

## Our Mission

Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives (THLHLA) is central to the borough it serves. It collects, preserves, manages and provides free public access to an extraordinary range of archives, library and other historical material.

The service provides facilities for onsite research with these collections and delivers outreach, exhibitions and events. These activities engage residents and visitors with the rich history of London's East End.

The service is operated by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. THLHLA sits within Customer Services in the Resources directorate and is a part of the Idea Store department of libraries and lifelong learning.

## 2022-23 Overview

The year was spent focusing on adding to our collections and seeking to increase our visibility within the council. Our outreach staff worked hard to producing onsite and online public events and resumed our popular workshops for schools.

During 2022-23 we:

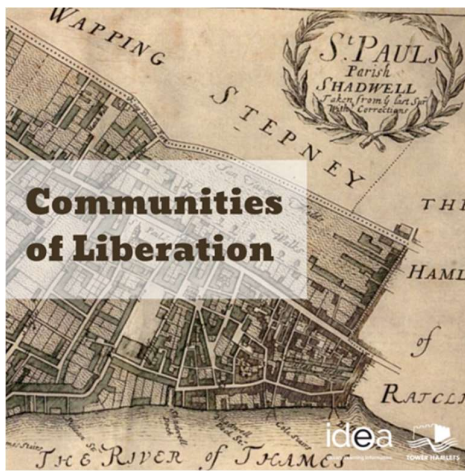
- Continued to enhance our online digital content, adding new user guides to music and our sound collection and developing activity on social media
- Procured Preservica, our first ever preservation system to preserve digital archives. We began testing and adding records
- Acquired 82 linear shelf metres of archive collections. These included over 80 transfers of records from the decant of the former Town Hall at Mulberry Place
- Added 1,366 new archive and library descriptions the online catalogue
- Prepared our application to The National Archives to retain Accredited status
- Delivered 79 events, reaching 1,930 people
- Got out 5,528 items from our collections for our readers, over the course of 1,183 Reading Room visits

We participated in the biannual **CIPFA Survey of Visitors to UK Archives 2022**. Our results show:

- Our overall rating was 9.6/10
- Readers particularly appreciated our staff availability, attitude and quality of advice, scoring 9.9/10 in each category
- 96% of readers found the evidence they were looking for, with 91% learning something unexpected during their research session
- room for improvement in the speed of our public PCs and usability of our online catalogue

## Key Highlights

### Communities of Liberation



*(Image: Communities of Liberation flyer artwork)*

We were delighted to convene a steering group for our new programme of work entitled **Communities of Liberation**.

This is a strand of new research and public engagement which will illustrate the long history of African people in the East End, highlighting stories of those who lived here during the time of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Research will identify the specific places where African people lived, worked or socialised in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and link them to modern locations in present day Tower Hamlets.

The steering group advises on strategic development, recruitment and fundraising for this piece of work which will result in new artwork being created and a public memorial for the borough.

## **Welcome to Annette Mackin**



*(Image: Annette with some of the material we are acquiring for the archives as part of the closure of Mulberry Place offices, February 2023)*

In January 2023 we welcomed a new member of staff, Annette Mackin, as Heritage Officer (Archives). Annette is an archivist who has lived in Poplar her whole life. Jumping in at the deep end, her first task was to assist the Archives Manager in appraising council records from the former Town Hall at Mulberry Place for transfer to the archives here. She is also leading on adding material to our new digital preservation system, and you will find her on the Reading Room enquiry desk every week too.

## **Town Hall move: New Archives from the Council**

A wide range of council records including minutes, photos, maps, plans and brochures were transferred to THLHLA as council departments rationalised their filing systems during the move from Mulberry Place to the new Town Hall in Whitechapel. As the building emptied, our Archivists spent 132 hours surveying and

providing advice to ensure that historically significant materials were preserved and deposited with us for safekeeping. Thanks to our former archivist Medha Chotai for her hard work on this before her departure.

Over 90 individual collections include records from Public Health, School Buildings, Democratic Services and other teams.

Highlights include:

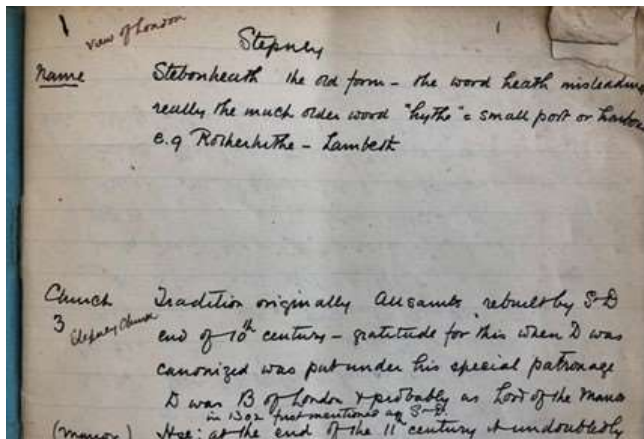
- Metropolitan Borough of Poplar deeds and registers of property dating from the 1800s
- Records of Unison (Tower Hamlets branch), with cartoons and photographs from the 1970s
- Records relating to services for the local Bengali community such as the Community Language Service
- Photographs of the 1995 Blur concert at Mile End Stadium

These records require processing, repackaging and cataloguing before they are accessible to the public. They add to our oldest local authority archives, which go back to 1598!

A case study of our work supporting the decant of the old Town Hall features in the annual publication [A Year In Archives 2023](#).

## Archive Collections: new additions to the catalogue

### Archives of two important local historians catalogued



(Image: Notes by Sydney Maddocks (1870-1953) on the early origins of Stepney, ref: P/MDS/1/2)

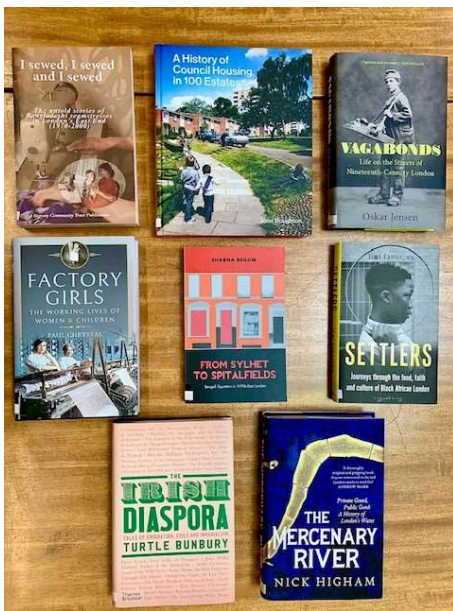
We released online catalogue descriptions to the archives of two local historians.

The papers of **Sydney Maddocks** (Ref: [P/MDS](#)) are a fine example of a personal research archive. In his lifetime, Maddocks was widely acknowledged as an expert on the history of East London. His papers include notes on church architecture, short biographies of local people, information from many sources about streets, taverns, events and past industries and much more.

**Bradley Snooks**, a local historian and resident of Bow has carried out extensive historical research and taken many photographs depicting Bow which are deposited with us (Ref: [P/SNO](#)).

A member of the East London History Society, he has researched the history of Bow and its streets including their origin and meaning. This collection of photographs are mounted on card, titled, and arranged alphabetically by street. We are grateful to Bradley for depositing his collection with us.

## Library Collection: new additions to the catalogue



(Image: a selection of newly acquired books)

Between April 2022 and March 2023 the local history library added around 600 items to our catalogued collections. This included both newly purchased stock, gifts and donations, plus material from our cataloguing backlog. Some notable additions from 2022-23 include:

- Our extensive collection of Oversize Pamphlets, including many rare local publications and periodicals dating back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century
- The remaining items from our Sound Collection cataloguing project, comprising over 100 historic audio recordings on vinyl, audiocassette, and open reel tapes
- 72 historic building plans
- 109 photographs

66 new books on a variety of local topics were catalogued into our collections, including:

- **I sewed, I sewed, and I sewed: The untold stories of Bangladeshi seamstresses in London’s East End (1970-2000)** by Stepney Community Trust (LC15400)
- **Settlers: Journeys through the food, faith and culture of Black African London** by Jimi Famurewa (LC15399)
- **Vagabonds: life on the streets of nineteenth-century London** by Oskar Jensen (LC15353)
- **Factory girls: from the industrial revolution to 1914** by Paul Chrystal (LC15427)
- **The mercenary river: private greed, public good: a history of London’s water** by Nick Higham (LC15381)
- **A history of council housing in 100 estates** by John Boughton (LC15419)
- **From Sylhet to Spitalfields: Bengali Squatters in 1970s East London** by Shabna Begum (LC1542)
- **The Irish diaspora : tales of emigration, exile and imperialism** by Turtle Bunbury (LC15474)

### Top Ten Book and pamphlets produced for the public in 2022

Productions	Top level subject category
1	Housing
2	Ethnic groups, migrants, race relations
3	Library and information science
4	Life of the people
5	Stepney
6	World wars
7	London

8	Places of worship
9	Education
10	Geography

## Unlocking the Jewish East End's sound heritage

Our recently catalogued sound collection includes unique oral history recordings on reel-to-reel and audiocassette tapes which went unheard for decades. These tapes have now been digitised, along with sound recordings relating to the borough's Jewish history. These include:

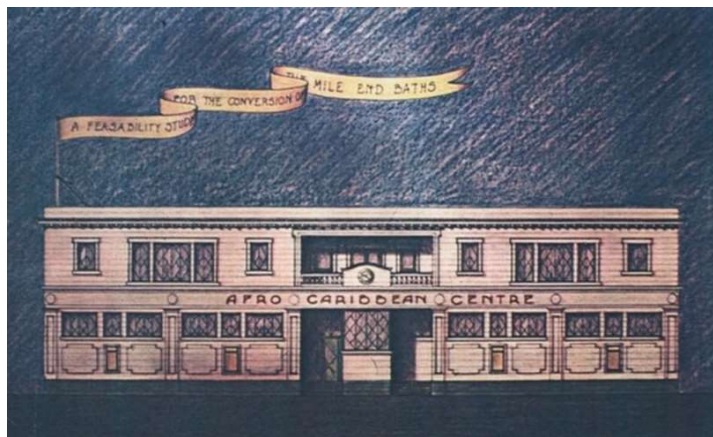
- Interviews with Battle of Cable Street veterans
- Childhood reminiscences by well-known East Enders, including Lionel Bart, Bernard Bresslaw and Georgia Brown
- Historic radio broadcasts on topics ranging from Yiddish theatre to local synagogues
- Lectures on Jewish topics recorded at Tower Hamlets Central Library
- Audio documentaries produced in the 1980s by the Springboard Education Trust

This digitisation was made possible thanks to funding from Prof. Nadia Valman's current AHRC-funded project ['Making and Remaking the Jewish East End'](#) at Queen Mary, University of London.

## Collaborations and Partnerships

### Black History and Mental Health, a BHM workshop in partnership with THACMHO

15 October 2022



*(Image: Campaign to convert Mile End Baths into a community centre, 1984. Image courtesy Archibald McAllister and Harry Cumberbatch)*

An all-day workshop in partnership with Tower Hamlets African and Caribbean Mental Health Organisation (THACMHO), connecting Black history with mental health was held in during Black History Month in October 2022.

The morning concentrated on the pioneering community work that took place in the borough in the 1980s, with guest speaker **Archibald McAllister**, formerly of THACA (Tower Hamlets African Caribbean Association).

The afternoon focused on mental health, with a presentation on the history of THACMHO, followed by a panel discussion with **Valerie Graham** and **Charles Brown**.

- *“Really interesting and insightful” – Visitor feedback*

A publication of the event was made by THACMHO, which can be consulted in the Reading Room (ref no LC15563, Class 490).



## Tuesday coffee mornings

Between January and March 2023 we hosted weekly coffee mornings for older African-Caribbean borough residents. These were hosted by **Newham African Caribbean Resource Centre (NAC)** on behalf of Tower Hamlets Council. These meetups, held each Tuesday in our Education Room were opportunities to socialise and engage in creative activities, including:

- reminiscence and sharing memories
- gentle movement and music appreciation
- health information, such as advice on diabetes, CHD, stroke, cancer
- opportunity to engage with local history projects

## 'Our Journeys' StoryTent project with Rich Mix

Autumn 2022 – Spring 2023



(Images: details from participants' artworks)

We worked with our friends at Rich Mix on a programme that:

- Shared the heritage and experience of our participants' journeys, by creating an 'Our Journeys' StoryTent for use as a school resource for pupils and their families and for local exhibition.
- Connected people through sharing stories, fostering a sense of belonging and wellbeing.

The participants were from a wide range of backgrounds and life experiences. Alongside personal histories, objects and documents from our collections relating to the diversity of Tower Hamlets, its textile trade and its migration histories were used to prompt discussion to create the tent, showing each person's rich and varied journey to the area.

We led on three workshops, and received very positive feedback:

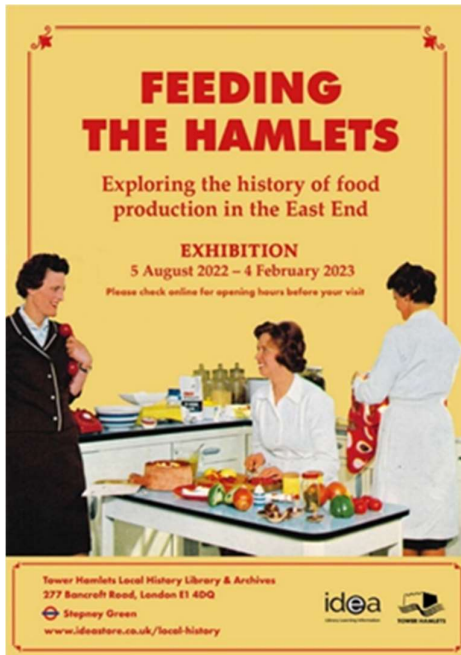
- *"This experience made me think about the future decades from now and how I as an individual will be part of Tower Hamlets' history"*
- *"I think that Tower Hamlets has a very rich textile history going centuries back, so I think this project is special because we are celebrating our diverse heritage now using a method of recording, i.e. sewing etc., that is part of the fabric of the history of the area"*

More info about this project can be found on the Rich Mix website: <https://richmix.org.uk/our-journeys-storytent/>

## Public Engagement: Exhibitions

### Feeding the Hamlets

August 2022 - February 2023



(Image: FTH exhibition flyer)

In planning since 2019 but delayed by the pandemic, our exhibition showcased the borough's history of food production, and was visited by 1,030 people.

Unique items including photographs, plans, deeds and maps were selected from our collections by staff to illustrate the many tales of food production in the East End, from flour milling and sugar refining to cow-keeping and vegetable growing. The exhibition looked at the methods and places where food production took place, as well as the people involved.

329 people attended the programme of free events which explored the themes in more detail, including:

- a talk with **Esther and Ray Rinkoff** about the history of Rinkoff's Bakery, established in 1911
- **200 years of Regent's Canal industries**: a talk by local historian **Carolyn Clark**, on working lives in the food businesses in the area
- **Soup kitchens and Spitalfields**: a talk by **Phil Carstairs**, on feeding the migrant poor in the 18th-19th century East End, with a focus on Jewish soup kitchens
- **Isle of Dogs Factory Memories**: an all-day event presented by members of **The Friends of Island History Trust** exploring the history and legacy of the famous firms Maconochie's, Morton's, McDougall's and Tate & Lyle
- a **Foraging walk at Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park** led by **Rasheeqa Ahmad**

Visitor feedback examples:

- *"Really enjoyed the exhibition - learnt a lot about the area in the 18th & 19th centuries and the industry in the 1900s."*
- *"Brilliant exhibition, learnt a lot."*
- *"Thank you, so good to learn the history about where we live."*

## living in fear of quicksand: an exhibition by Maria Amidu

February – May 2023



(Images: Exhibition promotional flyer, Lincoln Estate archive material, c. 1950s. Photo: Jonathan Bassett)

February to May 2023 saw the solo exhibition *living in fear of quicksand* by artist Maria Amidu taking place across two venues – THLHLA and the Nunnery Gallery in Bow.

The work on display at our site attracted 350 visitors and focused on the architectural and social history of the Lincoln Estate in Bow Common. Designed in the 1950s, the Estate includes Sleaford House – a 19-storey block of 90 maisonettes where the artist lived in the 1970s.

Maria unearthed council correspondence from our collections. These, as well as plans, drawings and newspaper cuttings about the Estate, played an integral role in developing the artworks. A selection of them were displayed with items from Maria's personal archive, accompanied by a timeline of the development of the Estate.

The exhibition at the Nunnery Gallery in Bow showed five new artworks. These included a print work, a text-based installation, a film piece, a sound work, and a bespoke paint colour.

Visitor feedback examples:

- "Excellent exhibition and series of events about an undiscussed aspect of East End life - the huge impact that artists have had in the area"
- "A quiet refuge from busy London. I look forward to the 2nd half of the exhibition"
- "It was great, thank you so much for organising. We loved it."

## Local Landscapes exhibition

May 2022

The streets, canals, parks and buildings of Tower Hamlets were featured in Local Landscapes, an exhibition by students of **Idea Store Learning's** Visual Arts courses, which ran between February and May 2022. The exhibition included a guided tour by the artists themselves.

These local artists, inspired by tutor **Virginia Hawke** drew, painted, printed and collaged their own personal snapshots of the borough's landscape. Scenes ranged from landmarks as famous as the Tower of London and One Canada Square to more modest houses, flats, and street markets. A selection of historic maps and other items from our collections relevant to each location were presented alongside the artworks.



## Public Engagement: Events & Workshops

### Celebrate! The street where you live

May 21, 2022



*(Image: Stan Jones's parents outside their house decorated for the Coronation in 1953. Photograph by Stan Jones)*

In the run-up to the Platinum Jubilee in June 2022, we hosted an event to showcase our archives, illustrating historic street parties in the East End, from the Peace Parties of 1919 to the 2012 Olympics.

The day's events included:

- A Family creative workshop making bunting and pennants
- A talk on Researching the history of your house delivered by **Robert Jones**, our local history librarian
- Independent researcher **Rachel Sweeney** shared her process for uncovering the history of her house in Bow using our resources

- *"Very interesting and informative"*

### Bengali Resistance in the East End

7 May 2022



*(Image: Protest against the National Front, 1978 (c) Syd Shelton)*

An all-day event exploring how the Bengali community in Tower Hamlets resisted organised racism and violence.

Speakers and workshops included:

- **Ansar Ahmed Ullah** from the Swadhinata Trust on the impact of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation war on activism in Tower Hamlets in 1978
- The **MayDay Rooms** archive exploring the Housing Struggle and Bengali squatters movement
- An inter-generational conversation between **Shuva Motin** (1978 activist working with Progressive Youth Organisation) and **Julie Begum** (Swadhinata Trust), discussing female activism over the last five decades.

- *“Great event - deserves a wider audience, great presentation, content and location. Thank you.”*

## **Recalling October 1936: The archives and activism of the Cable Street Group**

6 October 2022

Heritage Officer **Andrew Lewis** gave a talk on the Cable Street Group records ([S/CSG](#)), a community organisation dedicated to preserving the memory of those who stopped the British Union of Fascists marching through the then predominantly Jewish area.

Andrew explained the challenging nature of the records from an archival perspective, outlined cataloguing methods and suggested how they can be used by those interested not only in the Battle but also life in Cable Street and the East End in the 1930s.

- *“This talk was excellent! Great to hear how it came to be with this library and more importantly what it contains”*

## **Other workshops and events hosted/facilitated in 2022-23 included:**

- Idea Store Prime Time group sessions in April & June 2022 and March 2023 at [Cubitt Town Library](#) and onsite. These sessions explored family history and collections care themes.
- A half term family history workshop at [Idea Store Whitechapel](#) in February 2022
- A reminiscence workshop for [The Bow Geezers](#) using the David Granick image collection
- A research workshop for [Khidr Collective](#) around South Asian activism in Tower Hamlets
- One collection-based research session and two research support sessions for the Trinity Buoy Wharf project.

## **Public Engagement: Film screenings**



*(Image: Goodbye Longfellow Road screening)*

## “Where is Anne Frank” Film screening & Q&A

January 26, 2023

In partnership with [UK Jewish Film](#), we hosted a screening of the animated magic realism film by director Ari Folman, along with a Q&A session with filmmaker Jes Benstock to mark **Holocaust Memorial Day**.

- *“It was a lovely event to mark Yom Hashoah. Very good to have spent an evening with you!”*

## Living to tell the story: “Ain’t Hidin’ Nuttin’” Film screening & Q&A

10 November 2022

The musical genre Grime originated from Bow over 20 years ago. We welcomed **Mo Bangura** and **Dan Glen-Barbour**, the directors of the web documentary series *Ain’t Hidin’ Nuttin’* to Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives for a screening and discussion on grime's impact on the lives of residents, exploring issues such as conflict, social pressures and postcode violence.

- *“Excellent documentary, very inspiring”*

## Goodbye Longfellow Road screening for the u3a (University of the Third Age)

14 February 2023

We hosted a screening for the Tower Hamlets branch of the [U3A](#) of this powerful documentary made by Yorkshire TV in 1977. The film depicts the social impacts of the council’s clearance and demolition of rows of Victorian terraces in Mile End.

- *“Huge thanks for excellent film and thank you for providing tea and coffee”*

## Public Engagement: Education



(Image: Map created in educational workshop)

## Educational sessions delivered between 2022-23

- ‘This Is Our Local History’ was a project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund delivered in partnership with the [Tower Hamlets Schools Library Service \(SLS\)](#). Pupils in schools across the borough visited us to take part in workshops on five local history topics using primary and secondary sources

across the collections to support curriculum-based learning. This project also included 'an introduction to the collections' workshop for SLS staff and teachers in the borough.

- Other pupils' workshops were also delivered to both primary and secondary schools throughout the borough focusing on local history topics such as the Match Girls' Strike, Victorian London, and Our Local Area. Sessions were delivered both onsite and at the schools, reaching over 650 pupils from Years 1 to 6.

## Public Engagement: Talks, tours, visits



(Images: left New Curators Project workshop © UCL, centre: Weaving workshop © Museum of the Home, right: THLHLA Archives Manager Richard Wiltshire at British Library exhibition)

We hosted talks and tours for:

- [University of the Third Age](#) (u3a) Group in May 2022
- [The Museum of the Home](#) in June 2022, about the Vietnamese community in the East End. This workshop focused on recently catalogued archives about the Gor Hoi Festival kept by Peter Gibson ([I/THI/B/15/1](#)). The results supported a series of events [Uncovering Vietnamese Archives with Dora Lam](#), held at the Museum of the Home from March 2023
- a delegation of Nigerian archive and records managers, arranged by The National Archives in August 2022.

Visits from young people and students interested in cultural heritage included the UCL [New Curators Project](#) in June 2022 and the QMUL Public History Seminar in October 2022. Both sessions were designed to support their engagement and potential for future employment in the heritage sector.

We also loaned 3 images to the [British Library's Chinese and British exhibition](#), 18 Nov 2022-23 Apr 2023 exploring British Chinese communities and culture.



## Public Engagement: At the Idea Stores



(Images: left: Anthony Flemming, Customer Service Advisor, ISW with Annette Mackin, Heritage Officer, Archives, THLHLA - assisting him with finding content for Eid display, centre: final cabinet at ISW, right: detail of Bethnal Green 100 years exhibition)

We supported Idea Store staff in celebrating 100 years of [Bethnal Green Library](#), and in curating an Eid display centred around the history of East London Mosque at [Idea Store Whitechapel](#). Staff worked together to select images from our collections for the libraries' exhibition and display.

We also provided six induction training sessions for Idea Store staff to help promote Local History offer to residents and provided historical images of royal visits to the borough for the Council's celebration of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee.

## How Well Did We Do?

### Feedback from our public reading room users

- *Super helpful and friendly staff, and fascinating archives. Thanks so much!*
- *The staff here have been extremely helpful when I've come. They're also very knowledgeable and helped me discover things I wouldn't have found by myself. Thank you!*
- *I found fascinating information and loved every minute! The staff are amazing and helped me every step!*
- *Had a lovely experience on my first day here, staff were super useful in helping me find archives and I will be back soon!*

### Feedback from our remote enquirers

- *Thank you so much for the prompt reply, which has answered my questions – and much more.*
- *Wow, thank you so much, they are my ancestors, cannot thank you enough*
- *Thanks so VERY much for your very kind and informative note below, and for the time and trouble that you have taken with this.*
- *What a fantastic response, I am indebted to you for your outstanding help*



## Public Service Delivery figures for 2022-23

### Reading room and remote enquiries

- 5,528 items produced (1,107 archive, 4,421 library)
- 1,183 reading room visitors
- 440 new reading room user registrations
- 1,459 remote enquiries
- 135 new sign-ups to our newsletter

### Social media

- X (Twitter): 7.1K followers, 8.3K posts
- Instagram: 2,258 followers, 484 posts
- Facebook: 3.9K followers
- YouTube: 838 channel subscribers, 42 videos, 28,728 new views

### Collections, cataloguing and volunteers

- 766 new descriptions to the archive collections and 600 new library items added to the online catalogue
- 82 linear shelf metres of archives acquired. This compares with 53 linear metres of material acquired for the 2019-21 period
- 608.5 hours of staff and volunteer time cataloguing archives collections
- 71,987 online catalogue views
- 609.75 total volunteer hours
- 14 volunteers

### Outreach and events

- 79 outreach events held – 7 online, 62 onsite, 10 offsite
- 1,930 event attendees
- 23 school workshops held with 666 pupils in attendance

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