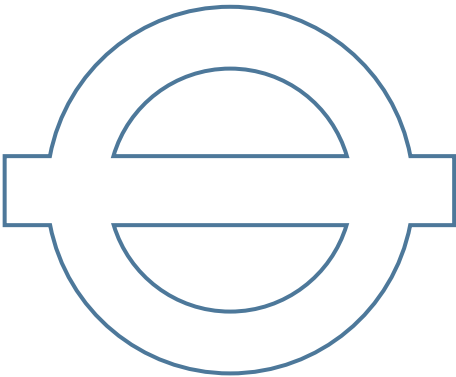# BRIXTON MURAL MAP

**MAYOR
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UNDERGROUND

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Introduction

Murals are indicators of both place and time. During the 1970s and 80s, London became an important centre for mural production. Murals from this period represent the political climate, social context and communities who collaboratively made them. These qualities define the murals that populate Brixton today. However, as London is further developed, many murals are being damaged or destroyed. The surviving murals reveal the rapid change London has undergone in the past few decades, but they have not received the same recognition, protection and conservation as other public artworks or heritage sites in the city. This Mural Map shares the stories behind Brixton's murals and makes these overlooked public artworks more visible.

Murals have an important legacy across the globe, ranging from the 1930's Mexican mural movement to Northern Ireland's politically charged murals and those painted on the Berlin Wall. While murals in other cities often dealt with local history, murals in London were frequently loaded with political messages. By 1986, London was home to approximately 300 murals, which were often associated with council-led regeneration in less-affluent areas of the city. There were 48 murals in the borough of Lambeth and the surviving Brixton murals are highlighted in this Mural Map. For 2018–20, Art on the Underground commissioned contemporary artists to create new artworks in response to the Brixton murals. These works explore commemoration, collective memory and the wider history of mural making, and will be on display at the Brixton Underground station entrance.

Brixton is an area with a multi-ethnic community and hybrid identity. Substantial bombing in World War II caused a severe housing crisis in the area. When London was being rebuilt in the 1940s and 50s, many West Indian immigrants settled in Brixton and have contributed to its unique energy ever since, although recent gentrification is now changing the local demographic. The Brixton murals reflect the diverse narratives of neighbourhood residents over the years and respond to significant topics such as the housing crisis, fear of nuclear war and rising race tensions. For example, the mural 'Children At Play' was commissioned as a direct result of the 1981 Brixton riots.

Art in public spaces 'belongs' to those who see it, and encourages viewers to question the context of its environment. The Brixton murals, as with all murals, are artefacts of the fixed place and time where they were created. Their images take meaning from their location, and in turn, transform the significance of their surroundings. As Brixton develops and changes, the murals' potency as political and social symbols grows. This map is your guide to the Brixton murals and their rich, often unknown histories.

Jessica Vaughan
Curator, Art on the Underground

🔍
Look out for our family activity questions while visiting the Brixton Murals.

Brixton murals to visit

1 Nuclear Dawn, 1981–1982
Brian Barnes, Dale McCrea
and housing association volunteers
245 Coldharbour Lane, SW9
Brixton station

2 Brixton Station Market Murals, 1986
Angie Biltcliffe and Karen Smith
Atlantic Road, SW9
Brixton station

3 Children At Play, 1981–1982
Stephen Pusey
Brixton Academy,
Stockwell Park Walk, SW9
Brixton station

4 Bellefields Road Mural #1, 1987
London Wall Mural Group
and local residents
Bellefields Road, SW9
Brixton station

4 Bellefields Road Mural #2, 1988
London Wall Mural Group,
Eugene Palmer, John Saward
and local residents
Bellefields Road, SW9
Brixton station

5 Big Splash, 1985
Christine Thomas, Diana Leary,
Dave Bangs and local residents
Strathleven Road & Glenelg Road, SW2
Brixton, Clapham North,
Clapham Common

6 The Windmill Mural, 1983 and 2012
Mick Harrison, Caroline Thorp
and local children and residents, 1983
Positive Arts and local children and
residents, 2012
143 Lyham Road, SW2
Brixton, Clapham North,
Clapham Common

**7 Slade Gardens Adventure
Playground, c. 1983**
Gordon Wilkinson and Sarah Faulkner
Slade Gardens, Lorn Road, SW9
Stockwell station

STOCKWELL

PARK ROAD

BRIX

7

ROBSART ST

LOUGHBOROUGH

STOCKWELL ROAD

SIDNEY ROAD

BRIXTON ROAD

LANDOR ROAD

HARGWYNE STREET

O2 Academy
Brixton

3

PULROSS RD

4

FERNDALE ROAD

FERNDALE ROAD

2

Brixton
Station

1

BRIXTON

ACRE LANE

ACRE LANE

5

BRIXTON HILL

MORVAL RD

6

Nuclear Dawn, 1981–1982
Brian Barnes, Dale McCrea
and housing association volunteers
Coldharbour Lane

'Nuclear Dawn' by Brian Barnes and Dale McCrea shows a skeleton swathed in flags of nuclear-armed countries, scattering rockets across London. The skeleton lands one foot on the Houses of Parliament and the other on the Shell Centre offices on the South Bank. A nuclear explosion erupts in the background and painted into the two mushroom clouds are a map of the world and the crying face of a child. In this mural, Barnes made a direct political statement, commenting on the Thatcherite government, nuclear armament and capitalism. The skeletal figure, based on the 1872 drawing 'Satan Sowing Seeds' by Félicien Rops, casts a shadow over South London as a rocket precariously hangs above Brixton. While London is being destroyed, key political figures take shelter under the Houses of Parliament; originally this showed Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and Prince Charles. Many Brixton landmarks are featured, including Brixton Recreation Centre, Brady's clock tower and a miniature version of the mural itself. From the right side of the image, a hand releases white doves that evolve into the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) symbol, offering a glimmer of hope in an otherwise apocalyptic scene. President of the CND, Hugh Jenkins, opened the 'Nuclear Dawn' mural in December 1981. This mural inspired the Greater London Council to commission a series of murals across London for their 1983 Peace Year, including another work by Barnes called 'Riders of the Apocalypse'.

🔍
This mural considers the future. What do you see? How does it make you feel – happy or sad? What are your hopes for the future?

Brixton Station Market Murals, c.1986
Angie Biltcliffe and Karen Smith
Brixton Station, Atlantic Road

Brixton Station was refurbished in 1986 and National Rail approached local artists Angie Biltcliffe and Karen Smith, also known as Anchor Designs, to create two new works for the station. The colourful abundance of food and wares sold in Brixton Market inspired Biltcliffe and Smith and became the main focus of their murals. The varieties of products available in the 1980s represented the multicultural communities that developed in Brixton as a result of post-war immigration. The food markets offered produce from every corner of the world and the popular second hand market was a treasure trove for locals. In these two murals, the produce as well as the hectic energy, sights and sounds of the markets appear to burst from the walls. Mangos, guava, red snapper and sugar cane are shown alongside more traditional British foods such as pheasants, turnips and partridge. Colourful beads, musical instruments and dominoes, a popular game within the Caribbean community, are scattered across a background of brightly coloured African wax cloths and floral chintz. These two murals seem to celebrate the bringing together of different cultures in the wake of the Brixton riots of 1981 and 1985.

🔍

The foods pictured here were sold in Brixton Market in the 1980s. Choose a food and play 'I spy' with your family.

Children At Play, 1981–1982
Stephen Pusey
Brixton Academy, Stockwell Park Walk

Following the 1981 Brixton riots, Lambeth Council commissioned a number of murals to rejuvenate damaged or neglected areas and promote messages of peace. This included 'Children At Play' by Stephen Pusey which was painted across the derelict Astoria Cinema, today known as the O2 Academy Brixton. Local residents of the Stockwell Park Estate, which overlooked the mural, were consulted throughout the design process. Initially, Pusey

wanted to show the struggles of local communities after the Brixton riots, however, residents rejected this idea and proposed a more celebratory design. The resulting mural shows a large, multi-racial group of local children, wearing bright clothes and playing in harmony. Joyful children shout, laugh and wave their arms as they boisterously tear around this idealistic scene. The mural was completed in November 1982 and opened by the Mayor of Lambeth, Hugh Chambers.

🔍

This mural is called 'Children At Play'. What are the children doing? What colours can you see? What games do you play?

Bellefields Road Mural #1, 1987
London Wall Mural Group and local residents
Bellefields Road

Bellefields Road Mural #1 was commissioned by a group of local residents who approached London Wall Mural Group, an all women non-profit. The mural making group aimed to increase enjoyment and awareness of art and explore alternatives to urban development. Consulting local residents and businesses through leafleting, displays and discussions was an essential part of their work. Furthermore, they encouraged schools and local residents to help paint the murals, promoting a feeling of shared ownership of the final mural.

For the Bellefields Road project, the group asked residents what they wanted from their mural. Responses pointed towards something non-political incorporating birds, animals, flowers and bright colours. The initial design was put on display at Brixton Library for two months so that residents could visit and give feedback. The final mural reflects the local landscape, past and present. Notable symbols include a bell for Bellefields Road, a gate for Gateley Road, stacked bricks from the Brixton Underground station tile designs, the Brixton Recreation Centre logo, the Empress Theatre roof (now demolished), a black vase referencing the history of Lambeth's pottery industry, the swan of Stockwell and the River Effra. The mural opened in May 1987 and was incredibly well received, so much so that residents of Bellefields Road invited the London Wall Mural Group to create a second mural on their street the following year.

🔍
Local residents asked the artists to paint birds, animals and flowers. How many birds can you count? What other animals can you see?

Bellefields Road Mural #2, 1988
**London Wall Mural Group, Eugene Palmer,
John Saward and local residents**
Bellefields Road

For the second Bellefields Road mural, the London Wall Mural Group spent months working with local residents to choose a design and colour scheme that complemented the first mural. Together they produced an image depicting a fantasy seascape. This beach scene includes shells, seagulls and crashing waves, as well as other unusual additions, including a winged black dog holding an olive branch and a psychedelic pink and yellow sunset. The top right corner, now difficult to see because of damage, once showed a lost beach ball floating through the sky, and sea grass swaying in the wind has been painted over. As with many community murals, residents wanted to experience a view beyond their regular urban environment, offering them an escape from the political upheaval unfolding across London at the time. Residents and local artists Eugene Palmer and John Saward painted the final design, completing the mural in 1988.

People living nearby asked the artists for a 'beach' mural. What would you like to see on a mural in your local area?

Big Splash, 1985
Christine Thomas, Diana Leary, Dave Bangs and local residents
Strathleven Road & Glenelg Road

In 1984, the Bonham and Strathleven Tenants Co-operative approached Christine Thomas to produce a mural for their community. Thomas consulted with the local residents, and at a time burdened by tensions of the Cold War and demands of Thatcherite austerity, they asked for a rural scene showing a seemingly simpler era. Incorporating the resident's wishes, Thomas decided to focus on the River Effra that once ran through Brixton. The mural 'Big Splash' depicts a small cottage mill, based on the Bateman Estate in Sussex. Residents are pictured in the mill windows, smiling down on the viewer. In front of the house runs the River Effra, featuring portraits of local children swimming amongst an array of birds and wildlife. The riverside is filled with ornate vases, echoing designs from the former Royal Doulton ceramics factory near Vauxhall. With this mural, Thomas also celebrates the ceramics factory, which provided opportunities for women to develop skills and offered the possibility of work outside of domestic labour. Local artists Diana Leary and Dave Bangs completed the painting, and the Mayor of Lambeth opened the mural in December 1985.

🔍

This mural features many different characters. Choose a person or animal and act out what they are doing. Can your family guess who?

The Windmill Mural, 1983 and 2012

Mick Harrison and Caroline Thorp
with local children and residents, 1983
Positive Arts and local children and residents, 2012
Lyham Road

The 'Brixton Windmill Mural' in Blenheim Gardens Estate has existed in two different versions during its lifetime. The first was in 1983 when residents commissioned a mural for an unwelcoming corner of their neighbourhood. For artists Mick Harrison and Caroline Thorp, who had previously worked on the Mauleverer Road mural (now demolished), the nearby Brixton Windmill seemed an obvious subject matter. The Windmill, built in 1816, survived the drastic transformation of the area from rural farmland to urban housing estate. A large central image featured the windmill, surrounded by seven small scenes of past rural life. These nostalgic images reflect the residents' desire for respite in an area experiencing urban and social upheaval.

The mural became dilapidated over the years, and the local community organised to repaint it in 2012. Similarly, the new mural features a number of images from when the windmill was first built, but also incorporates three contemporary scenes, including a young boy fixing his BMX bike. Many Blenheim Gardens residents helped paint the original 'Brixton Windmill Mural' and continued feeling a strong sense of ownership and commitment to it nearly 30 years later.

This community chose to celebrate the Brixton Windmill in their mural. What would you celebrate from your local community? Try and create your own mural design at home!

Slade Gardens Adventure Playground, 1983
**Gordon Wilkinson, Sarah Faulkner
and children and adults from the playground**
Slade Gardens, Lorn Road

The mural overlooking Slade Gardens was designed and painted by Gordon Wilkinson, Lambeth's muralist in residence, along with Sarah Faulkner and help from local residents. Wilkinson painted a number of murals in the borough, however 'Slade Gardens Adventure Playground' and 'Lambeth Walk' are the only murals that survive today. In the early 1940s, bombing during the Blitz destroyed this former residential area. After World War II ended, the city of London focused on improving housing and living standards, and the local government chose to turn the bomb site into a green space for the community. This mural was commissioned in 1983 by local residents and shows local children, park wardens and prominent figures from the neighbourhood such as the vicar, the police officer and the dinner lady. In the background, we can see nearby buildings such as St Michael's Church on Stockwell Park Road and residential tower blocks, which have since been demolished. This mural, alongside many others, reveals the rapid redevelopment and change that has occurred in Brixton over the last 40 years.

🔍

How many different objects are the children using to play on? What is your favourite? Look at the Adventure Playground today – how is it different?

Lost Murals in Brixton

1983
'Mauleverer Road Mural'
by Ruth Blench, Jane Gifford, Mick Harrison and Caroline Thorpe.
The muralists asked residents what they wanted to see from their
windows; one requested a view of the Caribbean.

1983
'Peace' by Dale McCrea
was also commissioned
by the GLC for Peace Year.
Both 'War' and 'Peace'
murals have been covered
by new developments,
however small sections
can still be seen from
certain angles.

1983
'War' by Pauline Harding,
was one of the five
murals commissioned by
the GLC for Peace Year.

1986
A large mural on the side of Brixton Black Women's Centre (now
demolished). Artist unknown.

Other Murals of Note Map
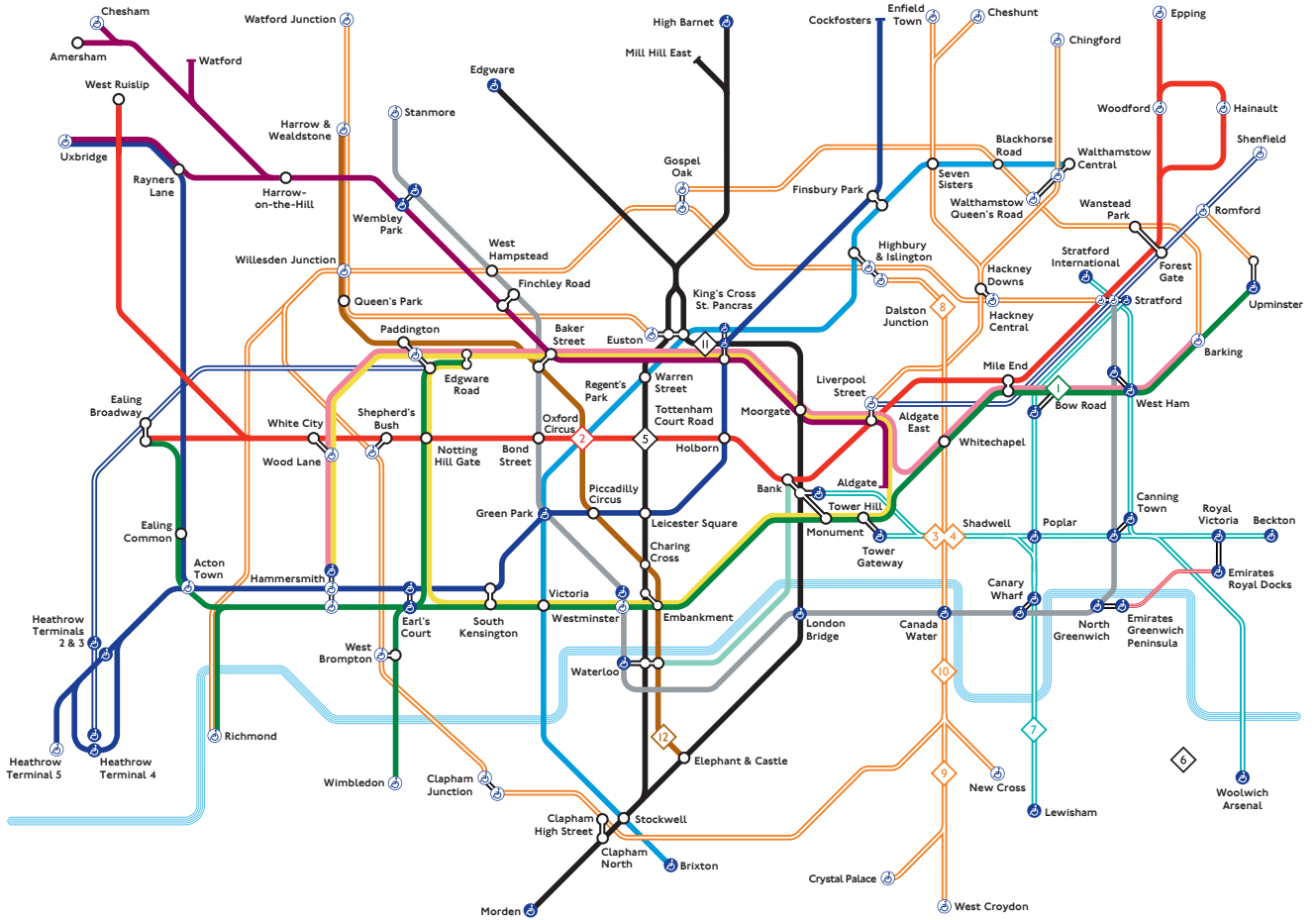
◇ Murals
○ Interchange stations
♿ ♿ Step-free access

Bakerloo
Central
Circle
District
Hammersmith & City

Jubilee
Metropolitan
Northern
Piccadilly
Victoria

Waterloo & City
DLR
Emirates Air Line
London Overground
TfL Rail

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Image credits

Image courtesies

Other Murals of Note

Locations

1 Bow Mission Mural, 1978
Ray Walker
Bow Road Methodist Church Merchant Street, Mile End, E3, Bow Road Underground station

2 Ode to the West Wind, 1989
London Wall Mural Group
17 Noel Street W1, Oxford Circus Underground

3 Tower Hamlets Peace Mural, 1985
Dushka Ahmad and Shanti Panchal. Dellow Street (past barrier) E1, Shadwell Overground

4 Cable Street Mural, 1983
Dave Binnington, Paul Butler, Desmond Rochfort, Ray Walker, Cable Street E1, Shadwell Overground

5 Fitzrovia Mural, 1980
Mick Jones and Simon Barber, Whitfield Gardens off Tottenham Court Road W1T, Goodge Street Underground

6 Floyd Road Mural, 1976
Greenwich Mural Workshop and Floyd Road Residents
40 Floyd Road SE7
Use local buses from Woolwich Arsenal

7 Changing the Picture, 1985
Greenwich Mural Workshop and local residents
Macey House, Thames Street, London SE10, Cutty Sark DLR

8 The Hackney Peace Carnival Mural, 1984–1985
Ray Walker, Anna Walker, Mick Jones
13 Dalston Lane E8, Dalston Junction Overground

9 'Riders of the Apocalypse', 1983
Brian Barnes
Sanford Walk SE14, New Cross Gate Overground

10 Surrey Docks, 1988
Greenwich Mural Workshop, Brian Barnes, Kim Bennet, Karen Gregory
Redriff Road SE16, Surrey Quays Overground

11 Tolpuddle Martyrs, 1984
Dave Bangs and Community Service Volunteers (CSV)
Copenhagen Street N1, King's Cross station

12 Lambeth Walk Murals, 1982
Gordon Wilkinson and Sarah Faulkner
Lambeth Walk SE1, Lambeth North Underground

Image courtesies

Other Murals of Note in London

1980
'Fitzrovia' by Mick Jones and Simon Barber, located off Tottenham Road, shows the daily lives of residents at the time and is filled with political messages.

1983
'Riders of the Apocalypse' by Brian Barnes was painted during the GLC's Peace Year. Based on the film 'Dr Strangelove', the mural shows political leaders racing around the earth on rockets about to collide with various symbols of peace.

1985
'Changing the Picture' shows the people of El Salvador rolling scenes of war away under a new image of peace. This mural was commissioned by the Cultural Commission of El Salvador Solidarity Campaign.

1982
'Cable Street Mural' by Dave Binnington, Paul Butler, Desmond Rochfort and Ray Walker commemorates a united community that denied fascists from entering their neighbourhood in 1936.

1985
'Hackney Peace Carnival Mural' by Ray Walker shows the Peace Carnival of 1983 and is one of London's best preserved murals.

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