

Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives



Remembering Benjamin Zephaniah, 1958-2023



Yesterday we were devastated to learn of the passing of Professor Benjamin Zephaniah, inspirational poet, musician, campaigner, and a true friend of Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives. Born in Handsworth, Birmingham, to Jamaican and Barbadian parents, after moving to East London in the late 1970s he became a frequent visitor to our reading room, explaining "I was just interested in getting to know the local history and the local people, to know about this place I was living in, where the people came from." The East End's history of anti-racist struggles such as the Battle of Cable Street were a subject of particular interest to him, echoing as they did his own anti-racist activism against the National Front and apartheid. Many years later he lent his voice to the Save Bancroft Library campaign in 2008, generously acknowledging "I've got 50 honorary doctorates: that can be traced back to Bancroft Library, it's a fabulous place". Our thoughts are with his family, friends, and loved ones.



Bringing history into the Royal London Hospital

New project by Barts Health NHS Trust Archives

Did you know that the Royal London Hospital has been caring for the communities of East London for over 280 years? Help bring stories from the hospital's long history to its patient spaces and waiting areas!

[Barts Health NHS Trust Archives](#) are looking for patients and local residents to join us as Community Curators. You will work with us on a new project to develop new interactive digital displays at the hospital. Discover new stories and bring new perspectives on the historic collections of the Royal London Hospital. There will be two-hour workshop sessions running from January. Community Curators will receive a £40 voucher as a thank you for participating. To find out more and get involved, please email barts.archives@nhs.net

Local history book sale

Saturday 16 December, 10am-2pm



It's back! Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives is excited to announce the return of its legendary local history book sale on **Saturday 16 December**. The sale will feature duplicate books and pamphlets which have been withdrawn from the local history library collection and is a great opportunity to find affordable pre-Christmas gifts for the bookworms in your life.



The titles available for purchase include many rare and out-of-print books covering a wide range of East End topics such as social history, politics, fiction, and local biographies. All hardbacks will be priced at £5 each, and paperbacks will be just £2.

New publications including the 2024 edition of the ever-popular [Friends of Island History Trust](#) calendar - modelled here by Rob and Andy in their seasonal knitwear.

Proceeds from the book sale will be used to acquire new stock for the library.

Both cash and card payments are accepted but if paying by cash please have the exact change ready. The sale will run between

10am and 2pm. We look forward to seeing you there!

Capital redevelopment update



Historic damage to the Old Lending Library in which archive collections are being stored

It is no secret to regular visitors that our building, previously the central lending library for the borough of Tower Hamlets and prior to that the Vestry Hall for the Hamlet of Mile End Old Town, is in serious need of capital investment. Completed in 1861, extended in 1902 and 1937, and listed at Grade II, this large Victorian library building has housed our unique and growing heritage collections since 1965.

The archive strongroom was adapted from the building's Edwardian-era lecture theatre in 1986, but it ran out of storage space well over a decade ago. Staff have been lobbying for investment for many years, with several options explored but not progressing. The National Archives awarded us Accredited status earlier this year on a provisional basis only, noting that "the premises remain a significant challenge to the award of accreditation in an otherwise outstanding archive service".

In 2022 Executive Mayor Lutfur Rahman included a pledge in his Manifesto to "invest in the future of our borough's excellent network of libraries and Idea Stores, including the Bancroft local history library & archive".

Tower Hamlets Council has recently commissioned a feasibility study for the redevelopment of the building. We have worked closely with colleagues in the Capital Delivery team to ensure that the needs of the service are reflected in the brief. The proposals include a new archive strongroom with space for up to 30 years' growth of the collections, compliant with the relevant standards (BS 4971 and EN 16893). Climate control in the new fireproof archive block would be managed through passive design instead of continuous air-conditioning.

In addition, the feasibility study proposes significant upgrades to the Old Lending Library, restoring its decorative period features so that this very large room, currently used for overspill archive storage, can be opened back up for public access as a community events space.

We are grateful to [Haworth Tompkins](#) for their thoughtful work on the feasibility study. Their report is being costed and finalised and will be presented to the Mayor in the new year. Staff are crossing all our fingers that the project will be approved to go forward, and public consultation can then begin.

Brick Lane 1978: The Turning Point

BRICK LANE 1978 THE TURNING POINT



02/DECEMBER/2023
TO 16/MARCH/2024

Photograph (c) Paul Trevor of an anti-racist protest in Brick Lane, 1978.

Exhibition and events | until 16 March

The new exhibition at Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives reveals the dramatic events in 1978 which were sparked by the racist murder of Altab Ali, a 24-year-old Bengali leather garments worker, and pays tribute to the activists who mobilised around the rallying cry of justice that followed.

Local photographer **Paul Trevor** documented how members of the local Bengali community endured racial abuse as a constant factor of everyday life, and the moment at which they mobilised against racist violence and institutional police racism. The exhibition – **Brick Lane 1978: The Turning Point** - brings together seventy of Trevor's photographs as well as original archival materials and first-person testimony.

The exhibition is now on show until Saturday 16 March 2024.

The display was originally created in 2022 as part of a major heritage project led by Four Corners and [Swadhinata Trust](#), in partnership with [Paul Trevor](#) and supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. With the help of volunteers and original activists, the project created a record of this watershed moment as told by local people.

Christmas opening hours

The Reading Room closes for Christmas at **7pm** on **Thursday 21 December**.

We re-open at 10am on **Tuesday 2 January 2024**.

The exhibition hall (but not the Reading Room) will be open for visitors on Friday 22 December, 10am-1pm and 2pm-5pm and reopen on Tuesday 2 January at 10am.

Please note that emails and phone calls will not be responded to during our Christmas closure.

Season's greetings to all our readers, we'll be back in the new year with details of our next events.

Contact us

- Email us: localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk
- Visit our website: <http://www.ideastore.co.uk/local-history>
- Phone (answered during Reading Room opening hours only): 020 7364 1290

Reading Room opening hours

- Tuesday 10.00am-4.30pm
- Wednesday 10.00am-4.30pm
- Thursday 10.00am-7.00pm

First and third Saturdays of every month:

- Saturday 10.00am-5.00pm

That's the following Saturdays coming up:

- Saturday 16 December
- Saturday 6 January
- Saturday 20 January

Exhibition opening times are: 10am-5pm Monday-Friday, plus the Saturdays and Thursday evenings noted above. On Monday and Friday lunchtimes, the exhibition will be closed for lunch between 1 and 2pm.

Stay Connected with Idea Store on social media:

