

2020-2021

ANNUAL REPORT

PANDEMIC LIMITED
SERVICE



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Tower Hamlets
Local History
Library & Archives

East End history
at your fingertips



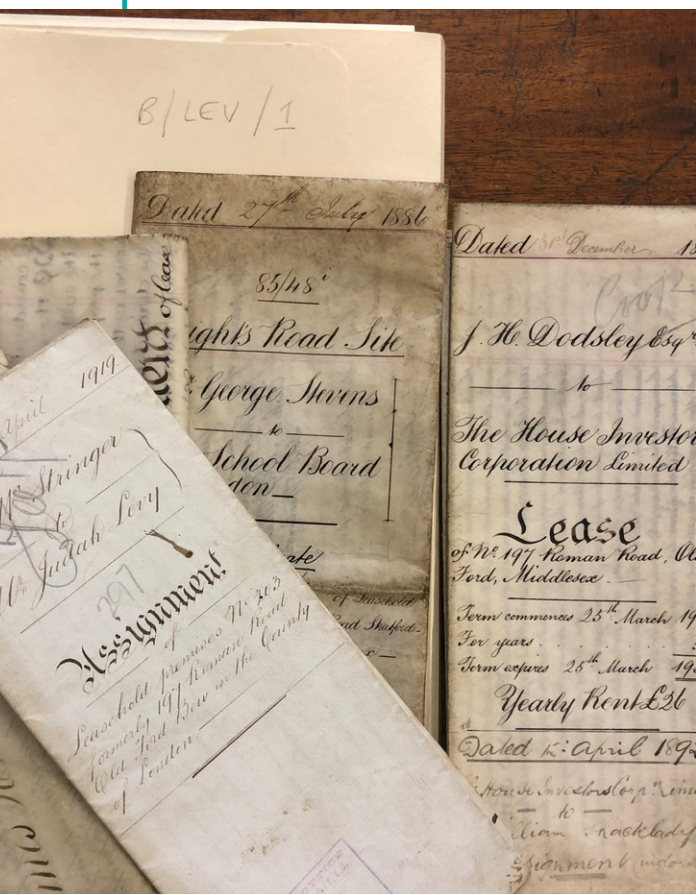
INTRODUCTION

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 borough residents and visitors from across the UK and overseas with the rich histories of London's East End.

The past year was challenging for the service due to the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Our building was closed during lockdown but we did have three periods of re-opening with limited hours of service. Staff continued to work behind the scenes

- answering local history enquiries
- enhancing digital content for collections online
- running virtual events including workshops around the Bangladesh 50 Years project
- collecting and cataloguing new digital archives
- writing new collection information guides
- reviewing collections management procedures



KEY HIGHLIGHTS



Accredited Archive status

We retained our status as an Accredited Archive Service as awarded by The National Archives.

Archive Service Accreditation defines good practice and agreed standards for archive services across the UK, thereby encouraging and supporting the development of the archive service.

New members of staff

We were delighted to welcome two newcomers to the team: **Richard Wiltshire** as our new Archives Manager who joined us after 18 years as an Archivist at [London Metropolitan Archives](#), and **Sanjida Alam** as Heritage Co-ordinator (Public Access) early in the first lockdown of 2020.

Our new YouTube channel

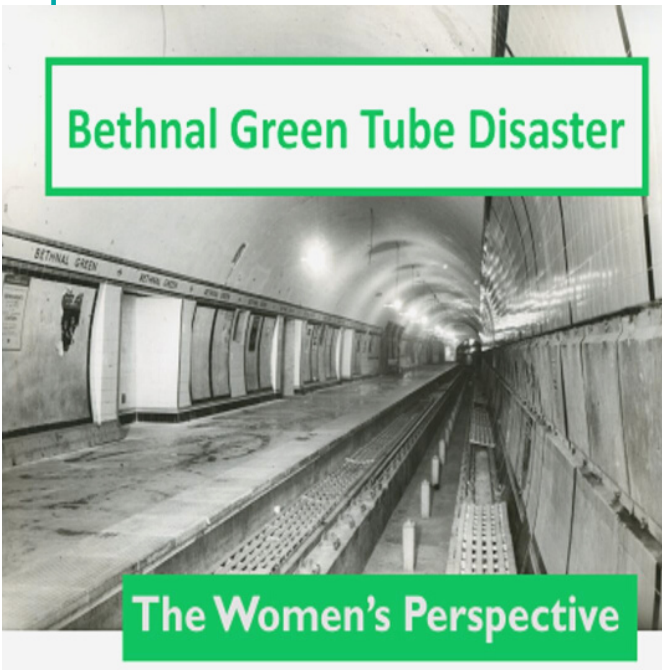
Our team managed to provide a level of service continuity during the pandemic by expanding our range of free online resources, including setting up a new YouTube channel on 27 April 2020 to showcase a selection of recently catalogued films from our moving image collection. Since then, the channel has grown to include twenty-five videos which have generated more than 30,000 views and over 350 subscribers. Highlights include:

- Amateur footage of Tower Hamlets Carnival from 1979 (pictured above)
- A fly-on-the-wall documentary from 1985 showing a day in the life at Stepping Stones Farm
- A chronological playlist, 'The East End on Film', collecting together the best archive footage of London's East End from other YouTube channels like British Pathé and London's Screen Archives

COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

We partnered with **The Stairway to Heaven Memorial Trust** to host the **Bethnal Green Tube Disaster: 'The Women's Perspective'** online exhibition and events previously planned to take place onsite prior to lockdown. The exhibition booklet can be downloaded [here](#).

Bethnal Green Tube Disaster



The Women's Perspective



We worked with **The National Portrait Gallery**, under its [Citizen UK](#) programme, to produce our **Bangladesh 50 installation at Idea Store Whitechapel**, bringing together artists and local communities for archival research and creative engagement.

Local residents were invited to research how the independence movement was experienced in the East End and explore the impact of the Liberation War of 1971 on local, personal and collective identity. Informed by these findings, **Ruhul Abdin**, the Lead Artist for the Bangladesh 50 Years Project, worked with the group to produce a commemorative artwork, now displayed at Idea Store Whitechapel.

ONLINE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

Our online outreach programme expanded to continue to meet the needs of reaching the local community and beyond during lockdown.

Online talks

We hosted local history talks on Zoom, which included an LGBTQ+ History Month Talk: **The Queer East End: introducing our collections** for LGBTQ+ Month (pictured above), and **Black Presence in the East End** for Black History Month.

New Local History Podcast

We launched a new occasional podcast, **East End History in an Object** – episode one is available on our website here.

Newsletter

We continued to publish our bi-monthly newsletter, keeping the public informed of our lockdown achievements, online events and any developments on reopening post-pandemic.

Film screenings

We started online public screenings of films with connections to the borough's history, including **'La Boheme to Gardeners: The Sights and Sounds of the Jewish East End'** for Holocaust Memorial Day, and **'The Life and Times of Miriam Moses'** for Women's History Month.

Our website

was updated regularly throughout lockdown with additional content, including a range of new user guides to our collections and downloadable subject and classification guides.

Bangladesh 50 Years

Our Bangladesh 50 Years exhibition events programme began in March 2021. We held 10 online events featuring notable Bengali speakers, academics, and teachers, which attracted over 350 participants.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

East End History Club

Our long-running bi-monthly public workshop moved online, featuring subjects that proved very popular with the public, including:

- The Matchgirls Strike: The Perspective of Sarah Chapman, a Local Girl
- East End Housing Estates
- Protest in the East End
- An introduction to LGBTQ+ Archives in partnership with ELOP

National Census Day

For Census Day on 21 March, we created a [webpage](#) highlighting some of the notable East Enders featured in censuses past - including their own census returns, photos and other special archive materials.

Explore Your Archives 2020

We produced an online event **Unravelling Building Plans** which featured rarely seen building plans and building control files from our collections which illustrated the research possibilities these records offer local historians, planners, and developers, outlined how this unique collection came to us, and the conservation challenges it presents.

Recordkeeping support

We offered heritage support for local businesses and other organisations affected by lockdown and the ongoing pandemic.

The charity Play Association Tower Hamlets (PATH) unfortunately had to close during the pandemic. .

PATH Play Development Manager Eleanor Image delivered four large boxes of material to Bancroft Road at lunchtime on 22 January 2021 (pictured below with Archivist Andrew Lewis). The collection comprises minutes, files, annual reports, promotional publications, posters, leaflets and digital photos, securing the social history of play in Tower Hamlets throughout the first two decades of the 21st century.



VOLUNTEERING

Our wonderful volunteers had to work remotely during 2020-21, but they still managed to put in a lot of work crucial to the service during lockdown. Tasks they were involved with included:

- collecting photos for the Covid-19 archive
- adding subject keywords to fond-level archive records
- writing and researching content for the website.



RE-OPENING TO THE PUBLIC

Following national Covid-19 guidelines, in September 2020 we were delighted to be able to welcome users to our public reading room again via a pre-booked appointment service on Tuesdays and Fridays, albeit for fewer hours per week than pre-pandemic. Staff retrieved items in advance for our visitors and were assiduous in sanitising the reading room and quarantining items after use.

The Top 10 book and pamphlet research categories in 2020

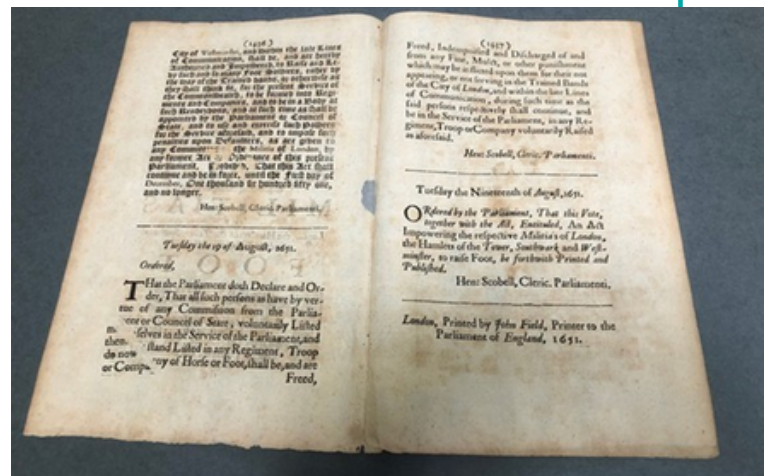
1. Ethnic groups, immigrants, and race relations
2. Recreation
3. Housing
4. Town planning and improvements, development
5. London
6. Chemical industries
7. Biography
8. Politics, political parties and associations
9. Education
10. Life of the people

LIBRARY COLLECTION

New additions to the catalogue

Act 'impowering the respective militias of London, the Hamlets of the Tower, Southwark and Westminster to raise foot.' (ref LC15107)

This newly acquired pamphlet joins related militia acts already held in the Library. Published in 1651 the by House of Commons of Oliver Cromwell's English Commonwealth. The act is among the early printed references we hold to the phrase which gave the modern London Borough of Tower Hamlets its name.



A selection of books added to our library collection this year

- Migrant City: A new History of London by Panikos Panayi (ref. LC15119)
- East End Born & Bred: The remarkable story of London Boxing by Jeff Jones (ref. LC15122)
- The Splendid Mrs McCheyne and the East London Federation of Suffragettes by Jane McChrystal (ref. LC15109)
- Female Husbands: A Trans history by Jen Manion (ref. LC15120)
- 111 Places in London's East End that you shouldn't miss by Ed Glinert (ref. LC15123)

ARCHIVE COLLECTION

New collection

Making History: Documenting Coronavirus in the East End (P/COV)

We initiated asking for contributions from the people of Tower Hamlets to document the impact of the virus and the lockdown measures in place on local residents and organisations based in the borough.

Life During Lockdown: COVID-19 Collecting Volunteer Project

We also ran a volunteer project for Tower Hamlets residents as an opportunity to help us capture and record people's experiences of life during this extraordinary period so that they may be preserved within our archives and serve as a learning resource for future generations. We have received photographs, documents and films. Submissions continue until the end of 2021.

Images (top to bottom):

- Embroidery for Stitches in Time Tapestry by Amelia Brookins, 2020 (ref. P/COV/2/12/3)
- The Angel and Crown by Trudy Wilton, 2020 (ref. P/COV/1/2/8/1)
- Victoria Park employees by Katie O'Reilly- Boyles, 2020 (ref. P/COV/1/2/3/12)



PUBLIC SERVICE FIGURES

How well did we do?



READING ROOM & REMOTE ENQUIRIES

- 372 items produced
- 35 reading room visitors
- 28 new user registrations
- 1418 remote enquiries answered

SOCIAL MEDIA

- 676 social media posts
- 17,263 likes, shares and retweets
- 1899 new followers on Instagram and Twitter
- 25 YouTube videos added to the channel
- 32,579 new YouTube views
- 391 new YouTube subscribers



COLLECTIONS & CATALOGUING

- 1063 items added to catalogue
- 316.6 staff cataloguing hours logged
- 84,162 online catalogue views
- 38 total volunteer hours
- 6 active volunteers
- 4 volunteer projects worked on

OUTREACH & EVENTS

- 37 online outreach events held
- 1081 event attendees
- 21 citizen researchers recruited for Bangladesh 50 project

"Thank you so much for the splendid information you sent and the speed with which you sent it. Unbelievable!"

"Thank you so much for providing this service, it's wonderful"

"I just had to write again to tell you - you did it! I have been looking for this certificate for years... now I know my great-grandmother's name and will be able to order my grandfather's birth certificate."

"Librarians & archivists are the most amazingly helpful and knowledgeable people! I can't believe how much detail you've been able to provide... I don't think it's said enough how important local archives, and the people who work in them, are."

FEEDBACK

from our remote users



"Thank you so much for giving my request your time and thought, and also for the useful information. You have been most helpful."

"WOW, this is brilliant, thank you so much! Quite honestly, I can't believe it... you've given me a real boost..."

"Thank you again for your amazing help. I'll definitely keep an eye out for when you re-open and will arrange to come in for a visit."

"Thank you so much again for helping me find this after all these years of looking - I'm so very grateful!"



TOWER HAMLETS