

Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives



We're back!



Thank you for your patience while we closed for two weeks for our annual stocktake. We are now back open and welcoming readers to the Reading Room.

During our closure staff were busy with a range of tasks, including cataloguing oral histories, rearranging storage areas and moving collections from unsafe parts of the building to safer ones.

We finally had the time and space to unroll the mysterious huge rolled map (above) that had been lurking anonymously in the old lending library. It turned out to be a civil defence map of the Metropolitan Borough of Bethnal Green, complete with pinholes. Read the [catalogue record here](#). We also incorporated 142 previously uncatalogued volumes of *The Illustrated London News* (1842-1918) into our main newspaper collection, making them accessible to our readers for the first time.

Several days were spent on a big project to survey, appraise, box up, transport and repackage archives from the Bethnal Green and Stepney Constituency Labour Party office at 359 Cambridge Heath Road. Staff braved some difficult conditions (pictured below) to sort through and select archives for permanent preservation, including minutes of meetings, campaign materials and photographs.



We ended up taking in over 25 boxes of their archives dating from the 1980s to 2025. This adds to sequences deposited here almost forty years ago. Much of it will be closed for data protection for many years, but some items are available by appointment - use accession reference TH/10718. Below, staff are pictured transferring these records from their original red box files into acid-free archival folders, ready for future cataloguing when funding permits.



We collect archives and publications from all political groups in the borough, as well as councillors and politicians. Recently we have received local branch records from the now defunct Women's Equality Party, and constituency files from former MP Peter Shore. If you have material of relevance to local politics and activism, let's chat! Please get in touch using the contact details below. For an introduction to other collections we hold, check out our [User Guide on politics and campaigning](#).

During our closure, archive staff also returned to East London Central Synagogue, Nelson Street, as mentioned in the last newsletter, this time surveying and preparing archives for imminent transfer here. The building's sale is expected to go through later this year.

New exhibition launching soon

During our closure we began installing [Communities of Liberation: African Peoples in London's East End, 1567-1802](#). The first version of this exhibition was on show at Tower Hamlets Town Hall a year ago, leading to coverage in [the Guardian](#) and [BBC](#).

It is now being shown here with additional content including:

- original archives from our collections, showing baptism records for many adults of African and Caribbean heritage. These took place at St George in the East and St John Wapping during the 1780s.

- [archaeological finds from Whitechapel](#), courtesy of UCL Archaeology South-East. This display illustrates community life in Georgian London in an area where many Black people lived - at or close to the White Raven pub. The White Raven was the scene of a rebellion by Black residents against local sheriffs, which you can read about in the exhibition.

The exhibition is still being installed. It will launch on Thursday 26 March, 6.00-7.30pm. [Book your free ticket here!](#)

A range of free public events are being programmed and will be announced in future newsletters. Communities of Liberation will be on show until Saturday 17 October 2026. We are grateful to the Communities of Liberation Co-Producers, Steering Group Members and to Historic England for funding this project.



The Modern Cockney Festival

Check out the programme for the annual [Modern Cockney Festival](#) which is happening now! It takes place every March. Upcoming events of particular interest to our readers include....

- a talk marking this year's 90th anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street
- a Poplar Rates Rebellion walking tour
- a Cockney ancestry workshop
- a new opera about suffragette and Poplar rates rebel Nellie Cressall



Women's History Month

Two exciting events happening tomorrow!

Women & the Regent's Canal

Thursday 12 March | 6.00-7.30pm

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

We are delighted to welcome local historian Carolyn Clark who will present stories and images of women's lives, both on and living by the eastern reach of the Regent's Canal. Carolyn runs the Regent's Canal Heritage projects, working with Laburnum Boat Club in Hackney and Tower Hamlets, and the Young Actors Theatre in Islington. She is the author of 'The East End Canal Tales', 'Tales of Old Ford, Bow', 'The Lower Clapton Tales' and 'The Shoreditch Tales'. She lives by the Hertford Union Canal in Bow.

[Book your free place here!](#)

The Women's Library @ 100

Thursday 12 March | 5.00-8.00pm

Venue: LSE Library, 10 Portugal Street, WC2A 2HD

This year, the LSE Library is celebrating the centenary of The Women's Library, the UK's oldest and largest book, archive, and museum collection, which documents the history of feminism, campaigning, and activism from the late 19th century to the present day. This special event will include a drinks reception with an opportunity to meet with the curators of the exhibition [The Women's Library at 100: Celebrating a Century of Collections](#) ,

alongside representatives from fellow research and archives institutions, including The National Archives, The London Archives, London Museum, East End Women's Museum and Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives. Stop by anytime between 5–8 pm to see the exhibition, pick up our special edition zine, and meet others interested in feminist history, archives, and activism. [Book your free place here!](#)

Threads of Liberation

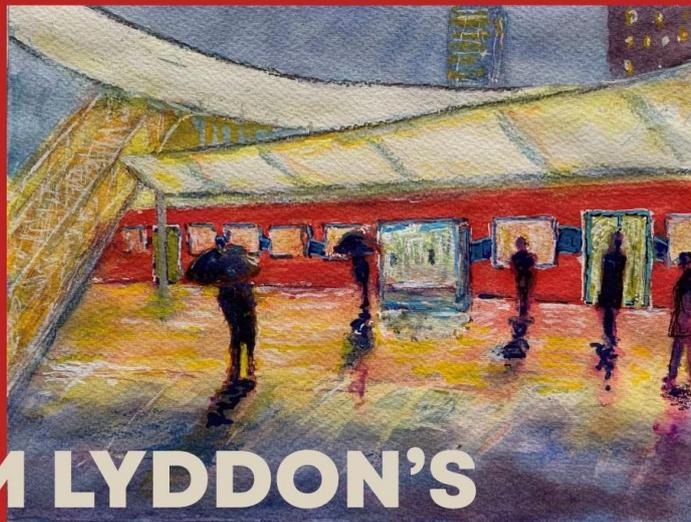
Wednesday 25 March | 5.30-8.30pm

Venue: G.47, Mile End Library, Queen Mary University of London, E1 4NS

Later in the month we will be co-facilitating an event at the Centre for Public Engagement at Queen Mary, University of London focussed on women's liberation in East London, past present and future. At this workshop you will be able to view materials from both Queen Mary and Tower Hamlets Archives, and reflect on what liberation means to you through a Nakshi kantha embroidery workshop with Oitij-jo Collective. Connect with others passionate about gender equity and women's justice in East London. This event is free and open to people of all genders. [Book your free place here!](#)

Art exhibition on show

01 Dec 2025 - 27 Mar 2026



TOM LYDDON'S CITYSCAPES

Art exhibition | until 27 March

Venue: Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives, First floor landing

We are currently hosting a small exhibition of local artist **Tom Lyddon's** paintings and prints which we received into our collections recently. Tom 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.

Poplar History Day

Saturday 28 March | 10.00am-4.00pm

Venue: St Matthias Community Centre, 113 Poplar High Street, E14 OAE

We are pleased to be able to share this event taking place at St Matthias Community Centre - a Victorian church building founded originally as the East India Company chapel which is now home to the amazing charity [Neighbours in Poplar](#).

There will be exhibitions and refreshments. The highlight of the day is a talk by **Danny Wells** entitled: A life in Poplar (before and after WW2).

Danny's talk will start promptly at 12 noon and the session will run through to 2pm. This is a free event with no need to book, but charitable donations are welcome.

News from our friends

Closing in two weeks is the brilliant exhibition [Joyce Edwards: A Story of Squatters](#) at **Four Corners** on Roman Road - a unique photographic portrait of Bethnal Green's squats during the 1970s.

The Fusiliers Museum is holding an Open Day on Wednesday 18 March, 11am-3pm. Explore rarely displayed photos and documents showing life at the Tower of London - and the role of the Royal Fusiliers - during World War II. Entry is included with a ticket to the Tower of London. Tower Hamlets residents pay only £1 (proof of address required).

Oxford House has some great heritage-inspired activities coming up including [Reframing the East End](#) with photographer Rehan Jamil, and a new archival display, Oxford House Curates, in the cafe.

Easter Saturday closure

We are now back open to the public - opening hours below. No appointment is necessary. Please note that the Reading Room will be closed on Saturday 4 April.

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 21 March
- **CLOSED on Easter Saturday - 4 April**
- Saturday 18 April
- Saturday 2 May
- Saturday 16 May

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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