



Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

Operational Policy for Collections Information

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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.

2. Policy Statement

This Collection Information Policy explains the information that is created during the processes of acquiring, accessioning, cataloguing and preserving collections at Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives, and the standards and processes followed. It has been produced to aid the efficient management of the collections for the benefit of the institution, depositors and users. As its name infers, Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives (THLHLA) collects both library and archival materials, and therefore this policy covers both.

3. Background

3.1 *Archives*

Tower Hamlets Local History Library (which became known as Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives in the 1980s) was established in 1965 at the time of the creation of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The collection was formed by combining the three local collections which had held by the public library services of the three former metropolitan boroughs of Bethnal Green, Poplar and Stepney. Each of these collections contained archive or manuscript as well as library material.

Tower Hamlets Local History Library did not appoint a qualified archivist until 1986 and prior to this no systematic accession records were kept, though it has been possible to establish provenance of some archive material from this time.

Until 1986 cataloguing of archive material was as arranged according to a number of manuscript "series":

- Bow
- Bromley
- Poplar
- Stepney
- Bethnal Green
- Deeds

Loose papers were very often distributed according to their subject in the Library's cuttings files. Similarly, archival maps were placed in the Library's map collection and photographs from archive collections were withdrawn from their context and placed in a general Image collection.

The archivist in 1986 introduced accession numbers and accession records which were used for cataloguing purposes also. In the 1990s a subsequent archivist introduced a hierarchical classification scheme which is still in use today based on the following management groups:

- Business records
- Records of Places of Worship
- Records of Institutions
- Local authority records
- Records of societies and associations
- Personal papers
- Oral History records (2012)
- Moving Image records (2013)

The provision of access to the archives continued to be by typed lists and card indexes.

In 1999 CALM cataloguing software was procured and all new cataloguing was undertaken using this. A programme of retro-conversion of manual finding aids was begun and this was greatly expedited by the service taking advantage of New Opportunities Fund/Access to Archives projects. An upgrade to the externally-hosted CALM service in 2015 enabled a publicly accessible digital version of the catalogue to be put online for the first time.

3.2 Local History Library

Following the establishment of the Archives in the late 1980s, as well as printed/published material, the Local History Library continued to include photographs, pictures, maps, films, sound recordings and museum objects. Access to these was provided by means of various card catalogues and indexes. Books and pamphlets, photographs and cuttings and ephemera are catalogued using a bespoke classification scheme, created in the 1960s, based on the Dewey Decimal system. As with the archive collections, cataloguing of library materials onto a database commenced in 1999 after the procurement of CALM cataloguing software, with each type of collection having a different 'repository' within CALM and its own set of fields compliant with the appropriate cataloguing standard. With the exception of the library's map, image and cuttings collections, since 2015 most of its holdings have been made searchable online through the same interface as the archives.

4. Accessioning

4.1 Point of deposit

For material taken by gift or long-term loan into the Archive Collection, Image Collection, Museum Collection and (in occasional circumstances) Library Collection, a Deposit Agreement form is completed

Two types of deposit agreement forms are used, of which one is more simple and used for small deposits of photographs or ephemera. Information captured in the agreement forms includes Deposit type (gift/loan); depositor's name and address, legitimacy to deposit records. For loans, the form records the length of loan, statements re terms and conditions, and copyright.

If the material is acquired the result of an internal transfer from a Council department, an Internal Transfer Form is used instead.

4.2 Depositor register

Details of each depositor are added to a register of depositors. This is the 'Depositors' module within the CALM software, one of its inter-linked databases.

4.3 Accessions register

Each accession is assigned an accession number and details are entered in 'Accessions' module of CALM. Cross-references are made to the 'Depositors' register (see 4.2).

The information recorded includes the following:

- Date of receipt of accession
- Name and contact details of depositor /donor

- Accession number, title and summary description of deposit
- Extent of deposit
- Accession category (Gift, Loan, Purchase, Transfer etc.)
- Any access restrictions
- Any copyright restrictions
- Any administrative and custodial history
- Any material in a fragile condition
- Location of accession

5. Cataloguing

5.1 *Archives*

- Archives are catalogued using the mandatory elements of International Council on Archives, General International Standard of Archival Description [ISAD(G)].
- Cataloguing is currently undertaken (for both Library and Archive collections) using the 'Cataloguing' module of CALM software.
- Archives are catalogued to file (and sometimes item) level.
- Small deposits (of under one box) are generally catalogued soon after receipt by core staff. External funding is also sought to support cataloguing work.
- Uncatalogued accessions are entered onto a Cataloguing Backlog Assessment spreadsheet in which is recorded the extent, priority, and complexity factor of each accession. By this means accessions can be identified which might be suitable for volunteer input or which might meet the criteria of specific funding streams.

5.2 *Local History Library materials*

All Local History Library materials, including the main image collection, are classified using a bespoke system based on Dewey Decimal Classification, which has been in place for some decades and was updated in 2013. The books, pamphlets and periodicals catalogued on CALM are done so in accordance with the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, Second Edition (AACR2).

6. Indexing

There are a number of historic card indexes which are gradually superseded by the use of CALM. Subject index terms (using a locally adapted version of the UNESCO Thesaurus) are added to all library records. The use of subject index term in entries for archives has been more arbitrary. The National Council on Archives, Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names (NCA rules) are used for the purposes of personal name indexing. No place name indexing is currently attempted.

7. Finding aid accessibility

Catalogues are published online at www.THcatalogue.org.uk. Some of these catalogues are also available via the National Archives *Discovery* search engine. Details of all new accessions are also reported annually to the National Archives.

8. Restrictions and closure periods

Collections include records subject to certain access restrictions or periods during which the records are closed. These may be determined by Data Protection legislation, advice and guidance from The National Archives and the Information Commissioner's Office or imposed by the depositor. Tower Hamlets Council's Governance officers provide guidance and advice in this area.

THLHLA reviews existing catalogued collections, on an ad hoc basis, to ensure that sensitive or personal information is not released. Accession and catalogue entries include information regarding any restrictions on access. Customers are made aware of any restrictions and their rationale.

9 Location and Movement Control including loans

THLHLA aims to maintain up-to-date information on the locations of all the collections in its care. The primary method is via the locations database module of CALM. Additional location guides are also used. A list of missing or mislaid documents is maintained in the Collections Management folder of the shared drive.

Depositors or donors wishing to withdraw their own archive material temporarily must complete and countersign a form prepared and signed by staff. Similar documentation is used for the loan of material to other institutions for exhibition or other purposes.

Movement of archival material for use in the reading room or for internal displays or events is recorded on duplicated slips which ensure all such material is returned to its correct location. Slips are retained for a period of three years. Information from the slips is processed to provide usage of the archives to fonds level.

10. Disposals and Withdrawals

On deposit, THLHLA captures depositors'/donors' permissions to destroy or transfer to another repository any material that we are unable to keep. For any archive accession disposed of by withdrawal, transfer or destruction a note is made in the accession record to that effect, but the Accession record is retained.

11. Policy Approval and Communication

The suite of policies will be approved by Shazia Hussain, Divisional Director, Customer Services.

The policy will be reviewed no later than 5 years after the date of approval.

Once approved, policies will be published on our website: www.ideastore.co.uk