

In 2012, the Westfield Stratford City shopping mall opened its doors to the east of the busy Stratford Regional station. It's considered a mainstay by many now, but in the decades before Westfield, the spot where you're standing - Stratford Centre - was a key meeting place for locals and stood as a cornerstone of Newham's community.

This spot has borne the beat of countless footsteps, whether they were strolling to the celebrated Drury Lane of the East for a performance at the Borough Theatre at the end of the 1800s, or in more recent times, two stepping on their way for a night of raving at the legendary Stratford Rex nightclub.

Stratford Market bustles with street food vendors from all five continents, while intricate fabrics and tapestries are sold across its stalls. Nestled deep within Stratford Shopping Centre stood the Market Village, a series of in-shops which has been providing bespoke items for the diverse population of Newham for over 30 years. One longtime Newham resident and journalist, Naz, remembers Marmalade Park as a key part of her adolescent years - a piercing shop that was affordable but more importantly, where she felt at home. Naz also laments the closure of a fast-food spot hailed by Newham residents as the best curry and chips in London.

The abrupt closure of Market Village in January 2024 left many devastated. However, in pockets of Stratford, aspects of the community remain strong and at the end of March 2024, calls from across Newham were finally answered. Sustained pressure from the 60 market village traders who'd been forced out of work prompted Newham council to take action. The council has since entered a 15 year lease, which has restored the livelihoods of market village shoppers and traders alike. This move stands as a testament to the strong sense of community in Newham.

Stratford Centre has stood the test of time. Be it through the Thatcher years of the 1980s or the 2012 Olympics, the space which it occupies was deemed a public right of way long before the centre was built in 1974. When security measures were more lax, underground subcultures thrived within Stratford Centre's door, and skaters and street dancers roamed free. The centre also operated 24/7 until it was bought out in 2017, so it provided a refuge for homeless individuals displaced from affordable housing. For every skateboarder gliding through, there's a homeless person perched on the corner, a reveller stomping through, lager in hand, and a commuter coming home from their city job. Stratford Centre does not discriminate!

To the north-west of where you're standing now on the Broadway, you can see one of Stratford's most iconic landmarks: St John's Church. Constructed by Edward Blore between 1832 and 1834, it initially served as a local chapel of ease, which could be easily reached by Stratford's burgeoning population. If you step into the churchyard, you

can see a memorial to the Stratford Martyrs, a group of Protestants who were executed by Queen Mary in the 1550s due to their religious beliefs.

The church's significance extends beyond its religious role. During the Second World War, its crypt provided refuge as an air raid shelter, and in the years that followed, locals enjoyed watching the many weddings that would take place over a weekend. The crypt underneath the church has also served as a music studio over the years. Between 1988 and 1994, it was the rehearsal space and recording studio for the influential music group Bark Psychosis, who were key in defining the genre of post-rock.

Fast forward to 2012, and the crypt continued its musical legacy as a studio space, now housing J.O.A.T. music, a production company founded by producer Blem, who is the cousin of prolific producer Jae5. J.O.A.T. Music, standing for Jack of All Trades, has played a vital role in the London music scene by offering opportunities for young men, diverting their energies away from potential involvement in gangs or criminal activities by engaging them in music.

Five minutes' walk from here, the Borough Theatre opened in 1896 with the production of Henry V, part 1. It had seating for 3000 people! The theatre was originally designed by Frank Matcham, who also designed the Grand Opera House in Belfast, the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith, the Hackney and Shepherd's Bush Empire, the London Palladium, and the London Coliseum. You can see a photo showing the streetscape outside the historic Borough Theatre from the early 1900s on our online page.

The theatre saw many changes over the century. In 1933, the interior was stripped and refitted as a super cinema, and the exterior was redesigned in an Art Deco style. Then in 1997, local businessman Malcolm Campbell reopened the theatre for live concerts and as a nightclub, hosting legendary raves for Club Telepathy, among others. The Rex and other venues in the area like Marshgate were a fundamental piece of Britain's dance music scene.

The iconic EDM group The Prodigy had their first gig in London at the Rex. Many locals remember club nights at the Rex fondly before it closed in 2007. Standing in a space steeped in history, repurposed for positive community impact, maybe you can think of new ways historical sites could be repurposed to provide exciting opportunities for local people?

If you'd like to see the former Stratford Rex cinema and nightclub, it's about a five minute walk from here. Cross the road and walk straight up past the old Town Hall Stratford on your left. Keep walking down the High Street, past Ye Olde Black Bull pub, until you get to the Art Deco building, 'Zap Space' Stratford, opposite Stratford High

Street DLR station.

Your closest stops from here on the Mile of Memories walking tour is Angel Lane (a six minute walk) or Sugar Lane, a 12 minute walk. For more detailed directions to either stop, please look on our online page.