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Library Learning Information

TOWER HAMLETS



East London's **FREE** Reading Festival

The **Write**idea **Festival** 2026

20–22 November

A weekend of events putting writers and readers together.

www.ideastore.co.uk/writeidea

“Brilliant event and selection of authors, very relevant, engaging and inspiring!”







“Really interesting speakers, very thought-provoking. Please keep the festival free!”







“A brilliant, free festival. Great staff and a great venue”

“A completely brilliant weekend of activities. It’s so great to see something like this in the borough. Can’t wait for next year!”







Writeidea Festival

We are delighted to welcome you to Writeidea 2026, Tower Hamlets Council’s annual literary festival, proudly delivered by the Idea Store team.

This year, we are excited to bring the festival once again to Tower Hamlets Town Hall, housed in the iconic former Royal London Hospital building. As a place where so many personal and community stories have unfolded, it provides the perfect setting for a celebration of writing, ideas and creativity.

Writeidea taking over the Town Hall, one of the borough’s most recognisable civic spaces, reinforces Tower Hamlets’ ongoing commitment to ensuring that everyone can access outstanding cultural experiences. As a free public space at the heart of local democracy and community life, it is a fitting home for a festival built on the sharing of stories, ideas and different perspectives.

As we celebrate the 16th year of Writeidea, we are bringing together an inspiring programme of established and emerging writers, thinkers, artists and storytellers. With 26 free events taking place across the weekend, there is something to engage and inspire everyone, whether you are a dedicated festival-goer or joining us for the very first time. From history and heritage to politics and current affairs, from poetry and fiction to wellbeing, travel, architecture and music, Writeidea 2026 showcases an extraordinary range of subjects and experiences.

Alongside nationally and internationally recognised speakers, we are proud to showcase local authors and artists whose work reflects the creativity, diversity and talent that make Tower Hamlets such a vibrant place.

We hope you enjoy the festival and discover new voices, hear fresh perspectives and spark memorable conversations that reflect the curiosity, creativity and diversity that define our festival and our borough.

Sergio Dogliani
Head of Idea Store and The Writeidea Team

All the events are FREE

Most events will be very popular and we strongly advise booking a ticket in advance. We allocate more tickets than there is capacity in order to allow for the high number of no-shows that unfortunately happen when events are free of charge.

Tickets

Please arrive early as entry to events is on a first come, first served basis.

Book tickets at
www.ideastore.co.uk/writeidea
or scan the QR code

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In memory of Rebecca Rudall

Founding Member of Writeidea Festival
1 March 1958 - 9 February 2026

Watch Writeidea videos at
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Keep up to date with Idea Store events through our website
www.ideastore.co.uk

Details in this brochure are correct at the time of print, but the programme may be subject to last minute changes. For the latest information see the Writeidea Festival pages **www.ideastore.co.uk/writeidea**

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Friday 20 November **7:00pm**



Photo credit: Laura Pannack

Deborah Frances-White

Six Conversations We're Scared to Have

Described by Gillian Anderson as 'an essential guide to today's polarized society', *Six Conversations We're Scared to Have* highlights the importance of free speech and encourages the reader to start the conversations we seem too scared to have. Deborah examines how the world has come to this and explores how to change minds- including our own.

Deborah Frances-White is an award-winning writer and comedian, best known for her hit podcast *The Guilty Feminist*. Her book, *The Guilty Feminist* was a Sunday Times Bestseller. Deborah is the screenwriter for *Bad Fairies* starring Cynthia Erivo – out in cinemas in May 2027. She is an official ambassador for Amnesty International.

Saturday 21 November **1:00pm**



Taj Ali

Come What May, We're Here to Stay

As British South Asians reel from the riots of summer 2024, *Come What May, We're Here to Stay* tells the inspirational story of how the community organised against racism in the past and how it continues to fight in the present. Taj Ali reveals how successive generations fought for rights and belonging while actively shaping the country they now call home. As racism rears its ugly head again, this book asks: are we doomed to repeat the past, or will we learn from our mistakes?

Taj Ali is a journalist and historian and the former editor of *Tribune*. In 2025 he set up Anti-Racist Radar and was chosen as a finalist for the 2026 Orwell Prize for his work on hate crime. Taj will be in conversation with Shabna Begum, who is the CEO of the Runnymede Trust and author of *From Sylhet to Spitalfields: Bengali squatters in 1970s East London* (2023).

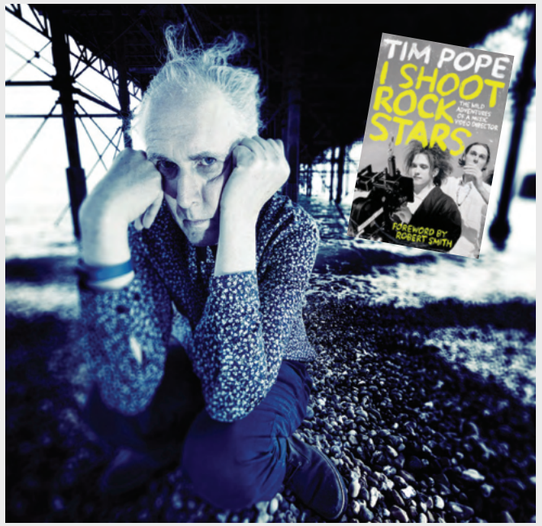


Photo credit: Andy Vella

Tim Pope

I Shoot Rockstars

The 1980s saw the birth of a new medium that took the world by storm: the pop video. And Tim Pope, a music fanboy-turned-video director, was at the forefront. *I Shoot Rockstars* documents Tim's journey from dressing Freddie Mercury as a giant Mediterranean prawn to being called a 'funny little arsehole' by David Bowie and hanging out with Neil Young on his family ranch.

Tim Pope has directed over 200 music videos and live performance movies for artists such as David Bowie, Neil Young, Queen and Paul McCartney. His name is most synonymous with The Cure, for whom he has directed 37 videos and two concert films. Tim will be in conversation with Sean Hannam who is a freelance journalist specialising in retail, tech and music.



Sarah Ainslie

Women at work - East End portraits 1992-2025

Sarah Ainslie celebrates the contribution of female labour in exuberant photographs that capture the passion and struggle of the working life, forming a panoramic survey of social change over four decades.

These pictures are a vital testament to the indomitable spirit of women in East London whose work is often unrecognised, but who shape the fabric of our lives, sustaining and binding together communities with their warmth, labour and fellowship.

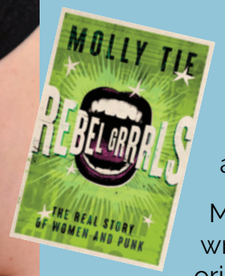
Sarah Ainslie is a photographer who has been living and working within communities in the East End since the early 1980s. An accompanying exhibition of Sarah's portraits runs at Four Corners, Bethnal Green, from 19th November until 13th December.



Molly Tie

Rebel Grrrls - The Real Story of Women and Punk

From the gritty streets of 1970s London to the sun-soaked beaches of 2000s California, *Rebel Grrrls: The Real Story of Women and Punk* is a raw and exhilarating exploration of rebellion and identity through the eyes of its fans.



The book examines what the punk movement has meant to millions of fans, setting their experiences within a wider cultural and political landscape. What is it like to be a woman at a gig? Which bands and songs truly reflect the female experience in a male-dominated space? And how does our connection to alternative music change when powerful figures face allegations of abuse?

Molly Tie is a music journalist, writer and lifelong punk fan originally from Portsmouth.

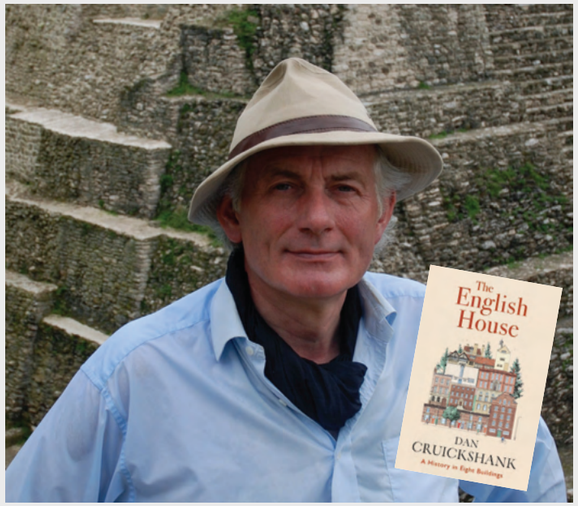


Owen Hatherley

The Alienation Effect

The Alienation Effect draws from an immense cast of artists and intellectuals to argue that the clash between British and European modernism has fundamentally realigned and remade our imaginations for the better. Provocative, entertaining and meticulously researched, *The Alienation Effect* opens our eyes to the influence of the émigrés all around us – many of our most quintessentially British icons are the product of this culture clash – and entreats us to remember and renew our proud national tradition of asylum.

Owen Hatherley writes about aesthetics and politics for the *Architectural Review, Jacobin, the London Review of Books, the New Statesman, Sidecar and Tribune*. He is the author of seventeen books. Owen will be joined in conversation with Daniel Trilling author of *If We Tolerate This: How The British Establishment Made the Far Right Respectable.*



Dan Cruickshank

The English House

The English House tells a history of England through eight buildings, including a block of flats in East London and Britain's 'first modern house' in Northampton. These buildings reveal how English homes have developed over the past few centuries and the evolving relationship between client, architect and builder. They have much to tell us about their first occupants- their lives, struggles and aspirations.

Dan Cruickshank is a London-based art historian and broadcaster. He has written books about London and other world cities and made numerous history and culture programmes for the *BBC including Around the World in Eighty Treasures; Adventures in Architecture; Under Fire: culture and conflict in Afghanistan, Iraq and Israel and the Occupied Territories: The Road to Palmyra*. He has recently been awarded an OBE.

Saturday **4:00pm**

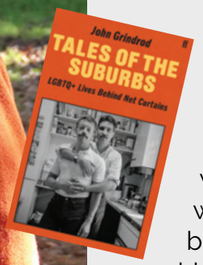


Photo credit: (c) Katie Belcher

John Grindrod

Tales of the Suburbs

From Addlestone to Wilmslow, *Tales of the Suburbs* explores the relatively untold twentieth century tale of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer people in small towns and suburbia. Through remarkable archive material and original interviews, Grindrod reveals stories that are messy, moving and uplifting. Together, they reclaim suburbia as a space for all - or those that want it - where counter-cultural expression thrives despite the Neighbourhood Watch, and queer love and friendship bloom against the odds.



John Grindrod is a social historian of modern places. *Tales of the Suburbs* is his fourth publication. John will be in conversation with author, journalist, broadcaster and cultural historian Travis Elborough.



Joey D'Urso

More than a Shirt



Joey D'Urso is a journalist and author covering football, and how it explains politics and history. He spent 10 years working as a journalist for BBC News, The Times and the Athletic before going freelance to focus on YouTube, Substack and Instagram.

His first book, *More Than a Shirt*, explores how football shirts, the sport's greatest means of social expression, reflect the social values, financial struggles and political ideologies of the day, as geopolitical issues increasingly seep into every aspect of the game. It has been named a Waterstones and Guardian sports book of the year and has been shortlisted for two major awards.



Lydia Wood

Locals: An Illustrated Ode to London's Pubs

From historic landmarks and iconic boozers to intimate family establishments, there are pubs on the river, pubs down twisting alleyways, pubs in the shadows of skyscrapers. There are over 3,500 pubs in the capital and illustrator Lydia Wood is on a quest to draw them all.

Locals is a collection of over sixty of her favourites and their stories: an artist's celebration of their beauty and their charm, their idiosyncrasies and their histories, their landlords and their locals. (Also, their cats.)

This is London and its beloved pubs – come on in.



Brick lane Bookshop

How To Get Published

A conversation with literary agent Ludo Cinelli, Goldsmiths Prize shortlisted author Han Smith and Brick Lane Bookshop Short Story Prize winner Alice Zoo on how to perfect your writing for submission, get an agent and publish your debut novel.



Ludo Cinelli

Ludo Cinelli is an Agent and the Managing Director at Eve White Literary Agency, representing authors of fiction, non-fiction and children's books. In 2022 he was shortlisted as British Book Awards Literary Agent of the Year.



Han Smith

Han Smith is a queer writer, translator and adult literacy teacher. She is the recipient of a 2019/2020 London Writers Award and was shortlisted for the Brick Lane Short Story Prize.



Alice Zoo

Alice Zoo is a London-based photographer and writer. Her photography has appeared in *National Geographic* and *The New Yorker* and been exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery. She is currently writing her first novel.



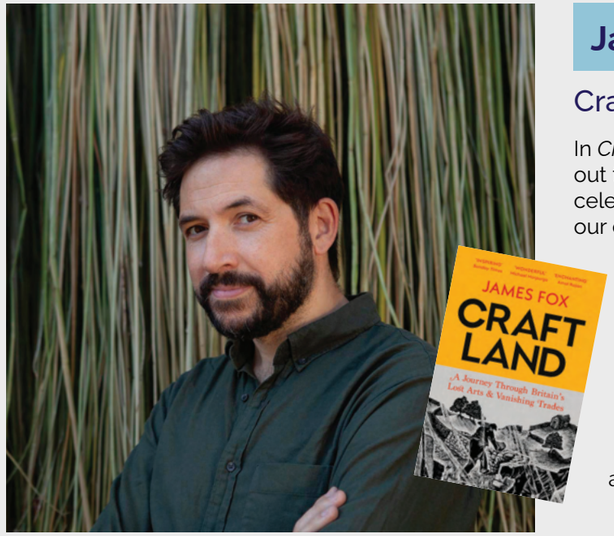
Beth Gardiner

Plastic Inc.

Plastic Inc. is a shocking expose of the industry that's flooding our world with plastic and preparing to pump out more than ever in the years to come, even as so many of us try to use less. Longlisted for the Wainwright Prize for Conservation Writing, *Plastic Inc.* shifts the focus of our conversation about plastic from where it ends up to where it comes from.

Beth Gardiner is an American journalist living in London. She has been published in *The Guardian, The New York Times* and *National Geographic. Plastic Inc.* is her second book.

Beth will be joined by Martha Dillon, a freelance writer, with a particular interest in the links between urbanism, housing and the climate crisis.



James Fox

Craftland

In *Craftland*, James Fox travels the length of Britain seeking out the countries last remaining craftspeople. *Craftland* is a celebration of that deeply necessary connection between our creative instincts and the material world we inhabit, revealing a richer and more connected way of living. For as long as there are humans, there will be craft

James Fox is an academic, best-selling author and multi-award-winning, BAFTA-nominated broadcaster, known for his many acclaimed BBC documentaries. He is an art historian at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and Creative Director of the Hugo Burge Foundation, a charity dedicated to supporting the arts and crafts across Britain.

Saturday **7:00pm**



Cally Beaton

Namaste Mother F*ckers

Part memoir, part stereotype-defying manifesto, *Namaste Motherf*ckers* is a funny, empowering, practical book that takes an irreverent look at the author's own story of radical midlife reinvention, taking her from meetings in the boardroom to becoming a stand-up comedian. Sharing stories and experiences from her career, alongside lessons learned from the many celebrities and experts that have guested on her hit podcast of the same name, Cally challenges at every turn the age-old narrative that women become invisible when they cease to be fertile.

Cally Beaton is a performer, broadcaster, entrepreneur and best-selling author. She has held senior management positions at some of the biggest media companies in the world. She is the host of the hit *Namaste Motherf*ckers* podcast. Joining Cally in conversation will be Dr Pippa Brush Chappell, who currently works as a freelance writing coach and editor, helping authors develop manuscripts and improve their writing.

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Enrol Now!



Writeidea Festival Planner

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Sunday 22 November **1:00pm**

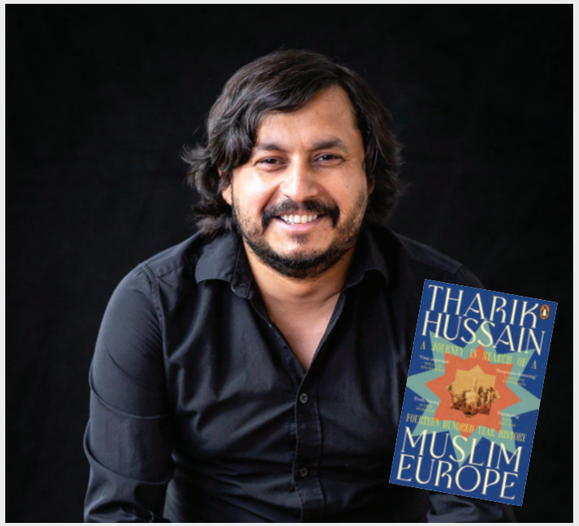


Dan Jennings

Paul Weller - Dancing Through The Fire

Across musical history, certain artists transcend their craft to become cultural icons, leaving an indelible mark on sound and style. Paul Weller stands among the select few whose influence spans generations. *Dancing Through the Fire* is the definitive oral history of Weller's extraordinary career, weaving together never-before-told stories, intimate reflections, and perspectives from those who have worked most closely with him across five decades.

Dan Jennings is a journalist, former radio presenter, and multi-award-winning content creator. His acclaimed podcast *Desperately Seeking Paul* launched in 2020. The series was a finalist for Best Music Podcast at the independent Podcast Awards in 2024 and 2025. Dan will be in conversation with Sean Hannam who is a freelance journalist specialising in retail, tech and music.



Tharik Hussain

Muslim Europe

For over 1,400 years, Muslims have been an integral part of Europe's story, yet their contributions have been pushed to the margins or erased altogether. In Muslim Europe, award-winning author Tharik Hussain restores this forgotten history. In a revelatory journey across the continent, Hussain explores the footsteps of the first Muslims who arrived on European soil in 647 AD, travelling through Sicily, Malta, Portugal and Spain.

Tharik Hussain is an award-winning author, historian and travel writer. His previous book *Minarets in the Mountains* was longlisted for the Baillie Gifford Prize. He has written for the *Times, the Guardian, the Telegraph and National Geographic Traveller* and broadcast media such as Al Jazeera and the BBC.



Tammye Huf

The Colour of Home

Tammye Huf is a novelist and short story writer. Her historical fiction debut, *A More Perfect Union*, won the Diverse Book Award and was longlisted for the Jhalak Prize as well as being chosen for the Radio Two Book Club. Her short stories have been published in various magazines, including *The London Magazine*.

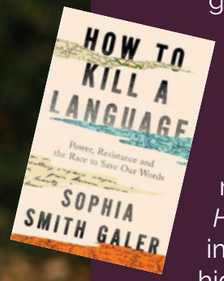
The Colour of Home (UK Title) is Tammye's second novel and is set against the backdrop of war where black men and women weren't allowed to be heroes. It is a deeply powerful novel about love, sacrifice, and the epic resilience of the human spirit.



Photo credit: Jordan Rose

Sophia Smith Galer

How to Kill a Language



As Sophia Smith Galer's Nonna lay dying, she realised it wasn't just a beloved grandmother she was losing – it was the language she spoke, too. With the death of the language, Sophia would lose a culture, a history, an inheritance – a whole world. This tragedy reaches far beyond her family. *How to Kill a Language* is an impassioned investigation into a hidden global crisis, and a call to speak, read and write the languages of our world, before it's too late.

Sophia Smith Galer is a multi-award winning journalist, author and content creator with more than 200 million video views. She writes and broadcasts about language, technology and culture and is a Contributing Editor at Translator magazine. In 2022 British Vogue named her one of the 25 most influential women in the UK for her work in journalism innovation.

Sophia will be in conversation with Megha Mohan, the BBC's first gender and identity correspondent and author of *Herlands*.



Annabel Streets

The Walking Cure

With an accessible, compelling blend of anecdotal and scientific evidence, *The Walking Cure* explores 20 different easy-to-find landscapes and their proven effects on our mood, mindset, and well-being. From canal paths to cemeteries, Annabel Streets reveals how the places we walk can heal, inspire and rewire our brains.

Whatever the season or state of mind, *The Walking Cure* is your go-to guide for walking to feel better and a joyful celebration of movement and nature.

Annabel Streets is an award-winning writer of highly researched fiction and non-fiction, and a *Sunday Times* bestselling author. She has written for a wide range of titles, such as *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*.

Annabel with be joined by writer, TV producer and health coach, Susan Saunders.



Imogen Willetts

Up All Night

In *Up All Night*, Imogen Willetts takes us on a dazzling journey through over 350 years of nightlife, from 17th-century Japan to modern dancefloors. Exploring the music, movement and moments that define a night out, she reveals how nightlife has long been a space for creativity, rebellion and connection.

Packed with vivid stories and unforgettable scenes, this is a celebration of what happens after dark - and what we lose when we stop going out.
Imogen Willetts is a writer, party historian and live event specialist, formerly of the Royal Academy of Arts. She now works at the leading creative agency Bompas & Parr.



Dean Atta

Photo credit: Josimar Senior



Jay Lafayette Valentine

Dean Atta in conversation with Jay Lafayette Valentine

Big Man

Big Man follows the life of Big, a middle-aged, Black British gay man who lives a gentle life with his boyfriend, Little, in their home in East London. When Big discovers his mother, an African American trans woman, is writing an autobiography, the two reconnect after decades of distance, and Big finds himself having to confront a long-repressed assault that opens old – and new – wounds.

Dean Atta is a multi-award-winning author, poet, BAFTA-winning and BIFA-nominated filmmaker. His poetry has featured on the BBC, BET, Channel 4, and MTV. *Big Man* is his adult literary debut.

Dean is joined in conversation with performer and voiceover artist Jay Lafayette Valentine, the audiobook narrator for *Big Man*.







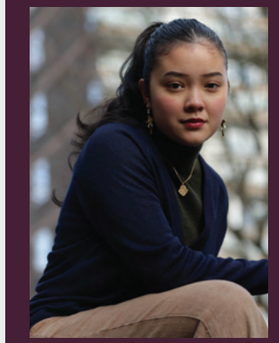


Brick Lane Bookshop

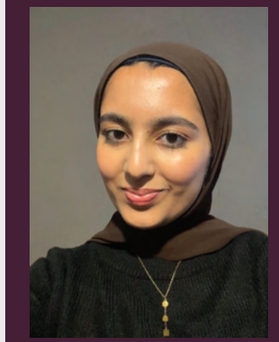
Short Story Prize Showcase 2026

Join us for a showcase and celebration of Brick Lane Bookshop New Short Stories 2026. Our winning author from the competition **Uduak-Abasi Ekong** and three shortlisted writers **Olly Barrett, Izzie Glover** and **Pushkar Mankar** will be in conversation with the prize's editorial partner **Rali Chorbadzhiyska** and will give a reading from their story that features in the latest anthology.

Learn more about how Brick Lane Bookshop Short Story Prize works before submissions open in the new year.









Mile End Community Project

Get To Know

Join us for a special celebration of local writers, creativity and community storytelling. Presented by Mile End Community Project, this event showcases the work of talented writers from Tower Hamlets, featuring poet, artist and Co-founder of ISO Collecitve **Samira El-Bahja**, who will be reading from her recent publication, *Naked Pen*.

Samira's work explores the legacy of Robin Hood Gardens and what it means to have lived on the estate, reflecting on her own lived experience.

We will also be joined by Robin Hood Collective (**Ikram Chowdhury, Mara Ahmed, Sadia Aziza, Cristina Silva Essien**) discussing their book *Robin Hood: The Art of Occupation* , exploring the legacy of Robin Hood Gardens.

Through readings, conversations and an audience Q&A, discover how creative projects can empower local communities to share their experiences, ideas and visions for the future. The event will also explore how you, as a local writer, can get involved in the project and contribute to its next chapter.



Photo credit: Poppy Raw

Natasha Devon

The Nuance Drought

The world is increasingly polarised and the ability to consider shades of grey is being obliterated as we're encouraged to see the world in black and white. To shout louder. To double down and abandon critical thinking. It's time to stop.

In *The Nuance Drought*, Natasha Devon explores the lack of nuance in today's world- one of the major issues facing modern society. Talking to a range of experts and celebrating the power of meaningful discourse, this book is a call to arms.

Natahsa Devon is a writer, broadcaster and campaigner, visiting schools throughout the world and delivering talks on mental health, body image and gender equality. She has a weekly show on LBC (Saturday's 6-9pm) and has been awarded an MBE for her services to young people.

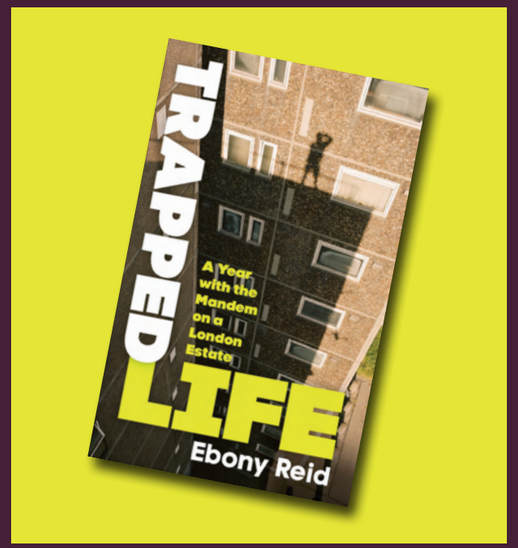


Esther Freeman

Great Women of London

Great Women of London explores the stories of the forgotten female rebels of London, and the sacrifices they made to give us the world we know today. Yet there are no statues, and rarely any blue plaques to many of these women. Beyond a few big names, most aren't even in the traditional history books. These were poor women, migrant women, queer women, disabled women, young women. From the NHS to the vote, Freeman presents an accessible walk through how women have shaped the last 150 years.

Esther is a social historian, writer and activist. Since 2015, she's been researching the history of women activists in East London. She works extensively in the community to share these stories through talks, exhibitions and her podcast, Rebel Women.



Ebony Reid

Trapped Life

Take a step into the heart of the British inner city with *Trapped Life*, a searingly candid narrative that shatters sensationalist headlines to reveal the authentic lives of the mandem on the infamous Northville Estate in London.

Dr Ebony Reid offers a raw and intimate look at the vibrant and complex community which is often misunderstood by wider society. This urgent and dignified account exposes the devastating socio-economic disparity in urban Britain, making *Trapped Life* not just a book, but a call to understand and change the lives of those trapped by their circumstances.

Dr Ebony Reid will be joined by Dr Joy White, author of *Like Lockdown Never Happened: Music and Culture During COVID*.

Venue

Tower Hamlets Town Hall
160 Whitechapel Road
London E1 1BJ
Tel: 020 7364 1731

Whitechapel Underground Station

Fully accessible

For more information about any of our events visit **www.ideastore.co.uk**

Brick Lane Bookshop will be supplying books for sale throughout the festival.

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