



The walking tour of Poplar pauses in Robin Hood Gardens.

## 14th Floor: the history of social housing in Tower Hamlets

As part of the Mayor's Story of London festival, from August to October 2010 we ran a small but ambitious project celebrating the history of borough's social housing. The project was funded by a grant of just under £10,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund and was delivered in partnership with local charity Bow Arts Trust.

Shane Davey, a film-maker from Poplar, was recruited to make a short film telling the story of the development of social housing, from slum clearances to the latest innovations of housing associations, based on interviews with local residents, archivists, artists, architects and housing officers past and present. Shane found he had such a wealth of material that the documentary ended up being over an hour long – making it a very intensive project! The film had its premiere at Rochelle School in Bethnal Green, now a gallery space but formerly the school which served the Old Nichol slum and later London's first council estate, the Boundary.

inspired by the borough's housing were produced and given away to all who attended the events, which also included a panel debate on social housing led by Cllr Marc Francis and two walking tours of historically significant public housing in Poplar and Bethnal Green.

We were thrilled that all four events were fully booked if not oversubscribed, demonstrating a clear audience for heritage projects of this kind. We were particularly grateful and pleased to work with so many enthusiastic local volunteers who contributed to every stage of the project, from steering group meetings and film-making to developing guided walks and staffing events. Thank you to all those who helped out on this project – we couldn't have done it without you!

We are intending to make DVDs of the film available, and more public screenings will be held in the new year. Please sign up to our mailing list to be kept updated.

Postcard sets featuring images from our collections and those of local artists

## Mayor's visit

The new Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets, Lutfur Rahman, paid us a visit on 4th November as part of a tour of his priority projects in the borough. Stan Newens, Chair of Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archive (Bancroft Road) Steering Group and Tamsin Bookey, Heritage Manager, showed the Mayor around the building and the health & safety works currently under way.

## Building works update

Regular users should be aware that we are currently closed to the public to facilitate essential health & safety building works including a new fire alarm and emergency lighting, new disabled WC and upgrades to the fire escapes. These Phase 1 building works are now well-advanced with all the internal works likely to be complete in December.

Unfortunately a long delay in receiving Planning approval for the Portland stone to be used on the new front step and access ramp has meant that the external works will overrun, leading to our service closure being extended until mid-January.

We are taking advantage of this opportunity to redecorate the entrance hall and improve the front-of-house space so that it is fit for a full programme of local history exhibitions that will be open to the general public from 2011. In addition, collections are being relocated within the building to make more room for readers in the search room.

## Heritage skills traineeship: recruitment update

As previously reported, we will be hosting two successive annual traineeships in heritage skills. This national programme providing specialist on-the-job training in local authority archive services is funded by a grant from Heritage Lottery Fund under their Skills For The Future programme, and is co-ordinated by The National Archives. We are focussing on engagement with the local Bangladeshi community in partnership with Swadhinata Trust, and are looking to appoint a trainee with knowledge of Bengali culture and the experiences of Bangladeshis in Britain. The postholder appointed in 2011, the 40th anniversary of Bangladeshi independence, will be trained in the running of the local history library & archive service and will work on outreach projects with the local Bangladeshi community, helping the service to acquire relevant new collections. We are one of 13 placement hosts under this scheme nationally, and recruitment for all opens in December. A bursary of £14,500 for the annual traineeship is payable. Keep an eye on [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/openingup](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/openingup) to find out more.

The Mayor indicated his support for the building's redevelopment as a heritage centre and was pleased with the progress so far. He even suggested a Cabinet meeting should be held in the currently vacant former lending library! We hope to welcome the Mayor back to open our first exhibition early in the new year.



Collections on the move!

## SELL-OUT LOCAL HISTORY WALKS

Once again the three summer local history walks (this year along the East India Dock Road and around Bow and Wapping) were sell outs. If you would like to receive details of next year's walks send your details to us.

## SCHOOL VISIT

Year 5 and 6 classes at Clara Grant Primary School were fascinated by the maps, pictures and documents relating to the history of the Bow Common area when the Archivist visited in September.

## Museum collection

Volunteer Museum Objects Curator, Christian Morris, writes:

We're taking advantage of the current closure to review the museum object collection held here at Bancroft Library. The Library over the years has acquired over 800 museum objects offering a unique viewpoint of the heritage of the borough. Unfortunately the collection has been largely inaccessible over recent years and this is something we are working to resolve. The current project has already aroused great interest from library and archive staff themselves as the items are being brought out to see the light of day.

The collection ranges from objects such as the Bible used for swearing in troops from Stepney during the First World War, to 4th century Roman tiles found on Old Ford Road. Some of the objects come with more uncertain histories such as an en-



Christian at work on the museum collection.

velope containing hair claimed to be that of George Bernard Shaw or a piece of rock suggested to have once been part of Tower Bridge.

The current project is to investigate what we have in the collection and make sure the items will have the best care in the future. By the end of this project we will offer a collection which is packaged and stored appropriately, more accessible to the public and which fulfils its role of complementing the local history library and archive collections.

## Black History in the Archives

The Local History Library's first ever Black History Month event was held on October 13th with a varied evening of very interesting talks from four distinguished speakers. Dr Hakim Adi's lecture about communists and black workers in East London raised the issue of the difficulty in researching radical subjects given their frequent absence from the traditional archival record. Dr Caroline Bressey's research in the archives of Barnardo's had uncovered pictorial evidence of local black children and young people, but finding out more about them as they got older proved elusive. Kelly Foster spoke about a collection of research papers held at the Black Cultural Archives which provide evidence of the black presence in the

area at the western end of Cable Street during the pre-war period. The collection was deposited by sociologist Michael Banton having informed his 1955 book *The Coloured Quarter*. Lastly, Judith Garfield introduced the film made last year by Eastside Community Heritage about Kamal Chunchie, who set up the first Coloured Men's Institute in nearby Canning Town in 1926.

The event was well-attended and all the staff, including recently retired Chris Lloyd, found they learned something new! If you couldn't make it, you can now listen to three of the talks online via the Idea Store website:

[http://www.ideastore.co.uk/en/articles/local\\_history\\_podcasts](http://www.ideastore.co.uk/en/articles/local_history_podcasts)

## STAFF CHANGES

Following on from the retirement of Chris Lloyd, as reported in the last newsletter, there have been a number of other changes. Sally Jacobs who has been with us since 2006 as Assistant Local Studies Officer has moved to Idea Store Canary Wharf, where Carol Pryer, Acting Heritage Assistant has also moved. Joining us from the same Idea Store is Anna Haward as our first permanent Heritage Assistant. Acting Assistant Local Studies Officer, Razia Khatun, has become full-time for a temporary period. There are three vacancies left to fill which we hope to advertise in the new year.



New Heritage Assistant  
Anna Haward

## Picture of the month: Mile End Road showing the Peoples' Palace and St. Benet's church, c 1904.

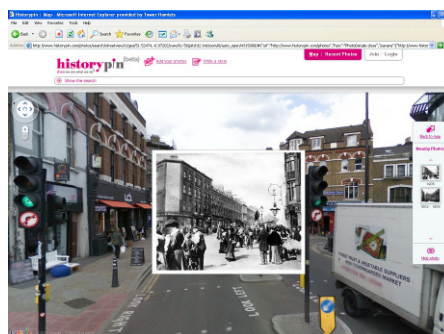


The only structure still standing from this postcard view, partially hidden by trees, is the clock tower of the People's Palace, now Queen Mary University of London. The rather grand middle-class housing known as St Helen's Terrace, dating from the late 1860s was demolished in the 1930s to make way for the new People's Palace. On the right is St Benet's church, built in 1871-2, to the designs of Ewan Christian in the 13th century style. The church was badly damaged by enemy action in August 1940. Deemed unnecessary under post-war reorganisation, it was demolished in 1950. The college chapel occupies part of its site.

### Now online - pictures on HistoryPin

The Local History Library and Archives has contributed pictures to the website historypin (<http://www.historypin.com/>).

Archive photographs are linked to the site they depict on a Google map, allowing them to be compared with Google Streetview images of the same location. Anyone can add their images and descriptions to the site, building up a rich resource navigable cartographically as well as through text searches.



### OPENING HOURS

The Local History Library & Archives is currently closed to the public for building works. We will re-open in January 2011. Call 020 7364 1290 or email [localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk) for more information.

### A TRIP TO THE SUBURBS

A packed audience of members of the Bexley Historical Society were surprised by the richness of the history of Tower Hamlets when the Archivist gave them a talk on the subject in October. Quite a number of the audience had East End roots.

## Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

Bancroft Library  
277 Bancroft Road  
London E1 4DQ

Tel: 020 7364 1290  
Fax: 020 7364 1292  
Email: [localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk)  
Web: [www.ideastore.co.uk](http://www.ideastore.co.uk)

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Library Learning Information