

Behind the Blue Doors

A new photo-story and exhibition by Jim Grover



In celebration of the 200th anniversary of Trinity Homes Almshouse, Brixton

19 April - 1 June 2024

Behind the Blue Doors is a new photography exhibition by Jim Grover, the award-winning south London social documentary photographer. It reveals the fascinating story of an almshouse in the heart of Brixton, endowed in 1824 by Thomas Bailey, a very successful china and glass merchant, and which continues to offer accommodation, for those in need, 200 years later.

Almshouses have been described as “The unsung heroes of UK social housing”; they are growing in number. This is the first time a documentary photographer has documented an almshouse, its residents and their stories, and its history.

The story is in three parts and is full of revelations. One part reveals how Trinity Asylum, as it was then called, came to be, and the two key characters behind its early years who, hitherto, have been unrecognised as important Brixton figures in the early nineteenth century. One part reveals how this almshouse ‘for pious aged women’ operated in the nineteenth century, including what it took to become an ‘Inmate’, its rules and regulations, and the life of ‘The Superintendent’.

And one part reveals the inspiring stories of some of the current 17 residents, two hundred years on, for whom age is no barrier to living a full life.

Comments Jim Grover, photographer. "I've often wondered what lay behind the blue front doors of this distinctive Georgian building on Brixton's busy Acre Lane, and which are always firmly shut. Who lives there and what are their stories? How did it come to be here and who was the man whose name is prominently displayed above its doors? It's been a wonderful voyage of discovery for me, full of extraordinary revelations that span 200 years. I am so pleased to be able to throw open the doors and share the remarkable and inspiring stories that lie behind them."

The exhibition includes over 50 photographs and accompanying narrative which are a combination of contemporary photographs and interviews, that bring to life the current residents, their life stories and their homes, as well as documents, prints and portraits from the nineteenth century that shed light on the almshouse's first 100 years.

Grover, whose photographic passion is to celebrate daily life, people, 'unsung heroes' and local communities, and 'to make the unseen seen' has built up close and trusting relationships with the current residents who feature in the exhibition. Continues Jim Grover, "Coupled with the inspiring stories of two, hitherto unrecognized, Brixton residents, the founder Thomas Bailey and his nephew John Illidge (who turns out to have been the Sheriff of London in 1834), are the remarkable and varied stories of five of the current residents who are leading wonderfully full lives, including making a difference in their local community."

The exhibition includes the story of Wallee McDonnell, a 72-year-old man who donated a kidney, was nominated for a 2024 Lambeth Civic Award for his work in the community, and who facilitates peace education workshops in London prisons. Christine Holding, now 76, retired from full-time work in 2020 at the age of 72, and is about to start volunteering at her local GP surgery. Guy Hunting, 78, has just written his second book and still finds time to scour local charity shops for artworks to add to his walls; his varied career included being a footman at Buckingham Palace. Peter Avery is 84 and was the first male resident back in 1996; a former senior art lecturer, he has converted his bedroom into a studio and is currently designing a stage set for a south London theatre, having staged an innovative puppet theatre in Venice last year. Andrew Taylor, the live-in warden, oversees the almshouse on a day-to-day basis; he trained as a professional singer and is now seeking ways to bring the residents together more often.

Some of the exhibition highlights that shed light on the almshouse's 200 year history include the moving story of Margaret Wright, an inmate from 1883 to 1914; the original 30 rules and regulations for the almshouse inmates (as they were called then) which bring to life what it was like to be a resident in its first century; details of a nineteenth century mansion, with extensive gardens, in the heart of Brixton, but which made way for Corpus Christi Catholic Church; and an 1805 invoice to the Princess of Wales.

Trustee Nick Guppy, who commissioned Jim Grover to create the exhibition, commented, "Almshouses have been around since the tenth century and they still have an important role to play in our society, especially in our current economic climate and social housing challenges.

We're proud to be able to continue to offer the compassion and kindness of our founder, Thomas Bailey, and are delighted to be able to mark our bicentenary anniversary with this exhibition that tells our story over 200 years."

The exhibition is being staged in the new Lambeth Archives facility in Brixton (see notes for Editors). The exhibition includes documents and objects going back some 200 years as well as some personal possessions that the current almshouse residents have selected which highlight the diversity of their lives.

For those unable to visit the exhibition, a selection of content from the exhibition will be available at www.jimgroverphotography.com from April 10th. A 112-page book that accompanies the exhibition will be available from April 18th as a printed edition (£25) or as a downloadable PDF (£10). More details at jimgroverphotography.com.

A selection of images for use by the media is available on request (jim.grover@mac.com).

Listings info:

Title: *Behind the Blue Doors*

Venue: Lambeth Archives, 16 Brixton Hill, SW2 1ET

Dates: 19 April – 1 June

Opening Times: Mondays 1-8pm; Tuesdays and Thursdays 10-6pm; Fridays 10-3pm; Saturdays 9-1pm, 2-5pm. Wednesdays and Sundays: Closed

Admission: Free

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Notes to editors

For media enquiries please contact Jim Grover at jim.grover@mac.com or 07803 855889.

New Oxford Dictionary definitions

Pious

"Devoutly religious"

Almshouse

"A house built originally by a charitable person or organisation for poor people to live in."

About Jim Grover

Jim Grover is an award-winning social-documentary photographer based in Clapham, South London. His particular passion is telling south London stories that celebrate daily life, 'unsung heroes', local communities and traditions ... and 'making the unseen seen'.

Jim's images have appeared in many publications and online including The Guardian; the BBC; The Times; The Sunday Times; The Observer; The British Journal of Photography, amongst many others. His images have been recognized in various competitions including The Sony World Photography Awards, and the Landscape Photographer of the Year. In 2015 he won the 'Faith Through a Lens' competition; the judging panel was chaired by Sir Don McCullin CBE.

His work has appeared in both solo and joint exhibitions. Since 2016 he has created and exhibited twelve different solo exhibitions; they have received extensive coverage by The Guardian, the BBC, and many others. He is best known for his 'Windrush' work. His 2018 exhibition in the Oxo Gallery on London's South Bank, Windrush: Portrait of a Generation, received extensive national media coverage ('One of 2018's must see shows ... '); the exhibition has been re-exhibited five times and been enjoyed by over 20,000 visitors. This was followed in 2023 by Windrush: A Voyage through the Generations.

Other major exhibitions have included Of Things Not Seen (2017), 48 Hours On Clapham High Street (2017); Here am I (2019); Covid Tales from Tom's Bench (2020); Behind the Shop Facade: The Life of Maurice Dorfman (2022).

Jim will be exhibiting his Windrush work in this year's Photo North photo-festival in Leeds (April 12th-14th); he teaches documentary photography at the Leica Akademie.

www.jimgroverphotography.com

www.windrushportraitofageneration.com

www.windrushvoyagethroughthegenerations.com

www.ofthingsnotseen.com

www.48hoursonclaphamhighstreet.com

www.here-am-i.com

www.behindtheshopfacade.com

About Trinity Homes

Founded in 1824, Trinity Homes almshouse in Acre Lane, Brixton, provides accommodation for 'financially needy' men and women over the age of 55 who are members of a Christian denomination. Accommodation may also be provided to married couples.

It is a registered charity overseen by a group of independent Trustees and is also a member of The Almshouse Association. The building is Grade II listed.

There are 18 flats and cottages in the complex, all of which are fully self-contained. The flats have a sitting room, bedroom, bathroom and kitchen all on one floor; the cottages have the same accommodation but are situated on two floors. Every resident has their own front door. When a resident leaves the homes, the vacant flat or cottage is redecorated and recarpeted for the incoming resident.

Residents pay a monthly maintenance contribution; most of the residents are entitled to housing benefit and so have their maintenance contribution paid by Lambeth Council. The maintenance contributions are well below council rents for equivalent accommodation and so the flats are always in demand.

www.trinityhomes.org.uk

About Lambeth Archives

Lambeth Archives is the record office and local studies library for the London borough of Lambeth. It holds the historic records of Lambeth council, the deposited records of many local organisations, such as schools, estates, churches, businesses, societies, charities and many others, as well as a local studies and museum collection. Materials held go back to the 16th century.

After 133 years of being based at the Minet Library, Lambeth Archives recently moved its historic collections to a new purpose-built archive facility at 16 Brixton Hill, SW2 1ET. The new facility includes extensive underground storage, with some 3kms of shelving, as well as an exhibition gallery; it re-opened in February 2024.

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