

# Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives



## BANGLA: a new public artwork for Whitechapel

We are thrilled to announce the launch of our latest project at Idea Store Whitechapel. A collaboration with the National Portrait Gallery, BANGLA is a bright and bold celebration of the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh installed in the facade of the borough's flagship library.

Initially planned as an exhibition in our entrance hall, the pandemic led the project's stakeholders to identify an open-air space to display the new artwork, designed by Bangladesh-based Londoner Ruhul Abdin.

The result - the word BANGLA constructed as a 3D illuminated steel structure clad in sari fabric - was informed by research in the collections of Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives by a group of more than twenty Citizen Researchers from the local British Bangladeshi community.

In addition to the sculptural artwork, which is illuminated at dusk every evening and will be on display until spring 2022, the installation includes two large embroidered hangings depicting archival fragments of the 1971 Liberation War, and its impact on the Bengali East End.

Pasted onto the disused escalator shaft in the overhanging glass facade, highlights from our collections are used in a new exhibition about the history of the independence struggle, the contribution of Tower Hamlets residents and the Language Movement in the East End.

**Bangladesh 50** is part of Citizen UK, a collaboration between the National Portrait Gallery and local authority archives. Check out [behind the scenes photos and videos of the project process](#).



Due to the pandemic the project rapidly evolved to become a large scale 'public realm' installation instead of the indoor exhibition in our entrance hall which was originally conceived. The entire display is located in the overhang of the Idea Store and you do not need to enter the building to visit it.

This necessary change in scale and ambition required urgent additional fundraising and a huge effort from the staff team at Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives, our partners at the National Portrait Gallery and in other council departments.



Many, many people pulled out all the stops to realise this project but as this is our newsletter, your editor (Tamsin - Heritage Manager) would like to give particular thanks to my amazing colleagues without whom absolutely none of this would have been remotely possible:

**Halima Khanom**, Heritage Officer (Learning & Participation) who was the project lead on all aspects, particularly devising and facilitating the collections research sessions, working closely with the lead artist, digital producer, citizen researchers and our amazing steering group.

**Sanjida Alam**, Heritage Co-Ordinator, who led on collections research, facilitated research sessions, curated and installed the exhibitions, AND did all the marketing and interpretation design work.

**Jackie Lyall**, sessional tutor in Idea Store Learning, who received the sari fabric (which was pattern cut in Bangladesh) and set up an intensive sewing station onsite at the Idea Store, making alterations, dressing and finally cladding the steel framework.

**Medha Chotai**, Heritage Officer (Archives), who is so handy with a needle and thread she was seconded to be Jackie's assistant for three weeks.

**Rob Jones, Richard Wiltshire** and **Debbie Smith** for their extra shifts covering the Reading Room while the BD50 team were up to our eyeballs in the last few weeks.

Finally, special thanks to the Canary Wharf Group, Steve Linwood, Sam Brown, Jane Abraham and Scott Aquilina for their help with fundraising, construction works and project management. Citizen UK is supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Art Fund.

We will be holding a free public event at the Idea Store exploring the themes of the exhibition in December, to mark Victory Day - watch this space for more details!



## Wapping Neighbourhood: archives released

The records of Wapping Neighbourhood local authority are now available for research. This collection (L/WAN) consists of the committee minutes covering local issues including planning, entertainments and grants. There are also papers of the Chief Executive and Committee Section, c1983-1994. It includes a file on the Clement Attlee statue and its unveiling, c 1983-1988 (L/WAN/B/1/1). You can explore descriptions on [our online catalogue](#).

In addition to Wapping, Bow Neighbourhood's records are also now catalogued, but other Neighbourhoods remain uncatalogued as we await further resourcing. Access to some series is restricted under data protection including 'exempt' or restricted minutes which cover sensitive matters often relating to named individuals.

A big thank you to our long-standing volunteer Anne Connaughton, pictured here with minutes from the collection. She has been invaluable in helping us make the collection fully available through labelling and repackaging the collection using archival standard folders.



## But what's a Neighbourhood?!!

Tower Hamlets Council saw a period of decentralisation of its administration under Liberal Democrat control between 1986-1994. This gave local areas more control over decision making. Seven Standing Neighbourhood Committees were created. They were Bethnal Green, Bow, Globe Town, Isle of Dogs, Poplar, Stepney and Wapping. Each was independent, with its own Neighbourhood Chief Executive and offices. However, they continued to be closely linked to Tower Hamlets Council with clerking for meetings often done centrally.

Their names were later simplified from Standing Neighbourhood Committees to Neighbourhoods. Wapping Standing Neighbourhood Committee therefore changed name to Wapping Neighbourhood. In 1994, Labour took over the council which signalled the end of the devolved neighbourhood system. Despite the return to a single local authority for the whole borough, associated local forum and area partnerships have continued to operate and work closely with the council to give a voice to residents.

The legacy of the Neighbourhood era is traceable in the borough today with much street and estate signage dating from the period which features the corresponding Neighbourhood's branding.

## The Vanished East End

### Documentary photography from the 70s and 80s

#### A new exhibition

Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives  
30 September 2021 - 4 February 2022

While we've been busy over in Whitechapel, thanks to our friends over at the East End Archive at London Metropolitan University we are delighted to announce a new exhibition opening soon on Bancroft Road.



*Photograph of fife and drum band parade in Wapping, 1980s (c) Diane Bush*

**The Vanished East End** highlights the huge social and economic changes in the area, including the now vanished industrial landscape and the deregulation of the financial markets. The group show features work from the 1970s and the 1980s by acclaimed photographers Tom Hunter, Diane Bush, Mike Seaborne, Brian Griffin and Syd Shelton.

The work on show by four of the five photographers is highlighted in a recent publication series by [Café Royal Books](#), a long term advocate of British documentary photography. Each book showcases each photographer's distinctive and personal approach to capturing the area, and comprise.

- ***Down the Lane*** features the work of **Tom Hunter** and dates from a time, now disappeared and prior to his professional career when he had a stall at Brick Lane Market and photographed the passers-by.
- ***East End*** features the work of **Diane Bush**, which was made whilst working with EXIT, Britain's first photography collective, which believed in the power of photography to contribute to positive social change.
- ***London Docklands*** features the work of **Mike Seaborne**, showcasing the huge social and economic changes in the area through the 1970s which were defined by a vanished post-industrial landscape.
- ***The Broadgate Development*** features the work of **Brian Griffin**, which comments on massive economic shifts but this time in the City of London in the 1980s where borders were re-drawn as the City spread with the deregulation of the financial markets.
- ***Syd Shelton*** is a British photographer who documented the Rock Against Racism movement. His work is held in the collections of Tate and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Please check our opening hours before visiting and email us if you are interested in attending the evening launch event on Thursday 30 September.

#### **About *The East End Archive* at London Metropolitan University:**

The *East End Archive* at London Metropolitan University is an online and digital photographic resource which develops collaborative ventures with other community groups, public bodies and research projects that have a common interest. The Archive collects the work of photographers whose practice is concerned with the East End of London and its

diaspora, where the East End is understood as an ever-changing frontier within the urban sprawl that is part imagined and part tangible.

The Archive holds only “bodies of work” in order to understand more fully the working methodology of the photographers, and to give context to the work. This is an archive for the future, which brings together not only historic bodies of work but contemporary collections from photographers currently working in the field in order to record current rather than retrospective ideologies. The work collected ranges from traditional documentary to works of the imagination in order to reflect the East End- a place where dreams, dissent and transformation co-exist. The archive aims to bring to light forgotten or little published work as well as the work of established photographers, and works with local communities to uncover and preserve histories, promote community well-being and cultural understanding.

<http://www.eastendarchive.org/>

## We're open! Come visit us

### No appointment needed!

We are currently open three days a week for visitors to our Reading Room.

- **Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays**  
10.30am – 4.00pm

You are welcome to drop-in without an appointment but if all tables are in use, you will be asked to queue or return later.

If you want to ensure you are not turned away (for example, if you are travelling some distance to use our collections) we invite you to email us at least two working days in advance, and we can reserve you a table. Request a morning (10.30am-1pm) and/or afternoon (1pm-4pm) appointment on one of the days above.

There will be a reduced Reading Room capacity with some tables reserved for walk-ins and other tables reserved for booked appointments. Please visit our [Visitor Information page](#) for more information, including on our health & safety procedures.

You will not need to order documents in advance, however we encourage you to plan your research visit before you come. Consult our online catalogue [THcatalogue.org.uk](http://THcatalogue.org.uk) and refer to our [User Guides](#) to get a head start. On arrival, you will need to provide reference numbers for the items you would like to see.

Later in the year, assuming restrictions continue to ease, we plan to open on one Saturday per month and also extend our opening hours into the evening on at least one of the weekdays.

For further information and to book an appointment, please email [localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk) or call 020 6364 1290. The telephone is answered during our opening hours only, and the inbox is monitored Monday-Friday.

## News from our friends

[My Name is Sara: an amazing exhibition at Four Corners](#) by artist Sara Davidmann documenting her archival research into family members lost in the Holocaust.

When the weather cheers up we intend to head over to Hale Street to check out the Poplar Rates Rebellion mural, originally painted in the 1990s which [has just been restored](#).

Some other excellent events marking the centenary of the Poplar Rates Rebellion are taking place online, including an excellent archive talk tonight (Tues 14 September). The full event listings are here: <https://www.poplar100.com/events>