



# Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

## Operational Policy for Collections Management

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**Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives**

# Collections Management Policy

## 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. Purpose of the policy

2.1 The purpose of this policy, and the suite of related collections policies, is to define why and how Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives acquires, preserves, develops and facilitates access to the archive, library and other collections in its care.

2.2 It is also to act as a guide for staff and to inform members of the public, council staff and other stakeholders of the policy by which Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives (THLHLA) collects and retains material for its archive and local history library.

2.3 The policy is underpinned by the British Standards Institution Code of practice for cultural collections management PAS 197:2009, the requirements of the Archive Service Accreditation Standard, 2013, and the current government policies *Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2009), and *Libraries Deliver: Ambition* (2016).

2.4 This policy and the suite of related policies replace the following service policies:

- Tower Hamlets Archives Service Collection Policy (April 1997; revised 2002).

## 3. Statutory and legal basis for Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives

3.1 Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives is not a statutory service but is the sole provider of archive services to Tower Hamlets Council under sections 224 and 226(5) of the Local Government Act 1972. This requires councils to make proper arrangements for any documents which belong to them, or are in their custody, and applies to records which are still in active use, as well as to those which are now inactive.

3.2 Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives exercises the council's powers in respect of historical, private and business records under the terms of the Local Government (Records) Act, 1962, as amended by the Local Government Act 1985. This empowers authorities to incur expenditure on facilities for the preservation, promotion of use, and public access to records of general or local interest, acquired by purchase, gift or loan.

3.3 In terms of the Library collections within its care, THLHLA operates under the terms of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964). This stipulates that it is "the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service" with access to

materials “sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children”.

3.4 THLHLA only collects records which it is authorised to collect by law. Consequently it does not collect Anglican parish records, manorial records or public records under the terms of the Public Records Acts, 1958-1957.

#### 4. Scope of the collections

4.1 The geographical area served by THLHLA is the present administrative area of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. However the collections include material relating to areas outside this due to changes in borough boundaries over time and the principle of keeping discreet collections intact. In terms of the Local History Library, material of a more regional nature is stocked as long it includes significant information about Tower Hamlets.

4.2 **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 on an individual level, such a biographies and personal memories of people living within the borough as well as the activities of groups, businesses, etc. Particular attention is focused on improving the diversity of our collections to reflect the high level of diversity within Tower Hamlets including the Bengali, Jewish, Somali, Chinese, and other immigrant communities as well as and LGBT communities.

4.3 **Formats:** THLHLA is a joint archive and library service and collects material regardless of format.

4.4 **Archives.** 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 places of worship and oral history records.

4.5 **Library** materials are managed according to the following collections:

- Books and pamphlets
- Periodicals
- Ephemera and press cuttings
- Maps
- Images (primarily photographs)
- Audio visual material

4.6 **Museum objects:** THLHLA holds around 700 museum pieces, many of which were acquired prior to the establishment of Tower Hamlets by the Poplar and Stepney boroughs, both of which had museums. There is not currently a local museum for Tower Hamlets (though there are a number of specialist museums within the borough). THLHLA does not seek to extend this collection but recognises that in some instances it should accept items to prevent the loss of interesting pieces of local history.

4.7 **Artworks:** THLHLA holds a collection of around paintings, many of which are framed local views. A large proportion were collected in the 1970s and 80s when a special fund was

set up for this purpose. Additions to this collection are now rare but are sometimes made if there is a strong compliance with the Collection Development Policy. Many small unframed “works of art” currently form part of the Image Collection (see 4.5 above) such as engravings or illustrations.

**4.8 Oversize images:** There is a substantial collection of oversized images held in wooden drawers whose contents are mixed. They include old exhibition panels, unframed drawings or illustrations, or other large flat items.

**4.9 Relationships within other closely related collecting institutions:** A number of other institutions are currently collecting (or have previously collected) archival records relating to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The most significant of these are the following:

- London Metropolitan Archives (<http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk>)
- Museum of London Docklands (<http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk>)
- Queen Mary, University of London (<http://www.library.qmul.ac.uk>)
- Royal London Hospital (<http://www.bartsandthelondon.nhs.uk>)
- Bishopsgate Institute (<http://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/>)

THLHLA adopts a policy of co-operation with such institutions, particularly concerning the exchange of information and copies of relevant archive lists.

## **5. Management of the Collections**

5.1 Archive collections are managed in accordance with its own approved policies, within The National Archives framework of standards and best practice guidance, and following the International Council on Archives Code of Ethics as expressed through the Code of Conduct of the Archive and Records Association. Similarly the Library collections are managed according to the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals’ Ethical Principles and Code of Professional Practice for Library and Information Professionals.

5.2 THLHLA selects and acquires unique and irreplaceable archive material of enduring historical significance to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in accordance with its Collections Development Policy and plans.

5.3 THLHLA accepts transfers of material from Tower Hamlets Council departments in accordance with approved retention schedules or, if necessary, more proactively where material is at risk of loss.

5.4 THLHLA offers facilities for organisations and individuals to loan or donate archive collections for safekeeping and for the benefit of research. THLHLA’s Collections Development Plan aims to ensure that our archive collections continue to reflect the community it serves.

5.5 THLHLA catalogues and records and provides information about the archive collections in accordance with its Collections Information Policy and plans. Cataloguing is carried out by trained and qualified staff, under the direction of the Heritage Manager. THLHLA documents its collections in accordance with appropriate professional standards and make catalogues available online for archive collections following the International

Council on Archives General International Standard of Archival Description [ISAD(G)]. Library material is catalogued according to the standards established by the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, Second Edition (AACR2). Currently, library, archive and museum collections are catalogued using *CALM* collections management software. More detail on this can be found in the Information Policy.

5.6 THLHLA preserves, cares for and commissions conservation work on the collections in accordance with our Preservation Policy. It follows the guidance in PD5454:2012, Guide for the storage and exhibition of archival materials and the Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections PAS198:2012.

5.7 While THLHLA has no conservators on its staff, conservation work is contracted out to local agencies with trained and qualified staff.

5.8 THLHLA provides access to the collections in accordance with its Access Policy and Standards and with respect to the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998, Environmental Information Regulations and current and relevant Copyright legislation. THLHLA provides direct public access, free of charge, in its Reading Room which is staffed to assist visitors to find the information they need and to interpret the collections. THLHLA requires visitors to register in order to tighten security.

5.9 THLHLA aims to meet The National Council on Archives PSQG Access Standard 2006 and recognises its statutory duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination of all kinds and is committed to promoting equality of opportunity in all aspects of the service.

5.10 THLHLA recognises the value of displaying material from its collections as well as the risks of exhibiting it. It aims to fulfil the requirements of PD 5454:2012 Guide for the storage and exhibition of archival materials. Any individual or organisation seeking to exhibit material from THLHLA's collections must comply with our terms and conditions for loan and sign the Exhibition Loan Agreement.

## **6. People and Training**

6.1 The full complement of staff at THLHLA since 2010 has been six, including the Heritage Manager. The operating standard is for there to always be two members of staff on duty in the reading room during opening hours, assisting users and fetching items for their consultation. The service also ensures that everyone who works onsite is given basic handling instructions and an overview of how collections are managed (appropriate to the task/s they are engaged in). All staff members working with collections will have a professional qualification in Archives & Records Management or Librarianship, or are trained on the job and via appropriate external trainers.

6.2 THLHLA manages the health, safety and wellbeing of all staff and volunteers working with the collections, in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) Regulations 2002 and we provide, as far as is reasonably practicable, a safe environment for visitors to the building.

## **7. Monitoring and Review**

7.1 The strategic aims for managing THLHLA's collections are reflected in the service's annual Team Plan.

7.2 Decisions regarding any changes or developments in collection management are made in regular meetings of the Collections Management team which are held at least quarterly.

## **8. Policy Approval and Communication**

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

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

8.3 Once approved, policies will be published on our website: [www.ideastore.co.uk](http://www.ideastore.co.uk)