



Come up and see our current exhibition

Cockney Rebels: Popular Music in Tower Hamlets

The new exhibition at THLHLA launched with a bang at the end of June and continues to draw crowds. On Saturday just gone we welcomed East End punk legends **Jah Wobble** and **Suresh Singh**, the Cockney Sikh, for a conversation with Debbie Smith, once upon a time the guitarist for Echobelly but of late Heritage Co-Ordinator here at Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives. Over 60 people attended on a warm summer's day and many anecdotes were shared. Thanks to our panellists and the great audience! Scroll down for more free events celebrating the borough's rich musical heritage.

About the exhibition

From 'The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green' to 'Bonkers', the people of London's East End have always appreciated a good tune. Our unique history, shaped by its connection to the river as a source of inspiration, work, and migration, has produced an extraordinary musical legacy, spanning everything from folk songs and sea shanties to music hall, jazz, punk, the Asian underground and grime.

Featuring over a hundred rare items selected by staff from the collections of Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives, **Cockney Rebels: Popular Music in Tower Hamlets, 1624-2003** is a major new exhibition exploring how our borough and its people have inspired and shaped popular music, both locally and globally, over four centuries.

Free entry, on display until 21 February 2025. Check opening times before visiting.



(L-R) Jah Wobble, Debbie Smith and Suresh Singh at Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives, 17 August 2024

Upcoming Cockney Rebels events

The Petticoat Lane Foxtrot

Thursday 5 September | 6.30-8.00pm | [Book your free place here](#)

Alan Dein, compiler of the album *Music Is The Most Beautiful Language In The World: Yiddisher Jazz In London's East End 1920s To 1950s*, presents the remarkable story of long-forgotten Jewish-themed jazz 78rpm discs - when swinging hot dance bands were still all the rage on the streets of East London. Alan will reflect on the musical stories of East London's Jewish community from singers, songwriters, conductors, and cantors to musicians, managers, proprietors of record shops and club owners.

"As I was a-walking down Ratcliff Highway" – an East End street in traditional folk song

Thursday 17 October | 6.30pm-8pm | [Book your free place here](#)

Several traditional folk songs make reference to Ratcliff Highway (modern day The Highway). Our guest speaker **Malcolm Barr-Hamilton** will examine the history of the street's notoriety and of the several folk songs associated with it, still popular in folk clubs today.

For over twenty years Malcolm was the much-beloved Borough Archivist for Tower Hamlets. He now works part-time as Archivist for the English Folk Dance and Song Society at Cecil Sharp House.

The Life & Times of the Music Hall and Marie Lloyd

Saturday 7 December | 2.00pm-3.30pm | [Book your free place here](#)

Join historian **Danny Wells** as he explores Music Halls of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. This illustrated talk celebrates the rambunctious nature of the entertainment, with characters such as Champagne Charlie, Little Tich, the 'coster comedian' Gus Ellen, George Robey-the 'Prime Minister of Mirth' and Vesta Tilley. And we mustn't forget the much-loved Marie Lloyd, both the 'Queen of the Music Hall' and of the double entendre.

All of these events take place in person at Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives and are listed on our [What's On page](#). To reserve your place, please note you can click 'book as guest' if you are not an Idea Store (library) member.

In the Neighbourhood

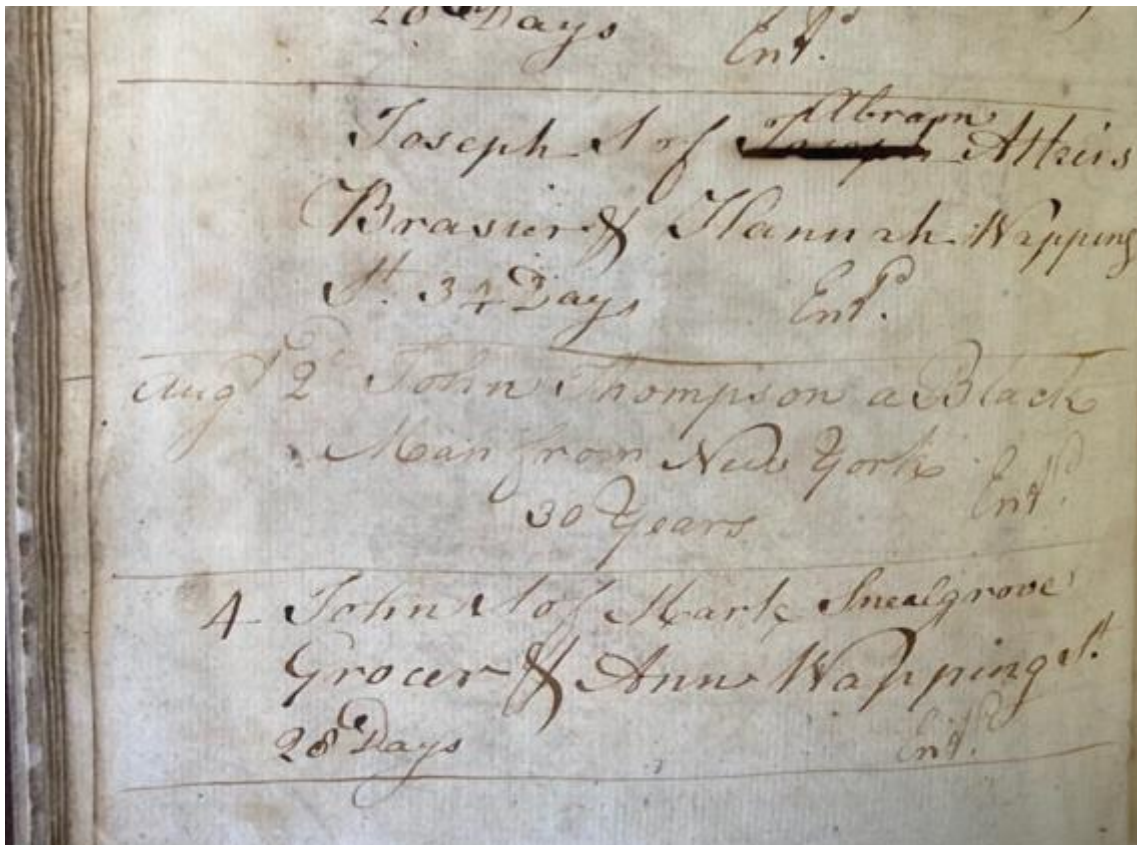
Wednesday 21 August | 10am-2pm | Free

Wander down to **Victoria Park** this week for [In The Neighbourhood](#), a free-to-enter community festival sandwiched between the two music-filled weekends of All Points East.

We will have a local history stall on Wednesday - Culture Day. Pop by and browse examples of materials from our collection and chat to staff! There will be stalls and activities from many other local cultural organisations including Half Moon Theatre, Adore Dance, Rich Mix and the London School of Samba.



Communities of Liberation



Entries from the day book of baptisms kept by St John's Church, Wapping, August 1792 (Ref L/SJW/2/1)

Update by Tony T, Research & Engagement Lead

"We're half-way point and on track with the [Communities of Liberation project](#). This isn't the first time that I've researched hidden Black experiences in British history from 1500s, but by turns my search for Black lives in 300-year-old sources at Tower Hamlets Archives has been a complex weave – intriguing, transformative, humbling, compelling, celebratory, personal...

Patience and persistence are essential: hours of combing fruitless searching (or efficiently ruling out) entries in a book of 18th century records melt away with each Black man, woman or child I discover – and always the thought, how long has she or he waited to be found?

I'm compiling all of this research into a dataset for public sharing, planned to be accessible from March 2025.

Meanwhile, the group of Co-Producers has spent May and June immersed in a series of workshops led by **Montaz Marché**, historian of early modern Black Britain, who introduced them to Black stories and characters she has unearthed from the local area; the locations significant in their experiences; along with ways to use supporting evidence to develop historical context, when creatively reimagining Black lives in C18th London.

Now, in sessions facilitated by acclaimed novelist and teacher **Judith Bryan**, the Co-Producers are developing their own narratives based on historical evidence of the African men, women and children who lived and worked in the group of parishes that, 300 years ago, made up today's Tower Hamlets.

The snapshot above shows an example of the treasures our Co-Producers are exploring at Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives. This is a daily record listing the names and ages of individuals who got baptised at St John's Church, Wapping. Most are newborn babies, but some are adults. The second of the three entries highlighted above reads:

1782, 2nd August: John Thompson, a Black Man from New York 30 years [old]

What could his story have been? Why did he leave New York, and why did he want to get baptised in Wapping?"

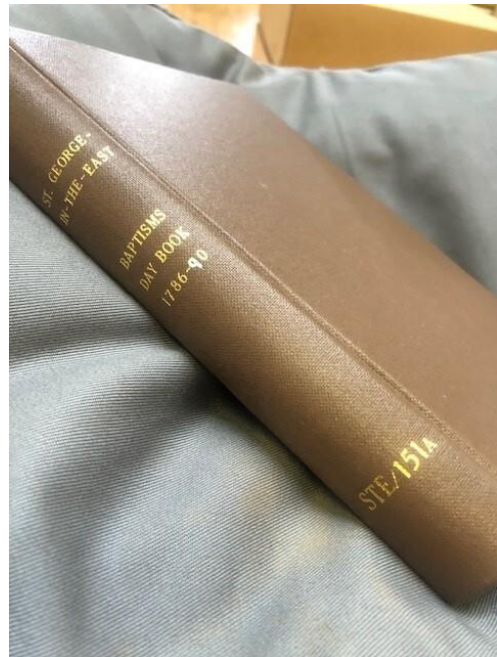
New podcast! East End history in an object

Keen to find out more about the records that the Co-Producers are exploring? We are thrilled to release our first podcast in a new series **East End History in an Object**.

For the first episode, we are focussing on another day book of baptisms in our collection - one kept by the church of St George-in-the-East. The span of years covers 1786-1790, a period when a number of Black people from North America and the Caribbean were living in the East End and getting baptised.

The podcast is conceived, produced and edited by Genova Messiah, Learning & Engagement Officer.

Please have a listen on [Spotify](#) or [wherever you get your podcasts](#). Feedback on the content is welcome via email to localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk



East End History Club: Parent and Baby Edition

Friday 6 September | 10.00-11.30am

Venue: Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

Come along to our new East End History Club designed especially for parents and carers to attend with their under 5s. It's a chance to meet other parents, enjoy a cuppa and browse our collection of materials - eg maps, photographs, newspapers - which illustrate the amazing history of London's famous East End. Toys for children aged 0-5 will be provided, along with a mini kiddie brunch, tea, coffee and biscuits.

Free entry, limited places - email localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk for further information. No booking required.

Remembering Bernard Nurse | 1947 - 2024



Bernard Nurse. Photo courtesy of Judith Nurse.

We were sad to learn that Bernard Nurse passed away on 21 February 2024 aged 77.

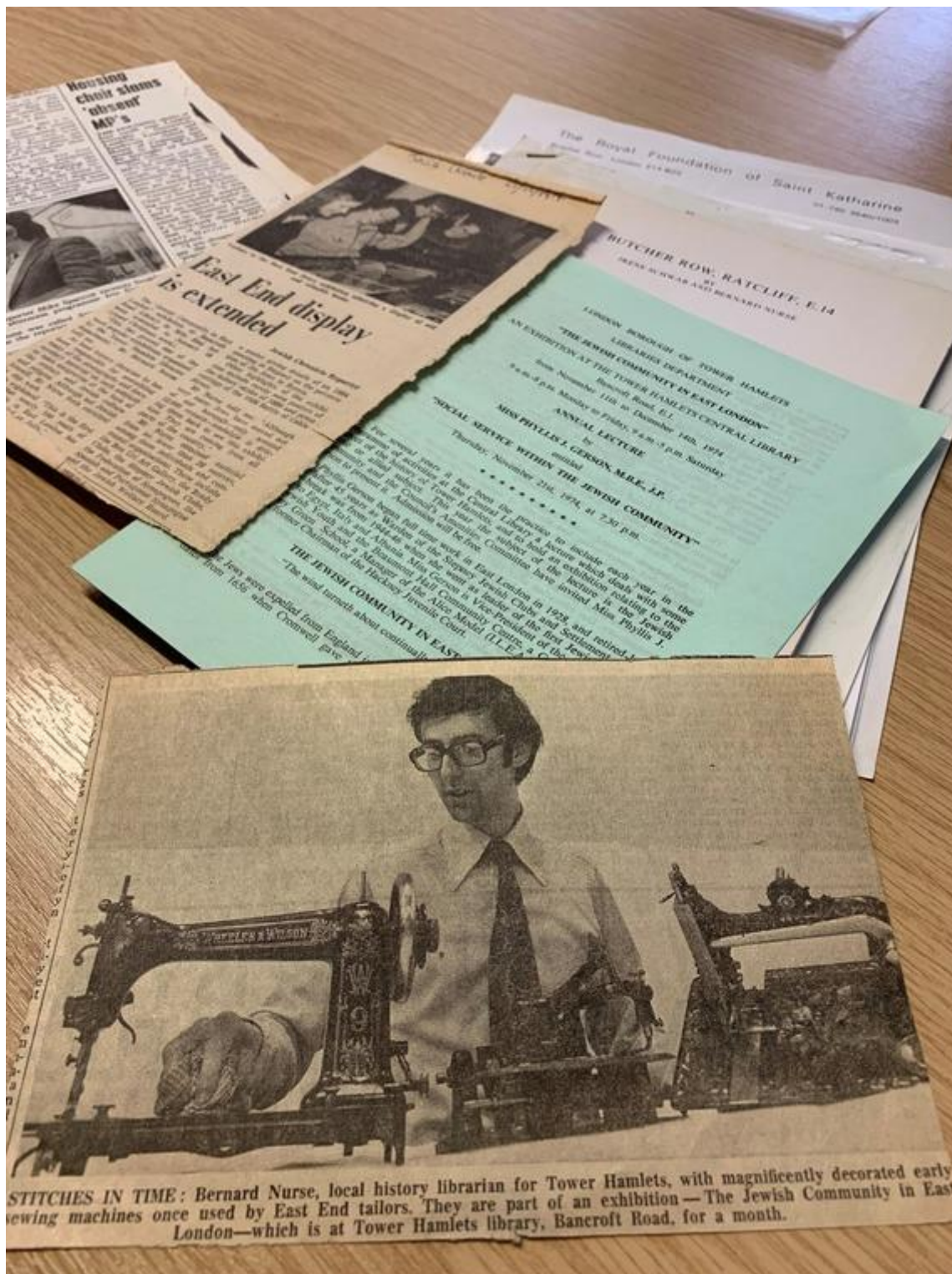
Bernard was Local Studies Librarian here at Bancroft Library from 1974-1981. He joined us from Guildhall Library in the City of London and seems to have hit the ground running! He put on an exhibition 'The Jewish Community in East London' during the winter of 1974 which was extended a month due to popular demand. Other exhibitions he organised included 'Tower Hamlets in photographs 1914-1939' in 1980.

Bernard wrote about highlights from our archives, including 'The notebook of Richard Newman of Mile End New Town' in the **East London History Society's** East London Record, no.1, 1978. Richard Newman married twice, secondly in 1787 to Elizabeth Reynolds. They moved in 1788 to 16 King Street, Mile End New Town and she died in 1792. In the notebook (archive reference P/NEW/1) Newman recorded household accounts but also noted occasions when Elizabeth disappeared for nights at a time and who 'came home at 1 o'Clock in the Morning drunk with a man'. He also noted recipes including for a cold remedy and the 'Queen of Hungary's Cordial', a spiced drink.

A scholar-librarian at heart, he loved researching local history. This included a history of **The Royal Foundation of St. Katharine**, Butcher Row with Irene Schwab which was published in Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, Volume 28 in 1977. Bernard also added to the collections through his photographs of local streets in the borough which are in our Image Collection.

In 1981 he left us to join as local studies librarian at London Borough of Southwark before becoming the librarian of the Society of Antiquaries of London from 1986 until his retirement in 2008. He explored the local history of Dulwich and Herne Hill where he lived and became chair of the Local History Group.

We would like to thank Bernard's widow Judith for kindly donating further items of Bernard's time in Tower Hamlets to our archives.



Contact us

- Email us: localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk
- Visit our website: <http://www.ideastore.co.uk/local-history>
- Phone (answered during Reading Room opening hours only): 020 7364 1290

Reading Room opening hours

- Tuesday 10.00am-4.30pm
- Wednesday 10.00am-4.30pm
- Thursday 10.00am-7.00pm

First and third Saturdays of every month:

- Saturday 10.00am-5.00pm

That's the following Saturdays coming up:

- Saturday 7 September
- Saturday 21 September
- Saturday 5 October
- Saturday 19 October

Exhibition opening times are: 10am-5pm Monday-Friday, plus the Saturdays and Thursday evenings noted above. On Monday and Friday lunchtimes, the exhibition will be closed for lunch between 1 and 2pm.

