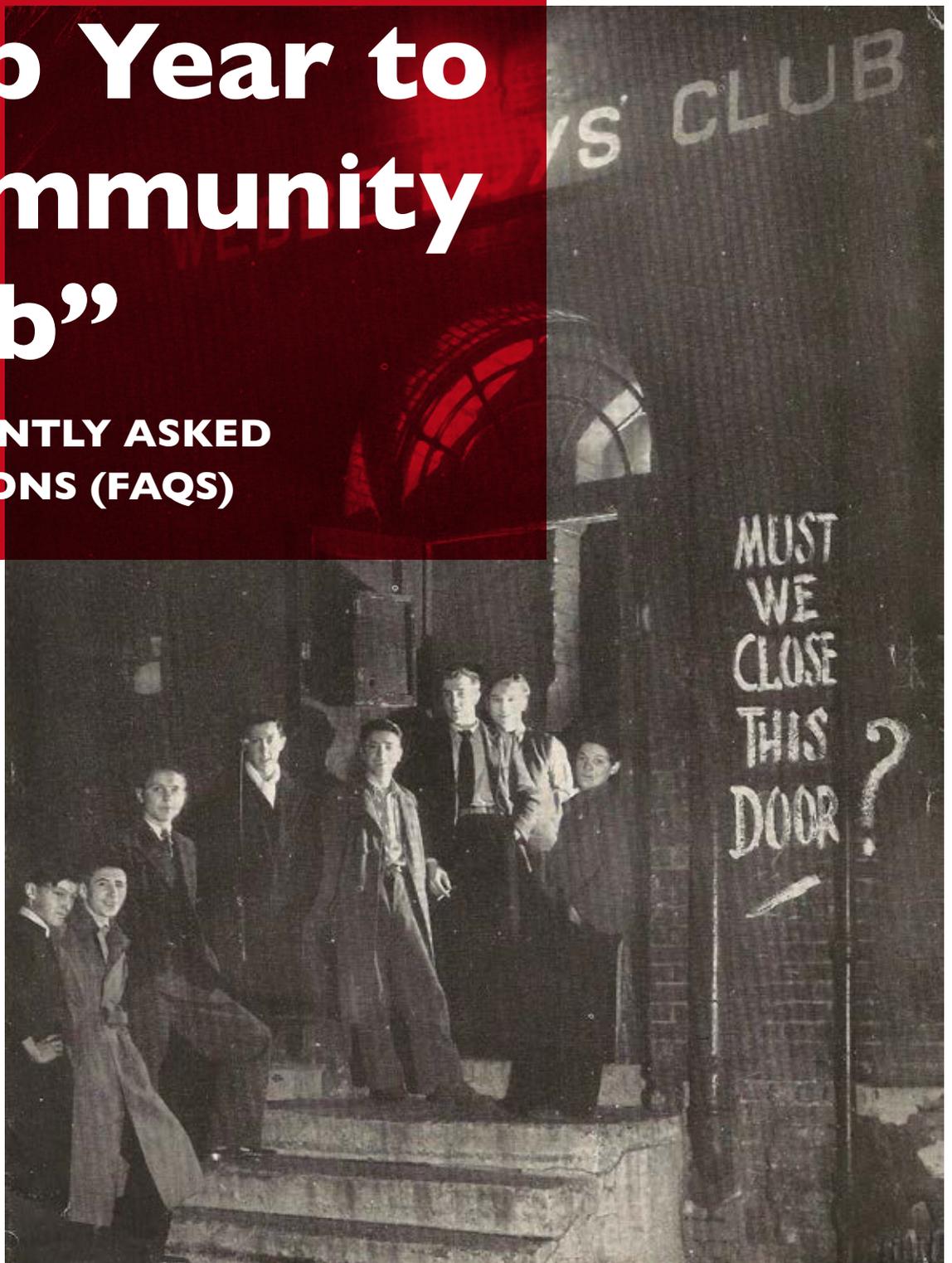


“From Victorian Gap Year to Community Hub”

FREQUENTLY ASKED
QUESTIONS (FAQS)



**OXFORD HOUSE'S MAJOR
NEW HERITAGE PROJECT**

oh! oxford house
in Bethnal Green



What is Oxford House and what do you do there?

Oxford House is a community, arts and heritage centre that is still at the heart of Bethnal Green, engaging with the diverse communities of east London. Our mission is to be the place in east London where people come together to work, learn, create and celebrate arts, community and heritage. There are three strands to our work:

- 1) Provide a community hub that is open daily, providing community activities, space for community organisations and activity programmes.
- 2) Provide volunteering programmes that tackle youth employability and offer a pathway to employment by building skills and confidence.
- 3) Provide a hub for the creative and cultural arts with a programme of weekly activities in the theatre, dance studio and gallery.



How and why did Oxford House start out as a community hub?

Oxford House was first created in **1884** as a 'settlement house', a new mode of philanthropy and volunteering that brought university graduates to live amongst the poorer communities, seeking to uplift their lives through social action. These graduate volunteers were instrumental in shaping early welfare state provision, and provided activities and clubs such as the Working Men's Club, The Webbe Youth Association, as well as social services such as labour exchanges and law advice.

The original settlement was housed in a disused day school (now demolished), and the house that exists today was designed and built in **1889** by architect **Arthur Blomfield**, who also designed the Royal College of Music. This was

completed under the permission and supervision of Head of House Arthur Winnington-Ingram, a key figure in the development of the house as a thriving community centre.

The House supported a variety of community clubs and associations throughout the 20th century, which extended beyond the boundaries of the building itself to places such as the now demolished Excelsior Hall/ Swimming Baths, Victoria Park Square University Club buildings and National Playing Fields in Walthamstow. In support of community life, Oxford House was also host to choral and amateur dramatic societies, and later on to dance and exercise classes which are ongoing today.



What is the heritage project “From Victorian Gap Year to Community Hub” all about?

Our project envisions better enabling of public access and transformation of the heritage spaces of Oxford House that make it so unique. A programme of activities will interpret the ‘hidden’ stories that highlight our ongoing community mission and bring the communities of the area together. **We will target new audiences**, especially those that aren’t as engaged in heritage, as well as the elder and Somali communities that have been an important part of Oxford House’s modern history.

We aim to explore particular strands of heritage, such as the development of Youth clubs and their impact on childhood, especially the boxing clubs of the East End. **We will explore the impact of the World Wars on the community and how Oxford House provided shelter for those in need.** We will examine the impact of post war development of the area around Oxford House, with particular focus on Weaver’s Fields, which once was the home of the important Huguenot silk industry.



What other areas will the project funding cover?

As well as diversifying our heritage activities, **we will be transforming the spaces inside the building itself.** Oxford House is a grade II listed building, with hidden architectural gems such as the original concrete staircase, leaded diamond window panes and the floating fireplace on the third floor, once part of the residences upstairs. The star of the house itself however is the 3rd floor chapel, noted for its art and craftsmanship. On the back wall hangs a painting by Alfred Soord of the Crucifixion set in a highly decorated wooden panel screen.

These elements of design, though beautiful, are also in need of repairs and replacement, especially in the chapel. **Roof repairs will be carried out using existing tiles, and window and brick repairs on the exterior of the building will follow.** The original entrance will be restored to highlight heritage

previously hidden by modern additions, with a historically appropriate door replacing the current one. As a part of the roofing renewal works, but subject to separate fundraising, we aim to reinstate the witches walk railings on the flat roof to provide a lookout area. This will be accessed via a new staircase in the lobby.

On the interior of the building, essential repairs and restoration will be carried out in the chapel. The wooden panels will be treated and varnished; repairs to hardwood flooring completed and make good the original plasterwork. The ground floor will be opened up and a new café and heritage space will be more accessible with an entrance from the Derbyshire Street Pocket Park, easily seen from Weaver’s Fields. The current kitchen space will be upgraded and refreshed to form the new heart of the house.



What kinds of community activities can I expect to see in the future?

The two year activity plan will aim to interpret and engage with Oxford House's heritage, and animate the newly refurbished spaces to create a permanent heritage programme. These **will be led by the new Heritage Curator** and delivered by community partners such as Kazzum, Green Candle Dance, Young & Talented and Columbia Road Primary School.

The structure of the programme comprises of two phases:

1) Research and Development

(From May 2017 — May 2018)

- During capital works, we will be gathering heritage stories of Oxford House, and begin cataloguing and preserving archival material. We will be using this material as the basis for our phase two activities, including working with local school to develop learning materials.
- Volunteering during repair and restoration works will be very important, and volunteer development for reopening will continue during this time.
- Themed talks will be scheduled offsite in partnership with local heritage organisations.

2) Launch and Reopening

(June 2018 — December 2019)

- Drop in activities will be provided for local school children throughout the summer holiday based on our previous research. This will include film making, arts

and crafts, wood working, story-telling through art, and performance pieces.

- Walking tours of Oxford House and Bethnal Green will be conducted, as well as showcasing a permanent display based on various themes from our research, including welfare, education, housing and so on. A huge variety of craft workshops and temporary exhibitions will be held over this period which will cater for all ages.
- Family festivals based around the heritage of Oxford House will be held in partnership with Kazzum, a performing arts company based in Oxford House.
- The programme will also offer activities which showcase our heritage spaces such as the chapel, the entrance hall, staircase and the Settlement Room, and (subject to funding) the historic roof walk.

We shall also take part in a series of events to animate the Pocket Park, e.g. Kazzum's Pocket Park Family Festival Weekend, and support a number of heritage themed projects undertaken by tenant/partners.

Our permanent heritage offer will cover: **fixed interpretation in the Chapel, Settlement Room, landings staircases, café; interpreted window views; external panels in Pocket Park and at our main entrance; interpreted views from roof---top walk.** This will be complemented by further detail on our interpretative themes available via online exhibitions and our **bookable---guided tours** from volunteers; expert special interest talks and workshops (some offsite e.g. History Hoppers).



Who is the project going to benefit?

Oxford House has been at the centre of community life in Bethnal Green for 130 years; **our aim is to continue the original founder's mission by bringing together our communities and showcase the huge personal heritage of the area.** We hope to attract new visitors to our redeveloped public spaces and engage further with existing community members such as the Somali community (the Somali Week Festival has been held annually since 1991).

Our activity plan aims to reach at least 10 local primary and secondary schools attending workshops and activities over two years, reaching at least 900 children over that period. We aim to train and use 150 volunteers from the youth community over the course of the three phases in areas such as creative writing, photography dance and drama, exhibition and curation, and so many more, with at least 200 training participants in various programmes supported by the house.



How can I help?

Oxford House currently generates over 90% of its own income from office rental and venue hire within the building. We are striving to develop a self-sustaining model of charity so that we are not overly reliant on public funds. The heritage project will enable us to continue this approach.

You can help in many ways!

Derbyshire Street, Bethnal Green.
London, E2 6HG 0207 739 9001

info@oxfordhouse.org.uk
www.oxfordhouse.org.uk

 Oxford-House

 @oxhse



Donate:

Your much needed donations will go towards creation of community activities in the future, opportunities for young people to volunteer and will enable us to continue our ongoing conservation of our architectural heritage. Follow this [link](#) to our donate page.

Volunteer:

there will be many opportunities to volunteer and help create this project. Follow this [link](#) for more information.

Keep informed & spread the word:

Sign up to our regular e-newsletter here and then pass the word on to your friends, or colleagues.