

# Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives



**Drum roll .... announcing our next exhibition**



## **Cockney Rebels: Popular Music in Tower Hamlets, 1624-2003**

**Exhibition | 20 June 2024 - 21 February 2025**

**Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives**

From 'The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green' to 'Bonkers', the people of London's East End have always appreciated a good tune.

Our unique history, shaped by its connection to the river as a source of inspiration, work, and migration, has produced an extraordinary musical legacy, spanning everything from folk songs and sea shanties to music hall, jazz, punk, the Asian underground and grime.

Featuring over a hundred rare items selected by staff from the collections of Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives, this major new exhibition explores how our borough and its people have inspired and shaped popular music, both locally and globally, over four centuries.

*Cockney Rebels* will open at Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives with a launch event on the evening of Thursday 20 June with an exciting programme of events to follow.

**Thursday 20 June | 6.00-7.45pm | Save the date!**

Please check our website and social media nearer the time for booking information.

## Creative writing for 18–25-year-olds



**'Uncovering the Archive' Youth Programme (18-25):**

**Reimagining History Through Speculative Fiction**

**A three part workshop with Nisha Ramayya, Zara Dinnen & Sanjida Alam**

**at Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives**

**Workshops | Saturday 18 May and Saturday 1 June, 1-4pm**

**Venue: Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives**

Often archives are thought of as static and decided – holding the material of our past and ordering our collective histories. But archives are never done, never decided. Archives are speculative. Archives always contain gaps and breaks that archivists and writers read into and imagine beyond. We are hosting a miniseries of archival and writing workshops; the first has already happened but it's fine to join the next one/s!

Participants will have the chance to investigate Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives and [MayDay Rooms](#) archives, working with selected materials to reimagine and reconstruct histories, and using creative writing practices to make your own speculative

fictions and radical counter-realities. Hosted by archivists and organisers from Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives and MayDay Rooms, and writers and lecturers from Queen Mary, University of London, these workshops will focus on the history of activism and community organising in East London, and how this material holds the seeds of futures yet to be written.

Schedule:

**Workshop 2, Saturday 18 May, 1-4pm**

Narrating the archives: A guided session in which we'll encounter materials from the archives and work with them using a combination of archival methodologies and creative writing practices. [Book here](#)

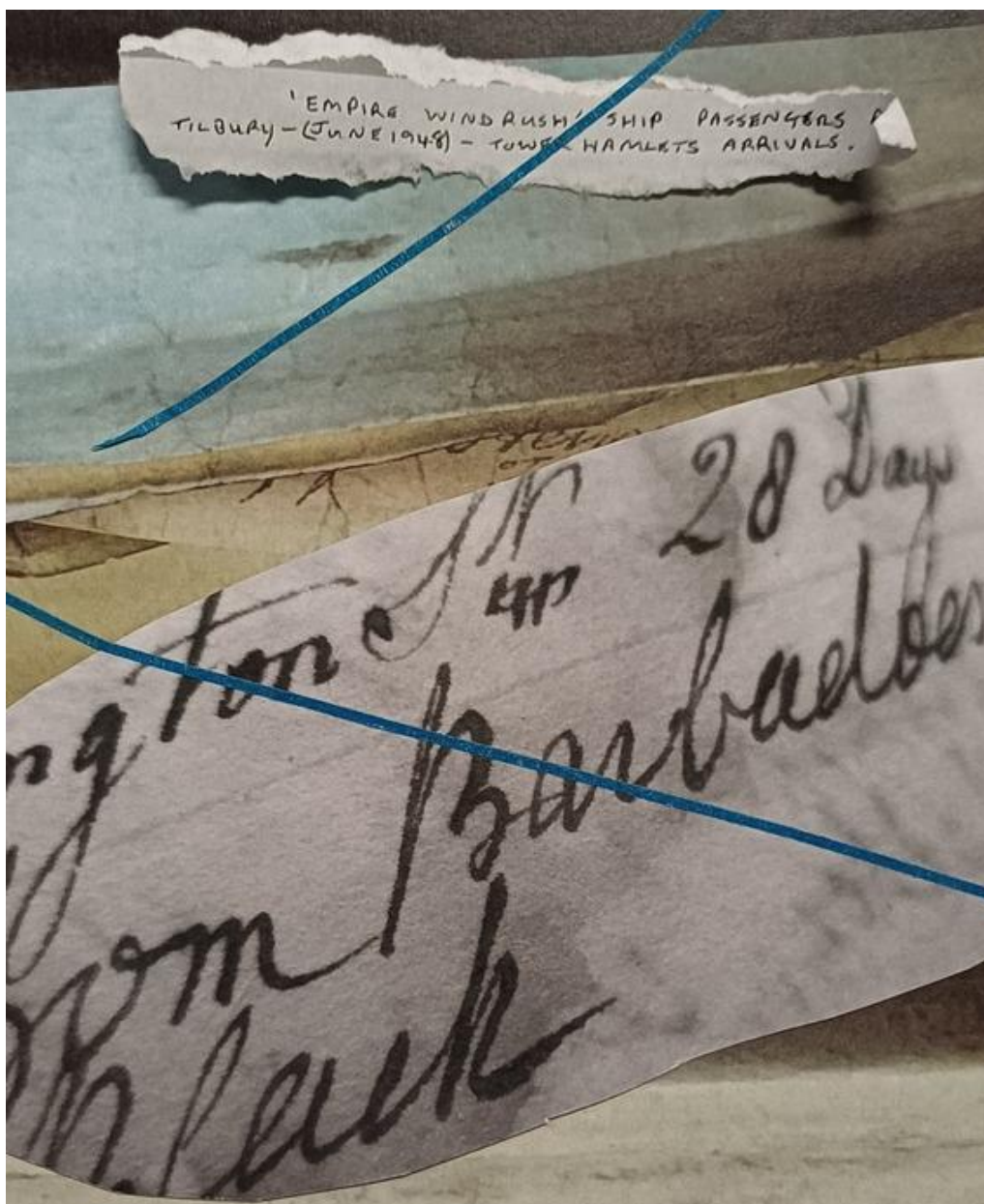
**Workshop 3, Saturday 1 June, 1-4pm**

Speculative futures: We'll head into the future - any number of possible futures! - and build on archival methodologies and creative writing practices to make new worlds. We'll share what we have written and put together our own archive from the workshops. [Book here](#)

'Uncovering the Archive' is free a programme for young people (18-25) on archives and archiving developed by MayDay Rooms in collaboration with other radical spaces, groups and people in London!



## What We Have Become - closing soon



*Artwork by Basil Olton, 2024*

The last day of our current exhibition is Saturday 1 June - catch it before it closes!

[What We Have Become](#) is an art exhibition by five artists responding to Stuart Hall's idea of cultural identity being formed from "points of deep significant difference".

The artists' work explores the impacts of silence and erasure in archival records created and kept by the British state about people of colour – for example, the destruction of Home Office immigration records which caused the Windrush Scandal – and how the violence implicit in the destruction of archival records may be reproduced as a rupture in the sense of self, identity and belonging.

Casting the exhibition as a space of healing and reconciliation, the artists evoke new narratives emphasising the contributions, resilience and rich cultural heritage of communities of colour, with the histories of Black and Asian Britons retold on their own terms.

The exhibiting artists are **Holly Graham, Rudy Loewe, Diensen Pamben, Kelly Wu** and **Basil Olton**.

The final FREE events in the *What We Have Become* exhibition programme are below:

### Archival breaks, gaps and silences

**Thursday 16 May | 6.30 - 8.00pm | Online talk**

Utilising the archive as a mode of expression and social document, this panel discussion with the artists participating in the exhibition, will explore the gaps within the archive that invite us to engage critically with the silenced voices and obscured histories that underpin its very existence and its relationship to artistic practice. Based on the writings of Stuart Hall and his essay 'Constituting the Archive', the panel will discuss how the archive has influenced their work and the connection between memory and meaning.

FREE Zoom event - [book online here to get the link](#).

## What we can become

**Thursday 30 May | 6.00-8.30pm**

**Venue: Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives**

With a subtle twist of the title (inspired by the book *Complicity* by Jay Bernard), the closing event for the exhibition *What We Have Become* showcases the work of a group of local young people from [Mile End Community Project](#) on their creative response to the exhibition exploring the impact of archives on collective and personal identity and how art can possibly help us understand modern day Britain.

Free entry - [book your place here](#).

## Coming up in June! A varied crop of events

### East End History Club: Parent & under 5's

**Friday 7 June**  
10am-11:30am



*Toddlers at the Mother's Arms (formerly the Gunmakers Arms pub, Old Ford Road), a childcare initiative of the East London Federation of the Suffragettes, c1917. Ref: P12195*

**East End History Club: Parent and Baby Edition**

**Friday 7 June | 10am-11.30am**

## Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

Come along to our brand new East End History Club designed especially for parents with their under 5s. It's a chance to meet other parents, enjoy a cuppa and browse our collection of materials - eg maps, photographs, newspapers - which illustrate the amazing history of London's famous East End. Toys for children aged 0-5 will be provided, along with a mini kiddie brunch, tea, coffee and biscuits.

Free entry, limited places - [book here](#).



## Festival of Communities

**Saturday 8 June | 11.30am-4.30pm**

**Venue: Stepney Green Park**

We will be hosting a stall at this year's [Festival of Communities](#) organised by our neighbour Queen Mary, University of London. From soft play and give-it-a-go sports, to QMUL researchers and community organisations running thought-provoking and hands-on

activities, there is something for everyone to get involved in at the annual festival in Stepney Green.

All activities are free to attend and food from local providers will be available to buy.

Our stall will feature the project **Changemakers of East London**, a collaboration between Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives and Studio Futurall, connecting Tower Hamlets residents with archival material on the local history of changemaking. Educators, Activists, Organisers, Creators, Representatives... Tower Hamlets has a long and rich history of people making change and this project will inspire young people to follow in their footsteps. Come along to Stepney Green Park on 8th June to find out more!

The Changemakers stall will be popping up across the borough in June - the next date is **Saturday 22 June** at Idea Store Canary Wharf.

## Talk | The Vitality of Needs: Retooling the Humanities for Social Action

**Thursday 13 June | 6.00-7.30pm**

**Venue: Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives**

We are delighted to partner with [Northeastern University London](#), a satellite campus of the prestigious American university whose London base is in St Katherine Dock, to present a keynote talk by Kris K. Manjapra, Professor in History and Global Studies.

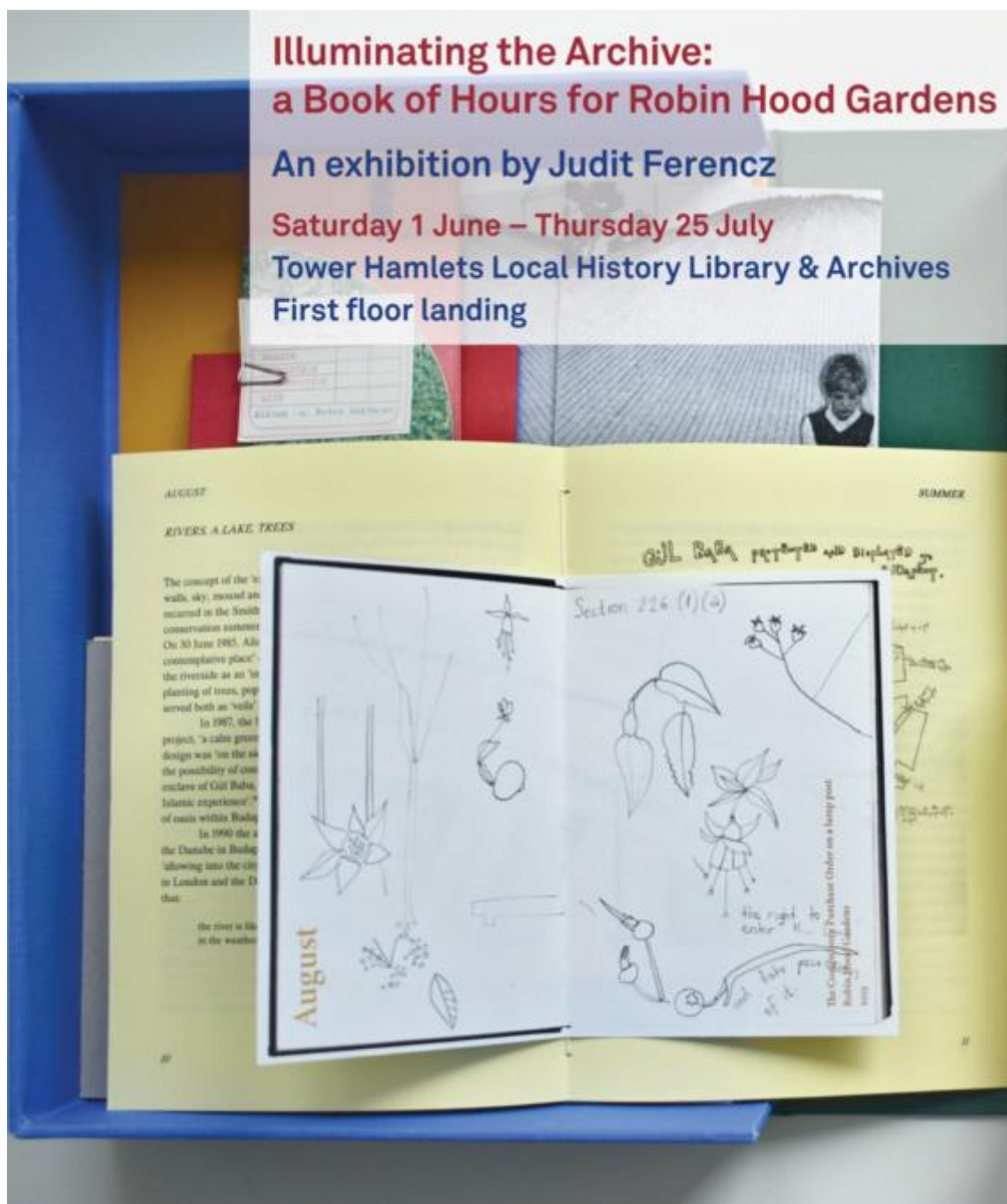
What and who are the Humanities for? Manjapra (pictured right) will explore powers of the Humanities with reference to specific case-studies. He will focus on archiving, technology, documentation, and data performances that take place in communities, outside the structure of universities. Retooled Humanities practices, embedded in community organizations, are essential for successful responses to the greatest social, political, and ecological needs of our times.

Free entry, all welcome - [book your place here](#).





## New exhibition about Poplar housing estate



**Exhibition | Saturday 1 June - Thursday 25 July**

**Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives | First floor landing**

Coming up in June and July, we will be hosting a small exhibition on our first floor landing which is part of the [London Festival of Architecture](#).

*Illuminating the Archive: A Book of Hours for Robin Hood Gardens* by **Judit Ferencz** explores the architectural and historical value of a building in the context of the time it takes to form a community and the efforts involved in making it a home. Rather than separating the life of a building into times of construction, inhabitation and demolition, this exhibition prompts us to relate to our built environment in terms of ongoing maintenance and care.

Robin Hood Gardens is a housing estate in Poplar, opened in 1972, which was refused heritage listing twice and is currently being demolished and regenerated. Judit Ferencz, who is an illustrator and an art and architectural historian, made drawings of everyday life

on the estate in the years immediately prior to its demolition and excavated the past of the buildings in architectural and historical archives, including Tower Hamlets Local History Library Archives. Judit found that when designing Robin Hood Gardens, its architects the Smithsons had also researched the past of the site and thoughtfully considered ways of living there.

Two different kinds of drawings - the architects' designs for a future estate and Judit's illustrations witnessing its final moments - are brought together in the form of a series of handmade books and booklets, as a contemporary interpretation of the late medieval prayer book the Book of Hours. By paging through these books readers may contemplate the life of a building that by now irreversibly belongs to the past and yet it may help us imagine a better future.

Judit's research was developed at The Bartlett School of Architecture as part of her PhD, and was funded by the RIBA LKE Ozolins Studentship. The exhibition is located opposite the Reading Room here on Bancroft Road where she carried out some of her research.

## News from our friends

The **Ragged School Museum** has [some exciting events coming up](#) exploring the past experiences of child migrants, the Victorian East End and Barnardo's London.



The **National Portrait Gallery** and **Central St Martins** are inviting applications for a fully funded Collaborative Doctoral Studentship, starting in October 2024.

### [Harry Diamond: Visualising Migrant London](#)

This project will explore the legacy of Harry Diamond (1924-2009), a self-taught Jewish photographer from the East End, as articulating diversity, migrant presence, and urban change in post-war London. In providing a framework for future access to the Diamond archive, and by examining and interpreting an under-researched part of the NPG's Collection, the project provides engagement with London's multi-cultural communities from an institution based at its heart.

Application deadline: 2 June 2024

Image from National Portrait Gallery, photograph by Harry Diamond: Unknown boy in Rampart St, after 1975. Reproduced from a gelatin silver print NPG x210305.

## Contact us

- Email us: [localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto: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 18 May
- Saturday 1 June
- Saturday 15 June
- Saturday 6 July

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.

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