



# **Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives**

## **Operational Policy for Collections Development**

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## **1 Introduction**

This policy is one of several policies relating to the heritage collections which are preserved and managed by Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives. The aim of the policies is to ensure that the collections are properly managed, preserved and are made available in the most appropriate manner to ensure their long-term survival and usability. This policy should be read in conjunction with the **Operational Policy for Collections Management** which describes the statutory and legal basis for THLHLA and the management of its collections, the framework of standards within which it operates and the code of ethics followed by staff developing the collections. This policy explains in more detail what THLHLA collects and how it will ensure that its collections continue to be a unique resource for everyone researching any aspect of Tower Hamlets' past.

### **1.1 Mission Statement**

Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives is central to the borough it serves. We collect, preserve, manage and provide free public access to a wide variety of materials which record, describe or illustrate the borough's past and present. Through facilitating onsite research with these collections and delivering outreach, exhibitions and events, we engage and connect local residents and visitors from across the UK and overseas with the rich histories of London's East End.

### **1.2 Governing body**

The service is operated by Tower Hamlets Council. Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives sits within the Resources directorate and is a part of the Idea Store department of libraries and lifelong learning.

### **1.3 Location and contact details**

Address: 277 Bancroft Road, London, E1 4DQ  
Phone number: (+44) 020 7364 1290  
Email address: [localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.ideastore.co.uk](http://www.ideastore.co.uk)

## **2 Scope of the existing collections**

### **2.1 Library collections**

The Local History Library collections cover:

#### **2.1.1 Book and pamphlet collections**

#### **2.1.2 Periodicals collection**

#### **2.1.3 Ephemera and press cuttings**

#### **2.1.4 Maps**

#### **2.1.5 Photographs**

#### **2.1.6 Audio-visual and digital**

With the exception of the maps and periodicals collections, the library collections are organised according to the same in-house classification scheme. This means that the same subject areas are used throughout the collections increasing findability and ease of browsing for both staff and users.

#### **2.1.1 Books and pamphlets**

The local history library holds over 12,000 printed books and pamphlets dating from the 17th century to the present day. These provide extensive coverage of the many differing aspects of the recorded history of Tower Hamlets. Many of the books are small press publications or currently out of print. The pamphlet collection also contains many rare copies of items not available in other libraries.

#### **2.1.2 Periodicals collection**

The periodicals collection consists of microfilm copies of newspapers, bound serials and loose serials. These start in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for microfilm and 18<sup>th</sup> century for print. The systematic collection of periodicals has varied in the past and as such many titles held include large numbers of missing issues. THLHLA is currently attempting to fill in the gaps of missing issues as well as to keep up to date with current publications. Focus is currently mainly on local weekly newspapers and small local publications produced by specific groups within the borough.

#### **2.1.3 Ephemera and press cuttings**

The cuttings collection, which is contained in over 400 boxes, includes newspaper and periodical cuttings and articles and printed ephemera, a substantial amount of which dates from the 19th century. It is a particularly important resource as material from diverse sources is grouped together by subject. Regular trawling of local papers by library staff ceased at the end of the twentieth century. Material, largely printed ephemera, is now added in an

ad hoc fashion where it donated by a member of the public or come across by staff

#### **2.1.4 Maps**

Over 2,500 maps and plans are held dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. The collection includes large-scale Ordnance Survey maps, street plans and some parish and estate maps. At one time all maps were contained in this collection but now, generally, manuscript maps and maps forming an intrinsic part of an archive collection are catalogued as archives.

#### **2.1.5 Images**

The library holds about 40,000 illustrations, mainly photographs. These are derived from a variety of sources including many from Tower Hamlets Council and its predecessors. There are over 80 boxes of photographs of general street scenes arranged alphabetically, while the remainder is arranged by subject within the library classification scheme. There are also a number of collections arranged by photographer or collector. The largest is that of the Island History Trust which consists of nearly 4,000 images relating to the Isle of Dogs.

#### **2.1.6 Audio-visual and digital material**

The library holds a collection of sound recordings, films and videos (in a variety of formats). Many of these are catalogued manually only. Many of these are catalogued only in a card catalogue at present, though new acquisitions are catalogued on the CALM database, either in the Library collections (for "published" items) or as "archives" if forming part of a fonds. A proportion of films and video tapes has been digitised by London Screen Archives and can be made available to watch on DVD to users in the Reading Room. Catalogued films and video tapes are stored in special environmental conditions at London Metropolitan Archives. The Local History Library has also started collecting some digital publications (mainly periodicals) which are stored in a discrete folder on the Council's shared drive.

### **3 Acquisitions to the library collections**

THLHLA actively collects material to add to its library collections, however, potential acquisitions will be considered in line with a specific set of criteria, as outlined below.

#### **3.1 Acquisition requirements**

New items will be added to the library collections as long as they meet the following requirements:

- **Geographical**

The geographic collecting area of the library is defined by the boundaries of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets as existing on 1 April 1965. The

material in the THLHLA collections will cover the area of Tower Hamlets only. Material about London or the East End in general, or neighbouring areas will be considered as long as it incorporates information relevant to Tower Hamlets.

- **Subject**

The subjects covered reflect all areas of life as it was and is lived within the borough. This includes social, economic, political history as well as current issues. It includes information about individuals, such as biographies and personal memories of people living within the borough as well as the activities of groups, businesses, etc. A proactive focus is required to ensure the library formats collected reflects the broad ethnic mix of community publishing in Tower Hamlets today as well as in the past. These communities include African and African-Caribbean, Bengali, Jewish, Chinese, Irish and other people of migrant heritage, as well as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) communities. Material by or about contemporary or transient communities tends not to have as wide a distribution or marketing reach as publications about the more established and famous aspects of East End history.

- **Time period covered**

Materials from earliest settlement to the present day will be considered for inclusion.

- **Donations**

Donations will be accepted if they fall within the scope of the collecting policy, do not duplicate existing materials and are in good condition. Materials that will require conservation treatment will only be accepted if provision can be made for the costs of conservation and preservation. We are unable to accept donations of personal libraries. If donations are refused, the Library will encourage the donor to offer the material to a more suitable library/institution where appropriate.

- **Duplicates**

In the past the Library regularly acquired multiple copies of books. Now, with few exceptions, such as if an item has a significant historical provenance, or is requested on a very regular basis, only one copy of a book or pamphlet is acquired.

- **Imaginative literature**

The Library collects significant works of fiction, drama and poetry by local authors as well as material set within the borough. These offer personal insight into the history of the borough and the way it was viewed by outsiders.

### **Reference material**

The collection contains some reference works that would be of interest to its users. For instance, work on how to do genealogical research. General reference material is provided online through the Idea Store website and as such is not collected in physical form.

- **Dissertations**

Dissertations on subjects that are not already well represented will be added to the library collection if they are deemed to be of sufficiently high quality.

### **3.2 Acquisition method**

Library items may be acquired by gift, bequest, or purchase. Suggestions from readers as to items for acquisition are welcomed and those items deemed appropriate for acquisition will be actively sought; the ability to acquire them, however, is necessarily dependent both on their availability and on the availability of resources to purchase them.

## **4 Archival Collections**

THLHLA holds an extensive and varied collection of archival records. They include: records of the local authority (and predecessor institutions); personal papers; records of local institutions; businesses; societies and associations; records of some places of worship and most recently, oral history records.

THLHLA works closely with other collecting institutions to ensure the suitable placement of archival records. It liaises with colleagues in other institutions to avoid any potential conflict of interest in relation to the deposit of archival records and also to prevent any unnecessary splitting of archival collections.

### **4.1 Background**

THLHLA is a recognised place of deposit for the following archival records:

- The records of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (Tower Hamlets Council) and those of its predecessors.
- Records of organisations, businesses, individuals, institutions and other activities germane to the history of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and its people.

### **4.2 Acquisition requirements**

In terms of geographical subject areas, the criteria for library material in 2.1.8 (above) apply with the proviso that because of changes in administrative boundaries and the need where possible not to break up archive collections, some material is held relating to areas outside the present borough boundary.

### 4.3 Acquisition method

Archival records may be acquired by THLHLA by: **transfer; gift, bequest; long-term loan or purchase.**

**Transfer:** This acquisition method refers to records received internally where they are transferred to THLHLA by other departments within the local authority (LBTH). The directorate retention schedules are the main tool to assist staff with identifying the core records for transfer, in conjunction with practical advice on the staff intranet about transfer of the records and other high level council policies. LBTH staff from across the council should liaise with THLHLA regarding the transfer process and also contact us if they wish to discuss specific queries or receive general guidance about the records held here.

#### **Gifts, Bequests and Long-term Loans:**

THLHLA prefers to receive deposits of records which have been given as permanent gifts, rather than on loan. This is because it is able to dedicate more resources to the care, conservation, preservation, cataloguing and access of records which have been donated on a permanent basis. It cannot allocate substantial resources to records on loan as these may be removed from its care at any time. Subsequently, the care of records acquired permanently by the archive through transfer, gift, bequest or purchase will be given priority over the care of those records deposited on a temporary/loan basis.

All archive records offered to THLHLA which fulfil the acquisition requirements (2.7) and do not fall within the list of those we actively cannot acquire (3.6) will be considered.

While we appreciate every offer of a deposit of records to the archives we regret that we cannot accept unsolicited material received by post or in person, consequently, such material will be refused or returned. Those interested in depositing archive records with THLHLA should contact us with information about the potential deposit (e.g. description, extent, dates, format and condition). This will sometimes be followed up with a meeting in person, depending on the nature, size and complexity of the particular records being offered to us.

Once it has been agreed that the offered material will be accepted, a deposit agreement will be completed and signed by the depositor and the archivist handling the deposit and appropriate arrangements made for the transfer of the records.

**Purchase:** We will consider the purchase of relevant archive records under certain circumstances. This will be ascertained at the time the records are offered for sale, according to the value it is considered that they will add to the collections if acquired. The value will be determined by considering the nature of the records in conjunction with how they compliment other archives already held by us and/or how they help fill the gaps in the archive collections. Purchases will also depend on other budgetary needs at the time and the availability of funds to acquire such material.

#### **4.4 Records which will not be acquired for the archives**

- Archival records which THLHLA is not authorised to collect by law, for instance, Anglican parish registers. The reason for this is that under the terms of the Parochial Registers and Records Measure (1978), Church of England archives have to be deposited with the Diocesan Record Office, which is London Metropolitan Archives.
- Records which, according to established usage and the collection policies of other repositories, are more appropriately deposited elsewhere.
- Records which are offered by persons who have no legal right to donate, deposit or sell them.
- Unique moving image records created in specific formats. Although THLHLA welcomes the deposit of relevant unique moving image and sound material into its archives, we are unable to accommodate donations of film records created on certain formats (such as nitrate and acetate) as these require specialist care, conservation and treatment.
- THLHLA reserves the right to refuse archival records which its staff judge to be unsuitable for permanent preservation, which are still in current use or which contain a high level of personal data or sensitive information which may affect their access conditions. The terms and conditions of donation/deposit are stated in a separate document, copies of which are given to donors/depositors.
- If THLHLA is offered a small number of items for its archives which have become separated from a larger collection of records already deposited elsewhere, we may recommend that such records should be united with the larger deposit. This would be done for the convenience of users and as a matter of professional courtesy. The wishes of the depositor will, however, be the decisive factor.



## **5 Other collections**

### **5.1 Museum objects**

A collection of approximately 700 'museum objects' has been amassed, mainly reactively over the last century, with people donating items to former borough museums (long since closed but legacy objects passed on) and THLHLA in the absence of a borough museum. It is a typical social history collection and includes ceramics, pottery, medals, signage from demolished buildings, and architectural models.

There has never been a museum curator employed within the service, and there is no professional facility or support to manage this collection properly. As a result no further museum objects will be collected unless there is an exceptional reason to do so. This will be at the borough archivist's discretion.

In 2010 a professionally qualified museum curator volunteering for THLHLA catalogued, photographed and repackaged a large proportion of the objects. These do not currently appear on the service's online catalogue pending the de-accessioning of part of the collection, but can be produced in the reading room on request for visitors.

Deaccessioning of this collection is set to take place [when] with a 150 items recommended for disposal due to their not having a relevance to Tower Hamlets.

### **5.2 Paintings, prints and drawings**

A former collection of approximately 400 framed pictures was in 2015 catalogued onto Excel by an art consultant, based on an existing card catalogue. As part of the cataloguing retroconversion, recommendations were made for disposal (based on a picture's subject matter being irrelevant to Tower Hamlets) and items have been de-framed where desirable or necessary.

In addition, there are many more unframed prints, paintings and drawing currently held in oversize drawers Many smaller ones have been included in the main image collection (see 2.1.5 above) but oversize ones are currently uncatalogued. This is planned to take place in a Phase 2 of the paintings cataloguing project

## **6 Collection Development**

## **6.1 Library and Archives Collections Development**

**6.1.1** THLHLA aims to ensure that its library and archive collections represent, as fully as possible, the past and present activities of all communities within its collecting area. To achieve this it seeks to address the existing weaknesses of its collections while continuing to build on their many strengths.

### **6.1.2 How gaps in collections will be identified**

THLHLA will identify aspects of the borough's history which are not sufficiently represented in its collections, as well as areas. It will do this by:

- Increasing and improving the information held about its existing collections, ie by cataloguing
- Analysing information in CALM
- Consulting with key stakeholders: our customers; people with expert historical knowledge; and depositors.
- Reviewing its Collections Development Plan annually.

### **6.1.3 What are the gaps?**

There are some significant gaps in the collections held by THLHLA, so it is particularly desirable to acquire library and archive materials from:

- Tower Hamlets Council itself (as identified in retention schedules).
- Individuals and families, particularly material from the 20th century.
- Non-Christian places of worship and Christian places of worship of recent foundation.
- All business sectors, but especially local and smaller businesses, including retail professions, and professions such as architects, dentists, and opticians.
- Voluntary organisations, charities and local pressure groups.
- Trade unions and employers and business organisations.
- Politicians and political parties.
- Specific community groups e.g. LGBT, Asian, Black and mixed minority ethnic, Eastern European, Irish, and disabled people.

- Societies and clubs.
- Sports clubs and sporting organisations.
- Arts organisations; and artists who have taken Tower Hamlets as a key inspiration or subject matter.

#### **6.1.4 Making collections more representative**

A five year **Collections Development Plan** outlines how these gaps will be addressed in the medium term. The THLHLA annual team plan includes specific schemes for acquiring material based on a proactive work to be undertaken that year to address a particular gap, eg coinciding with a funded project or particular community partnership.

To improve the chances of such acquisitions being made, THLHLA will:

- Promote the idea of depositing material to relevant individuals and organisations: online, including the use of social media channels; by attending appropriate events; using leaflets and posters and through direct contact with relevant organisations and individuals to discuss the benefits of depositing material.
- Monitor auction catalogues, local and specialist publishers' websites, Amazon Marketplace and Ebay.
- Work closely with the Council's Information Governance Group to ensure records selected for permanent preservation find their way to THLHLA in a timely manner.
- Develop partnerships with local community groups to collaborate on heritage projects together. One of the objectives of such projects would include eventual deposit or digitisation of material to be added to the THLHLA collections.

## **7 Deaccessioning and disposal**

**7.1** While there is a presumption that material accessioned into the collections will be retained permanently, sometimes material will subsequently be deemed to fall outside of the collecting area or to be not sufficiently significant to be preserved permanently.

**7.2** All library and archival material in the collection will be reviewed on a reactive basis to ensure that the collection being maintained is still in line with the current policy. Proactive reviews of the archive collections will be undertaken if the legal basis for retaining certain archives for a particular duration is known to be changing. Proactive reviews of

library and archive collections may also be undertaken during any physical re-arrangement of collection storage areas.

- 7.3** Material held which has previously been accepted and accessioned but not yet catalogued will be reviewed periodically to ascertain its suitability to remain as part of the collections.
- 7.4** Deaccessioning of the library and archive collections will take place only on the basis of non-compliance with this policy (section 2.7 in particular). This final decision on what constitutes compliance or non-compliance rests with the borough archivist and will not be subject to political influence.
- 7.5** Where the records to be deaccessioned are better placed with another collecting institution, or for another reason need to be transferred or returned to their owner, THLHLA staff will liaise with the relevant institutions and make appropriate arrangements for the records to be safely and securely removed from THLHLA and transferred accordingly.
- 7.6** Accession records will not be deleted from the catalogue when the deaccessioned material has been removed. The accession record will be updated to reflect the fact that the material has been deaccessioned so there is an accurate record of the material taken in and out of the archives and library collections over time.

## **8 POLICY APPROVAL AND COMMUNICATION**

- 8.1** This Collection Development Policy will be approved by Shazia Hussain, Divisional Director, Customer Services.
- 8.2** The policy will be reviewed no later than five years after the date of approval.