her for the recipe. It was made from raw blended tomatoes, onions, garlic, chili, sugar and salt.

"I don't get the rotten stuff from the wholesale market, even though it's cheaper. Food must be healthy. I sell quality, not quantity"

Sunny then unpacks some mangoes called East Indian mangoes although, he says, they are actually from the West Indies. They are stringy but people like them because it's what they eat back home, he explains. Sunny says there are over a thousand types of mangoes and two hundred varieties just in Pakistan. He also sells Jamaican Julie mangoes and Dominican Republic mangoes. His favourite one is tiny; in Pakistan it costs £1 and here in the UK it is even more expensive. He only sells quality produce. He doesn't get the rotten stuff from the wholesale market, even though it's cheaper. Food must be healthy, he says. Sunny says that he sells quality, not quantity.

“It’s a community. You don’t get that in Sainsbury’s or Tesco’s”

Steve, Fruit and Vegetables

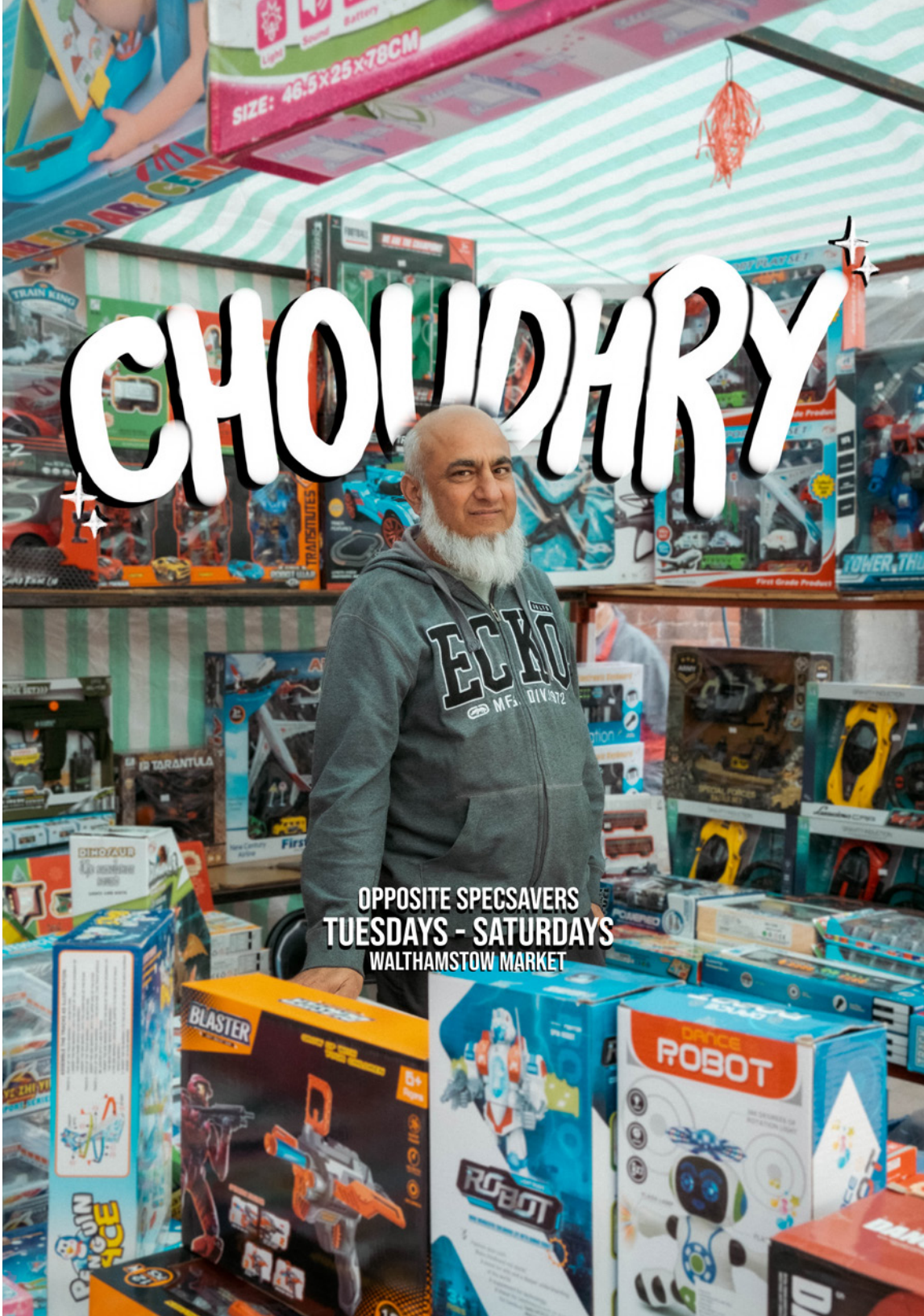
"In 1957 my dad got his trader's license. He did twenty, thirty years the other side of Palmerston Road, and then he done twenty-three years outside the fish and chip shop here, and he's just done thirty years up here with me. My dad and I were a team, we're an absolute team, he used to drive the lorry, I used to do the buying, we worked together for thirty years fortunately. My family is one of the oldest trading families in the market. My mum still comes down on the odd occasion now. She's ninety. I put her a chair, on a sunny day. She likes the life - it's your life, isn't it. It's been our life."

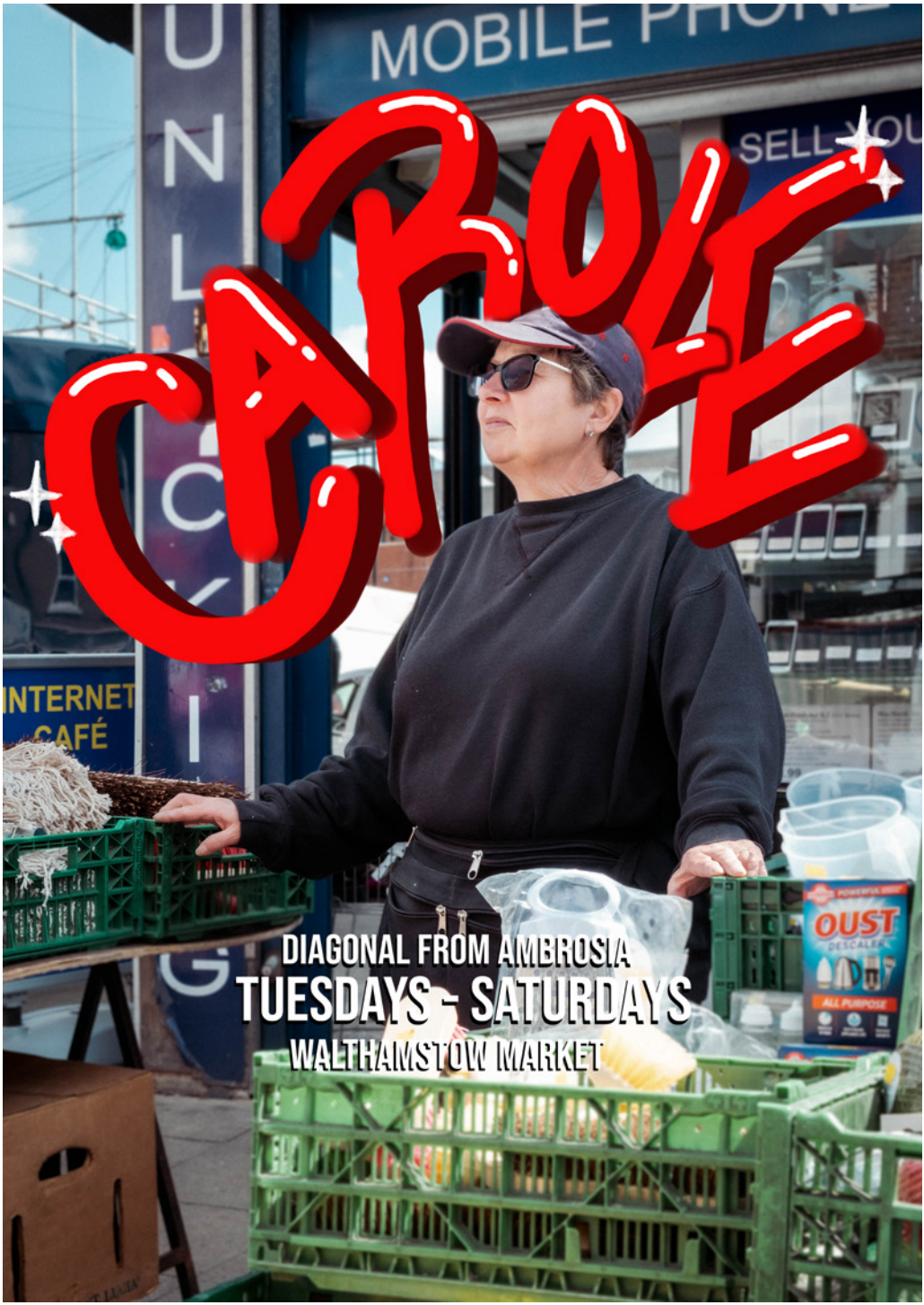
"I was born in 1965 in Thorpe Coombe Hospital, which is the maternity hospital in Walthamstow. We lived above the fish shop in the high street. I started working on the market when I was about six or seven, I used to push my little barrow around. There used to be a pie factory called Gillard's, Gillard's Pies, and I used to push my barrow down and pack it up. The market was my life."

"I know lots of people who lose their partners who want to talk to you, that I've served for years. They lose their partners and it's a community, they wanna talk to you. You have to make time, you have to be polite, and you have to … that's their life. They come and see you and they might not talk to anybody all day. 'Steve, how are you? How's your dad?' How's me mum? Lovely. It's a community. You don't get that in Sainsbury's or Tesco's."

“A lot of my customers come from the local area, lots and lots and lots of people, I would say seventy percent of my customers are repeat customers I serve every day, every week – serve them most days, especially the elderly retired people, ‘cause they like a little walk. They walk down to the bottom, they stop and have a chat ‘cause it breaks their day up. They like that community spirit.”

“I serve a lovely family, Asian family, up there on the left. Been friends with them for thirty years, absolutely lovely, really lovely, lovely family. They come to me, in Diwali he brings me some chicken, brings me rice, brings me a Christmas card. It’s so nice. And Mr. Ali, one of my fellow traders, he always buys me a packet of biscuits for Christmas, always wishes me a happy Christmas. Lovely man. Lovely, served all his family, served his cousins and staff, all of them they come to us. He comes to my stall at nine o’clock every day and makes his tea, has a cup of tea. His family all work here, his sons help him on a Saturday, family orientated. That’s what I feel really is interesting and good though, it’s all the family.”


CHOUDHRY
OPPOSITE SPECSAVERS
TUESDAYS - SATURDAYS
WALTHAMSTOW MARKET
ECKO
BLASTER
ROBOT
DANCE ROBOT
TARANTULA
DINOZAUR
PENGUIN ICE


CAROLE
DIAGONAL FROM AMBROSIA
TUESDAYS - SATURDAYS
WALTHAMSTOW MARKET
MOBILE PHONE
SELL YOU
INTERNET
CAFÉ
OUST
DESCALER
ALL PURPOSE

Carole, Kitchen and household items

Carole has been working at the market for thirty years – "this Christmas it'll be thirty years!" she adds proudly. She tells me she inherited the stall from her father. Since she was eleven years old her dad came here to sell. "To be honest, I love it!" she exclaims.

There used to be 480 stalls here when she started out. She had to wait ten years to get a pitch on a Saturday, that's how busy it was.

Carole used to work in a factory before coming here. She and her husband worked together at the factory but when her father retired, he asked if she wanted to take over his stall. She took it on when she was thirty. Then she adds that she actually already worked here when she was fourteen. She used to come on Saturdays. She would work here with her sister.

"I'm still ticking over because of the things I sell – people always need black bags. Women tend to go for the black bags, foil … I tend to keep what I call 'the old-fashioned things'".

I ask Carole whether her father sold the same things as her and she smiles and says, “Yes. He actually sold exactly the same things as me!”

“I have six years left before I can retire”, she tells me. I comment that it’s impressive that she’s managed to keep going for this many decades. She tells me, “I love it! I really do. I’m not rich but this is what I enjoy doing. I’m a very sociable person”. She tells me she was born in Mile End. Her brother lives in Brighton, “he’s not a trader but he tells other people, ‘my sister she’s proper Cockney, proper East End!’ I think he’s even more proud of it than I am!”. She’s busy dealing with a tall elderly man. She comments so he can hear it, “Many of my customers I’ve known for years!”, clearly implying this man. He replies, “She’ll even give me the black bags for free!”, teasing Carole. Carole then comments affectionately about the other traders: “We are like a little community here”, saying it loudly enough for the guys to hear. One of them moves closer to us and starts joking in a friendly way with Carole. He exclaims: “She is the mother of this market!”. Carole chuckles happily. “These guys, they look out for me. If I need to go to the toilet they look after my stall. They even supply me with food!”.

Steve: top of the market opposite the Library, near Cleveland Park Avenue

Farook: diagonally opposite the Town Square, near the corner of Westbury Road & High Street, in front of The Textile Centre

Nadeem: corner of Truro Road & High Street, in front of Nadeem Bedding Ltd

Andrzej: near the corner of Selborne Avenue & High Street, close to the Polish Deli

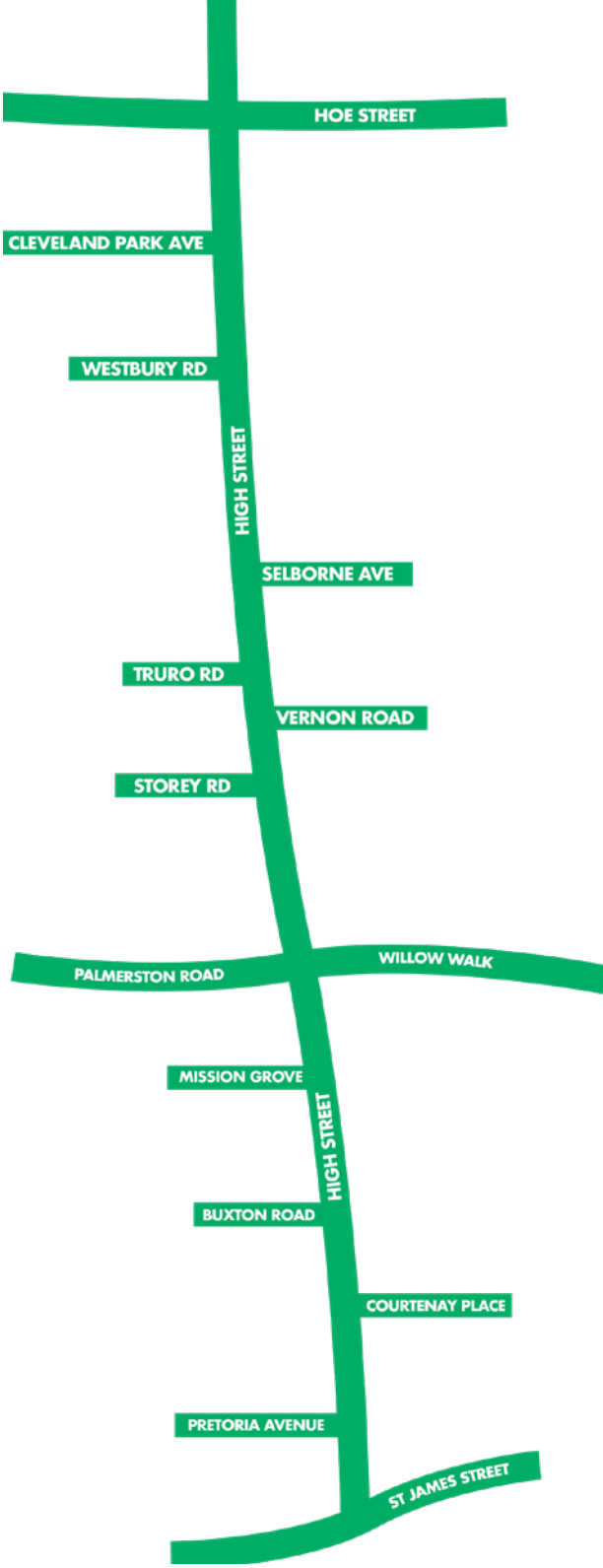
Carole: Corner of Selborne Avenue & High Street

Sunny: Corner of Vernon Road & 120 High Street, in front of Sea Catch Fish shop

Safwan: near the corner of Vernon Road & High Street, next to Sunny's stall

Joseph: Corner of Palmerston Road & High Street, near the traffic lights and close to Wilko

Nicky: far end of the market near Buxton Road, outside Farmfoods

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NEGRO YAM
SWEET YAM
SWEET POTATO
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