

Building project news



Regular users will be aware that the first phase of the renovation of the Bancroft Library building got under way last year. The 'masterplan' for the Grade 2 listed Victorian library

building will see it used fully for the archives and local history service with redeveloped spaces for exhibition and education.

The first phase of works, funded by a capital grant by the council of £255,000 in 2009 will bring about essential fire safety and disabled access improvements.

However, unforeseen delays in the processing of the planning and listed building applications have led to the estimated works start date being put back. We now expect works to start onsite in August with completion 6-8 weeks later.

Temporary closure and reduced service

As reported in February's newsletter, we will be closing the service temporarily during the building works which are now expected to begin in August. This is now the estimated date for the full service closure rather than May/June as previously advertised. We will take the opportunity of the disruption caused by the building works to rearrange and refresh the reading room, creating more space and better conditions for users and staff. The exact date of the closure will be advertised as soon as it is known. In order to make the necessary preparations for this project, we will be offering a reduced reading room service over the summer months.

From Monday 14 June until temporary service closure in August:

Monday:	CLOSED	Thursday:	9 - 5
Tuesday:	CLOSED	Friday:	9 - 5
Wednesday:	CLOSED	Saturday:	9 - 5
		Sunday:	CLOSED

Following building works the library will re-open at the end of September 2010.

Outside these hours we will offer a limited remote enquiry service via phone and email. We regret the inconvenience this reduction in service may cause to our users.

Photograph of the month

This photograph of what is now known simply as Alie Street was taken by Poplar photographer William Whiffin (1878-1957). It shows an intriguing mix of motorised and horse-drawn traffic. The left half of the picture is dominated by eighteenth-



Great Alie Street, Whitechapel, c. 1934

century buildings with shop fronts, destroyed by enemy action in the Second World War. Behind the lorry laden with timber, at the corner of Leman Street is the Eastern Dispensary built in 1858, now a public house. The Dispensary had been founded in 1782 to provide free medical and surgical relief to the poor. Beyond this building are silhouetted the chimneys of the former St George's German Lutheran School.

33,490 is the magic number

For some years when asked how many pictures there are in our image collection, we have said about 25,000. But in truth we did not really know. As a preliminary stage to capturing information about the images on our cataloguing database, each image had to be assigned a unique number. This onerous and painstaking task fell to Martin Goldfarb, our temporary assistant.

Martin went systematically through the collection, box by box, giving each item a unique number. Fitting it in with his many other jobs, it took him about a year to reach that *Eureka!* moment of discovering that we have 33,490 pictures!

Work by volunteers has now started on adding details of each image to our database. Details of over 3,000 images have now been added. Ultimately, this catalogue will be available online.



Number wizard Martin Goldfarb

'VOICES OF STEPNEY' BOOK LAUNCH

Dee Gordon's new book is based on interviews with people who lived in Stepney during the 1950s and 1960s. Published by The History Press, the book also uses illustrations from our collection and will be available for consultation here.

The book launch, where signed copies can be purchased, is being held at Idea Store Whitechapel on Saturday June 5th, 2.30pm – 4pm. Refreshments provided.

ST. HILDA'S EAST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

St Hilda's East Community Centre in Bethnal Green has been awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund grant to carry out an oral history project. So if you grew up on or nearby the Boundary Estate or have used St Hilda's East Community Centre over the years, they would like to hear from you. Contact Anna on 020 7739 8066 or anna@sthildas.org.uk

ISLAND HISTORY TRUST OPEN WEEKEND

Drop in over the Bank Holiday Weekend, May 29th - 31st. Browse the extensive collection of photographs depicting the island and its residents during the twentieth century.

Island History Trust
Docklands Settlement
197 East Ferry Rd E14
DLR: Mudchute
www.islandhistory.org.uk

The reader's view

Third in our series of interviews with visitors to the reading room, Razia Khatun interviewed Patricia Sears from Devon.



Patricia Sears and Jill Jones exchange tales

What is the purpose of your visit today?

I'm visiting from Devon today to visit Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives especially to search the local newspaper collection for 1867 for information about my family history. My great-great grandfather from Stepney died from drowning and a coroner's inquest took place, so I'm hoping to find any information on the death or the inquest in the local newspapers. I also want to know more about what life might have been like in Tower Hamlets for my ancestors, so I've been looking at the collection of historic photographs of houses and streets.

The collection of Ordnance Survey maps has also been of interest. While consulting the maps, seeing the places where my ancestors lived and all the changes that have taken place over the decades, I've made a connection with another visitor here,

Jill Jones who has travelled from Canada. We've discovered that my great-great grandfather was born in 1886 at 29 Caroline Street, Stepney, and Jill's great-great grandfather resided at 32 Caroline Street in 1881.

What have you achieved from your visit today?

One of my objectives was to find new possible leads to explore my family history by identifying local schools, parishes and hospitals. From the historical maps I've discovered the location and name of a local school which is a new possible lead. It was great seeing some of the original archives. I've also enjoyed meeting Jill Jones and exchanging tales from our family histories.

What items from our collection has been most interesting and useful to you?

The collection of original local newspapers held on microfilm has been very useful. Studying our detailed maps I've been able to gain further insight to the lives my ancestors may have led, locating the streets they resided in, and where their local public house may have been.

Are you a regular visitor for LHLA? Would you use our resources again?

This is my first visit to Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives and I would certainly recommend it. If the family history trail brings me back here, I will be happy to visit again!

New addition

The Bethnal Green Tube Shelter Disaster of 1943: A Stairway to Heaven by Sean Dettman

Published this year by the East London History Society, Sean's book is a detailed account of the tragic accident which took place at Bethnal Green Underground Station. It includes plenty of first hand accounts from survivors.



On 3rd March 1943 people were descending the stairs into the tube shelter, after an air raid warning, when panic broke out after some anti-aircraft rockets were set off as a firing practice exercise in a nearby park. In the ensuing rush many people fell and were crushed to death. The news of the disaster was late arriving and played down by the government who subsequently promised an independent inquest.

However, the findings were withheld from the public. Sean's book explores possible reasons for government censorship and secrecy.

There has been plenty of media coverage about the event over the years. The Independent newspaper described it as Britain's worst civilian tragedy of the Second World War. A memorial service was held on 3rd March this year in Bethnal Green Library. To support the day a play reading about the event also took place in the library and Tower Hamlets LHLA staff took along a display of photographs and cuttings from our collection.

Although there is a plaque above the tube station entrance in memory of the 173 people who died, the Stairway to Heaven Memorial Trust are raising funds for a more substantial memorial to be erected in the adjacent park, Bethnal Green Gardens. It will be a scale model of 19 suspended bronzed steps. This will be very welcome memorial for survivors and relatives as well as being an excellent way of informing future generations about the disaster.

Visitors to the library are welcome to consult Sean Dettman's publication. Copies are being ordered for sale to the public. Other records we hold on the tube shelter disaster include articles, pamphlets, photographs, news cuttings and records of Bethnal Green Borough Council.

“Britain's worst civilian tragedy of the Second World War”

Collections News:

Family business papers deposited in Archives

The Chair of the Local History Library & Archives Steering Group, Stan Newens, has generously donated to the Local History Library and Archives, the records of the business run by his parents.

The haulage and removal business of A E Newens was started in about 1928, when Arthur Ernest Newens purchased a van to be driven by his wife's uncle, Walter Sheen, and operated from 31, Quilter Street, Bethnal Green, where he and his wife occupied the upper rooms. The business gradually expanded and both Arthur E Newens and his wife became fully involved in operating it. By 1934 they had six furniture vans, but were obliged to take one off the road by the Road and Rail Traffic Act of 1934. They obtained five 'A' licenses for the other vehicles - four 30 cwt Luton vans and one 2 ton Luton van (Bedford).

Month	Day	Description	Value
Jan	12	Molter Hire	3 10 -
Jan	19		1 15 -
Jan	26		1 15 -
Feb	2		3 10 -
Feb	16		1 15 -
Feb	23		1 15 -
Mar	2		1 15 -
Mar	10		1 15 -
Mar	16		1 15 -
Mar	23		1 15 -
Mar	31		3 -
Apr	21		3 10 -
Apr	27		1 15 -
May	11		1 15 -
May	18		1 15 -
May	25		1 15 -
June	1		1 15 -
June	8		1 15 -
June	14		1 15 -
June	22		1 15 -
June	29		1 15 -
July	6		1 15 -
July	13		1 15 -
July	20		1 15 -
July	27		1 15 -

The vans were garaged overnight in a yard in Ivimey Street but continued to be

operated from 31 Quilter Street. Most of the work was done for small furniture manufacturers, etc but removals were also undertaken. During the Second World War, the business was fully occupied, on contract to Bethnal Green Borough Council, to pick up furniture and belongings salvaged after bombing attacks; but as these ceased and manufactory and removals were at a low ebb, two vehicles were taken completely off the road and only two were effectively operated.

After the War, trade revived and all five vehicles were brought back on the road. However many smaller manufacturers expanded or gave up their business. As a result, those firms continuing to operate often acquired their own delivery vans and demand for the services of A E Newens fell off. Owing to the redevelopment of the yard in Ivimey Street, another yard was obtained in Northiam Street, near Victoria Park Road. Following the death of Mrs Newens in 1966, the business was sold to Mr F F Creasy and family, who subsequently operated from 506/510 London Road, West Thurrock, but still under the name of A E Newens Ltd.

The records cover the period 1933 to 1967 and include ledgers and cash books, an invaluable resource for studying the operation of a haulage contractor. Business records are underrepresented in the Archive collections, so we are always pleased to receive material of this kind.

PLEASE NOTE OUR REVISED OPENING HOURS

Until Saturday 12 June:

Monday: Closed
Tuesday: 10 - 8
Wednesday: Closed
Thursday: 9 - 8
Friday: 9 - 6
Saturday: 9 - 5
Sunday: Closed

From week commencing Monday 14 June until temporary service closure in August:

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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
Web: www.ideastore.co.uk

idea
Library Learning Information