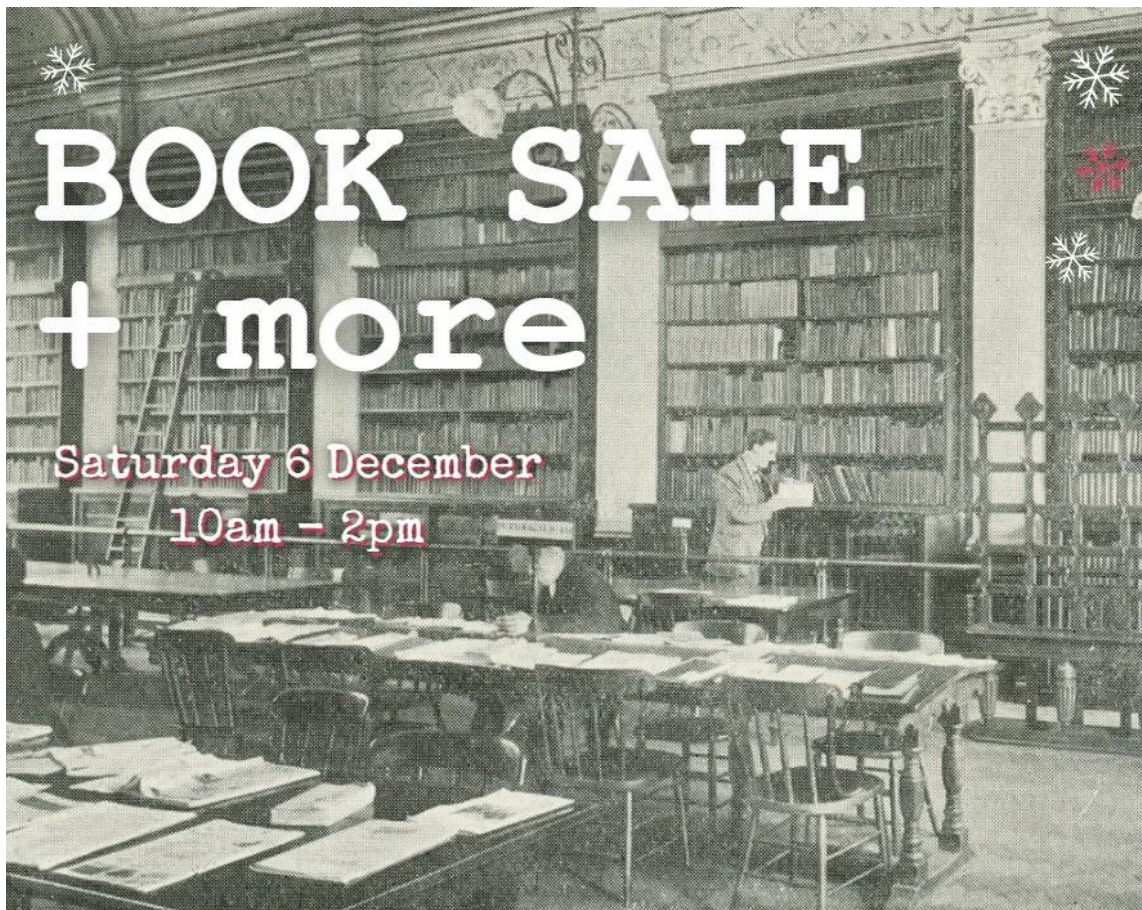


Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives



Festive book sale + more!



Saturday 6 December | 10am-2pm

Venue: Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

This coming Saturday we at Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives will be holding our annual end of year/festive season **book sale**. As usual, there will be a wide range of pre-loved local history books and pamphlets to choose from - all at the bargain price of £2 for paperback and £5 for hardbacks.

This year we have an additional room full of stalls, including The Common Press + Hajar Press + Almari Coffee + House of Annetta + Spitalfields Life + History of Wapping Trust + Rabbit's Road Press + People's Letter + Hidden Keileon + and local makers & crafters!

Just drop in - no booking required. The ground floor has level access. We have a new wireless card machine to take payments, but you may also wish to bring cash in case of any technical issues...

On sale and highly suitable for gift giving will be our [Cockney Rebels](#) book, 'The East End In Colour' by David Granick, and the 2026 calendar pictured below, full of historical photos of the Isle of Dogs compiled by [FOIHT](#).





Art exhibition | 1 December - 27 March 2026

First floor landing, Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

Now open on our first floor landing is a small exhibition of local artist **Tom Lyddon's** artworks which he recently deposited here in our collections. Staff have selected a range of his mixed media works which depict a vibrant variety of cityscapes across Tower Hamlets.

Tom Lyddon is a long-time resident of Poplar who was a black cab driver from 1976 until his retirement in 2012. He is also a student of [Idea Store Learning's](#) Visual Arts classes.

An official launch event will be held on Saturday 17 January, while the exhibition is now open on our first floor landing. Thanks to Jackie Lyall and Sanjida Alam for framing and installation.

Next Stop exhibition and events



[Next Stop](#), our current exhibition showcasing 900 years of public transport history in Tower Hamlets continues to draw the crowds. Check out this great [article in The Slice](#). Our final Next Stop event of 2025, the London & Blackwall Railway talk with Jago Hazzard on 4 December, is fully booked. Next....

On the buses of the Isle of Dogs

Thursday 8 January | 6.00-8.00pm

Venue: Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives, Education Room

We are pleased to welcome the [Friends of Island History Trust](#) (FOIHT) for a talk exploring the history of buses on the Isle of Dogs. Members of the group will share the history of the island's buses, from horse-drawn omnibuses to the first motorised vehicles and their own memories of long-gone bus routes. This event will include a short talk followed by discussion and a chance to explore the Island History Trust image collection.

[Book your free place here!](#)

Bangladesh Heritage Week

Events | 13- 14 December and 20-21 December

Various Tower Hamlets venues

The Bangladeshi High Commission in London and Tower Hamlets Council are proud to present [Bangladeshi Heritage Week 2025](#), taking place across two weekends in December. The events promise to be an exciting and eclectic display of British Bangladeshi heritage, history and culture. On 13 and 14 December events will take place in Tower Hamlets Town Hall, and on 20 and 21 December at Brady Arts Centre in Whitechapel.

There will be literature and photography displays, an art exhibition, film screenings, cultural performance and great workshops on different artistic forms including calligraphy a Sylheti Nagri Script, Rickshaw Art & Henna Design. There will also be a trade fair, and panel discussions on trade and B2B investments. Children can take part in the British Bangladeshi Kids Quiz Competition. It promises to be a fantastic event! Don't miss it! Keep an eye out on Tower Hamlets Council residents and arts newsletters for further information.

Bangla Beats!

Tuesday 16 December | 5:30pm to 7:30pm

Venue: QMUL ArtsOne, Mile End Road

Join Swadhinata Trust for [a night filled with Bangla music and celebration](#) at QMUL ArtsOne, celebrating Bangladesh Victory Day in a special way. Get ready to immerse yourself in the rich culture and vibrant beats of Bangladesh. Mark your calendars and don't miss out on this unforgettable evening! Supported by the Queen Mary Centre for Public Engagement.



EAST END HISTORY CLUB: Parent/Carer & Under 5s



Tower Hamlets Image Collection
P23734 Abbott Road, 1954

TERM TIME ONLY

**FRIDAY 5 DEC
FRIDAY 6 FEB
FRIDAY 6 MAR**

10AM-11:30AM

Local history for all ages

Friday 5 December | 10am-11.30am

Venue: Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives, Education Room

Looking after young children need not prevent you from exploring our collections! Parents or carers of under 5s are invited to join our monthly 'stay and play' sessions - bring your little one, meet other parents over a cuppa, and browse some local history materials selected in advance by our Engagement & Learning Officer from the archive. Drop in - no booking required. The next date in the new year will be Friday 6 February.

Christmas opening times

Our last day of opening before Christmas is Tuesday 23 December. We will reopen on Saturday 3 January.

Online video archive of Dhamail launched

A new online video archive has been launched by Mukto Arts CIC to celebrate, preserve, and promote the rich artistic tradition of **Dhamail** within the Bengali diaspora. Dhamail is a centuries old form of dance-song, performed by women. The *Brit Bangla Heritage Fest: Dhamail* took place earlier in 2025 at Poplar Union, featuring a wide range of performances, workshops and discussions. The Heritage Fest offered an inclusive platform where British Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets could reconnect with their heritage, as well as share the Dhamail art form with a wider audience.

[A curated collection of videos](#) is now available online. It serves as an archive of the performances which took place in Poplar earlier this year, along with storytelling segments, a documentary and round table discussions that examined how Dhamail continues to unite Bengali communities worldwide, including those born and raised in Britain with little or no direct connection to Bangladesh.

Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives is proud to support this initiative as an archival partner, ensuring that all documents and videos relating to the performance and preservation of Dhamail in Tower Hamlets are included as part of the borough's historical record. This project was generously funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.



Bodysnatching in Stepney

*We are grateful to **Robert Hartle** (a WRoCAH funded University of Sheffield PhD student studying the history of bodysnatching) who has written this article for the newsletter, sharing some findings from some of his recent research in our Reading Room.*

Bodysnatchers (or 'Resurrectionists', as they later became known) stole corpses for British anatomists from c.1700 to 1832, when the passage of the Anatomy Act effectively ended the practice. Tower Hamlets has a prominent place in the history of this gruesome practice.

In the early hours of Wednesday 9 April 1736, a man arrived by coach in St. James, Westminster, and then began moving a basket to a house in Pall Mall Court, when he was interrupted by Thomas Oaky, a night watchman. Perhaps suspecting contained stolen goods of a more normal kind, Oaky discovered a male corpse, and the man was immediately apprehended. Contemporary records and newspaper reports reveals much about this extraordinary crime and its punishment.

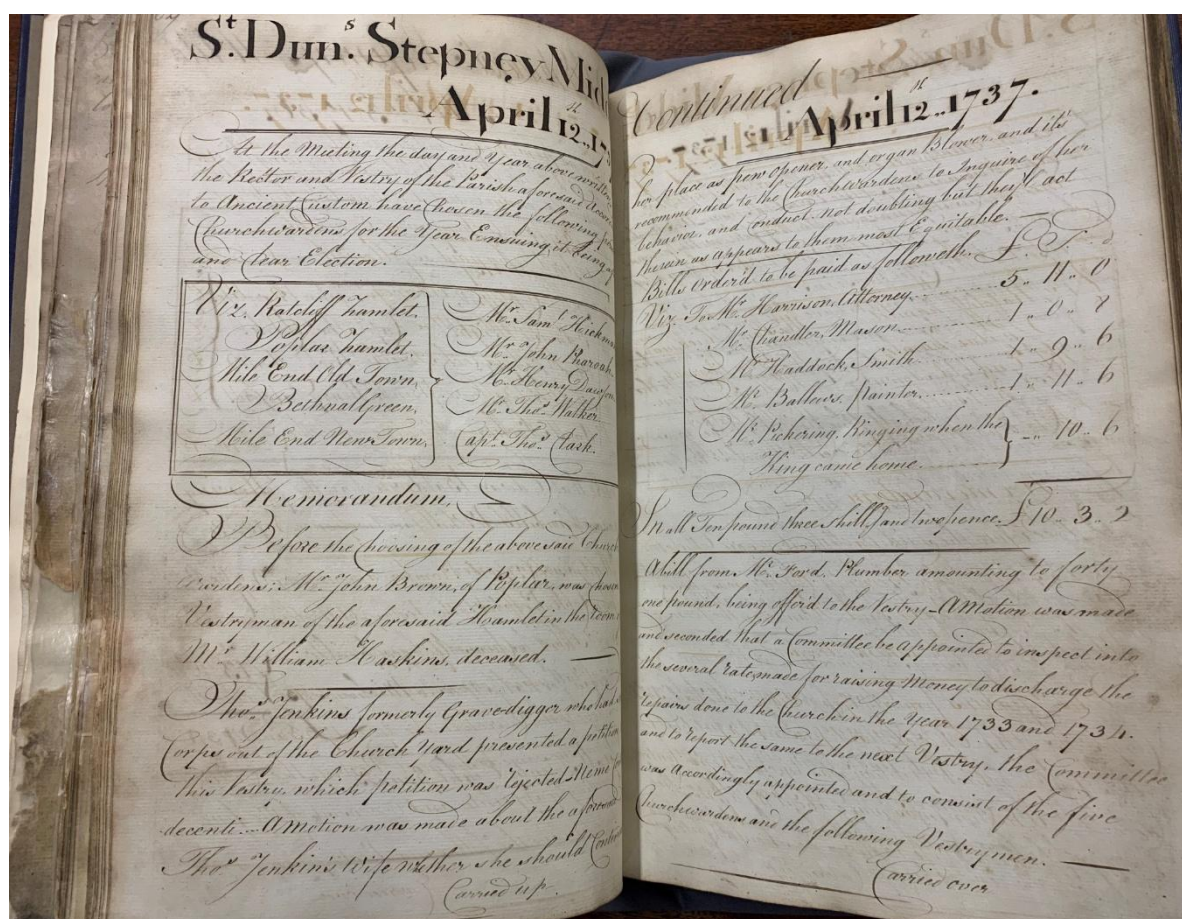
The arrested man was Thomas Jenkins (or Jenkinson), who had been grave digger at St Dunstan and All Saints, Stepney, for some twelve years. He confessed that his macabre contraband was destined for a young man called John Brown, an apprentice of a prominent surgeon-anatomist who had promised Jenkins would be 'Satisfied for his Trouble' if he supplied his master with dead bodies. The corpse found on the 9 April - a man who, it was reported, had been buried the previous day in a cheap deal coffin - was probably Richard Williams, a pensioner of Bethnal Green. However, Jenkins had likely been stealing for weeks because others were also found missing from their graves. It was alleged that Jenkins had been assisted by three women, one of whom was his wife, Elizabeth.

St. Dunstan's chose to prosecute Thomas; he was found guilty at the Middlesex Session in June 1736 and was sentenced to be whipped around Stepney churchyard later that month. The minutes of the vestry reveal the prosecution cost the parish the not insignificant sum of £4 15s 6d. Although Jenkins received an unpleasant punishment, he was fortunate that it was not a harsher one, such as transportation or execution. Bodysnatching was punished relatively leniently because it was only treated as a misdemeanour against common decency. Bodysnatchers escaped felony charges if they took only a corpse, since a dead body was not considered 'property' in the eyes of the law and, therefore, could not be 'stolen'.

Nevertheless, his punishment must have had a profound impact on Jenkins, his family and friends. St. Dunstan's vestry received a petition from him in April 1737 (pictured below - ref. L/SDS/1/1). What he requested – perhaps reinstatement or financial help – is not recorded, but the petition was unequivocally rejected, and, furthermore, prompted an enquiry into Mrs Jenkins, who was a pew opener and organ blower at the church. What became of the couple does not appear to have been recorded, but social ostracism seems to have driven them from the parish.

Bodysnatching itself continued unabated. Although St. Dunstan's adopted ever more vigilant security over the next century, Jenkins' thefts were not the last from Stepney and their churchyard remained a key target right up to the peak of the bodysnatching crisis in the late 1820s and early 1830s. Only the greatly increased legal supply of cadavers provided by the Anatomy Act (1832) finally put a stop to the practice.

Read more about Robert's research [here](#).



Get in touch with 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 (late opening)

First and third Saturdays of every month:

- Saturday 10.00am-5.00pm

That's the following Saturdays coming up:

- Saturday 6 December
- Saturday 20 December
- Saturday 3 January
- Saturday 17 January

Our last day of opening before Christmas is Tuesday 23 December. We will reopen on Saturday 3 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.



TOWER HAMLETS



Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives, 277 Bancroft Road,
London E1 4DQ

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