



Read The Wharf's E-Editions

Why east London is a hotspot for unidentified fatalities

By Rob Virtue on September 25, 2014 8:00 AM | Tagged with: Anchor House, East London

The tattoo on his left hand simply read "786". In his wallet, along with a fake Italian driving licence, was a photograph of a woman.



The Asian man in his 20s was found washed up in the Thames at Ballast Quay, just south of the Isle of Dogs on January 10, 2011. His body had been in the river for seven days.

His real name remains a mystery as do the circumstances which led him into the river. Somewhere, someone must be missing him and wondering why he disappeared.

There are 235 deaths currently listed as unidentified in the capital from records dating back to the 1960s.

The database by the UK Missing Persons Bureau shows bodies are found all over London, but east of the City and along the Thames features repeatedly.

No-one knows who they are but it's easy to presume most slipped through the net and ended up on the streets.

Keith Fernett, chief executive of charity Anchor House, which operates a homeless hostel in Canning Town, said the reason for this location arose from a cycle of poverty.

"The national hotspot is London," he said.

"You get gangmasters bringing in people on a regular basis, immigrants head to London, and the East End has historically been a point of entry.



"Then they get trapped in the poverty of these boroughs, which also has high incidents of offending. And if those people are not at Anchor House then where are they?"

Working at the east London centre for a decade, Keith (pictured left) has seen a number of cases where people have died or been close to dying in similar circumstances.

The charity now establishes the identification of every person it comes into contact with.

"We did that because a few years ago we discovered one of our residents

was a heroin user and he disappeared," said Keith.

"After a few days we called the police and they made inquiries but nothing happened. We then contacted his family who called the police again. They finally found him in the mortuary at Newham Hospital where he had been laying dead for two weeks.

"Society doesn't take the same consideration for someone they believe is homeless or an immigrant that they would for me and you."

And, according to Keith, it's a problem which is growing. This, in part, is due to the negative coverage given towards those in poverty through TV programmes such as Benefits Street, he says, which has contributed to society "hardening" its views towards those on the streets.

CASE STUDIES

■ A white male was found dead in the Thames by Pipers Wharf in Greenwich on May 6, 2008. He was aged between 50 and 65. Traces of prescription drugs believed to cause suicidal thoughts when mixed with other drugs were found in his bloodstream.
■ It was a clear August day in 2007, when the blue suited man

in his 40s collapsed and died on a street in Greenwich Peninsula. His only possessions were £1.51 in cash and a yellow band on his wedding finger. A post mortem found he had 2kg of heroin in his stomach. Police suspected he was a drugs mule from Nigeria as he also had an airline baggage label in his pocket.

The tragic result is isolation and, far too frequently, an anonymous death.

The lifestyle of those living on the streets also dramatically increases the risk of a premature death, very often in east London's vast waterways.

"Only yesterday I had to talk very harshly to an east European man who is an alcoholic and I told him 'if you carry on you'll be found dead in the Thames' because he'll lose control of himself and won't know where he is," said Keith.

"We've had people who were growing up in the East End who 20 years ago would swim in the Royal Docks. And someone decided to continue that, in November, days after leaving hospital with a heart illness. How close must he have come to dying?"

The figures of unidentified deaths is only likely to increase as the capital suffers the effects of a housing crisis at a time of a major population growth.

Anchor House currently has 190 bed spaces but 606 referrals from the authorities in what Keith calls a huge rise of people sleeping on the streets.

"It's affecting people from all walks of life now," said Keith. "We found a mother and her two children living under the Bow Roundabout recently. They were English. These people are out there."

Share: | Permalink | [Tweet](#) [f](#)

Older/Newer

« West Ham: 'We've no reason to fear United', says Nolan | Review: Stewart Lee at Greenwich Comedy Festival »

Top Stories

1. McDonald's closes as Helix towers prepare to launch
2. Brothers guilty of Ibrahim Ghib killing at Shadwell Basin
3. WIN two nights in Staycity
4. David, Goliath and the sickening politics of scorn in Tower Hamlets
5. Cars seized at 'Fast and Furious' gathering in Newham

Competitions



Enter all Wharf competitions here

Columnists



Read the latest thoughts from The Wharf's columnists

What's On



Latest reviews, previews, gossip and interviews from the world of events and entertainment

Food



Latest news, reviews, snippets and features on what to eat and where to eat

Tweets

[Follow](#)

TfL Traffic News @TfLTrafficNews 2h
A13 Commercial Rd j/w Brunton Pl - Lane 1 blocked westbound due to a broken down van. Traffic slow on approach, qs to West India Dock Rd.
Retweeted by The Wharf
Expand

Elizabeth Middleton @lizziemidd 27 Sep
@the_wharf thanks for the posting for HMS Wesminster. Had an informative & interesting visit this morning.
Retweeted by The Wharf
Expand

Canary Wharf Group @yourcanarywharf 26 Sep
Grab a leaflet or see link for details & T&Cs of all our store discounts, offers & promotions bit.ly/YLrqpI pic.twitter.com/jX2GZhtPnR
Retweeted by The Wharf



Tweet to @the_wharf

Facebook



Like The Wharf on Facebook

Twitter



Follow The Wharf on Twitter

Contact Us



Click here if you have a story or want to place an advert