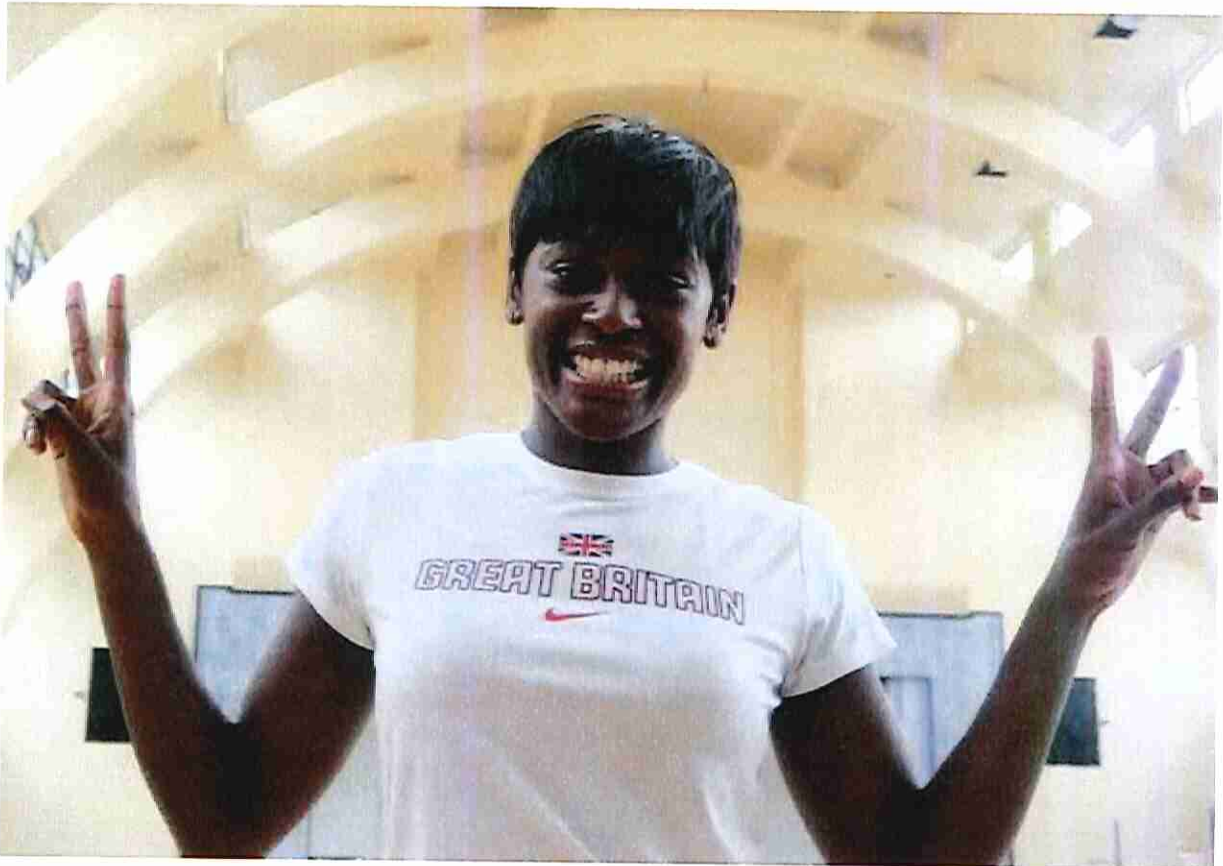


East London Advertiser

Perri Shakes-Drayton makes splash as Poplar Pool reopens first time in 34 years

18:14 14 August 2016 | Mike Brooke



World athlete Perri Shakes-Drayton at reopening of Poplar Pools

Former world athlete Perri Shakes-Drayton returned to London's East End where she grew up—just four weeks after an operation for a knee injury—for yesterday's grand reopening of a swimming pool that had been derelict nearly 30 years.



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Poplar Pool reopens

The 27-year-old who was raised in Bow was determined to see the revamped Poplar leisure and sports centre finally open its doors after a community campaign which began when nearby Canary Wharf was being built.

“The East End is what made me,” the former world athletics champ told the *East London Advertiser*. “It built my character.

“It doesn’t matter where we come from or the limitations we start out with, it’s hard work at the end of the day that does it.

“Even coming from the black community gave me extra motivation because I had to win races. I never thought it was a disadvantage.”



Sister Christine Frost at reopening of revamped Poplar Pool

Perri was second in the world-rating at the Moscow championships until a knee injury put her out of the running in the 400m hurdles. But now she's back as a runner after an operation last month—although strictly no hurdles yet, she tells you.

But the real heroine of Poplar yesterday was people's champion Sister Christine Frost, who had been campaigning for more than 30 years to get the derelict Poplar Baths near the Blackwall Tunnel reopened.

She started her bid when the London Docklands Development Corporation used Poplar Baths as a temporary training centre for Canary Wharf before the 1934 art deco complex was finally abandoned in 1982.

Sister Christine told the paper: "We went door-to-door and visited schools to see if there was a need for the facility, after building was left derelict.



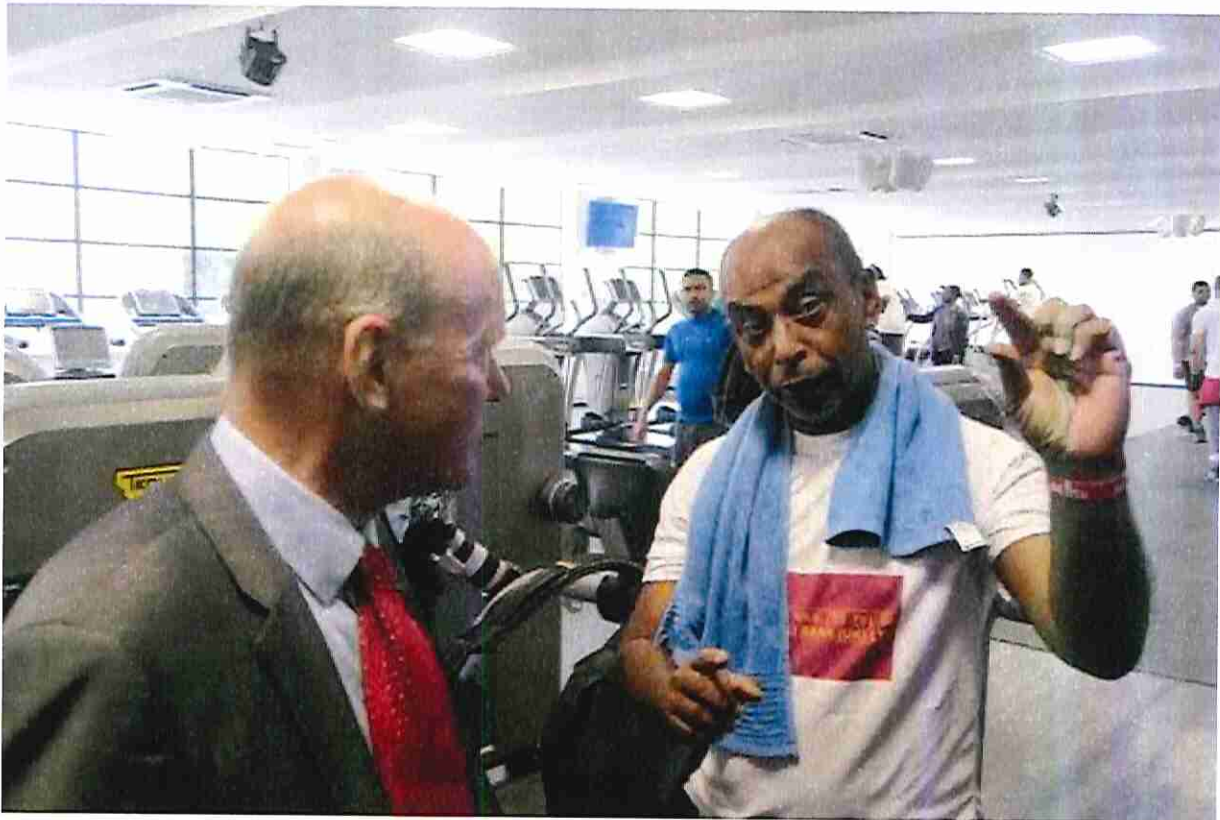
Tower Hamlets Mayor Biggs meets former world champ Shakes-Drayton at new Poplar leisure centre

“It should have fallen down—that’s what they wanted to happen.

“But we said ‘no’. We marched up to the council with banners and eventually got the mayor’s support, which was the turning point.”

A £34 million restoration deal was struck with developers by Tower Hamlets Council with new Olympic-standard swimming pools with a state-of-the-art sports hall and gymnasium added.

But the deal comes at a higher price, borrowing against the future, in a public-finance initiative with Guildmore developers covering the costs against future repayments—not the ideal way to “hock the community” for years to come.



Mayor John Biggs meets people using new gymnasium

Tower Hamlets Mayor John Biggs, who took over the project last year when he won the local election, explained: "It's not the way I would have chosen to do it. These finance initiatives have got a bad name—like the new Royal London Hospital which you get free to start with, but pay through the nose into the future."

The costs also hits 60 council-rented flats that were agreed to be included in the redevelopment scheme.

"The challenge is that the rents are twice what normal council rents are," the mayor added. "We couldn't squeeze those downwards."

But all attention for thousands of East Enders was enjoying their new leisure and sports centre with an open day and tours of the complex in West India Dock Road—for the first time since it closed to the public in 1982.

Keywords: John Biggs Tower Hamlets Council Royal London Hospital London
Tower Hamlets
