

# Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives



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## Researching African-Caribbean presence in Tower Hamlets



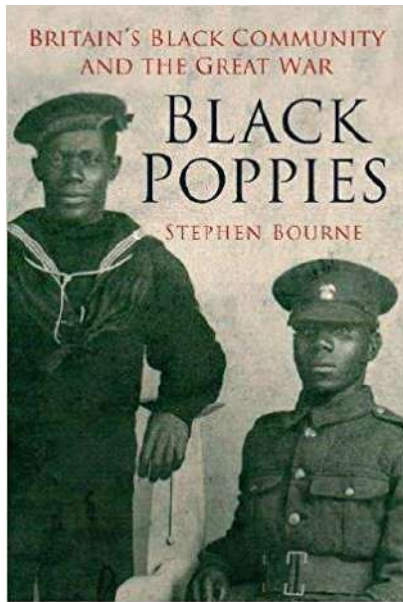
P27137 Tailoring class at the Stepney Institute, 1963

London's East End has been home to people of African and Caribbean origin since at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century; their presence since this time reflecting Britain's imperial past and maritime history, in addition to the country's involvement in the slave trade.

This user guide has been written to introduce some of the material available at Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives which may be of interest to those researching the African and Caribbean presence in the borough.

Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives continues to actively collect new material, particularly on themes and communities which are currently under-represented. If you would like to discuss depositing material at the archives, please call 0207 364 1290 or email [localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk).



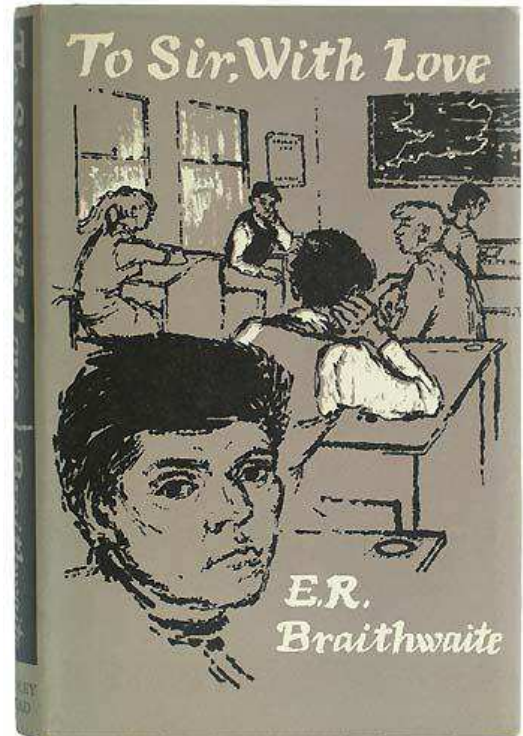


Elsewhere in the collection, you can read more about the black presence during military conflicts in, for example, *Black Poppies: Britain's black community and the Great War* by Stephen Bourne (2014) or *The Ethiopian patriots: forgotten voices of the Italo-Abyssinian war 1935-41* by Andrew Hilton (2007). Other topics you may want to browse include sport, where you will find *Fighting back?: Jewish and black boxers in Britain* edited by Michael Berkowitz and Ruti Ungar (2007).

E.R. Braithwaite's autobiographical novel *To Sir, with Love* (1959) appears in our Literature and Local Authors section. Based on Braithwaite's experiences of being a teacher from British Guiana working at St. George-in-the-East School, near Cannon Street Road, the novel was later made into a film starring Sidney Poitier.

Our biography section includes books on notable local people, such as army officer and footballer Walter Tull, and former MP for Bethnal Green and Bow, Oona King.

Those hoping to research their African or Caribbean family history may be interested in *Tracing your West Indian ancestors* by Guy Grannum (2002).



## PAMPHLETS

Our pamphlet collection includes a range of material relating to the history of African and Caribbean people in Tower Hamlets, the majority of which is filed under class mark 490. This includes booklets and articles on topics such as health, housing and the arts, dating mainly from the 1980s onwards and focusing particularly on the Somali community.

Other pamphlets and articles filed under this class mark explore earlier black history, such as the role of African sailors in the Royal Navy, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to and including World War Two. Others document well-known local figures, such as Chris Braithwaite, leader of the Colonial Seamen's Association, who was born in Barbados but lived in Stepney during the 1930s, and Kamal A. Chunchie, a Methodist minister who carried out missionary work among the transient African, Caribbean, Indian, Malay, and Chinese seamen in London's docks and helped to found the first 'Coloured Men's Institute', a religious, social, and welfare centre for Black and Asian people and their families, in Victoria Docks.

Also included in the pamphlet collection are newsletters, such as those produced by the Stepney Coloured People's Association (1954) and Black Women's Health and Family Support (2008), in addition to a copy of *Race Today* (1978), focusing on East End housing issues.

## CUTTINGS

Within our cuttings collection you will find newspaper articles and printed ephemera. Those filed under class mark 490 relate mainly to the Somali community and are dated from the 1980s onwards, however, you may find additional relevant material under other subject headings.

### Harmony



Safia Jassia receives the award from James Caspell

## Tabantaabada dhinaca hoyga

Somali housing project wins award - page 19

MASHRUUCADA Tower Hamlets dadawaynaha Somaliida ee yeesho joojka dhinaca hoyga

## Culture shared

It's All Women Together in celebrations for the Somali Festival at Oxford House

Somali women sang a big hit when they shared their culture with others in the local community at Oxford House.

All Women Together was a special occasion held as part of the Somali Festival week celebrated recently in the borough. Women from many organisations were represented including Tower Hamlets Council chief executive Sylvia Preece who described the event as "most enjoyable and wonderful experience".

And in the absence of the male folk, the festival women shared traditions to the street and sang in a series of cultural dances, sampled food from all over the world and enjoyed traditional Somali entertainment.

The event also had a special role as the women discussed community issues like building village manager Somali studies. As well as the Council, other community organisations including the local police and London Transport Police.

"The event was a huge success in bringing together Somali women and other members of the community," said Miriam Preece, of the Tower Hamlets Supporting Blackening Community organisation (TBSCO) one of the organisers.

## Building Somali links

### Council appoints first Somali liaison officer

The Council has appointed its first Somali liaison officer, Dr Ahmed Ismail, a Somali GP, to work with Somali elders to provide a link between the Somali elderly, carers and social services in the borough.

The Council hopes to take full advantage of the fact that Somali people are now becoming more established in the borough.

The council's new role will be to provide a link between the Somali elderly, carers and social services in the borough.

Dr Ahmed Ismail, a Somali GP, will be the first Somali liaison officer. He will be working with Somali elders to provide a link between the Somali elderly, carers and social services in the borough.

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## Ballad of the New Somali Café

It's not spacious, it's not comfortable, it's not homely. But for the Somali refugees in London, it's now where to go. Hadasi Dimas reports. Photograph by Kaye Branscombe

The new Somali Café in Tower Hamlets is a place where the community can come together. It's not spacious, it's not comfortable, it's not homely. But for the Somali refugees in London, it's now where to go. Hadasi Dimas reports. Photograph by Kaye Branscombe

## SOMALIS PROTEST

Somalis from east London are holding regular pickets (picture above) to bring to the attention of the public more the people turn to the Somali National Movement (SNM). SNM have promised: "a Contact Somali Office Information Committee (Dr Omar Elhadi), Room 21, 10 Cleveland Way E1 1RN

## The invisible EastEnders

gh of Tower Hamlets' Somali has been ignored by officials; now the City is making them its business. Tim Kebley

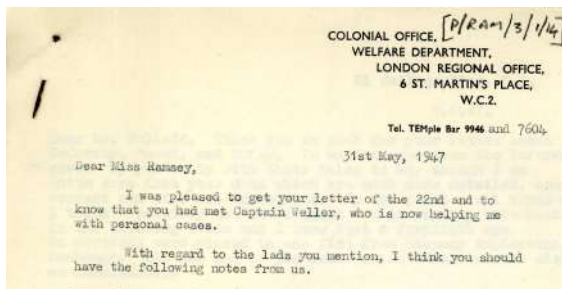
The invisible EastEnders

## PHOTOGRAPHS

The library collection holds around 40,000 illustrations and photographs. Approximately a quarter of these are arranged by street name, with the remainder arranged as in the Subject Guide. When browsing images of street scenes, areas you may want to focus on include Bow and the area surrounding Cable Street, as the borough's black population has historically been concentrated in these areas. Also consider whether there are any particular professions or trades African and Caribbean people in the borough may have been employed in, or whether you're aware of any local venues, clubs or societies or political groups popular with African and

You will find photographs of notable local figures filed under Biography (100), including the singer, songwriter, entertainer and actor Kenny Lynch, who grew up in Stepney, the horse racing tipster, Ras Prince Monolulu, who ran a stall in Petticoat Lane Market, and Kofi Appiah, the first Black Mayor of Tower Hamlets.

## Archive Collection: Highlights



P/RAM/3/1/14

Letter to Edith Ramsey from the Colonial Office Welfare Department regarding three African stowaways, 1947

The primary material relating to African and Caribbean people in the archive collection are the papers of local educationalist and community worker Edith Ramsey (Ref: P/RAM). Ramsay was appointed Head of Stepney Women's Evening Institute in 1931 and held the post until her retirement in 1960. In the 1950s she was very active in the campaign against vice, particularly sex work, in the Borough of Stepney. During her time in Stepney she undertook voluntary social work, helping children, alcoholics and immigrants. She was particularly concerned with the conditions of colonial seamen and served as a member of the Colonial Office Advisory Committee. Her papers include correspondence to and from African seamen, in addition to the Colonial Office. There are also various papers and reports relating to issues affecting the African and Caribbean population of Stepney during the 1940s and 1950s, particularly relating to housing and education.

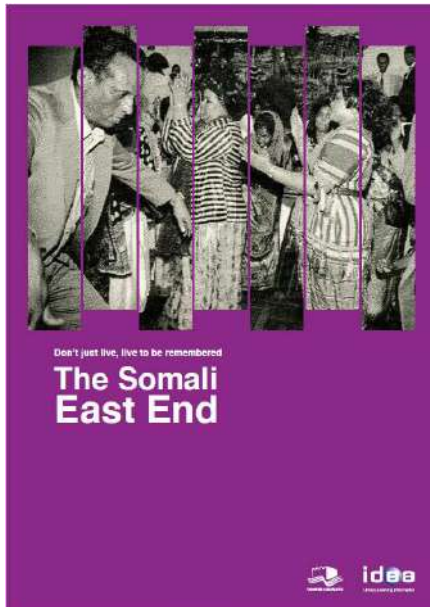
We also hold the papers of Father Joseph (Joe) Williamson (1895-1988), who became the Vicar of St Paul's, Dock Street, Whitechapel, in 1952 (Ref: P/WLM). Williamson's campaigning on the two issues of slum housing and prostitution made him a national figure. His papers include photographs showing African and Caribbean people in the local area.

Other material of interest includes The Spitalfields Project papers (Ref: I/SPP), which contain material on the Somali Women's Association (1979-1980).

## **Audio-visual material: Highlights**

Since 2010 Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives has been engaged in several oral history projects, with the recordings created showcased in exhibitions hosted at the library.

'Don't just live, live to be remembered: The Somali East End' (Ref: O/DJL) explored the history of Somali migration to Tower Hamlets. Eighteen oral history interviews were carried out in 2013 with members of the borough's Somali community, who narrate their experiences as immigrants, the way in which they and their families lived, their years at school and their first jobs.



'Where I Belong: Black and Asian women's lives in Tower Hamlets' (Ref: O/WIB) was a project undertaken in 2014 which included thirteen oral histories with Black and Asian women living in Tower Hamlets. The interviewees describe their experiences as immigrants and their first impressions of England. The themes running throughout the interviews are education, faith, home life and belonging. These histories also address the main difficulties faced by these women, including leaving family behind, learning a new language and holding on to their cultural traditions.

'Mapping the Change: Old Ford Voices and Island Memories' (Ref: O/MTC) was a project carried out in 2011-12 which included oral histories focusing on the area of Bow known as Old Ford, including Fish Island, located in the north-eastern corner of Tower Hamlets. One of these interviews was conducted with Miss Anne, who arrived in the local area from Jamaica in the 1950s.

Also in the collection is a CD of oral history interviews with Black British LGBT people, carried out in 2012 as part of the Rukus! 'Sharing Tongues' project.

### **... And you?**

We welcome donations of items or collections which reflect contemporary or historic experience of the people, organisations or businesses based in Tower Hamlets. Please speak to a member of staff, phone or email us if you have anything you think we might be interested in!