

Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives



We are having a face lift!

Regular readers may have noticed that the façade of our Grade II listed building - [originally constructed in 1860-1 as the Vestry Hall for the Hamlet of Mile End Old Town](#) - has been in need of TLC for some time. We are pleased to report that the council is investing £125,000 in restoration works which have commenced this week. The much-needed repairs to the frontage will include overhauling the large windows and gutters at the front of the building, as well as restoration of the Bath stone corncicing, pilasters and columns.

Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives remains open to the public as usual while these building works take place. The scaffolding which is currently going up is due to come down by the end of March 2022 at which point our gleaming new look will be revealed.

Compare the lower sections of the two columns below to see the difference that will be made! The one on the right was restored last week by the specialist stonemason contractor (as a sample of the process to be used) while the left remains untreated. We are all really looking forward to seeing the building returned to its original glory.



Before and after! The left-hand column has yet not been restored while the lower section of the one on the right was completed last week as a demonstration.

Family history comes to life in the archives

Researcher Helen Wynn writes about a recent red letter day

63 Newark Street, Whitechapel. Until recently, the only significance this held for me was that it was the house where my father was born. Here, my grandmother would have lived in two rooms with her husband and their nine children. As to other occupants of the house, I had no knowledge of them.

Fast forward over a hundred years, and DNA testing has brought me together with two newly found cousins. Here we are, sitting in a flat just a five-minute walk from Newark Street, chatting about work (we are all involved in education) and our families over a beigel supper. Pooling our information, it becomes clear that 63 Newark Street plays a large part in our collective history, bringing together our different stories. For it transpires that my newly discovered cousins also had family members living there at the same time. We were all keen to learn more about this house.

I soon discover that Newark Street suffered war damage and although some of the houses still stand, sadly nothing remains of the terrace that would have included No.63. Part of the area has now given way to the extension of the Royal London Hospital, whilst the surviving houses show that rooms were spread over three floors with possibly two rooms to a floor. According to the 1901 and 1911 censuses, families generally occupied two rooms, regardless of size. Often, they even managed to find space for a lodger!

As my walking tour of the area revealed nothing, my next port of call was Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives in Bancroft Road. It was a long shot but maybe I would find a picture of the street as it once was. I couldn't believe my luck when I discovered this photo of the actual house, together with the number still on the door! Although the photo was taken in 1946 and shows war damage, it would have changed little since my grandparents' day.



63 Newark Street, pictured in 1946 by Stepney Metropolitan Borough's Engineers' and Surveyors' department. (c) Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives (Ref no: P04876)

So now we have a priceless, tangible piece of evidence to add to our story. I try to imagine my grandmother entering the door of No. 63 with her young baby. What would she have found inside? There may have been an entrance hall with a staircase leading to the upper floors. There would probably have been two rooms to the left plus a scullery and an outside toilet. Each family would have had to cook, eat and sleep in their two small rooms. There would be little privacy, much noise and people continually coming and going. It's hard to imagine the overcrowding that would have existed. Public health records from the period show diseases such as TB and smallpox were endemic, spreading quickly through households. Fortunately, we seem to have been spared this fate.

Needless to say, my cousins and I are now eagerly awaiting the publication of the 1922 Census in the hope that it may shed more light on the occupants of this house. If nothing else, though, our research has brought new friendships, which has been the icing on the cake.

-- Helen Wynn

What's on: The Vanished East End

Our current exhibition, organised by the East End Archive at London Metropolitan University, continues to draw in the crowds. The Vanished East End comprises the work of six photographers documenting visions long gone from the 1970s and 1980s.

Read a great review of it and see some sample images on Londonist here: <https://londonist.com/london/art-and-photography/vanished-east-end-photos>

2022 Island History calendars now on sale



Hot off the press, modelled here by Rob and Andy, the ever-popular Friends of Island History Trust calendar for 2022 has now landed. Purchase your copy from us for £8 before they sell out! As with all the other local history books, maps, tote bags and pamphlets we sell, all income we generate helps to offset the costs of running the Local History Library &

Archives service - and thus keep our staff in seasonally and professionally appropriate knitwear.

Last chance to upload to Covid archive portal

Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives is creating a lasting collective memory of our community's response to the COVID-19 crisis. As an archive it is our responsibility to not only preserve historic records from the past but collect and preserve the history of today to inform many generations to come. In summer 2020 we set up an online portal for residents to upload their digital materials, and we have received many informative and moving submissions. The portal, "Making History: documenting coronavirus in the East End" will be closing on 31st December 2021.

This is an opportunity for anybody living or working in the borough to share with us your experiences of living through the pandemic. The forlorn dog pictured here is an example of a photo submitted in 2020.

What was life like for you during lockdown? Key workers, how has your role changed? Are there positives to take away from this crisis?

By collecting your individual testimonies and documents, we can create an archive that will help future generations understand our lives and the environment we have been living in and help them meet the challenges they may face.

There is still time to send us your materials so please check out the portal here: <https://talk.towerhamlets.gov.uk/coronavirus-collection>

Christmas opening times

The Reading Room and Vanished East End exhibition will be closing over the Christmas period as follows:

Last days of opening in December

- Saturday 18 December 10am-5pm
- Tuesday 21 December 10.30am-4pm
- Wednesday 22 December 10.30am-4pm

CLOSED: Thursday 23 December - Monday 3 January inclusive

First days of opening in January

- Tuesday 4 January, 10.30am-4pm
- Wednesday 5 January, 10.30am-4pm
- Thursday 6 January, 10.30am-7pm

We are usually open every first and third Saturdays of every month but due to the New Year's Day Bank Holiday, in January we will be open on **Saturday 15 January** only. Don't forget we are now open til 7pm every Thursday.

Bangladesh 50: Free film screening



EastendHomes is hosting a screening of the film *Shongram* to mark 50 years since the Liberation War and independence for Bangladesh. Director Munsur Ali will introduce the film. The screening takes place at Genesis Cinema on Monday 13 December at 6pm, and is free! [Register soon](#) because space is limited.

New Bangladesh 50 event: Ruhul Abdin Q&A

On **Saturday 18 December, 2pm-3.30pm** we are hosting a Q&A at Idea Store Whitechapel with the artist Ruhul Abdin live from Bangladesh on Zoom, who will be interviewed by some of the project's Citizen Researchers about the Bangladesh 50 fabric clad sculpture produced as part of our partnership with the National Portrait Gallery earlier this year.

Save the date and contact localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk to be kept informed about how to book for this event.

If you are planning a visit to [this hugely popular exhibition and installation](#), please note that the lights switch on at around 4pm.

New archive catalogue released



Handwritten diaries by Rev. Dan Greatorex, 1852-1892.

Reverend Dan Greatorex - Victorian life captured in diaries

We have now published online catalogue descriptions to the papers of Reverend Dan Greatorex (Ref no: P/GTX). The collection consists of illustrated travel diaries, a photograph album, and a printed sermon. Reverend Dan Greatorex served as vicar of St. Paul's Church, Dock Street for thirty-five years from 1862 to 1897 where he had a major involvement in helping the poor in his parish.

The diaries offer a valuable insight into Victorian Britain and the lifestyle and attitudes of the Victorian clergyman abroad. The volumes are heavily illustrated and include photographs, pressed plants and flowers gathered on his travels. Most diaries have been catalogued in detail (to the level of each diary entry).

They are available to order to explore in the Reading Room. Volumes contain fragile, loose items. If you request these items, please handle with extra care and keep the order as found.

More about Dan Greatorex

He was born in March 1828 in St Marylebone, Middlesex and baptised on 4 May 1828 at Christ Church, St Marylebone as 'Dan' son of William and Susanna Greatorex of 31 Lisson Street. His father William was a grocer.

After studying for ordination in Cumbria he became chaplain of the Thames Church Mission in London, subsequently moving to the new parish of St Paul's Church, Dock Street and becoming vicar in 1868. Diaries for the period 1852-1862 cover his studies and early career prior to moving to London, where they reveal in great depth Rev. Greatorex's work for the Thames Church Mission. This work involved visiting ships to distribute books and religious tracts to their crews. On 19 May 1860 he visited twenty-two ships and one yacht on one day.

The other distinct period is that of 1872-1892 which is covered by the illustrated travel diaries. Rev. Greatorex fills these diaries with sketches. Subjects include people, buildings and artefacts through to shorelines. The diaries cover his trips to Australia, Spain, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Canada, USA, Eastern Europe, Russia, Norway, France and the Mediterranean.

Rev. Greatorex retired on 1 July 1897 after being partly paralysed by a stroke. After he retired, he moved to Dover, Kent where he married Margaret Doyle. She had been Head mistress of the St. Paul's Church Infants School in Wellclose Square.

Greatorex helped poorer inhabitants of his parish through schools, arranging mothers' meetings, a Penny Bank and Provident Fund, Clothed Scholars Fund and an infant nursery which taught skills of parenting to new mothers. Rev. Greatorex also was involved in the St. Paul's Poor Mother's Friend Society, the Wilfred Cottage Hospital and Poor Children's Dinners. He was the first to establish Poor Children's Dinners in 1864 and provided some 376,599 free dinners in his time. Rev. Dan Greatorex died on 7 March 1901 aged 72 in Dover, Kent.

We would like to thank Gary Haines for his extraordinary diary cataloguing and the Parochial Church Council of St. George-in-the-East for depositing these records. The parish records of St Paul Dock Street can be explored at London Metropolitan Archives, reference P93/PAU2.



Example diary entries by Rev. Greatorex showing sketches of Damascus, Syria.

Contact us

Contact Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

- Email us: localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk
- Visit our website: <http://www.ideastore.co.uk/local-history>
- Phone (during opening hours only): 020 7364 1290

Reading Room Opening hours

- Tuesday 10.30am-4pm
- Wednesday 10.30am-4pm
- Thursday 10.30am-7pm

First and third Saturdays of every month (except January and April):

- Saturday 10am-5pm

Additionally, our exhibition hall is open 10am-5pm Monday-Friday, plus the Saturdays above, for anyone wanting to see **The Vanished East End** which is on until 5 February.