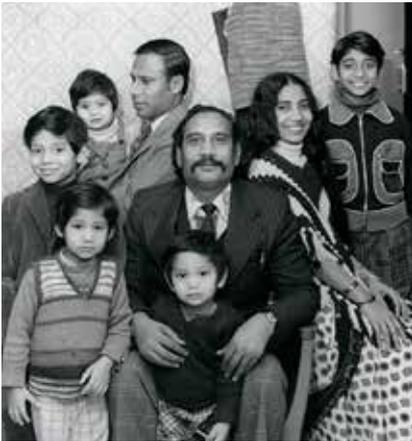




Bengali East End

20 August - 28 September 2014



Miah Family, Woodseer Street, 1978 (c)
Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

The Gallery at Idea Store Whitechapel invites you to an exhibition of the Bengali history in London's East End.

It is generally perceived that the Bengali presence in the UK is something relatively new, at its earliest, from the years after the Second World War. In fact, it goes back over 400 years, right to the British involvement in India. Records can be traced to the 17th century when the East India Company began trading in South Asia. Entries (of baptisms and burials) in parish registers indicate that there were a significant number of Bengali people settled in East London.

The first big wave of immigration was from France in the late 1500s, with the French Huguenot Protestants fleeing persecution. The word 'refugee' entered the English language at this time. As a result of prosperity and poverty, they moved to other parts of the UK. They were

followed by other waves of immigrants- the Irish escaping the 'potato famine' of the 1840s, and the Jews from Eastern Europe in the late 19th century. Immigrants settled close to Brick Lane, as living costs there were relatively cheap, while job prospects made the area particularly attractive.

The life changing settlement in the East End was not a wholly pleasant one for the Bengali ethnic minority community. They faced racial discrimination, prejudice, and injustice not only from their neighbours but the authorities too. As a British Bangladeshi herself, the curator of The Gallery shares the excitement in presenting this small yet significant part of the Bengali history. She believes that the accounts made by some voices in the community which were otherwise unheard, created real progress and the generations that followed can see that.

This exhibition is aimed at celebrating the unique contribution Bengalis have made in shaping culture, food, fashion and history in the East End. As the oral histories, newspaper clippings, and photographs are weaved together from past to present, they create a captivating journey made by the Bengali people. This is not a definitive collection, and the archive continues to seek out evidence of Bangladeshi experience in Tower Hamlets in all its variety.

The oral histories in this exhibition were compiled by Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives as part of an ongoing project to fill gaps in its collections and ensure that the council's archives reflect the histories of Bangladeshi residents. These illustrate just a few stories that form part of the history, which include people who live and work in the borough today, or people who played a significant part in the establishment of the Bengali community.

If you would like to listen to some oral histories, please visit

<http://www.ideastore.co.uk/local-history-online-oral-history-bengali-east-end>

For more information on the Bengali East End at the Local History Library & Archives, please visit

<http://www.ideastore.co.uk/local-history>