



Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

July-August 2015

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Opening Times

Tues: 10am-5pm
Wed: 9am-5pm
Thu: 9am-8pm
Fri: closed
Sat: (1st & 3rd of the month): 9am-5pm
Sun, Mon: closed

Contact Us

Send us your enquiry via email, phone or letter at

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Visit our website at



Last chance to see!

#50TH: Half a century of Tower Hamlets

If you haven't caught this fascinating exhibition yet, you have until **Thursday 6 August**. Don't miss it! As well as looking at the last 50 years, the exhibition delves back into local government in Tower Hamlets over hundreds of years, using rarely-seen original archives and artefacts. These include a wonderful manuscript map of Bethnal Green which is over three hundred years old and a Poplar minute book dating from 1593. A striking oil painting of George Lansbury, loaned by members of the Lansbury family, is on show for the first time. The borough's town halls and also its regeneration are explored extensively with illustrations, press cuttings and photographs. There is also a section on political control in which the changing political make-up of the borough is represented in a fascinating series of maps, with displays of ephemera relating to the Lib-Dem 'neighbourhood' years (1986-1994), the Millwall by-election of 1993, and the origins of Bengali people's involvement in local politics.

www.ideastore.co.uk



Nicknamed 'Mr Tower Hamlets', this man was Leader of the Council for a decade. Who was he? Visit the exhibition and find out!

Coming soon!

**Exhibition: William Whiffin's East End
Photographs, 1910s-1950s
20 August - 14 November 2015**

The next exhibition hosted here celebrates the photography of William Thomas Whiffin (1878-1957), a pioneering visual chronicler of his time. Whiffin's powerful, evocative, and sometimes playful images are among the finest photographic documentation of London's East End ever produced, and are among the most popular and well-used items within our collections.



Children following a Poplar Borough Council water cart, August 1919.
(c) William Whiffin

One of the earliest and most pre-eminent artists working in what today might be known as street photography, Whiffin captured daily life in the East End. The range of images in this exhibition range from the First World War, such as an airship looming over Cotton Street in 1915, to the utopian modernism of the Lansbury Estate, newly opened for the Festival of Britain in 1953. Elsewhere in Whiffin's work you will come across the Chinese community of Limehouse, dock workers on strike, people at leisure in the art deco Poplar Baths or thronging in local markets, as well as scenes of pubs, shops, offices and bomb sites, each image characterised by the photographer's expert eye for balance of composition. We are particularly grateful to Whiffin's grand-daughter Hellen Martin who has loaned his camera and other memorabilia items for our display, joining the forty photographs from his enormous body of work which we have selected for this exhibition.

A series of free public events will take place during the run, including a talk by Hellen Martin at the exhibition launch here on **Thursday 10 September at 6pm** followed by a range of photography-related talks and workshops inspired by Whiffin's work. These events will form part of [Photomonth](#), East London's annual photography festival, which takes place in October and November. Look out for an events bulletin detailing our events later in August or check our website in a few weeks.



The ship Milverton in Stewart's Dry Dock, Manchester Road, Isle of Dogs, c1919. (c) William Whiffin

Upcoming events

Drawing Black Lives in the East End

Tuesday 28 - Friday 31 July 2015

Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives

Young people aged 14-21 are warmly invited to take part in a creative black history summer school to be held here at the end of the month.

- * Learn about the black presence in East London's history
- * Explore black history exhibitions and archives
- * Create your own black history comic

Over four days the group will explore different stories and experiences of black people who lived in the East End of London during the 1920s to 1950s. In addition to relevant material from the archival collections at Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives, the group will also have a guided tour of the exhibition Spaces of Black Modernism at Tate Britain with its co-curator Dr Gemma Romain.

Visual artist Rudy Loewe will lead a creative workshop in which each participant will design and produce a comic page about one of the people, events or themes they have come across in this historical research. All of the comics will be published together in a booklet, and presented at a special launch event at Idea Store Whitechapel during the Writeidea Festival in November 2015.

The summer school is a non-residential series of workshops organised by the Spaces of Black Modernism project at The Equiano Centre, UCL (supported by the Arts & Humanities Research Council) and Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives.

To book your free place, please email

localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk or call 0207 364 1290.

History Hoppers

Wednesday 12 August, 2.30-4.30pm

Do you have a passion for old pictures? Fond memories of forgotten streets? Are you curious about archive collections? Our monthly History Hoppers group offers you and your friends the chance to explore and discuss original historical library and archive sources that help to tell the story of your local area in Tower Hamlets. Free, no booking required. Tea / coffee and biscuits provided!

Please note that from September 2015, History Hoppers will be moving to the third Wednesday of every month. The time will remain the same. The remaining upcoming History Hoppers dates for 2015 are: 16 September, 21 October, 18 November and 16 December.

Talk: The Floral Traditions of Spitalfields

Saturday 18 July, 2.00-3.30pm

Spitalfields and the surrounding area have played an important part in the horticultural life of London over the centuries, with the Huguenots playing leading roles. Margaret Willes traces the story from Tudor times, introducing florists, herbalists, nurserymen and amateur gardeners. She is the author of 'The Making of the English Gardener' and 'The Gardens of the British Working Class'. This event forms part of Huguenot Summer. Free, but please book in advance on the Huguenot Summer website.

Upcoming events elsewhere

Huguenot Summer

Until September 2015

The Huguenots of Spitalfields, in partnership with the City of London Corporation, have created a programme of events to celebrate the lives and talents of the Huguenots. 'Huguenot Summer' will run until September 2015. A full listing of events can be found on their website.

The Spark

20 - 26 July 2015

Brady Arts Centre, 192-196 Hanbury Street, E1 5HU

On Friday 24 July, 11am - 2pm, Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives will be at The Spark, a completely free festival of ideas, discussion, art and performance. Join us in the foyer area, where a variety of images illustrating the history of the borough will be on display. To view the full programme of events, please visit The Spark's website.

Exhibition: Soldiers and Suffragettes

Friday 19 June - Sunday 1 November 2015

Museum of London Docklands

Christina Broom is regarded as the UK's first female press photographer. With creativity and a bold pioneering spirit she

took her camera to the streets and captured thousands of images of people and events in London, revealing unique observations of the city at the start of the 20th century. Free Entry. Further information, including opening times can be found on the Museum of Docklands [website](#).

Recent events

#50TH events programme

Over 100 people took part in the free programme of events we curated to accompany our #50TH exhibition, marking fifty years of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.



Participants on the tour of the former Bethnal Green Town Hall , now the Town Hall Hotel, June 2015

Partners from the [Town Hall Hotel](#), [Limehouse Town Hall Consortium Trust](#) and the [Half Moon Young Peoples Theatre](#) worked closely with staff at Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives to facilitate the tours of former civic buildings in the borough. Our external speakers, David Luck from the [London Metropolitan Archives](#) and [Municipal Dreams](#) author, John Boughton both delivered excellent talks here as part of the events programme. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our partners, without whom it would not have been possible for us to deliver this series of free events.

Other events organised and delivered by our staff also proved to be popular, especially Malcolm's walk around Poplar and Bow. Twenty-two attendees took part in this event which was a really fun and enjoyable way to learn about the former town halls and other significant civic buildings in the area.



Participants on the guided walk around Poplar's old town halls
by Malcolm Barr-Hamilton, June 2015

To all of those who participated in the events - thank you for attending, it was great to meet you all and we hope you will be back to visit us in the future, whether to carry out research using our reading room or to attend future THLHLA exhibitions and events. We are particularly grateful to those of you who took the time to complete our feedback forms - we use this data to improve our understanding of your experiences as a participant, and the strengths and weaknesses of the events we deliver. This helps us to plan future events and develop our events programme accordingly.

For those of you who missed the recent tour of Limehouse Town Hall on Saturday 4 July you may be interested in the free Memento audio tour which our colleagues at the Limehouse Town Hall Consortium Trust have organised for the evening of Tuesday 4 August, further information can be found on their [website](#).

Finally, colleagues who attended the tour of the Town Hall Hotel may be interested to hear that not long after this took place I attended a screening of the recently restored and re-released Bob Hoskins film, *The Long Good Friday* (1980-81). It was my first time watching the film so it was a real treat. What I didn't expect however was to find myself looking at familiar premises in one of the later scenes - footage shot inside the former Bethnal Green Town Hall building in 1979!

- *Natasha Luck, Heritage Officer (Archives)*

The Salvation Army 150th Anniversary programme

To celebrate the founding of the Salvation Army in Whitechapel by William and Catherine Booth 150 years ago, a free programme of events was organised by Idea Store in partnership with the Salvation Army. As part of the programme, Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives hosted a workshop on Tuesday 30 June during

which participants were able to explore unique historical materials that chart the development of William Booth's Salvation Army in the East End. Material included newspaper cuttings, old maps, photographs and documents from the archives which shed light on the widespread poverty and housing problems that led to the founding of the organisation. Furthermore, on Thursday 9th July, film historian Tony Fletcher visited THLHLA where he presented a number of short films about the historic work of the Salvation Army, both in East London and further afield.

School visits

Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives has welcomed a number of class visits from local primary and secondary schools over the last couple of months. These have included a visit from Year 4 pupils at Olga Primary School who were interested in finding out more about the history of their school and the surrounding area, and a group of sixth form students from Central Foundation Girls' School, who took part in a creative writing workshop led by the poet Fiona Sampson, inspired by material from our collections. This workshop formed part of the [Through the Door](#) project, run in partnership with Archives for London and Poet in the City.

We have recently created a new [Outreach and Education](#) section of our website describing what we offer for schools and other local community organisations. Teachers will now also find on this page a number of free Key Stage Two learning resources available for free download which we have developed based on our collections.

If you are a teacher and would like to arrange a visit for the autumn term, please get in touch using the contact details above.

- Perdita Jones, Heritage Officer (Learning & Participation - Acting)

Pamphlets collection catalogued!



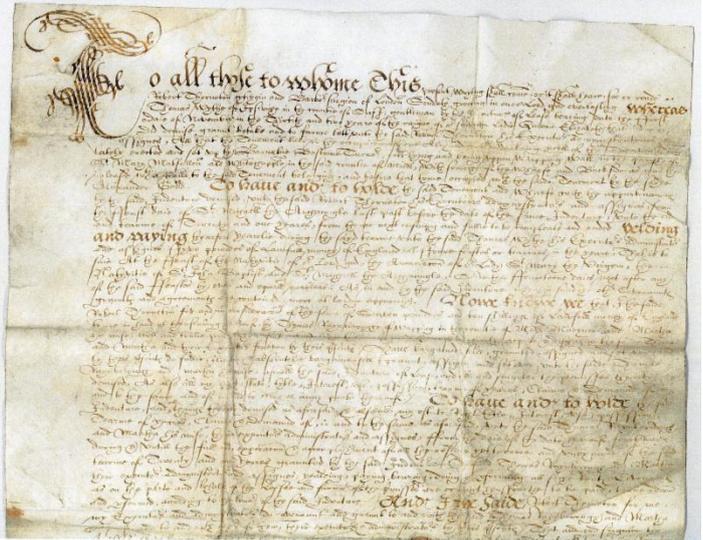
One half of the library's pamphlets collection

"Since I started working at Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives four years ago, I have been cataloguing the pamphlet collection. This has been a huge undertaking, as the pamphlet collection consists of just over 400 boxes and a total of over 6000 pamphlets. Each pamphlet has now been individually catalogued onto the CALM database using library cataloguing standards. Cataloguing library materials on an archives database has been a bit tricky at times. Subject headings are much more restricted than the hierarchical Library of Congress subject headings I was used to using. As such, I ended up putting additional information to help users of the catalogue in the 'notes' field. When the library catalogue goes online (very shortly, we hope) the pamphlets will all be searchable by key words, title, author, or subject.

Cataloguing this collection has brought to light many interesting items. Now that users can search and find items in this collection via the catalogue it is hoped that it will greatly increase their use. Nearly all items in the pamphlet collection are small press, independently published, or published by the council. As such it includes very rare or unique items where we may hold the only publicly accessible copy."

- Melanie Strong, Heritage Officer (Library)

New acquisition



Extract from assignment of lease of a tenement
in Wapping Wall, 1594

We have recently acquired a deed dating from 1594. We hold very few documents from this period. The document concerns a "tenement", one of seven "lately built" on Wapping Wall "together with the wharf and backside enclosed within a paling". In the document the lease is being assigned by Robert Thornton, citizen and barber surgeon of London to Thomas Raynborough, mariner of Wapping, and his wife Martha.

Raynborough was not only a mariner but also owned shares in ships, mainly engaged in the Levant trade. His grandson was another Thomas whose surname is usually spelt Rainsborough, a prominent figure in the English Civil War on the Parliamentarian side. He was killed in a bungled Royalist kidnap attempt in 1648 and buried in Wapping churchyard. A plaque commemorating his life was unveiled in 2013 by Tony Benn and others.

Photography volunteer wanted



Poplar Entertainments poster, 16 October 1948

Our ongoing Poplar Entertainments project - focussing on the extensive collection of playbills and posters from Poplar Borough Council's municipal theatre, which was uncovered during the cataloguing of the pamphlet collection described above -- has been very successful so far.

Judy Jones and Lee Rogers, two of our wonderful volunteers, have inputted the names of the actors, performers and musicians that appeared in the posters and playbills over three decades during the mid-twentieth century. The information has been added to our CALM archive catalogue, and when this is shortly made available online you will be able to search to see who appeared. Famous names include Tommy Cooper, Bob Monkhouse, Benny Hill, and the third Doctor Who, Jon Pertwee.

We are hoping now to be able to upload digitised copies of these posters in our [Digital Gallery](#). But for this we need a bit more help....We're looking for a keen amateur photographer who would be interested in digitising these posters so that we can make them available online. These are too big to fit on our flatbed scanner, so they need to be photographed with a camera, possibly on a stand and with some decent lighting - equipment we don't have ourselves.

Once we have good quality digital images, we will then need to upload them to our website's content management system along with the names of the performers for each event, copied from the catalogue. This could be done by the photographer or a different volunteer.

There are altogether 75 posters, so the photography shouldn't take more than a few visits. We can accommodate volunteers during the working week, on Thursday evenings or on the Saturdays we are open to the public.

If you'd like to volunteer, please do get in touch by emailing localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk. Thanks!

Picture of the month



Bethnal Green Tube Shelter Library, WW2

Most readers will be aware of the Bethnal Green Tube disaster in which 173 civilians were crushed to death on the stairs down to Bethnal Green Underground station on 3 March 1943. Fundraising for the [memorial](#) is ongoing.

The Bethnal Green Borough Engineer's papers held here at THLHLA contain correspondence about the use of the tube station as a shelter both before and after the tragedy (L/BGM/D/2).

At first the government tried to deter Londoners using Underground stations as air-raid shelters, encouraging the use of domestic Anderson or Morrison shelters instead. Bethnal Green tube station was not fully built, for its construction had been suspended when war began, and the London Public Transport Board had already perceived dangers from flooding and the proximity of a sewer, but when the Blitz began these concerns were set aside.

During its use as a shelter, the tube station came to contain a canteen, a hall, even a cinema and a lending library. The

Council considered the provision of library facilities there so 'very essential' as to plan shelving for 4,000 books underground. It wrote to the Ministry of Home Security for reimbursement of the cost and set up wire netting to protect the Librarian's sleeping accommodation. The Commissioners demurred at the "extravagance" of the proposals, but did agree to compensate Bethnal Green Borough Council for £50, rather than the £910 requested.

- *Mark Ballard, Heritage Assistant*