

# World War One

## in Tower Hamlets



Exploring the collections of  
Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

# Contents

Introduction	3
<b>Key themes</b>	
Air raids	4
Germans in the East End	6
Military conscription	8
<b>Research ideas</b>	
Soldiers' lives	10
Women	11
Children	12
Factories	13
Black and Asian East Enders	14
Newspapers	16
The wounded	17
Streets and buildings	18
<b>Useful websites</b>	19
<b>Contact details</b>	20



Items from the archives collection illustrating remembrance for those lost in the war.



The unveiling of the memorial to the victims of the Upper North Street School tragedy in Poplar Recreation ground, 1919.

## Tip

Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives is one of the largest local authority collections in London, and holds original archives dating back to the fourteenth century as well as thousands of maps, photographs, newspapers and publications. The records of the Metropolitan Boroughs of Bethnal Green, Stepney and Poplar are particularly well-represented in the archive holdings, and include committee minutes, rate books and correspondence files. In addition, the collections include the records of many local institutions, including places of worship, schools, local clubs and societies and businesses. Where these organisations were active during the period 1914-1918, the impact of the war on the institution and its members, owners or customers can be reflected in its archives from that period.

Local history library materials include books, pamphlets, cuttings and photographs and are arranged according to a unique classification system which can be consulted in the library to track down themes and areas of study relating to "War".

Catalogues for the collections can be accessed onsite and will soon be available online at [www.ideastore.co.uk/local-history](http://www.ideastore.co.uk/local-history).



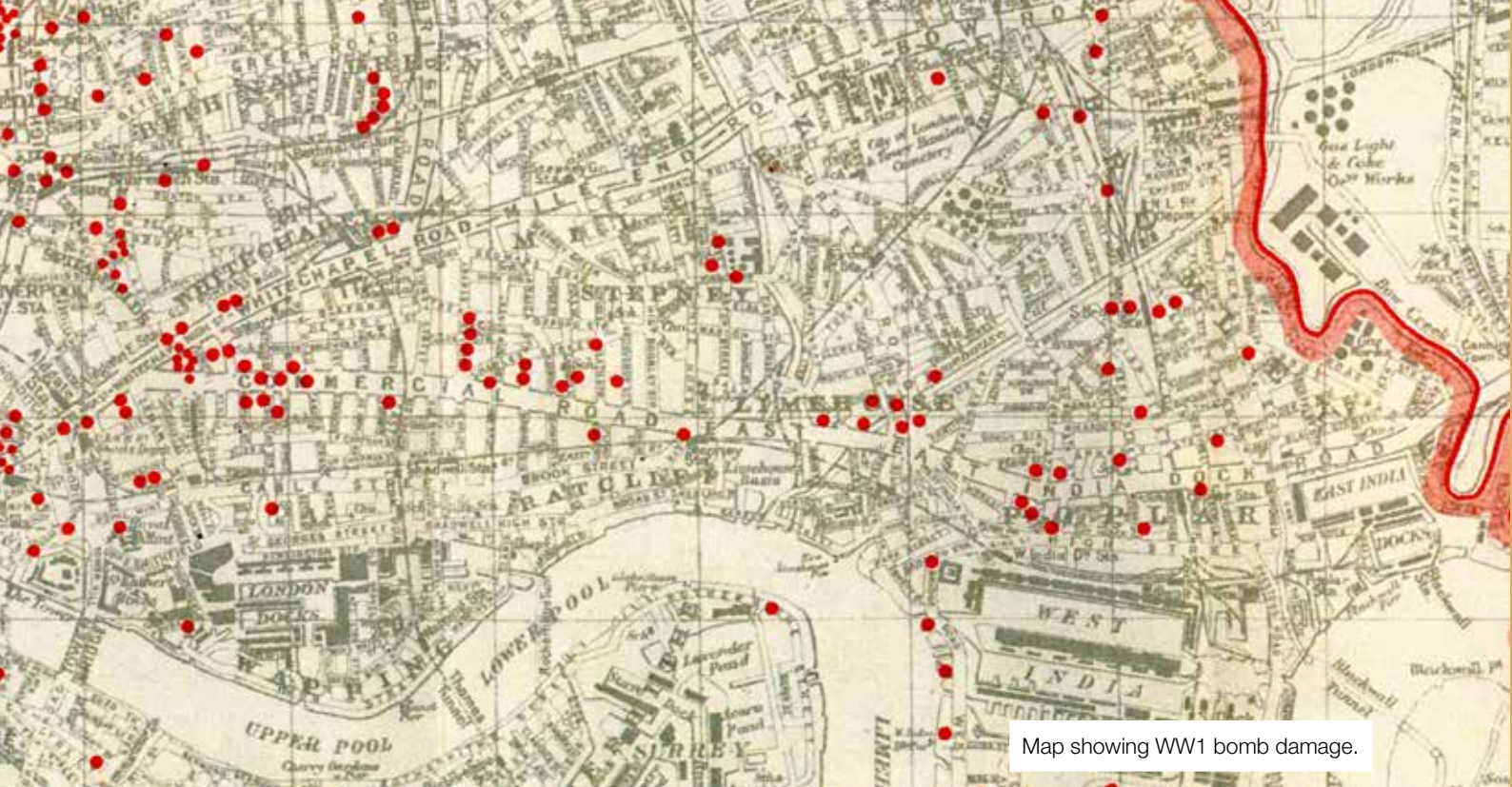
Employees of Locke, Lancaster and W W and R Johnson & Sons Ltd, lead and metal merchants, Burdett Road, showing a predominantly female workforce.

## Introduction

World War One had a significant impact on the old Metropolitan Boroughs of Stepney, Poplar and Bethnal Green - these boroughs merged in 1965 to become the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Containing dockside and industrial areas, the predominantly working class East End of London at this time was home to over half a million people whose lives would be directly affected by the war. Across the country, as thousands of men were volunteering or, from 1916, conscripted to serve in the armed forces, many other people remained. Women on the home front, taking on responsibilities in civil defence, industry and business, gained an independence that would permanently transform their position in society. In the East End, factories newly staffed by women and infirm men were turned over for the mass production of munitions and other supplies for the war effort. Sailors from the Royal and Merchant Navy who had joined up

in Britain's overseas territories began to arrive in London in larger numbers than ever before and settle near the docks; but public attitudes towards the East End's long-established German community grew hostile and led to rioting. Naval airships, zeppelins and fixed-wing aircraft loomed overhead; bombs fell, one of which landed on a primary school in Poplar to terrible effect.

Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives holds a variety of records reflecting life in the borough itself at this time as well as activities immediately after the war – for example, living conditions for the returned soldiers, remembrance and war memorials. This guide identifies some key themes for further study and provides tips on how to use our collections to delve further.



Map showing WW1 bomb damage.

## Air Raids

Most people associate the Blitz with the Second World War, but the first airborne terror campaign in Britain took place during World War One. Bombs dropped on Britain - initially from zeppelins by night and, in the war's later years,

from aeroplanes during daylight hours - killed over 1500 people and injured thousands more. Air raids provided an unprecedented means of striking at resources vital to the enemy's war effort. Lighting restrictions and blackouts, air raid warnings and improvised shelters first took place during WW1 and went on to become central to the home front during the Second World War less than thirty years later.



Damage to the Black Swan pub, Bow Road, 1916.

The East End of London was targeted because it hosted the docks and industrial areas which were making and building munitions for the war effort. Poplar in particular was badly struck, leading to the deaths of many innocent civilians.

### Tip

A good place to start when researching air raids is J Hook's *Air raids on London, 1914-18*, a copy of which is available in the Library. Council minutes provide references to the adaptation of buildings for air raid shelters while newspapers provide reports of the raids themselves. The collections include photographs of air raids in the former borough of Poplar area.

# The Great Air Raid.

East End  
news

EAST LONDON BADLY BOMBED.

JUNE 15.  
1917

SCHOOLS BOMBED: SCHOOL CHILDREN KILLED.

97 PEOPLE KILLED; 439 SEVERELY INJURED.

MR. WILL CROOKS BOWLED OVER.

In this and the following columns we furnish a full report of the organised raid by German aircraft on London—mainly on East London—on Wednesday morning last. The Press Censor still prohibits the mention of names of thoroughfares, or buildings, where damage has occurred, which is the explanation why individual places and institutions are not named in our reports. This will be clearly understood by our readers.

The final official report issued prior to our going to Press showed that the total casualties to that time were as follows; but the condition of some other injured persons was precarious, and it is quite possible that before this reaches our readers other deaths may have taken place:—

Men Killed	...	...	...	55
Women Killed	...	...	...	16
Children Killed	...	...	...	26
<b>Total Killed</b>	...	...	...	<b>97</b>
Men Injured	...	...	...	223
Women Injured	...	...	...	122
Children Injured	...	...	...	94
				<b>439</b>
<b>Total Killed and Injured</b>	...	...	...	<b>536</b>

A very strong feeling is arising that there has been neglect somewhere. Lord Derby has stated that notice of the raid was received off the Coast forty minutes before the raiders reached London, so that there should have been ample time for a warning, and for an organised attack on the raiders by our own aircraft, before they reached East London.

## The tragedy at Upper North Street School

The first daylight bombing attack on London by a fixed-wing aircraft took place on 13 June, 1917. Gotha Bombers flew in from Germany and dropped bombs across a swathe of Essex and London. 108 East Enders were killed that day with over 400 people injured. In the gravest incident, a bomb hit the Upper North Street primary school in Poplar. The bomb fell through the roof into the girls' class on the top floor; it then proceeded to fall through the first floor boys' classroom before finally exploding in the infant class where there were about fifty children gathered. 18 children died as a result of the bombing, of which 16 were aged between four and six.

There are also orders of service from the children's funeral at All Saints Church a week later, and the 1920 unveiling of the Children's Memorial in Poplar Recreation Ground which can still be visited today.

Find out more about this event by visiting the library to look first-hand at the collections, or view our online exhibition.

<https://www.ideastore.co.uk/local-history-online-exhibitions-upper-north-street-school-air-raid-june-1917>

Examples from our collections relating to this tragedy, including photographs, ephemera and press cuttings.



# Germans in East London

East London's German community had been gradually established from the eighteenth century, when it was primarily centred on the sugar-baking industry – processing raw sugar cane soon after it had arrived in the docks from British colonies overseas.

On the outbreak of the First World War, the Alien Restriction Act was passed which required all enemy 'aliens' to register with the authorities. This included British citizens of German heritage. Soon afterwards, arrangements were made to intern men of fighting age who were not naturalised British citizens.

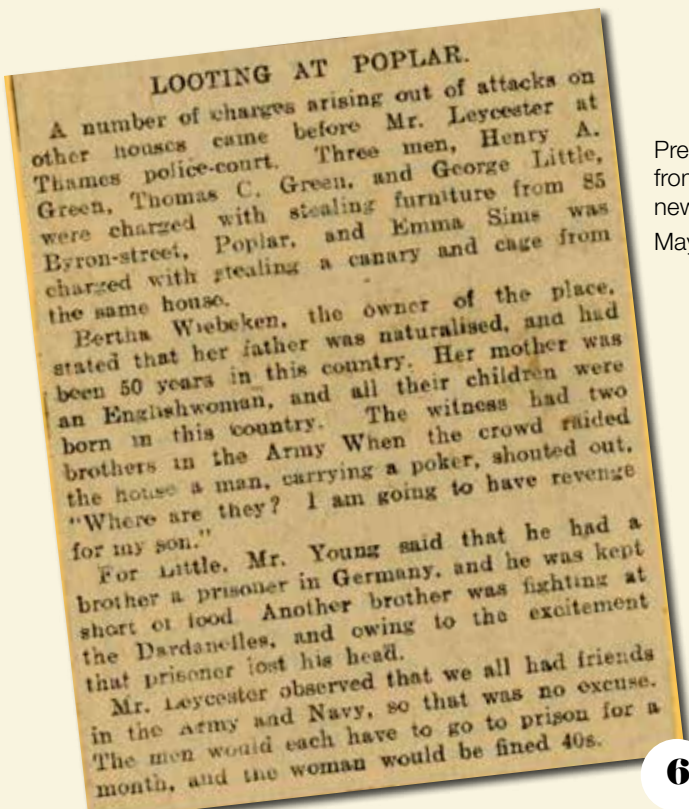
Public hostility towards London's German population was sporadically expressed in attacks and vandalism throughout the war, but a series of destructive riots took place across the country in May 1915 after the sinking by Germany of the RMS Lusitania (a Cunard ocean liner sailing from the USA to Liverpool) which resulted in nearly 1200 civilian fatalities.

German-run shops across London and in particular the East End were targeted by mobs and looters, and German Londoners were attacked in Bethnal Green and Poplar. Fifty

people needed treatment in Poplar Hospital after one day's rioting alone.

Livelihoods were destroyed in the riots, resulting in many women, children and men too old to have been interned returning to Germany. Others who did not leave voluntarily were at risk of expulsion from Britain by the Home Office. After the war, only a few men eventually released from internment were granted permission to remain; most were repatriated.

The thriving days of the East End's 'Little Germany' were over.



Press cuttings from local newspapers in May 1915.





Rioting outside A. Schoenfeld's shop, Crisp Street, Poplar.

**Tip**

Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives holds a file of original press cuttings on the anti-German riots. In addition, we hold the records of St George's German Lutheran church in Whitechapel. The church remained open during the war and its archives show how it adapted in difficult circumstances, for example in providing relief for the families of interned Germans and prisoners of war across the country. Its registers are also of unique importance to genealogists seeking information about ancestors of German heritage.

For further reading in our library collections, we recommend the publications of Dr Panikos Panayi about Germans in Britain during WW1 from which some of the text opposite has been sourced.

Project volunteer Anne Connaughton has researched the life of German Londoners living in the East End during WW1 using census returns, electoral registers and trade directories as well as council archives. She writes:

**Harry Jungblut**, born in Poplar in 1855 to a German father and English mother, followed his father into the baking trade, and became a prominent local figure, serving five terms on the

Poplar Borough Council, together with a term (1910-1913) as a member of the Poplar Board of Guardians. His contemporaries included MP and future Labour leader George Lansbury.

Despite his high standing in the local community, or perhaps because of it, Jungblut's bakers shop at 43 Upper North Street was badly damaged in the riots in 1915.

After that no trace of him can be found in the archives until his death in Brighton in 1922.



Harry Jungblut (centre).

The lives of Harry Jungblut and other German East Londoners can be traced in our collections. Given the antagonism from the local community, many moved away or changed their names, such as pork butcher John Hagmaier, a trader in Poplar High Street who became John Hammond.



Army recruiting office, Poplar, 1914.

## Military conscription

In January 1916 the Military Service Act was passed, requiring men between the ages of 19 and 40 to join the armed forces. However, men could apply for exemption from conscription for a variety of reasons (see opposite page). Tribunals met locally around the country to review these applications and the court's decisions were recorded in a register. Though after the war Parliament directed that all tribunal registers should be destroyed, a handful survive. Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives holds the register for the Poplar Military Service Tribunal. The Metropolitan Borough of Poplar included Bow, Bromley-by-Bow and the Isle of Dogs as well as Poplar itself.

The Poplar Military Service Tribunal Register contains unique information about over 3000 appeals from men living or working in the borough. In some cases the employer was located within the borough but the man resided elsewhere, or vice versa.

The Register records the names of men who applied, the exemption they sought, and the decision of the court. It includes the addresses of each applicant, or their employers' name and place of work, where they are applying on behalf of an employee. The Register is therefore a unique and valuable resource for people tracing ancestors who were resident or working in the borough at that time. It has other wide-ranging uses for research - for example, you can find out names of people who cited Conscientious Objection as a reason they did not want to serve; and who claimed ill health or infirmity. It can also be used to support research into the wide range of economic impacts of the war as experienced by local businesses as well as individuals and families.

Thanks to funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the efforts of volunteers, the register has now been digitised and indexed, and can be searched online here [www.ideastore.co.uk/local-history](http://www.ideastore.co.uk/local-history)

The Poplar Military Service Tribunal Register.





Exemptions to conscription were permitted under the following categories -

- "A: On the ground that it is expedient in the national interests that the man should, instead of being employed in military service, be engaged in other work in which he is habitually engaged.
- B: On the ground that it is expedient in the national interests that the man should, instead of being employed in military service, be engaged in other work which he wishes to be engaged.
- C: If he is being educated or trained for any work, on the ground that it is expedient in the national interests that, instead of being employed in military service, he should continue to be so educated or trained.
- D: On the ground that serious hardship would ensue if the man were called up for Army service, owing to his exceptional financial or business obligations or domestic position.
- E: On the ground of ill-health or infirmity.
- F: On the ground of a conscientious objection to the undertaking of combatant service.
- G: On the ground that the principal and usual occupation of the man is one of those included in the list of occupations certified by Government Departments for exemption."

Cass, Rogers & Co., Ltd., Tenby Street, S.E. - (1872-1911)

Serial No. of Case.	Reference to Serial No. of previous entry.	MAN IN RESPECT OF WHOM APPLICATION MADE.			EMPLOYER.		Nature and Grounds of Application. (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f) and (g), as on Application.	Whether made by Man or Employer.	Date when Received.	In (100)
		Name and Occupation.	Address.	Age.	Name and Business.	Address.				
936		Frederick J. B. Clerk.	112 Gough St. Poplar	24	Amalgamated Resco.	Ludgate Hill	E	m	22616	
939		James H. J. Manager	284 Shrewsbury Rd. Forest Gate	39	Wright & Co.	15 King St. Poplar.	G. D. G	m	22616	
940		Holmes C. J. Licensed Victualler	99 Upper Horse St. Poplar	40				m	22616	
941		Macdonald A. Dental Practitioner	63 Serial St. Poplar	32	Mr. Barrett Dental	109 G. J. Road.	D	B	22616	
942		Galston A. S. Baker	156 Abbot Rd. Poplar	29			G. D. G	m	22616	
943		Loote J. J. Insurance Agent	93 Clements Rd. C. Ham	39	86 Bow Road.		G. D. G.	m	22616	
944		Young J. J. Wireworker	36 Parnell Road Bow	25	C. H. Young Wireworker	169 St. Leonards St. Bromley	G	B	22616	
945		Lambidge J. C. Accountant's Clerk	75 Bedegar Rd. Bow	20	A. J. Hill Silicoth & Co.	2 Broad St. Place E. C.	D	m	22616	
946		Pugh J.	31 Gurdley Street	35	French & Sons	Old Ford Rd.	D	m	22616	

This excerpt from the register lists some of the applications put before the Poplar Military Service Tribunal. The addresses of employees and in some cases employers are given. The occupations of the appellants include wire-worker, baker, bricklayer, licensed victualler, dentist,

insurance agent, and accountant's clerk. Most applications in this example are for exemption D—serious hardship. In some cases either the employee or the employer resides outside of the borough of Poplar. The result of these applications is not shown in this excerpt.

**Tip**

The Middlesex Military Service Tribunal archives have also survived and they have recently been digitised by The National Archives. The case papers include more detail about each case that went before the tribunal than the Poplar register. During WW1, the County of Middlesex included parts of West and North London and stretched as far east as Tottenham, Enfield, Wood Green and Edmonton. You can search the register here:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/middlesex-military-service-appeal-tribunal.htm>



Soldiers of the 17th London Regiment (Stepney and Poplar Rifles).

## Would you like to find out about East End soldiers?

If you would like to research the life of someone who fought in the war, there are numerous family history tools at your disposal. Free access to the genealogical database Ancestry Library Edition is available at all Tower Hamlets libraries and Idea Stores. Use this website to look up census records and military service lists. The blog 'My Tommy's War' by staff at The National Archives researching their own ancestors provides particularly good tips on how to go about this, and includes East End case studies.

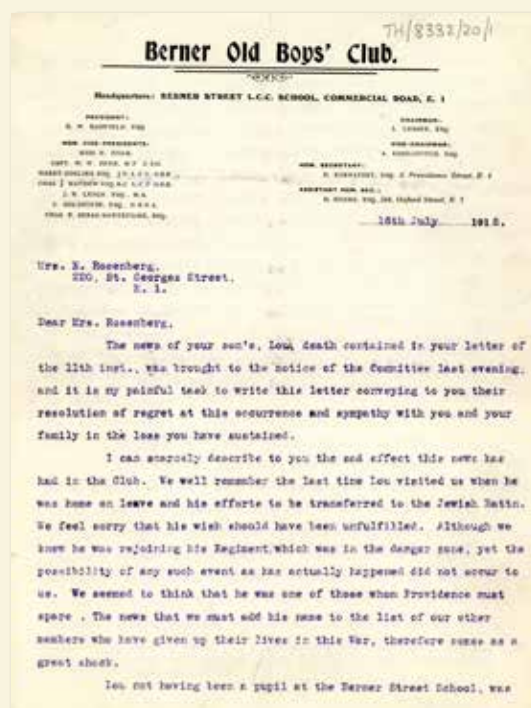
<http://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/blog/tag/my-tommys-war/>

A visit to Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives will enable you to look up names and addresses of your ancestor in local electoral registers and trade directories kept onsite, though please note that no electoral registers were compiled for 1916 or 1917. You can also look at local newspapers to check reports of residents killed in battle or safely returned, though these are not routinely reported.

The names of soldiers who lost their lives can often be found in relation to the later unveilings of

war memorials. Photographs of some of these memorials are held . A national index of war memorials is held by the Imperial War Museum and is accessible online at [www.ukniwm.org.uk](http://www.ukniwm.org.uk). Of particular interest is the memorial in Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park where the grave of local hero Arthur Lovell is located, a soldier who survived the war but died on a Limehouse street on Armistice Day in 1928 as he went to save a child from an oncoming vehicle just as the two-minute silence ended.

The government employed Medical Officers in each borough who reviewed and reported on issues in public health locally. Their reports cover the war years and are freely available online at <http://wellcomelibrary.org/moh/>. Those covering Tower Hamlets boroughs can be read in hardcopy at the library. The reports are a very valuable source for the impact of the war on living conditions in the East End, illustrating the setting for local soldiers departing or returning.



A moving letter from 1918 from the Club to the mother of Private Louis Rosenberg.

### Tip

Our archives can tell us more about individuals who died or were injured, as organisations or institutions whose staff or members went to the front kept records detailing their fates, such as the letter from Berner Old Boys' Club above. Some local institutions or places of worship published Rolls of Honour, and our holdings include those of Olga Street School, Bethnal Green Council, and the Parish of St. Luke's, Millwall. Unusually, the latter also includes a list of the names of wounded soldiers from the parish.

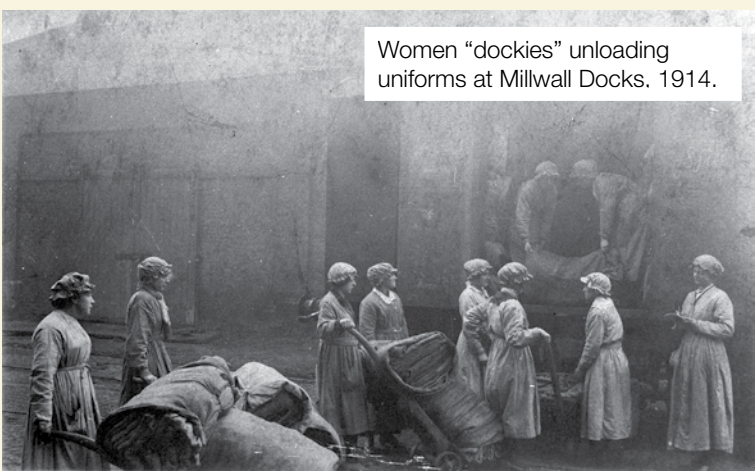


Three women wearing the costumes of First World War munitions workers including Grace Boothby of 8 Janet Street, Isle of Dogs.

## What did women do during the war?

Women's roles changed dramatically throughout this period as they took up jobs which previously had only been available to men, often in factories and hospitals. Men and women worked together, as shown in a selection of photos from the Stepney Commercial Gasworks Munitions Factory.

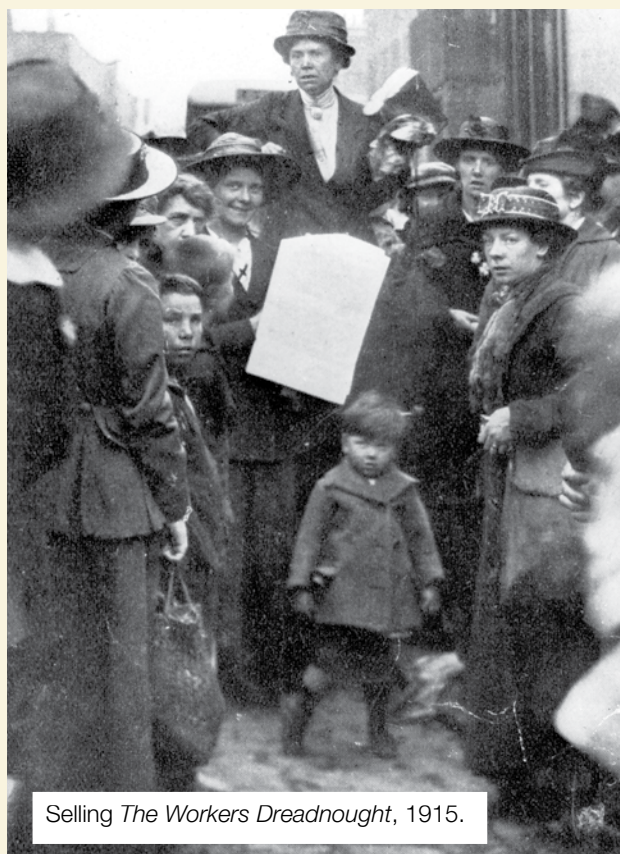
The series of "War" photos within the Island History Trust collection includes some depictions of women at work in factories on the Isle of Dogs.



Women "dockies" unloading uniforms at Millwall Docks. 1914.

The East London Federation of Suffragettes, whose activities were based locally in Bow, published *The Women's Dreadnought* newspaper which recorded issues faced by local women on a daily basis; they were expected to work hard in factories and raise children on a very low income. Copies of the newspaper can be viewed on microfilm at the library. One factory in Globe Road was fined for paying women ten shillings (50p) for a 49 ½ hour week.

From her base in Bow, leading Suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst's campaigned against the war—she opposed conscription—and with her comrades established relief opportunities for local women such as a nursery and a cost-price restaurant. Her book *The Home Front* published in 1932 is held in the library which provides details of these.



Selling *The Workers Dreadnought*, 1915.

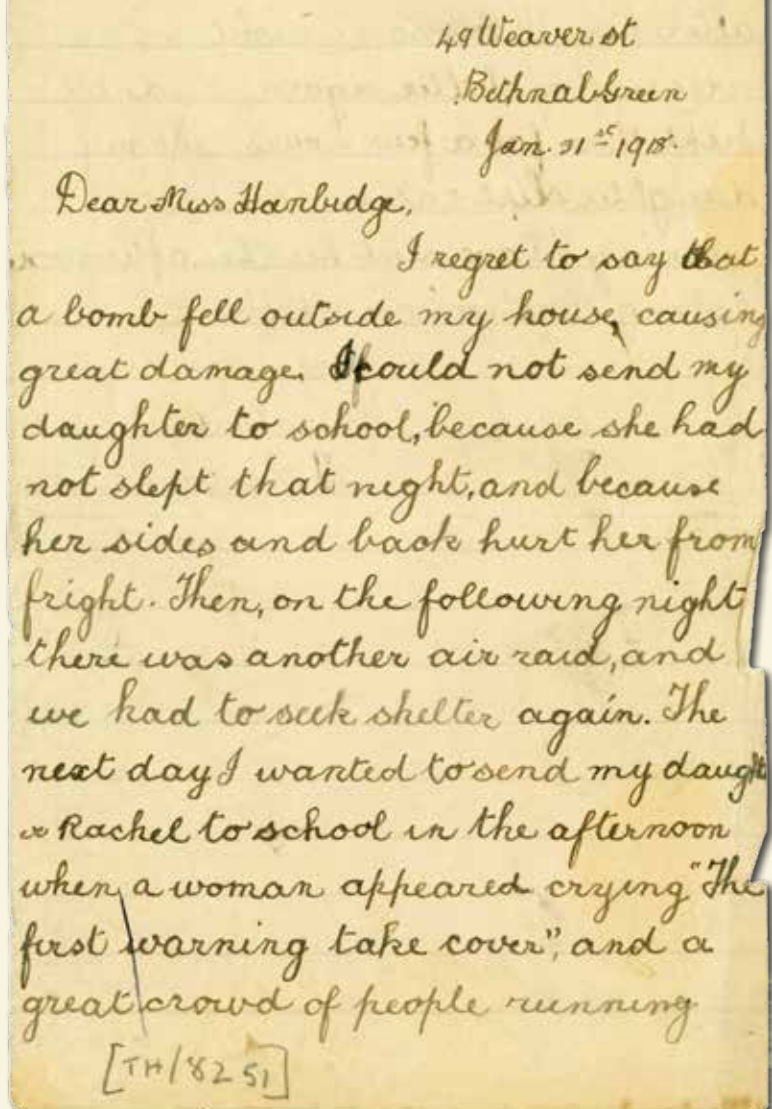
### Tip

Women were also very actively involved in nursing and fundraising for wounded soldiers, so as well as local newspapers, newsletters or minutes from hospitals and related charities can illustrate other aspects of women's wartime experience.

## What was it like to be an East End child during the war?

*The attendance is exceedingly bad this afternoon. The children are tired out having been up each night this week until past midnight – Many have been for shelter to railway stations, factories & such places.* [Fairfield Road Girls School, Bow log book, 28th September 1917. (I/CFS/C/1/2/3)]

Children continued to go to school throughout the war although with a growing absence of teachers who would join up. Evidence regarding school life can be found in school logbooks from this period. Many of these are held at London Metropolitan Archives, but we hold examples including those for Bonner Street School, Central Foundation Girls' School, George Green's School, Guardian Angels Roman Catholic School, and Stepney Greencoat School. The minutes of the East London Teachers Association portray the struggle to maintain standards under difficult circumstances. Local places of worship provided an important framework for organised activities for children outside of the education system. Such activities can be found reported in the local newspapers and parish magazines which are held in the library collection. Efforts were made to brighten the lives of children through treats and parties. For example, the parish magazine of St Matthias, Poplar reported in January 1918 that "notwithstanding war with all its terrible



Letter from a parent of a child at the Central Foundation Girls School, Spital Square, 1918.

accessories, the annual Christmas Treats to the children... took place as usual... For nearly two hours the little guests gave themselves up to complete enjoyment, telling their elders vociferously to 'Pack up their troubles in their old kit bags and smile, smile, SMILE.'



Certificate awarded to a Poplar schoolgirl, 1916.

### Tip

Clubs were also active part of young people's lives in this period. You can consult the archives of a range of local clubs and societies including the Highway Clubs (based in Shadwell, Ratcliff and St George's), the archives of which we hold. The cuttings and pamphlet collections are worth investigating for clubs and societies. The cuttings for Kingsley Hall in Bow for example, show the establishment in 1915 of a girls' club primarily to provide the "working girls in the neighbourhood with good wholesome, cheap dinners, and the opportunity for social re-union during the mid-day interval."

## What did local factories produce for the war effort?

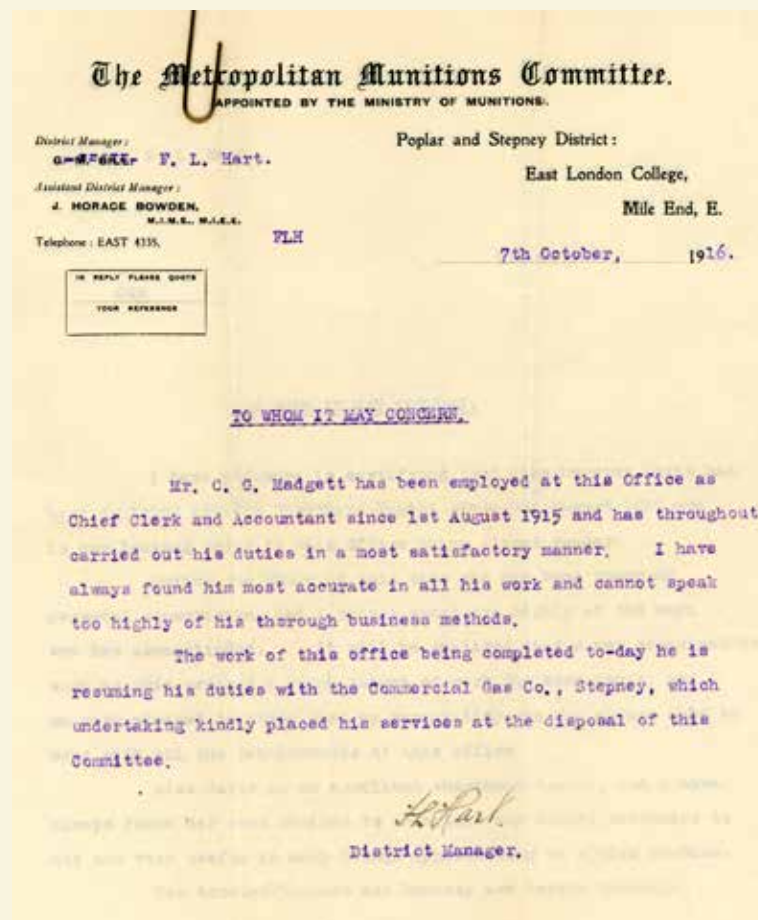
During World War One, British industries turned many of their production methods over to helping the war effort. The factories in Tower Hamlets were no exception. One such example was the Commercial Gas Company whose gasworks at Harford Street in Stepney were utilised for munitions manufacture between 1915 and 1917. At Bryant and May's match factory in Bow, workers engaged in munitions production making fuses. The Connaught Works in Old Ford Road, Bow, was opened in 1918 and is now the only surviving building of the London Small Arms Company where two thousand Lea-Enfield rifles were produced by shift workers during the war.

The East End garment and tailoring industry, in the Whitechapel district dominated by the Jewish population, was harnessed for military purposes producing additional uniforms, kit bags, etc. Notices in newspapers report which local firms were awarded contracts, including Jameson's of Poplar, Fifers of Roman Road, and the Weyman Clothing Company in Stepney.

Casting gun cases at the Commercial Gas Company Munitions Foundry, Stepney, c 1916.



Schneider's tailoring shop, Whitechapel, just before World War One.



Testimonial to CG Madgett, Chief Clerk of the Commercial Gas Company Munitions Foundry, Stepney, 1916.

### Tip

Look at diverse sources. In addition to the adverts or notices placed in local newspapers mentioned above, the Poplar Military Tribunal Register (p8) lists the places of work of men appealing against conscription. Letters of reference provided by employers can describe in some detail the nature of the work undertaken and why the man in question could not be spared. The Medical Officer of Health reports (p12) mention local trades and industries in the context of their effect on residents' health.



## **Were Black or Asian East Enders involved in the war?**

More than four million men and women from Britain's colonies volunteered for service during World War One. The docks situated in Stepney and Poplar brought seamen from all over the world, often living in hostels and lodging houses. In particular, seamen from the Indian subcontinent have had a presence in London dating back to the establishment of the East India Company's base in Blackwall in the early seventeenth century. These seamen settled in London's East End close to the docks and were commonly referred to as 'lascars'. The word was once used to describe any sailor from the Indian sub-continent or any other part of Asia, but came to refer to people from Bengal (a geographic area

which includes the modern-day country of Bangladesh). During World War One, more merchant seamen were needed to take the place of British sailors who had been recruited into the Royal Navy. As a result the numbers of lascars grew further. By the end of World War One Indian seafarers made up 20% of the British maritime labour force.

Close to the Tower of London in Trinity Square Gardens is Tower Hill Memorial, a monument that commemorates British merchant seamen who lost their lives in the First and Second World Wars. Many of the names on the monument indicate seamen of Bengali origin with names such as Miah, Latif, Ali, Choudhury, Ullah or Uddin. However, these named individuals only represent a privileged few Bengalis who had been employed as British crew members, and exclude some four to five hundred lascars who died at sea and whose names were never known.

The origins of the large Somali community in contemporary Tower Hamlets can be traced back to World War One, when Britain had a colonial presence in parts of eastern Africa including Egypt, Sudan and the protectorate of British Somaliland. Britain controlled key ports on the main trade and transportation route between Europe and the Indian Ocean, at Aden and along the Suez canal. As the war progressed, and more and more British merchant seamen joined the Royal Navy, a new abundance of employment opportunities led to a great many men from these countries finding work on the ships which plied this busy and prosperous route—and some signed up for the Royal Navy too. In due course, many of the sailors from British colonies and protectorates settled in London and other UK ports, where they found that as the war came to an end, white British sailors were preferred for the jobs and housing that were available. Riots and racist attacks took place in British port cities including London in 1919 and the early 1920s, leading to the government repatriating thousands of black seamen.

## Walter Tull

Walter Tull was the first Black British outfield footballer and the first Black British army officer. He was born in 1888 in Folkestone to Daniel Tull, a carpenter originally from Barbados and Alice Palmer, an English woman from Kent. After both of his parents died young, Walter came to the East End in 1897 to be raised in the National Children's Home orphanage in Bonner Road, Bethnal Green. Before the war broke out, Walter had enjoyed a successful football career, playing eventually for Tottenham Hotspur. He was the first black outfield player to play professional football in England.

Walter volunteered for the army at the outbreak of war and joined the 17th (1st Football) Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment. He continued to inspire and break down barriers while in the army - he was promoted three times to become the first black officer in the British armed forces. Despite military laws of the time forbidding 'any negro or persons of colour' from becoming an officer, he



Lt. Walter Tull, spring 1917.

Somali sailors on board HMS Venus at Singapore, 1917 © National Maritime Museum.



was mentioned in dispatches for his gallantry and coolness. He became a Lieutenant after fighting bravely through the Battle of the Somme and spent two years fighting on the Italian Front. Sent back to the Somme in what would be the war's final months, he was killed by enemy machine-gun fire on 25 March 1918.

### Tip

In the library collection you will find a number of **biographies** of Walter Tull, as well as a copy of "Black Poppies: Britain's black community and the Great War" by Stephen Bourne. You can also look at **maps and photographs** to learn more about Bonner Road, Bethnal Green at the time Walter grew up here in the National Children's Home orphanage.

# East London and the War.

East London Advertiser

HOW WE ARE AFFECTED.

FOOD PRICES EASIER.

Aug 15 1914

The three most noteworthy features of the war crisis as it affects East London since our last issue have been the decrease which took place on Tuesday and Wednesday, in the price of many articles of food; the proclamation of the Government calling upon all Germans to forthwith register their names and addresses at the nearest Police Station under threats of a heavy fine or imprisonment, and thirdly, the remarkable manner in which men who have served in one or other branches of the Army, Navy or Reserve Forces have come forward to register themselves as being prepared to undertake to go either on active service or act with the home defence forces. To this may be added that a large number of young men not having had any previous military experience are answering to the call of Lord Kitchener for 500,000 men.

## THE FOOD QUESTION.

Probably the worst day's experienced by people in the East End in the matter of food purchases were Friday and Saturday in last week. On two or three previous days the uncertainty which surrounded the matter of our food supplies—as to their being maintained—together with excessive buying in certain quarters and the action of many traders and shopkeepers in putting up prices in fear of a shortage, had led to inflated prices for various articles of food, the only exceptions being flour and milk. The former, it is true, did advance slightly, but the increase was inconsiderable when compared with the rise which took place in the matter of bacon, cheese, butter and margarine. With our wheat and corn supplies supplemented by the great gift of 28,000,000lb. of flour from Canada, the

country has no reason to fear a shortage in the first of the staple foods of the nation. Taking the shop-keepers in the East End generally, it must be conceded in fairness to them that they did not attempt to profit improperly by the unsettled state of affairs.

Isolated cases there were, such as, for example, a fried fish and potato dealer who informed his customers that owing to the great increase in the price of potatoes and flour he was only going to supply them in the matter of potatoes for a penny what he had been in the habit previously of retailing for a half-penny! His customers very quickly found out that they were being imposed upon and that there was no advance to justify an increase of even this article of food to the tune of 100 per cent, and he soon realised his mistake.

Not only that, but those who act in a similarly foolish manner will realise, when the war is over and we get back to a normal state of affairs that the British public in these matters have a long memory. In contrast to actions of this kind it is pleasant to point to the case of a greengrocer in a prominent thoroughfare in Mile End who on Friday put up a notice that he had seven tons of potatoes in stock and they would be retailed in small quantities to householders at the old prices. This decision he adhered to and refused to part with his stock in tons to fried fish and potato merchants, who

would have bought him out and sold at the 100 per cent. increase, as in the case above referred to.

## THE STREET MARKETS.

Six principal local street markets may be said to be Roman-road (Old Ford) Burdett-road (Mile End), Whitechapel, St. George's-in-the-East, Wapping (St. George's-in-the-East), and Wapping (St. George's-in-the-East). At all of these, business went on as usual all the week and on Saturday and Sunday on much the same lines as usual and tradesmen in those thoroughfares did not as a rule increase the prices of commodities more than the circumstances warranted. For example, at no time did granulated sugar go to 4½d. per lb., or lump sugar to 5d., the official maximum retail prices announced on Tuesday. The prices for sugar, ranged from 2½d. to 3½d. per lb., and on no provision dealer's stall did our representative find bacon marked up as high as 1s. 6d. per lb. Instead sugar, butter, cheese and bacon have stood all along at about the prices which were issued as the maximum retail prices for Wednesday and which were to remain in force until this (Friday) evening:—

	Per lb.
Granulated sugar	0s. 3½d.
Lump sugar	0s. 4½d.
Butter (imported)	1s. 6d.
(other qualities in proportion).	
Cheese (Colonial)	0s. 9½d.
Lard (American)	0s. 8d.
Margarine	0s. 10d.
Bacon (Colonial or Continental), by the side	1s. 2d.
Bacon (British) by the side	1s. 3d.

## THE WORRIED BUTCHERS.

Probably the butchers were the most worried people of all the East End traders. The prices of meat were advanced by them naturally, and in a way that one could well understand, but their action was the outcome of inflated meat market prices, produced, not on account of actual shortage of meat supplies, but due to the wholesale markets being impoverished by the short quantities the wholesale traders took out of storage and placed on sale. It was difficult for the retail butchers to explain and make understandable cause and effect in this direction and apparently a good many people did not understand it as in visiting the markets that are open on Sunday mornings—and there are many

in the East end—our representative heard one woman grumbling because she could not be supplied with an English leg of mutton at 8½d. per lb! This was in Burdett-road, and at the establishment of a butcher whose reputation, both as a contractor and retailer, for good and honourable dealing is beyond all question. He met the customer by selling the article much under 1s. per lb. and undoubtedly lost not a little over the transaction, as on the Saturday. English legs of mutton in other parts of London were realising 1s. 3d. per lb. In all the retail markets under notice, nearly all the butchers were sold out much before the accustomed hour on the Sunday and some people had to go disappointed of a Sunday joint.

The butchers of the East End certainly did not profit over last week

end's trading, as with short stocks, bought at much higher prices, they were not to retail at such prices as would bring them even a little profit and one butcher well-known in Mile End assured us that he could demonstrate without any trouble that the three days' trading of Friday, Saturday and Sunday, had, represented to him a serious financial loss. That this is perfectly true was confirmed by what our representative gleaned in other directions.

The real cause of the trouble in the matter of the meat supply was due entirely to the very limited supply put into the wholesale markets and the way the lock and key, so to speak was kept on the supplies—sufficient without any further additions—for six months and with the three to four weeks' supply on passage and due to arrive shortly, sufficient for nearly three months—was as impolitic as it was unreasonable. Apart from the chilled and frozen meat, the Board of Agriculture have ascertained from the recently collected agricultural returns that there is a substantial increase in the numbers of live stock as compared with last year.

The East London Advertiser details the local impact of the war a year in, August 1915.

## How did local newspapers report the war?

Before photography or film was widespread, people relied on newspapers for in-depth accounts of what was happening, whether in their local neighbourhood or across the world. Newspaper reports therefore typically provide detailed physical descriptions of events and can often include the names of people in attendance. So the opening of a new shop or factory, a bombing, a riot, a strike, an unveiling, a talk or dance could all be reported in sometimes very fine detail. Moreover, many more local newspapers were published then compared with recent times. As a result we hold thousands of newspapers available to view on microfilm in the reading room, including the City and East

London Observer, East End News, East London Advertiser, Eastern Post and Jewish Chronicle. You can gain a great picture of daily life in the local area by browsing through these papers, or if you are looking for a specific event, view editions from around the same date across all of the different titles.

### Tip

There is also an extensive collection of press cuttings which are kept in boxes classified by subject. Ask to look at the Subject Guide for an A-Z listing of topics. This is usually a good starting point for your research.





Belgian soldiers being treated at the London Hospital, c1914.

## How did the East End care for those wounded in war?

Many hospitals in the borough took in casualties, and you can look up cuttings, photographs and pamphlets about these in the library. The famous London hospital in Whitechapel was one.

*28 August 1914 ...*

*House Governor received sudden message from the War Office, a hundred men were on their way to London by Ambulance train. The War Office then asked if as well as admitting them the Hospital could provide transport as Army Medical Department had no ambulance available.*

Programmes from fundraising events held by Bethnal Green Military Hospital.

AE Clark-Kennedy, *The London: A Study in the Voluntary Hospital System*, Vol. II.

The London Chest Hospital in Bethnal Green specialised in caring for soldiers who had developed TB and soldiers who had been gassed. Other hospitals were specifically given over to the care of wounded soldiers for the duration of the war including Mile End Hospital and Bethnal Green Hospital. Events were often organised to raise money for the soldiers and to supply them with comforts. Programmes of these events can be found in the pamphlets and cuttings collections.





Ordnance Survey map, 1919, showing the closely-packed streets of Limehouse and Poplar.

**Tip**

The library holds thousands of photographs of street scenes, categorised alphabetically by street, which are a very popular source for those researching a house, building or street.

## Are you interested in tracing a building or street during the war years?

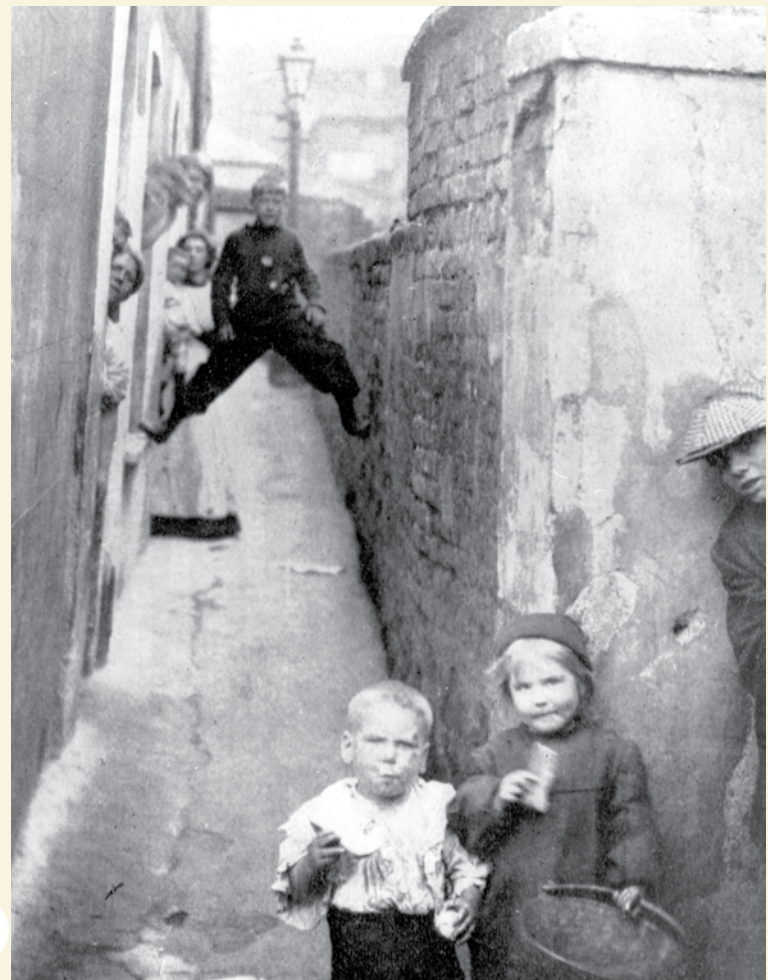
There is a large collection of maps covering this period in the reading room that you can consult. These include Ordnance Survey maps, one of which omits the Docks 'for security reasons'. Maps and plans can also give clues about the impact of the war on daily life; one plan showing a horse-drawn tramline states that some services have been suspended due to horses being requisitioned for the war, and another shows where bombs dropped.

We hold Post Office directories published every year which list shops and businesses in London by street. From these, you can discover what businesses or tradesmen were based on a particular street during a given year.

Children pose in a typical East End alleyway in this image from Sylvia Pankhurst's book *The Home Front* (see p11).



Dixie Street, Bethnal Green, 1915.



## Useful websites

### **[www.1914.org](http://www.1914.org)**

A huge database of all of the WW1 centenary projects taking place across the UK, managed by the Imperial War Museum.

### **[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/first-world-war](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/first-world-war)**

Here you can search World War One related records originally created by central government departments such as the Ministry of Defence, now held at The National Archives in Kew, west London. Includes digitised service records and correspondence from over 140,000 Armed Forces servicemen and women, as well as information about medals, prisoners of war, nurses, conscientious objectors, conscription appeals and merchant seamen. Sources held here are also invaluable if you want to learn more about the wartime experiences of people living in British colonies and wartime travel or migration to the UK.

### **[www.redcross.org.uk/ww1](http://www.redcross.org.uk/ww1)**

Digitised and searchable service records of VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) workers, including ambulance drivers, nurses, stretcher bearers and others on the Home Front.

### **[www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/first-world-war-home-front/](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/first-world-war-home-front/)**

Digitised resources illustrating the war's effect on the UK's built heritage, including stately homes and care institutions.

### **[www.hlf.org.uk/looking-funding/our-grant-programmes/first-world-war-then-and-now](http://www.hlf.org.uk/looking-funding/our-grant-programmes/first-world-war-then-and-now)**

Grants from £3,000-£10,000 for projects which conserve or share aspects of the UK's World War One heritage.



Peace party in St Leonard's Road, Poplar, 1919.

## Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to all the project volunteers who helped with research: Angela Gibson, Anne Connaughton, Jill Napier, Sigrid Werner and Rose Mint. We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund in the creation of this guide and its accompanying pop-up exhibition.

All images are from the collections of Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives unless otherwise stated, and reproduction of images or text is not permitted without consent.

This guide was written by Gary Haines, Tamsin Bookey and Malcolm Barr-Hamilton. Designed by Bob Stuart and published by Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives © 2015.

The guide is dedicated to archives volunteer Hyacinth Maynard, a greatly valued and much missed member of our team.

## Contact details

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

Nearest tube: Stepney Green / Mile End

Nearest bus: 25, 205

[localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

020 7364 1290

[www.ideastore.co.uk/local-history](http://www.ideastore.co.uk/local-history)

## Opening times

Tuesday	10am-5pm
Wednesday	9am-5pm
Thursday	9am-8pm
Saturday	9am-5pm
(first & third Saturday in every month only)	

Group visits welcome by prior appointment

