

## Where do Londoners come from? London's communities 1675–present

London is one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world and has always been so. From its origins around AD50, the city has attracted people from all over the world. Some early settlers came as invaders, seeking land and wealth. Some came against their will, as enslaved people or servants. Others chose to come as economic migrants or refugees fleeing hardship, poverty and political or religious persecution. They believed London would offer them life changing opportunities.

Today, research has shown there are over 300 languages spoken in London's schools. Immigrants continue to have a strong influence on the city's development, from its economic growth to its cultural life. This pocket history uses the Museum of London's collections to explore a small sample of the communities who came to settle in London from 1675.

### Huguenots in the 1680s

**Huguenots** (French Protestants) fled to London in the 1680s because of religious persecution in France. Many settled in Spitalfields in east London and set up businesses as silk weavers, creating an industry that survived until the early 1900s.

Other Huguenots were skilled in fine metalwork and engraving. Some Huguenots also brought with them important knowledge and skills from France's main clock and watch making centres.

This pendulum watch was made by French watchmaker David Lestourgeon. He came to London from Rouen in around 1681. Lestourgeon was a Huguenot and worshipped at one of the French churches in Spitalfields.



**Pendulum watch, 1702–1703**

**Huguenots gradually assimilated into the London population and stopped speaking French. Of 23 Huguenot churches in existence in 1700, only the French Church in Soho Square survives today.**

## London's Italian community

The whole area around Clerkenwell was known as Little Italy due to the number of Italian residents and business located there from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some arrived as political migrants in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Others were economic migrants who came to London for a better life with greater opportunities.

Carlo Gatti was Swiss-Italian and arrived in London in 1847 as an economic migrant. Originally a street seller, Gatti and his family later operated a number of successful businesses in the capital including cafés and ice cream and confectionery shops. They are credited with having introduced ice cream to London in 1850. Gatti had an ice depot in Saffron Hill at the heart of the Italian community in Clerkenwell.

This theatre programme is for Gatti's Palace of Varieties on Westminster Bridge Road. The theatre opened in 1865 and could hold up to 900 people. It shows the opportunities available in London to enterprising migrants like Gatti at this time.



Theatre programme for Gatti's Palace of Varieties, 1902

By the 1870s, London's ice cream and flavoured ice trade was completely run by the Italian community.

## London's Irish community

There has been an Irish population in London since medieval times but a period of famine meant there was a huge influx of people to London in the 1840s. By 1851 there were 108,500 Irish-born people in the city, plus a large number born in London of Irish descent.



Dock labour card issued to Patrick Kelly, 1838

This dock labour card was issued to Patrick Kelly by the St Katharine Dock Company in 1838. It tells us Kelly was 27 when the card was issued. His name suggests Kelly was part of the large Irish community living in east London who tried to make their living as dock workers. By 1870, there were more Irish people in London than in Dublin.

As well as working as dockers and **stevedores** (people who loaded and unloaded cargo from ships), Irish labourers also made a huge contribution to the building of the canals, docks, roads, bridges and railways that established London as a powerful industrial capital.

Irish families maintain links to their cultural heritage by joining Irish sporting and social clubs often based around local Catholic churches.

## The Jewish community in London's East End

This newscutting appeared in *The Sphere* magazine on 1 February 1908. The article is about the Jews' Free School in Bell Lane in Spitalfields in east London. The Jewish community was one of the many that grew up in the East End of London from the 1650s onwards.

Between 1880 and 1914 this small, well established Jewish community grew dramatically when 150,000 East European Jewish refugees emigrated to London. They came to London to escape from poverty and religious persecution. Up to 70% of the new immigrants settled in east London.

After World War II, many of London's Jewish families moved out of the overcrowded East End to the more prosperous and leafy suburbs in north and east London. However, many continued to maintain strong business and cultural links with the area.

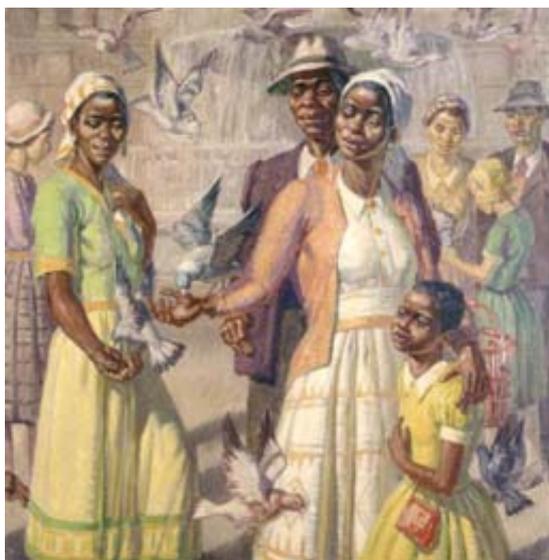


Newscutting from *The Sphere* magazine, 1908

Although the Jewish community in the East End came from many different places, they were united by their language: Yiddish.

## London's Caribbean community after 1948

In 1948 the British law changed so that people from the **Commonwealth** (a group of countries, most of which used to be part of the British Empire) could become British citizens. Recruitment campaigns encouraged people from Commonwealth countries including the Caribbean, India and Pakistan to come to work in Britain and rebuild the nation after World War II. In 1948 three ships (including the, now famous, Empire Windrush) left the Caribbean with 700 men hoping to find work in Britain.



*Caribbean family in Trafalgar Square, painting by Harold Dearden, 1950–1962*

This painting depicts a Caribbean family in Trafalgar Square. Painted in the 1950s, it shows how Caribbean families soon became a visible presence throughout the capital. Although they look fairly happy and integrated in the painting, many new arrivals faced prejudice on a daily basis. They often found it difficult to find decent housing or acceptance amongst the local community. Others missed the families and friends they had left behind and found it difficult to get used to the greyness and cold weather of London.

Although the first arrivals were primarily men who found work in the transport and construction industries, they were soon followed by women who found work in hospitals and schools. As the men and women married and had children they became more settled and established strong communities around areas such as Hackney and Brixton in east and south London.

### See also

Collections Online is an online database which allows users to find out more about the Museum of London's objects, on display and in store. Go to

[www.museumoflondon.org.uk/collections](http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/collections)

Reassessing What We Collect: Museum of London online resource that features over 800 objects related to 42 communities who have settled in London from prehistory to the present day.

<http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/reassessing>

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### Visit the Museum

Galleries of interest to this topic:  
Expanding City: 1666–1850s at the Museum of London

People's City: 1850–1950 at the Museum of London

World City: 1950s–today at the Museum of London

### Further resources for teachers/tutors

Explore the images for this topic in the Picturebank:

[www.museumoflondon.org.uk/picturebank](http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/picturebank).