



# Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

## Operational Policy for Collections Access

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# Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

## Operational Policy for Collections Access

### 1. Mission Statement

Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives is central to the borough it serves. We collect, preserve, manage and provide free public access to a wide variety of materials which record, describe or illustrate the borough's past and present. Through facilitating onsite research with these collections and delivering outreach, exhibitions and events, we engage and connect local residents and visitors from across the UK and overseas with the rich histories of London's East End.

### 2. Service and building overview

Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives (THLHLA) facilitates access to its collections, free of charge, and without the need for an appointment or reservation, in its public reading room in the library at 277 Bancroft Road, Mile End.

There are two staff on duty in the reading room at all times, offering help to visitors to find the information they need. Staff can also assist in reading and interpreting material.

Accessibility upgrade works were completed in 2012. The front entrance to the building features an accessible ramp in compliance with Part M of the Building Regulations. There is an accessible lift to the first floor, where the reading room is located, and an induction loop system to assist those with a hearing impairment.

The reading room open to the public for 30 hours per week on average, at the following times:

- Tuesday 10.00am-5.00pm
- Wednesday 9.00am-5.00pm
- Thursday 9.00am-8.00pm
- Saturday (first and third Saturday of each month) 9.00am-5.00pm

In addition, the building is open for exhibitions, meetings and room hire on these days:

- Monday 9.00am- 5.00pm
- Friday 9.00-5.00pm

### 3. Access details

Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives  
277 Bancroft Road  
London  
E1 4DQ  
Phone: + 44 (0)7364 1290  
Email: [localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.ideastore.co.uk](http://www.ideastore.co.uk)

#### **4. Access to the collections**

THLHLA provides direct public access to its collections as follows.

##### **4.1 The collections are made available to persons**

- who have registered as a user of THLHLA
- and who by so doing have agreed to comply with our Reading Room Regulations
- who have completed and signed the Register of Visitors

##### **4.2 THLHLA makes its collections available unless**

- there is a statutory exemption prohibiting access
- the owner/depositor of the material has placed a restriction on access
- access is likely to cause physical harm to the archives
- there is a surrogate or other alternative copy available

##### **4.3 People visiting THLHLA in person to use the collections may:**

- take advantage of the variety of guides, catalogues, lists and indexes on offer to help identify materials which may assist their research
- consult original archive and library materials
- use surrogate copies of materials held at THLHLA or elsewhere
- access the internet free of charge in connection with their research using public PCs or wifi provided
- consult staff about the collections, research skills, and other avenues of research
- order digital copies of material (for a fee)
- take their own photographs or photocopies of material (for a fee), subject to *Public photocopying procedure*.

##### **4.4 Access to the collections from a distance**

THLHLA responds to enquiries emailed to the generic mailbox about the collections, or enquiries received by letter or telephone in accordance.

##### **People wanting to use THLHLA's collections from a distance may:**

- view our website to find information about the service and the collections
- search our online catalogue [www.THcatalogue.org.uk](http://www.THcatalogue.org.uk), to identify material which may assist their research
- search the TNA Discovery website to identify THLHLA archive collections which may assist their research

- view some THLHLA records online through *FindMyPast* and THLHLA's own website
- write, email or telephone with an enquiry about THLHLA's collections or for general information about the service
- write, or email to request copies of material
- choose to employ a record agent to carry out research on their behalf

#### **4.5 Access to copies of material from the collections**

THLHLA supplies copies of material in accordance with its *Public Photocopying Policy* and relevant legislation.

THLHLA supplies digital copies of material to people who have received a quotation for the cost of the copies and have paid in advance for all the copies they require and have completed and signed a copyright declaration form for each item requested.

Visitors to THLHLA who are carrying out personal research only may purchase a daily camera permit and use their own cameras to make photographic copies as long as they complete a digital camera permit form where they list items photographed and sign a copyright declaration.

THLHLA makes and supply copies of material from its collections unless

- there is a statutory exemption prohibiting copying.
- the owner/depositor of the material has placed a restriction on copying
- copying is likely to cause physical harm to the material
- copying is likely to cause an infringement of copyright legislation

#### **4.6 Access for groups of people**

THLHLA welcomes visits from groups of adult learners, community groups or leisure interest groups, and schools, colleges and universities. THLHL&A does not usually charge for general group visits but can do so for specially commissioned workshops or where external funding has been provided for this purpose.

#### **4.7 Access to archives containing personal information**

THLHLA provides access to its archive collections in compliance with current UK access to information legislation including the Data Protection Act (1998) and the Freedom of Information Act (2000). The majority of the catalogued archive collections held by THLHLA are freely open and accessible to members of the public. However, some records contain personal data / sensitive personal data and these records need to be identified and closed to protect those to whom they relate. Records closed include groups of records produced by institutions which often contain a significant amount of personal data about many people (e.g. records about pupils within school admission registers) and other records about individuals (e.g. personal data within job applications, other employee records etc.)

THLHLA's archivists are responsible for assessing archive material during accessioning and cataloguing and those records which are found to contain personal data at this stage are subsequently closed for a set period of time (75 years for records of adults; 100 years for records of children) this time period is calculated from the 1st of January of the year immediately following the latest date of the record/s involved. Such closure is undertaken in order to protect those whose information is contained within as they have not given consent for their personal information to be in the public domain or have an expectation that it would be made publicly available in this way. This is particularly important where the records contain sensitive personal data, such as, for instance, information about a person's health, racial or ethnic origin, religious beliefs, political opinions, trade union membership, sexual life, and details of criminal offences. Information about these closed records, including details of closure periods, is made publicly available within THLHLA's electronic catalogue (online) and in hard copy catalogues provided in THLHLA's reading room. The physical records themselves are also clearly marked as closed, so it is obvious to all THLHLA staff retrieving archive records that they are not be produced.

Individuals retain the right to ask for access to information about themselves which is contained within any archives held by THLHLA (including those which are closed), for instance, they have the right to submit a Data Protection Subject Access Request (SAR). However, requestors are reminded that such access is not automatic or immediate and the original records, where they contain the personal data of a number of people which cannot be separated out (for instance in a register), will not be produced for them. If such a request is received by THLHLA an archivist will assess it and, if appropriate, search the relevant records and make a copy of the personal information found which relates to the data subject and provide this to them.

#### **4.8 Statutory framework**

THLHLA works within the following legal framework:

*Local Government (Records) Act 1962*

*Local Government Act 1972: s224 and 226(5)*

*Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985*

*Public Records Act 1958 (especially s3(6) and s4(1)) as amended 1967*

*Church of England Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978, amended 1992*

*Manorial Document Rules, 1959-67*

*Data Protection Act 1998*

*Freedom of Information Act 2000*

*Representation of the People Act 2000*

*Environmental Information Regulations 2004*

*Equality Act 2010*

### **5 Access Standards**

THLHLA aims to meet The National Council on Archives PSQG *Access Standard* 2006. It is committed to giving a high standard of service at all times in accordance.

### **5.1 If you visit THLHLA in person staff will:**

- be friendly and helpful at all times
- inform you of relevant policies, procedures and charges
- protect your personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act
- provide lockers for the security of your personal possessions and papers that are not allowed into the secure area of the reading room
- provide access to the catalogue plus other lists, indexes, guides and reference books to help you identify, use and understand the records you need
- assist you to identify the records you need to consult, and do our best to answer your questions
- provide professional advice about the collections held and how to use them for your research
- produce material on demand throughout the day and archive records until 30 minutes before closing time, aiming to produce these within 10 minutes of your request or to tell you why we can't
- provide copies of documents for you, wherever possible, for a fee, in accordance with our copying policy and current charges, or explain to you why an item is unsuitable for copying

### **5.2 If you contact THLHLA by letter or email staff will:**

- endeavour to respond to your enquiry within 72 hours or at the very most within 10 working days of receipt
- suggest alternative appropriate avenues of research if they are unable to help
- respond to your enquiry in compliance with relevant legislation

### **5.3 If you contact THLHLA by phone staff will:**

- respond in a friendly and professional manner and tell you to whom you are speaking
- answer basic enquiries at once or phone you back within an agreed time
- invite you to forward more complex enquiries by letter or email, or to visit in person

### **5.4 If you visit THLHLA we expect you to:**

- Follow our *Reading Room Regulations* and sign the visitor's register each time you visit to show that you agree to observe them
- Handle all documents and books with care, not resting or leaning on any items
  - Ask us if you are unsure about how to handle something
- Tell us as clearly as possible what you want to find out. We need enough information to be able to fully understand and answer your enquiries.
- Treat us as courteously as you would like us to treat you
- Help us to improve our service by completing our monitoring and evaluation forms

### **If you are unhappy with any aspect of our service we want to know**

- Please talk to a member of staff who will try to sort things out
- If you are still not satisfied, please ask to speak to the Heritage Manager, Tamsin Bookey; or write to her at Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, 277 Bancroft Road, London E1 4DQ (email: [localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk))

- If you feel that your complaint has still not been resolved, please ask for an official Tower Hamlets Council complaint form
- You can also make any compliments, comments and complaints about our service through the Tower Hamlets Council website.

## **6. Widening access and engagement**

THLHLA is committed to widening enjoyment and understanding of its collections in all sectors of the community and is particularly keen to reach more borough residents.

Engagement with a person's family history, community history or local/geographic/house history can produce positive social outcomes such as improved mental and emotional wellbeing; learning and research skills leading to increased educational attainment and employability; and community cohesion from discovering more about the background of one's neighbours.

A range of outreach events and exhibitions are held every year to promote the collections and to encourage people to enjoy and explore their heritage.

A Strategic Plan for Public Engagement is produced every 2 years by the Heritage Manager. In addition to the 'business as usual' local history walks and talks, the plan sets out several overarching strands dedicated to particular themes or community groups where it is felt there could or should be a greater level of engagement during the period in question. The plan's aspirations for community engagement during the period in question is based on a variety of factors, including but not limited to:

- ❖ analysis of current usage statistics revealing under-served audiences
- ❖ borough demographics for Tower Hamlets
- ❖ collection development requirements (eg identified gaps)
- ❖ stakeholder requests or feedback
- ❖ centenaries of relevant events and other significant historic anniversaries
- ❖ staff suggestions and reflection, drawn from their awareness of current user interests

## **7. Policy Approval and Communication**

7.1 This policy will be approved by Shazia Hussain, Divisional Director, Customer Services.

7.2 The policy will be reviewed in 3 years following the date of approval.

7.3 Once approved, policies will be published on our website:  
[www.ideastore.co.uk](http://www.ideastore.co.uk)