Welcome to

Newham’s Sporting Life

Exhibition

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1800s.......West Ham Marshes.........Spotted Dog...

From prize-fighting on the West Ham marshes to the successes of West Ham United and Newham’s Olympians, this exhibition takes a look at the sporting history of Newham.

It shows the range of sports that people have enjoyed playing either as individuals or as members of their school, club or works team.

We can also see how the footballers, boxers, speedway riders and stars of many other sports have thrilled generations of spectators over the years. Above all it shows how important sport has been – and continues to be – in the lives of local people.

“...The Races at Plaistow on Monday last were conducted with great harmony and good order. They began at three o’clock, and consisted of donkey racing, men running in sacks, women for shifts, men wheeling barrows blind-folded, etc, etc.”

Times. 30 May 1806.
Many works and factory sports teams were set up in the 1890s. Arnold Hills of the Thames Iron Works, who was keen to encourage his workers to lead healthy lives, went a stage further and in 1897 opened the Memorial Recreation Grounds and Cycle Track for the use of his employees.

Thames Iron Works Cycling Club, 1895.

Arnold Hills.

The Cycle Track also came to be increasingly used for motorcycle testing and racing, sometimes with fatal consequences.

Thames Iron Works football team, 1896. The team later became West Ham United FC whose badge is two hammers. The hammers were used by shipwrights at the Iron Works to rivet ships – hence the name The Hammers.
Away from work, sport provided social opportunities too. West Ham Council members and officers, with West Ham Park governors, are photographed here during a cricket match in the park in 1898.

Members of the Boleyn Castle Social and Sports Club in carnival mood.

Rowing club members, 1898.

West Ham United Football Club in 1900, the year they were formed from three amateur teams.

West Ham moved to their new ground on Green Street, behind Boleyn Castle, in 1904.
Many of Newham's parks and recreation grounds were created around the turn of the century to serve the leisure needs of a growing population. Central Park opened in 1896 and offered swimming and other sports as well as more sedate activities including putting.

School sport too was becoming more organised with better facilities and inter-school competitions. Here the boys of Sandringham Road School Football Club celebrate an unbeaten season during 1902-3.

Abbey Mills Chemical Works was run by F W Berk & Co (later Berk Spencer Acids) and was one of many chemical works in Abbey Lane at this time.

Edward Ambrose Fenton of Forest Gate flexes his muscles in this serious boxing pose. In years to come his grandsons would have strong connections with West Ham United Football Club (Photo: Carol Johnson).
Balaam Street Baths

......Quoits......Tennis.......Netball......

Sunday morning swimmers at Balaam Street Baths, 1911.

Prince Regent Lane Quoits Club, 1911.

Members of an East Ham tennis club, around 1910.


GER Cars Football Club, 1911-12. The employees of the Great Eastern Railway restaurant cars service, based in Stratford, had their own football team.
West Ham reached their first Cup Final in 1923 losing to Bolton Wanderers in the first match to be played in the new Wembley Stadium. The final was preceded by chaotic scenes as huge crowds surged into the stadium and the pitch had to be cleared by mounted police. West Ham Corporation entered into the spirit of the occasion by decorating one of its trams for the final.

Action from the 3rd round FA Cup tie between West Ham and Tottenham Hotspur on 8 January 1927. West Ham won the match 3-2 with a hat-trick by Vic Watson, one of thirteen that he scored for the club during his career.

Stockdales was a fixture on Stratford High Street for many years.

Members of the darts team and supporters outside the Golden Horse, Forest Lane, in the 1920s.
Edward Temme

Edward Temme, born in Stratford Road, Plaistow, was the first man to swim the English Channel in both directions. A plaque in the former Balaam Street Baths recorded his first crossing from France to England in 1927. His second crossing, from England to France, took place seven years later. Temme was also a member of the British water polo team in the 1928 and 1936 Olympics.

Temme (second left, front row) was a member of Plaistow United Swimming Club, founded in 1920, which became one of the best in the country and provided five members of the British water polo team at the 1936 Olympics.

Sports Day at West Ham Secondary School.

Members of the Plaistow United Swimming Club at Balaam Street Baths, 1930.
West Ham Stadium

.....Thames Association.........Old Westhamians......

West Ham Stadium in Custom House was opened in 1928. It was mainly a greyhound racing and speedway stadium but it was also used for other sports including baseball, athletics and football, where it was the home for several years of the ill-fated Thames Association FC. The stadium could house over 100,000 spectators.

Old Westhamians Football Club, winners of the London Old Boys’ Cup in 1930. They were presented with the trophy at their annual dinner at The Pigeons in Romford Road.
Fairbairn House

Boxing...........Jack Leslie.....

Jack Leslie leads out the Fairbairn House Old Boys in a charity match against West Ham United in 1935. Born to a Jamaican father in Canning Town, Leslie played for local teams before joining Plymouth Argyle in 1921 where he made over 400 appearances. Selected to play for England, his call-up was withdrawn when officials realised he was “a man of colour”.

Boxing and football at Fairbairn House, 1930s. Fairbairn Boys’ Club, part of Mansfield House University Settlement, was founded in 1891 at the Old Shipwrights’ Hall in Canning Town. It later moved to Fairbairn Hall in Barking Road and offered boys not only a range of sports but other activities too including dramatics, drawing and essay writing.
Speedway Champions
Borough Jubilee……..Essex Beagles........

Ted and Ben Fenton, 1930s. The Fenton brothers Ted (born 1914) and Ben (born 1918) both played for West Ham United, and Ted was manager of the club from 1950 until 1961. (Photo: Carol Johnson)

Schoolboys demonstrate their physical fitness as part of the West Ham Jubilee celebrations, 1936.

Essex Beagles celebrated their Golden Jubilee in 1937. Founded in 1887 as Beaumont Harriers the club, now known as Newham and Essex Beagles, is based at Terence McMillan Stadium and counts several Olympians amongst its past and present members.

West Ham became National League Speedway Champions in 1937 finishing four points clear of their nearest rivals. The Cundy Trophy at their final meeting of the season was won by Australian rider Bluey Wilkinson who was to become World Speedway Champion the following year. The West Ham Speedway Supporters’ Club had over 30,000 members by this time.
Beckton Lido.....Venesta......Gracie Fields.....

West Ham mayor Daisy Parsons opens the new Lido in Canning Town Recreation Ground in 1937. She is seen here with Pat Dennahy, aged 10, and (centre) taking a well-earned dip after the ceremony.

West Ham mayor Thomas Wooder opens the first wartime speedway meeting at West Ham in 1940. Sporting events were soon to come to an end as the war came closer to Britain.

The Mayor of East Ham and Deputy Mayor of West Ham taking part in exercises at West Ham football ground with local men about to be called up for war service, July 1940.

Venesta boxing team, 1938. Venesta made packing cases, plywood and metal foil at their factory on North Woolwich Road and had over 1300 employees at this time.

Crooner Eric Chitty was also one of West Ham’s star speedway riders. He later became captain of the team and was known as the ‘Custom House Cannonball’ by the fans.
The West Ham ARP (Civil Defence) Service was also under less pressure by this time and its members were able to enjoy their own Sports Day. Activities included sack racing, tug-of-war and children’s sports as well as events with a wartime flavour including the stirrup pump race.

Clapton FC is one of the oldest football clubs in England and first played at the Old Spotted Dog Ground in 1888. By 1943, with better war news and fewer air raids, life was getting back to normal and Clapton are photographed here on their return to the ground after a four year absence.

An unusual view of West Ham Stadium taken during an air raid over Custom House in September 1940.
Among the many victory celebrations in East Ham at the end of the Second World War was this Swimming Gala in July 1945.

Diana Churchill presents the trophy to the owner of the winning greyhound in a race run at West Ham Stadium in aid of the Printers' Pension Fund, December 1947.

West Ham Stadium viewed from above on 24 June 1947 during a speedway meeting between West Ham and Hackney.

West Ham mayor Percy Hearn (nearest to camera) prepares to set sail at the Forest Gate Model Yacht Club Competition.
Jean Desforges

......Cycle Speedway......Bowls........

Jean Desforges represented Great Britain in the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki where she won a bronze medal as a member of the 100 metres relay team and came 5th in the 80 metres hurdles. She was also a long jumper and pentathlete, and won gold medals at the European Championships.

West Ham mayor Percy Hearn meets riders competing in the All London Cycle Speedway Grand Prix at Stratford in March 1949. The track at Janson Road had been laid out on the site of buildings destroyed during the Second World War.

Schoolchildren learning to swim at East Ham Baths, 1949.

Baseball…Old Time Cricket…Stock Car Racing…

West Ham mayor William Paton pitches the first ball in a baseball match in June 1952. The popularity of baseball had received a boost with the arrival of American servicemen during the Second World War.

Princess Margaret visiting the Dockland Settlement Boys’ Club in June 1952.

West Ham boxers at the finals of the Essex City Championships at West Ham Baths, January 1955.

Stock Car Racing at West Ham Stadium, April 1955.

Old Time Cricket Match at West Ham Park, August 1955.
Terry Spinks

......Show-Biz XI....Fun and Fitness.....

A product of the West Ham Amateur Boxing Club, Terry Spinks was only 18 when he received a late call-up for the Olympic Games in Melbourne in 1956 where, after five fights in seven days, he clinched the flyweight gold medal. He returned to a hero’s welcome in Canning Town with flags, bunting and a crate of champagne from the Duke of Edinburgh. He later turned professional, becoming British Featherweight Champion, but retired from boxing for health reasons in 1962.

Fun and Fitness. Muscles are flexed during a Display of Physical Activities at East Ham Town Hall in 1959.

A reminder of the less serious side of sport — but charity matches were important at a time when professional sportsmen were often not well paid. Making a return to East Ham was Lonnie Donegan, one of the stars of the Show-Biz XI, who had moved to the area with his family when he was only two years old.

Future Olympic prospects test their punching power at the fair on Wanstead Flats.

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The Duke of Edinburg pays a visit to Fairbairn House, which continued to offer opportunities and a range of activities for boys throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

Eileen Fowler was a popular radio and television presenter with her no-nonsense approach to health and fitness. She believed that women should start getting fit by standing properly at the sink and that men could 'take the bulge from their bodies' by getting up from an armchair without putting their hands on the sides.

Billy Walker, a former member of West Ham Boxing Club, enjoyed a successful career through the 1960s and fought for both the British and European heavyweight titles.

Forever blowing bubbles. West Ham United won the FA Cup for the first time in 1964 when they beat Preston North End 3-2 with goals from John Sissons, Geoff Hurst and Ronnie Boyce. Here fans wait at Stratford Broadway to welcome the team while captain Bobby Moore shows off the cup to supporters.
West Ham went on to win the European Cup Winners’ Cup the following season beating TSV München 1860 in the final at Wembley. The team was welcomed back by large crowds at Newham Town Hall and Bobby Moore is seen holding the cup aloft with Terence McMillan, the first mayor of Newham. Street parties were also held to celebrate the victory. In 1966 three members of the team – Bobby Moore, Geoff Hurst and Martin Peters – helped England beat West Germany 4-2 in the World Cup Final with Hurst scoring three times and Peters once.
West Ham United said farewell in 1968 to the famous “Chicken Run”, an old wooden stand so called because it was surrounded by a similar sort of wire to that used in chicken runs and, when viewed from a distance, looked just like one. It was also close to the pitch which made it easy for fans to intimidate players from opposing teams.

Arnold Schwarzenegger was a regular at Wag Bennett’s gym at Forest Gate in the late 1960s. It was while he was there that he won the first of his four Mr Universe titles in 1967.

The residents of Rancliffe Road celebrated the 1977 Silver Jubilee with a series of events in Central Park.

1972 saw the final closure of West Ham Stadium. Where greyhound racing and speedway bikes had once drawn crowds in their thousands, falling attendances and rising costs brought about its demise. The site was soon redeveloped for housing with several of the new roads named after former speedway stars.

Children’s summer activities in Central Park, 1971.

Trevor Brooking with a five-a-side football team at the Newham Town Show in 1978.
The possibility of the Olympics coming to Newham was first proposed over thirty years ago when the former Greater London Council announced its intention to bid to stage the 1988 Games in docklands. The plans envisaged the filling-in of most of the Royal Victoria Dock to create a landscaped park and a feasibility study was commissioned. In the end the proposals came to nothing, but the idea had been planted.

The Newham Carnival Queen and Princesses prepare to welcome the West Ham United team after their victory over Arsenal in the 1980 FA Cup Final.

Runners passing Plaistow Fire Station during the Royals Road Race, 1982.

The Imps Motorcycle Display Team perform at the Newham Town Show in 1982. Founded in 1970, and dedicated to helping educate children through their leisure time activities, the Imps continue to thrill audiences around the world with their spectacular displays.

Newham mayor Edward Daly meets members of the East London Rugby Club at the 1980 Town Show.
Daley Thompson

Beckton Alps

Bobby Moore

An artificial ski slope, created by landscaping the waste heaps of the former Beckton Gasworks, first opened in 1986 and is seen here in February 1991 when there was real snow. The “Beckton Alps” had a troubled, open and shut existence, and finally closed for good in 2001.

Daley Thompson, a former member of the Newham and Essex Beagles Athletic Club, signs autographs at the reopening of the Terence McMillan Stadium in 1985. He won gold medals in the decathlon at both the 1980 and 1984 Olympics.


Fans outside West Ham United’s Boleyn Ground in 1984.

Behind the scenes: Bobby Clark, No 1 Boiler Man at East Ham Baths, keeps the wheels turning, May 1990.

1993 saw the sad death of Bobby Moore, West Ham United and England captain, at the early age of 51.
Lennox Lewis

......Taekwondo.......Dragon Boat Racing....

Lennox Lewis was born at Queen Mary’s Hospital, Stratford, in 1965, before moving to Canada at the age of 12. He excelled at several sports but decided to concentrate on boxing and won a gold medal as a super heavyweight at the 1988 Seoul Olympics while representing Canada. He enjoyed a long and successful professional career, which culminated in his defeat of Evander Holyfield in 1999 to become the undisputed World Heavyweight Champion.
Ascension Eagles

.......East Ham Leisure Centre......The Champions....

April 2003 saw the unveiling of “The Champions,” a bronze statue by Philip Jackson celebrating England’s victory in the World Cup of 1966. Bobby Moore holds up the trophy while being supported by Geoff Hurst and Ray Wilson of Everton, Martin Peters, the third West Ham player in the team, looks on.

East Ham Leisure Centre was opened in 2001 replacing the old East Ham Baths.

The Newham Magazine celebrates the award of the 2012 Olympic Games to London.

The Ascension Eagles, another Newham success story who began in 1996 as part of an outreach project at the Ascension Church Centre, Custom House. In 2006 the Eagles became England’s first ever team to compete in the Cheerleading World Championships in Florida where they were ranked twelfth in the world.

Construction is well underway on the Olympic site.

(Photo: David Fearn)
Championship Final

......Christine Ohuruogu.......2012 Olympics....

5 May 2012: With less than three months to go until the start of the Games, the London 2012 Olympic Stadium and Olympic Park are officially opened to the public as part of the London Prepares series of test events. (Photo: Andrew Baker)

Newham medallists. Ade Adepitan won bronze medals at the 2000 and 2004 Paralympics as a member of the Great Britain Basketball team before retiring from international competition. Christine Ohuruogu, gold medallist in the 400 metres at the 2008 Olympics, is hoping for further success in London.

West Ham United fans at Wembley celebrating the return of the club to the Premiership after defeating Blackpool in the Championship Play-Off Final, 19 May 2012. (Photo: David Fearn)