

AN VIET FOUNDATION

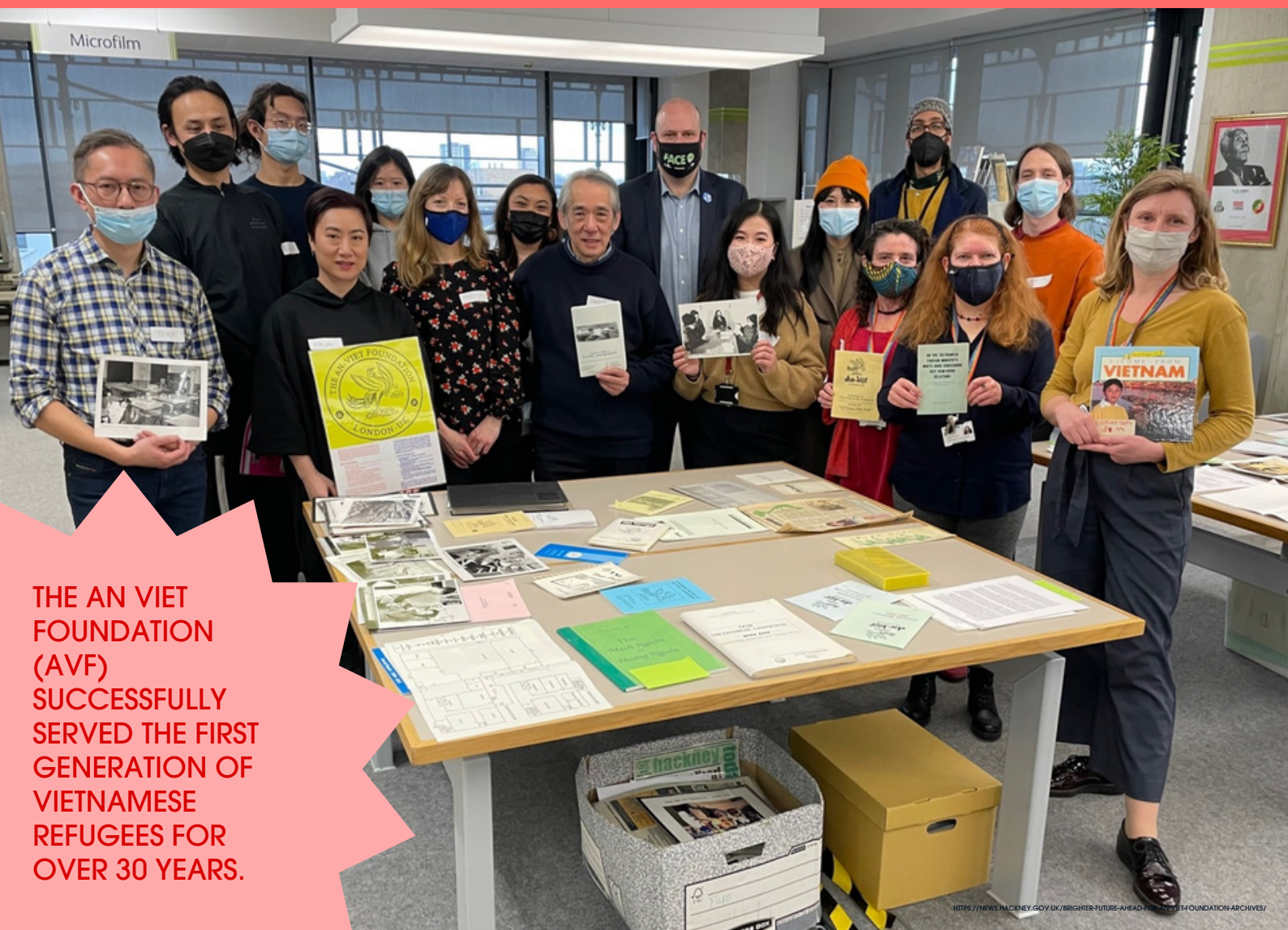


STUDENT CASE STUDY

OVERVIEW

The An Viet Foundation was a centre for the Vietnamese community, including refugees and asylum seekers. It provided advice on benefits, housing, immigration and ran a lunch club with mahjong, table tennis and chess, ESOL classes and a wide range of training. It served the community for 35 years and was based in the iconic premises on Englefield Road in Hackney until it closed in 2016 due to funding issues.

Initially, the services were focused on employment training, support with navigating the welfare system, ensuring school places for children and translation services. It expanded over the subsequent years to include more community-building activities, such as the restaurant.



THE AN VIET
FOUNDATION
(AVF)
SUCCESSFULLY
SERVED THE FIRST
GENERATION OF
VIETNAMESE
REFUGEES FOR
OVER 30 YEARS.

ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

Built in 1932 as 'Slipper Baths', public wash houses. Until the 1960s, over 60,000 people used the baths every year. In the 1980s, this registered community building was converted into a restaurant and community centre by the Vietnamese community until its closure six years ago.

The An Viet Foundation, meaning 'well settled', took over the building after its original use became less and less needed with the increasing introduction of indoor bathrooms in the surrounding homes.



ENGLEFIELD ROAD BATHS

COMMUNITY PROFILE

HOW IS THE SPACE USED BY THE COMMUNITY? WHAT DOES IT SERVE THE COMMUNITY?

Vietnamese refugees arrived in the UK following the end of the Vietnamese War in 1975, often referred to in derogatory terms as 'boat people'. Following this migration, the government used the original "dispersal" housing programme to scatter the community across rural Britain. This left many people isolated and wanting to return to large metropolitan areas. Of 2,000 Vietnamese who went to rural Scotland during the dispersal programme, barely a couple of hundred remain.

Hackney in London welcomed much of this secondary migration, being home to the UK's largest Vietnamese population. While the number of Vietnamese people living in the borough today is unknown, local community centres state the number of residents is around 5,000.

Coung Pham is a London based artist and community organiser interested in his Vietnamese heritage. He creates and supports platforms for narratives that tell the Vietnamese migrant story within the UK. He spoke to us about Vu Khank Thanh who founded An Viet in the 80s, before stepping down and vacating the foundation from the premises in 2016. He tells us it has since been abandoned.



USE

HOW HAS THE COMMUNITY USED THE SPACE IN THE PAST, TODAY AND HOW WILL IT BE USED IN THE FUTURE?

PAST

The building, originally a bathhouse, was built in 1932, before becoming a launderette until 1981. After this, the An Viet Foundation (AVF) had been operating from the Englefield Road site as an active community centre as well as a public facing restaurant 'Houng Viet.' As the AVF and restaurant moved out of the space, the building fell into disrepair. In 2019, squatters moved in and damaged the space.

PRESENT

The Vietnamese community in Hackney, the Kanlungan Filipino Consortium, and Hackney Chinese Community Services (HCCS) are collaborating with the council to reopen the building. In 2021, the Town Hall agreed to a £1.4 million investment to refurbish the building and support local residents.



FUTURE

The current plans are to convert the dilapidated building into a modern multicultural centre and community kitchen. The Town Hall helped secure £450,000 for structural repairs from the Greater London Authority, while the council invested £950,000 into the project.

REFLECTIONS

HOW HAVE COMMUNITIES OF DIERSE ETHNIC HERITAGE HAD A VOICE IN THE PLANNING AND DESIGN OF SITES THAT ARE SIGNIFICANT TO THEM?

The An Viet Foundation was lucky enough to have a strong leader to lay out a robust route to a very active community hub. With him stepping down, it could have easily been a moment where this work is undone. However, we see younger artists and Vietnamese community members coming forward to take on this new phase.

The Filipino consortium are making future plans for the building and are central to conversations on how it is being developed. Previous users and prospective tenants are currently working together with architects and the local council to create practical space as well as design a community kitchen.

