



Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives



Tuesday 22 March 2016

Update on temporary closure of Reading Room

Repair works

A programme for the building works to the repair of the reading room ceiling has now been confirmed and will start on site at the beginning of April, with completion due at the end of July.

The works comprise the repair, strengthening and redecoration of the whole reading room ceiling of our Grade 2 listed building. A number of specialist companies were invited to quote from a list of suppliers approved by Historic England, and G. Cook of Cambridge have been appointed by the council after a competitive tendering process.

A scaffold will be erected inside the reading room above the top of the shelving and will be fully boarded out to provide a safe platform to work from. The collections stored below will be moved out into other rooms within the building so that they are not at risk of dust damage during the project. The decant of collections will be carried out by THLHLA staff. During the building works, our collection of c.6500 books will receive specialist cleaning as they sustained some dust damage from the original ceiling collapse.

Public access to collections

We are currently offering an appointment-only research service to consult the archive collections one day per week (see below for details). This service will be expanded from late April to include most of the library collections, ie the images, books, cuttings, pamphlets, microfilms, trade directories and electoral registers. The opening times will also be extended to three days per week, plus occasional Saturdays and

Thursday evenings, although a prior appointment will be necessary. Further details and dates of the expanded public service will be circulated as soon as possible. It is anticipated that the service will be fully open again in the restored and redecorated reading room in early August 2016.

Archives consultation service

We are currently open one day per week for archives consultation by appointment. You will be able to book a 3 hour slot to view items in the archives collection in our ground floor Education Room. You must provide references of the material you wish to view when booking your appointment. When searching our [online catalogue](#) to identify references, please ensure you limit your search to the 'Archives' repository, as *all other collections are not accessible*. Unavailable material includes the image collection, pamphlets, press cuttings, books, maps and newspapers on microfilm. There will be a limit to the quantity of material that can be consulted in each session - please discuss this with staff when booking your appointment.

We are open for bookings on the following dates:

Thursday 31 March, 10am-1pm or 1.30pm-4.30pm

Tuesday 5 April, 10am-1pm or 1.30pm-4.30pm

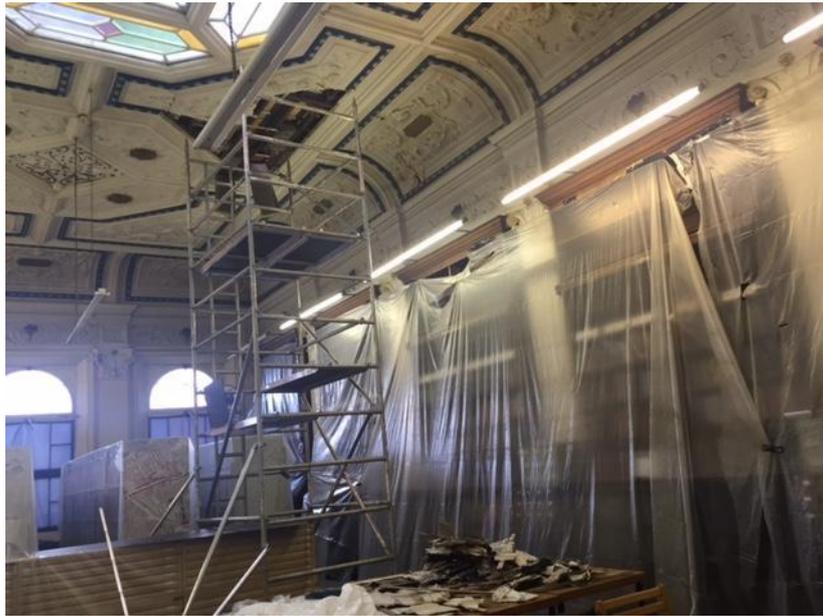
Thursday 14 April, 10am-1pm or 1.30pm-4.30pm

Tuesday 19 April, 10am-1pm or 1.30pm-4.30pm

Thursday 28 April, 10am-1pm or 1.30pm-4.30pm

Email localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk or call 020 7364 1290 during office hours to book an appointment.

We apologise for the ongoing inconvenience to our users. Updates will follow as the project progresses. Our exhibition and events programme continues as normal during this period, as the ground floor remains fully accessible.



A scaffold tower has been erected to facilitate investigations of the damage to the ceiling. Shelving has been sheeted off to protect books from dust.

The Match Women's Strike 1988 Alison Marchant's *Wall Paper History* revisited

Our current exhibition and associated events has proved extremely popular since launching at the beginning of March.

In 1888 over a thousand women and girls employed at the Bryant & May match factory in Bow successfully went on strike to improve their working conditions. In 1988, East End artist Alison Marchant marked the centenary of this pivotal moment in feminist and labour history with an exhibition and a range of public installations across the local area. In 2016, to mark Women's History Month, Alison Marchant and Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives have restaged her 1988 exhibition, which includes original prints, photographs, etchings and collages inspired by archival imagery. Produced originally for Rochdale Art Gallery, the work has never before been exhibited in Tower Hamlets.

A programme of free talks and events - details below - explores women's history in the Victorian East End, and provide a platform to explore and discuss feminist cultural activism in the 1980s and today.

During our temporary closure, the exhibition's opening times are different to normal: it is open every Monday-Friday 9am-5pm, til 8pm on Thursday evenings when there is a talk or event on (see below for these dates) and on Saturdays 2 April, 16 April and 21 May, 9am-5pm.

The last day of the exhibition will be Saturday 21 May. Pick up a free A5 poster zine

here, or at an Idea Store, which features images from the exhibition such as the one below.



'Exhausted home worker' by Alison Marchant
Outside installation, 1988. Photo by Patsy Mullan

Exhibition events programme

All events are free and take place here at Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives, with the exception of the Bow history walk.

Women's Labour in the Home

Thursday 7 April, 6-7pm

Dr Frances Holliss, Emeritus Reader in Architecture at London Metropolitan University will talk about women's work in the home from the medieval era to the present day, with special reference to the East End. Just drop in, no need to book.

Artist's exhibition tour

Thursday 14 April 6-7pm

Join artist Alison Marchant for a personal tour of the exhibition and a chance to see analogue slides of her work. Just drop in, no need to book.

The Match Women's Strike, 1888

Saturday 16 April, 2-3pm

We welcome Louise Raw, author of *Striking A Light: The Bryant & May Matchwomen and their place in history*, to discuss her research on the women and girls behind the famous strike. Just drop in, no need to book.

Bow History Walk

Saturday 7 May, 2-4pm

A guided history walk around Bow with Tower Hamlets Borough Archivist Malcolm Barr-Hamilton. Fully booked but waiting list spaces may be available: please email localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk or call 020 7364 1290 during office hours.

Other upcoming events

at Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

History Hoppers

Wednesday 20 April 2016, 2.30-4.30pm

Come along to our monthly drop-in History Hoppers group, where participants will have the chance to explore a variety items from our archive collection relating to the history of the local area, including photographs, old newspapers, letters and diaries. Refreshments provided. Free, no booking required.

Upcoming History Hoppers dates:

Wednesday 18 May, 2.30-4.30pm

Wednesday 15 June, 2.30-4.30pm

Talk: The Irish East End

Thursday 28 April, 6-7pm

Join Professor Bronwen Walter, Emerita Professor of Irish Diaspora Studies at Anglia Ruskin University, for this illustrated talk on the history of Irish people in London's East End, focusing on the mid-nineteenth century to the 1960s. Free, no booking required.



Preparing shrines in Rook Street, Poplar in readiness for a Roman Catholic procession, 1920
Photograph by William Whiffin

Archives cataloguing update

Records of Tower Hamlets Council

The archives team have been working hard on a project to tackle the cataloguing backlog of Tower Hamlets Council committee papers which form an important part of our Local Authority archives. We are pleased to report that we can now make available the papers of Tower Hamlets Full Council meetings, 1976-2010. Information about these newly catalogued records is available on our online catalogue (reference: L/THL/A/1/1) and they are now accessible to researchers. Information about meetings of the Council, its current set-up, composition and constitution can be found on the Tower Hamlets Council website along with digitised versions of Full Council meeting papers from 29 May 2002 onwards is available online via <http://moderngov.towerhamlets.gov.uk>.

Oral History

Our collection of oral histories continues to expand. Thanks to volunteer work undertaken in the summer by our previous UCL cataloguing placement student, Valentina Rojas, cataloguing is now complete of the 'Don't just live, live to be remembered: The Somali East End' project oral histories which were captured in 2012-2013. These consist of 18 audio recordings of interviews with members of the Somali community in Tower Hamlets (reference: O/DJL). A recent deposit of interviews from local charity Magic Me, which were

undertaken as part of their 'Rooms with a View' project, have now also been catalogued (reference: O/RWV).

In-house, work is progressing on our own oral history project involving Sneath Engineers, a local company based in Solebay Street, Stepney. The project aims to capture a number of oral histories from the owners and employees of this long-standing family-run business which dates back to 1898 when it was originally located in Poplar. Two interviews have been undertaken so far and information about these recordings can be found on our catalogue (reference: O/SNT).



Sneath's factory in Solebay Street, Stepney, 2012

Those of you who were inspired by our 2015 'Whiffin's East End' photography exhibition may also be interested to learn that the oral history interview we undertook in July with Whiffin's grand-daughter, Hellen Martin, is now catalogued (reference: O/IND/3) and a digitised copy of the full interview and a transcript of the recording can also be accessed remotely from our [website](#).

New archive acquisitions

We have recently been given a remarkable letter which relates what life was like in Bethnal Green at the height of the Blitz. It was written by seventeen-year old Ada Patten of Pollard Row on 30 December 1940 to a Mrs McKee in Oxfordshire where Ada's brother Jack had been evacuated. This was the day after the air raid of 29 December considered to be the most devastating raid struck on London. She describes how the family took refuge in the cellar of the nearby Red Lion pub, the bodies her father helped recover, and her journey to work the next day. We are very grateful to Vic Woods of Gosport, a distant relative of Mrs McKee for donating this fascinating document.

36, Pollard Row,
Bethnal Green,
London, E.2.
Monday, 30.12.40

Dear Mrs. McKee,

Jack has written and told us of the lovely time he had at Christmas and also of the lovely presents he received. He is a very lucky boy and I wish I could change places with him.

You have probably heard about the terrible raid we had on Sunday night. It really was awful and is about the worst we have had so far. An incendiary bomb fell on the house next door to us where Mrs. Golden lives. They go to an underground shelter at night so the fire got a hold before anything could be done about it. We were all very scared and Dad said we couldn't stay in the house in case the fire started to spread so we all ran round to the Red Lion and took shelter in their re-inforced cellar. It is quite a distance from our house.

Letter from Ada Patten re. the Blitz, 1940 (Ref. P/MIS/450)

Another interesting personal (1895-1980). fought 58 between became a facilities. The ephemera, history during a



Jack Greenstock in his prime

accession received recently is the deposit of papers of Jewish boxer Jack Greenstock. Greenstock was born in Bethnal Green and times professionally as a welterweight 1910 and 1922. After retiring from the ring he promoter and ran gymnasiums and training papers, which include photographs and have been catalogued by Sabiha Azad, a student at Goldsmiths University of London placement with us.

Conservation news

We are very pleased to report that, thanks to funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of the Land and Lives project, some of our most fragile title deeds have been conserved. These documents were so badly damaged as to be unfit for production. The work was carried out by Graham Bignell Paper Conservation, to exacting standards. Mainly the deeds have been flattened and holes and tears repaired, and then placed in inert polyester sleeves.



Mark Ballard, Land and Lives Project archivist, with a newly conserved deed

A request from our friends...

The Shanghati Oral History Project aims to help reveal the rich heritage of poetry in East London during 1960s-1980s, with a particular focus on the East End Bengali community. The project will document the memories of forty community poets through oral history and collect one hundred Bengali and English poems. These will be included in a printed publication and exhibited in arts and cultural venues across East London in 2017. If you wrote poetry between 1960 and 1980 and are willing to be interviewed, please contact Michael Bowden on 07901805628 or email michael.bowden40@gmail.com. Further information can be found on the project website: www.shanghatoralhistory.com.

Picture of the month



Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives reading room ceiling,
photographed in the halcyon days of 1972

Contact Us

Send us your enquiry via email, phone or letter at

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Phone: 020 7364 1290
Email: localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk

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