

EXTRACTS FROM THE LITTLE BOOK OF THE EAST END

The first man to win a Lonsdale Belt was Bombardier Billy Wells from Cable Street. Born in 1887, Billy went to Broad Street School in Shadwell, learning to box in the local clubs and East End missions. He took the British Empire Heavyweight Title in 1911 after leaving the army to turn professional, and defended it fourteen times. Rather less famously, perhaps, he was the second muscular hunk to strike the Rank gong at the start of Rank movies from 1948, also taking on a few “bit” parts.

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When Reggie Kray married Frances Shea in April 1965 at St. James the Great in Bethnal Green Road, the wedding photographer was Leytonstone-born David Bailey, who did the job “for free”.

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The Museum of Immigration and Diversity in Princelet Street combines a master silk weaver’s house (dating from 1719) with a Victorian synagogue (1869) – the only listed building in Britain (Grade II) with its particular specialisations.

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James I attempted to boost the silk trade in Spitalfields by planting mulberry trees (to feed the silk worms) but it seems he chose the black, instead of the correct white, variety. Whoops.

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In September 1917, a baker from Chapman Street, Shadwell, was imprisoned for three weeks for selling fresh bread. Only day-old bread was allowed to be cut into thin slices, because it was easier to cut and therefore went further at a time of bread shortages.