

September - October 2012

Hello!

Welcome to our new email newsletter. Here you will find updates on our upcoming events and recent activities. If you have any feedback on this new format do let us know!

The Bancroft Library building may currently be closed for building works but our free heritage events programme continues apace at other venues, including some Black History Month activities and a talk with local Bow residents inspired by our Old Ford Voices and Island Memories exhibition. Check out the listings on the left for more information.



Meanwhile, staff are busy protecting the collections before the roof works get under way and making good headway tackling our cataloguing backlog.

The old lift has now been removed and part of the lift shaft demolished, and we expect the new accessible lift model to be installed by the end of November. The roof works will start on site at about the same time and we hope to reopen to the public in February 2013.

We continue to provide a limited enquiry service by phone and email during our closure. Please email localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk or call on 020 7364 1290 during working hours and we will do our best to help.

Collecting the history of Somali Tower Hamlets

The United Kingdom has historically been close to Somalia, through its involvement in the British Somaliland Protectorate. This link has given rise to a long tradition of Somali migration to the UK.

The early Somali people to come to the United Kingdom were seamen and merchants who settled in port cities in the late nineteenth century, mainly in Cardiff, Liverpool and London. Many of these early sailors came from British Somaliland and worked in the thriving docks, whilst living in boarding houses run by other Somalis.

A second group came during the First and the Second World War with the Royal Navy and stayed on, with a majority settling in Tower Hamlets. Somalis represent the second largest minority ethnic group in Tower Hamlets.

Our trainee Simeera Hassan, funded by Heritage Lottery Fund under their 'Skills For The Future' programme, has started making oral history recordings with Somali seamen who paved the way for many of the Somali people who now live in Tower Hamlets. Many have passed away but the remaining



Somali men at the Mayfield House Day Centre, Bethnal Green

inspirational individuals have fascinating stories to tell, with each personality being diverse. The seamen have travelled all over the world and are inspirational role models within the Somali community in London.

So far Simeera has had the opportunity of meeting with ex-Royal Navy sailors, a World War Two veteran, electricians, entrepreneurs, to name but a few. As Simeera's project progresses she hopes to collect archives from and interview more influential Somalians in Tower Hamlets including women, community workers and politicians.

Simeera's project will culminate in a new exhibition in March 2013 to be called 'Don't just live, live to be remembered'. The traineeship is delivered in partnership with the Somali Arts & Culture organisation KAYD, based in Bethnal Green, and The National Archives. Catch Simeera's work in progress at the Somali Week Festival, October 19-28. Details at KAYD: www.kayd.org

Summer walks

This year's three Local History walks were all oversubscribed and apologies to all those who were therefore unable to get tickets. Given what a wet summer it has been it is fortunate that all three were unaffected by the weather with just a short shower in Millwall and those round Ratcliff and Spitalfields taking place in



Local History walk outside Christ Church Spitalfields, September 2012

bright sunshine.

The Games readers

Many have rightly praised the dedicated and inspirational Olympics volunteers who helped make the Games such a success this summer. During the Olympics and Paralympics it was a regular occurrence to spot one of these volunteers on the streets of London but we were still pleasantly surprised to discover that one of our own readers was included in this



Paralympics volunteer in THLHLA reading room

number! This reader told us that she was wearing her Olympics uniform as she was heading straight to a shift at one of the Paralympics sites immediately after her visit to us - now that's dedication for you!

Staff news

We are very happy to report that Heritage Officer for Learning and Participation Katherine Weston gave birth to a baby girl, Eva, in early September.

For the period of her maternity leave Heritage Assistant Anna Haward has been appointed to the post. We have also been joined by Perdita Jones from Idea Store Whitechapel who will be covering Anna's post.

We are also pleased to have with us Louise Grainger as temporary Heritage Assistant. Louise has the task of appraising over 1000 boxes of files which have been transferred by the Council's Building Control Section. These files are a vital source for the study of the history of the built environment.

Finally, a big thank you to Susan O'Brien who, along with Perdita, helped us out over the summer on secondment from Cubitt Town Library.

Upcoming Events

Our local history events programme continues at other sites during the library's temporary closure.

Black History Month

Tea Party
Saturday 6 October
2 - 5pm
Idea Store Whitechapel

Come and celebrate Black History Month with a nice cup of tea. Activities

include Somali tea tasting and a photo scanning workshop. Bring your old family snaps for the possibility of adding your pictures to the collections of Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives. Plus create your own Box of Dreams, inspired by Dr Martin Luther King.

Old Ford Voices and Island Memories

Exhibition

24 September - 24 October

Idea Store Bow

Our recent oral history exhibition has been adapted for a tour of local venues in Bow. Find out about the history of local landmarks and businesses and what life in the area was like in the last century, in the words of long-time residents.

Old Ford Voices and Island Memories

Talk Show

Saturday 13 October

2:30 - 4pm

Idea Store Bow

Join some of the interviewees from our recent oral history project to explore the history of this part of Bow. This free event will be chaired by local historian and Bow resident Gary Haines.

The African-Caribbean community in postwar Stepney

Online Exhibition

An online exhibition for Black History Month featuring some of our unique archive and library collections.

Now online here

Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

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idea
Library Learning Information