



Back in Business!

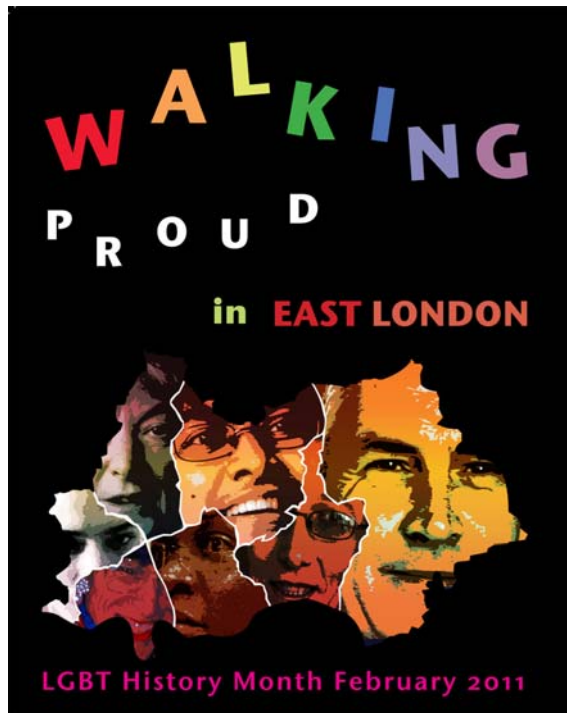
After a four month temporary closure for building works, we are open to the public again. We now benefit from a new disabled access ramp and improved front entrance, fully compliant fire compartmentation, a clean and clutter-free reading room and a refreshed and reinvigorated entrance hall fit for holding exhibitions.

The library will be formally reopened by the Mayor of Tower Hamlets, Lutfur Rahman, on February 14th. Thank you to all our users for their patience during our closure; we look forward to welcoming you back. Meanwhile, the fundraising for future phases of further building works gathers pace...



Forthcoming exhibitions

Kicking off our exhibition programme in the new entrance hall, and forming part of the borough's LGBT History Month programme, is ***Walking Proud in East London***, an exhibition of oral



histories gathered as part of a year-long project run by Isle of Dogs-based community group River Cultures. Fifty one lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender East Londoners were interviewed about their experiences as

residents of Tower Hamlets and the surrounding areas, and the exhibition features a panel display and a DVD showing selections from their testimonies. *Walking Proud in East London* is on from February 15th – 24th during opening hours (these have changed – please see following page).

The Old Jewish East End: Journey through a Vanished Shtetl



is an exhibition curated by the Jewish East End Celebration Society. Running from March 1st until April 16th, the previously unseen collection of photographs and rare archives illustrates the experiences of Jews in Tower Hamlets over one hundred years ago.

Preservation Matters...

Heritage Assistant, Anna Haward, recently paid a visit to the British Library to explore Preservation Basics. She joined delegates from a broad variety of backgrounds, such as the V & A, the Royal Botanical Society and the National Theatre Archives.

The British Library's official definition of preservation goes a bit like this: "All managerial, technical and financial considerations applied to retard deterioration and extend the useful life of (collection) materials to ensure their continued availability". However, Caroline Peach, the Head of the Preservation Advisory Centre took pity on the delegates and simplified the definition to "no one thing – instead many different factors". Factors such as temperature, light, physical material and even wildlife (albeit microscopic) should all be taken into account when seeking to ensure collections remain in a usable condition for public access.

Anna felt that the course was a useful window into the world of preservation. Should readers have any related enquiries, the British Library Preservation Advisory Centre offer print and web-based information and an email, telephone and letter enquiry service. www.bl.uk/blpac

Picture of the month: The (future) King's speech



This picture shows, HRH The Duke of York (later King George VI) at the opening of York Hall (named after him) in Bethnal Green in November 1929. The new Public Baths and Washhouses in Old Ford Road cost about £125,000 and were among the best-equipped and most up-to-date in the country. The Duke concluded his speech by saying "We shall always retain very happy memories of our visit here today. We hope we may on some future occasion be able to come here and see you again". His subsequent visits to the East End as King George VI were as morale-boosting exercises during World War II. In the centre of the picture is the Mayor of Bethnal Green, Councillor Wesley Clark Chandler J.P., and to his left the Duchess of York, later Queen Elizabeth. The Duke and Duchess are currently being portrayed by Colin Firth and Helena Bonham Carter in a film about the king's struggle with a speech impediment.

Schools round-up

In November pupils at Sir William Burrough Primary School in Limehouse enjoyed a hands-on session using maps, photographs and other documents, led by the Borough Archivist, to find out about the effects of the Blitz in the immediate neighbourhood of their school. Also in November the Archivist visited Langdon Park School where the entire Year 7 were assembled to hear him talk about the history of Poplar.

Register Office

Like us, the staff at Tower Hamlets Register Office deal with a large volume of family history enquiries. As part of the training of staff there, in November, Borough Archivist Malcolm Barr-Hamilton gave an illustrated talk on the collections of Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives focussing on resources for family history.

NEW OPENING HOURS

Our opening hours have changed following the reopening and the retirement and relocation of some staff. Until further notice our new opening hours are:

Monday: **Closed**
Tuesday: 10 - 5
Wednesday: 9 - 5
Thursday: 9 - 8
Friday: **Closed**
Saturday: 9 - 5
(fortnightly)
Sunday: **Closed**

We will be open on Saturday 19th February and alternate Saturdays thereafter, ie:

March: 5th, 19th
April: 2nd, 16th, 30th
May: 14th, 28th
June: 11th, 25th
and so on.

“Several decades’ worth of grime was removed”

Decluttering!

The thought of clearing out the Reading Room completely was rather a daunting one. The room has housed the Local History Library since about 1965. The last time any major alteration had taken place was in 1986, when the archive strongroom directly underneath it had been set up and archive material previously housed there had been moved out. The room not only acted as the reading room but also housed nearly all the library collections and had acted as the office for the service, with cupboards of stationery and miscellaneous equipment. Very little, if anything offered had been turned away over the years and the room was incredibly overcrowded with boxes and framed pictures vying for any bit of space. Space for readers was also at a premium with competition for seats at busy times.

We decided to take the opportunity while the building was closed for building work to empty out completely the Reading Room, clean it and completely re-arrange it, with a view to providing more space for users, a safer environment for staff



(nothing to be stored higher than could be reached with a kick-stool) and the collections, and have most of the book stock on open access. We would also repackage the pamphlet and cuttings collections (over 400 boxes of each) and transfer the map collection from vertical plan

cabinets into brand-new, preservation-quality horizontal plan chests.



A detailed plan of action was prepared. Work began prior to closure as staff tackled various cupboards and nooks and crannies, the contents of which were not always well documented. Part of the old Lending Library was sectioned off and the shelving in there adapted to take our material. Once we were closed to the public in October we began to move the book stock out, carefully maintaining the various sequences. The shelving thus freed up was then moved into the old Lending Library and boxes of pamphlets, cuttings and photographs moved across. Progress at first seemed rapid but the emptying of the room completely seemed to drag on interminably. Just before Christmas it was finally emptied and cleaners were brought in to give the room a thorough “deep clean”. Several decades’ worth of grime was removed and the floor polished. Work began in earnest on repacking the cuttings in acid-free folders and new boxes and the pamphlets into polyester sleeves and new boxes. New shelving was put up in the Reading Room and the new plan chests moved in and we began moving the collections back in. As pressure mounted with the reopening date looming, we were fortunate to obtain the services of two members of Idea Store staff for a week to assist us. When we reopened on 1st February we were very pleased with our new-look spacious Reading Room, as have been our customers.

Campaign! Make an Impact!

British Library course uses past campaigns to inspire activism in today's children

A British Library course run recently for schools, museums and archives sought to mobilise the imaginations of young people through learning about historical campaigns.

The course provided teachers and outreach workers with a three-step teaching framework. Firstly, young people explore an historic campaign, such as the Match Women's strike of 1888 with Annie Besant. Contemporary links and comparisons are encouraged from the outset. Museum and archive workers, such as the Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, might be involved primarily at this point, to provide information and expert guidance as a springboard to the following stages. Secondly, young people work at campaigning strategies. What sorts of strategies were used in past campaigns? Were they effective? How do these strategies stand up in our current climate? Thirdly, in teams they mount a real campaign. This is an opportunity for young people to decide on a topic that really matters to them, such as Racism or Bullying and to get actively involved with campaigning tactics such as boycotting, speechmaking, producing campaign materials such as badges and leaflets for distribution and debating.

I believe the true value in this course lies in teaching young people at an early age that getting involved matters. In a country where political engagement has been on the wane for years, giving young people these learning tools is now more important than ever.

Anna Haward, Heritage Assistant

Whitechapel Gallery heritage traineeships

Readers may be interested in six new paid traineeships in heritage skills currently being offered at the Whitechapel Gallery. The closing date is 4th March 2011 and two open days will be held at the end of February to introduce the placements to those interested.

See <http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/about-us/job-vacancies> for more information.

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Library Learning Information