



Cockney Rebels

Popular Music in Tower Hamlets, 1624-2003

Exhibition | 20 June 2024 - 21 February 2025

Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

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** 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.

Launch event | Thursday 20 June | 6.00-7.45pm | [Book your free place here!](#)

Cockney Rebels will open at Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives with a launch event on the evening of Thursday 20 June. Join BBC broadcaster Alan Dein, the curator and perhaps some special guests as we open the exhibition. Speeches at 6.30pm.



The first Cockney Rebels events are listed below. More to follow throughout the year!

East End History Club: Listening Session

Saturday 20 July, 2-4pm

Join us for an informal afternoon of browsing, nattering and cups of tea while listening to a rare LP from our collections. *Look In At The Local* documents an evening of live pub entertainment recorded in 1964 at the legendary Waterman's Arms on the Isle of Dogs. There will also be chance to browse items from our musical collections that didn't quite make it into the exhibition. [Book your free place here](#)

Anarchy in the East End: Punk Pioneers

Saturday 17 August, 2-4pm

We are chuffed to welcome East End punk royalty **Jah Wobble** (Public Image Ltd) and **Suresh Singh** (Spizzenergi) for an afternoon discussion, sharing their early years living, working and playing music in the borough. This discussion will be chaired by our very own Heritage Co-ordinator and Indie Legend **Debbie Smith** (Echobelly). Prepare to be dazzled by stories of musical journeys in the East End and beyond. [Book your free place here](#)

The Petticoat Lane Foxtrot

Thursday 5 September, 6.30-8.00pm

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. [Book your free place here](#)

Robin Hood Gardens on display

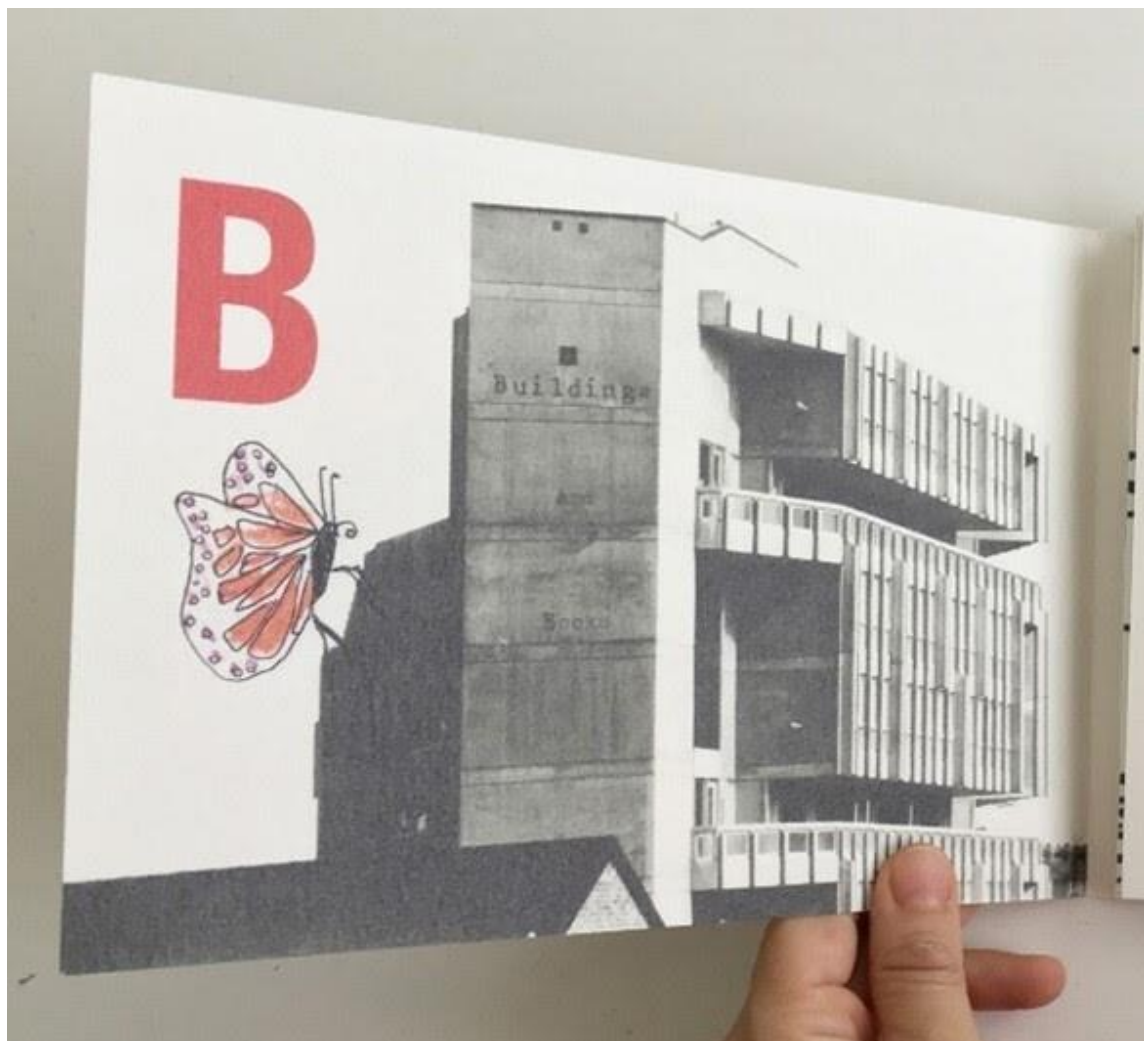


Image by Judit Ferencz, Alphabet book for Robin Hood Gardens, 2022

Exhibition | until Thursday 25 July

Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives | First floor landing

Now on display is a small exhibition on our first floor landing which is part of the [London Festival of Architecture](#).

Illuminating the Archive: A Book of Hours for Robin Hood Gardens by **Judit Ferencz** explores the architectural and historical value of a building in the context of the time it takes to form a community and the efforts involved in making it a home. Rather than separating the life of a building into times of construction, inhabitation and demolition, this exhibition prompts us to relate to our built environment in terms of ongoing maintenance and care.

Robin Hood Gardens is a housing estate in Poplar, opened in 1972, which was refused heritage listing twice and is currently being demolished and regenerated. Judit Ferencz, who is an illustrator and an art and architectural historian, made drawings of everyday life on the estate in the years immediately prior to its demolition and excavated the past of the buildings in architectural and historical archives, including Tower Hamlets Local History Library Archives. Judit found that when designing Robin Hood Gardens, its architects the Smithsons had also researched the past of the site and thoughtfully considered ways of living there.

Two different kinds of drawings - the architects' designs for a future estate and Judit's illustrations witnessing its final moments - are brought together in the form of a series of handmade books and booklets, as a contemporary interpretation of the late medieval prayer book the Book of Hours. By paging through these books readers may contemplate the life of a building that by now irreversibly belongs to the past and yet it may help us imagine a better future.

Judit's research was developed at The Bartlett School of Architecture as part of her PhD, and was funded by the RIBA LKE Ozolins Studentship. The exhibition is located opposite the Reading Room here on Bancroft Road where she carried out some of her research.

Artist talk | Robin Hood Gardens: Onsite

Wednesday 3 July | 6.00-7.30pm | Online

We are pleased to be hosting a free online talk and discussion with artist and researcher **Judit Ferencz** and architectural historian **Peter Guillery** (formerly Survey of London), as they explore the relation between the archive and Judit's onsite works at the Robin Hood Gardens estate leading up to the demolition.

[Book your free place here](#). The meeting link (Microsoft Teams) will be sent to all those booked before the session.

Coming up next at the archives

Talk | The Vitality of Needs: Retooling the Humanities for Social Action

Thursday 13 June | 6.00-7.30pm

Venue: Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

We are delighted to partner with [Northeastern University London](#), a satellite campus of the prestigious American university whose London base is in St Katherine Dock, to present a keynote talk by Kris K. Manjapra, Professor in History and Global Studies.

What and who are the Humanities for? Manjapra (pictured right) will explore powers of the Humanities with reference to specific case-studies. He will focus on archiving, technology, documentation, and data performances that take place in communities, outside the structure of universities. Retooled Humanities practices, embedded in community organizations, are essential for successful responses to the greatest social, political, and ecological needs of our times.

Free entry, all welcome - [book your place here](#).



Changemakers of East London

Saturday 22 June | 1:00-4:00pm | Venue: Idea Store Canary Wharf

Come and join us at a pop-up stall as part of our project Changemakers of the East End. Educators, Activists, Organisers, Creators, Representatives... Tower Hamlets has a long and rich history of people making change and this project, led in collaboration with Studio Futurall, inspires young people to follow in their footsteps.

At the stall you'll be able to take the 'Changemakers' quiz and make and read zines about changemakers past and present. No booking required, just drop-in on the day!



East End History Club: Parent and Baby Edition

Friday 5 July | 10.00-11.30am

Venue: Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

Come along to our brand new East End History Club designed especially for parents 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. Booking link coming soon.



Creative workshop for new Brick Lane mural

Saturday 6 July | 1.00-3.00pm | Venue: Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

A new heritage-themed mural is being designed for Brick Lane and you are invited to get involved! Join **Bablu Miah** from Trapped in Zone One at this creative workshop exploring archives and images depicting the 1978 turning point against racist violence. Find out more and [book your free place here](#).

News from our friends



History House 140

Exhibition | until 20 December | 10am-5pm daily | Venue: Oxford House

A brand-new exhibition at **Oxford House**, Bethnal Green exploring 140 years of social history and change in East London. From young Victorian social reformers tackling the great challenges of their day, to courageous nights spent in air-raid shelters, and captivating stories of 1970s working-class activism – History House will take you on a journey through 140 years of social change in the East End. This interactive exhibition, which marks Oxford House's 140th anniversary, features unseen material from its newly digitised archive of 10,000 objects highlighting the diversity, energy and ideas of the East End and its extraordinary communities.

Stories of Migration: Passport to the NHS

Tuesday 18 June | 6.30-8.30pm | Venue: St Margaret's House

A community performance based on six months of workshops exploring migration and marginalisation with East London residents using Forum Theatre techniques, led by Pindrop Trust. Refreshments provided. This event is part of Refugee Week. Find out more and book your place [here](#).

Stories of Struggles and Strides: Half a century of Bangladeshi endeavours in London's East End (1950-2000)

Wednesday 26 June | 6.30-8.30 pm | Venue: Brady Arts Centre

Do you want to learn about the postwar history of the East London Bangladeshi community? Do you want to understand how the Bangladeshi activists of the 1970s and 1980s in East London responded to challenges that the community faced? Do you want to be involved in documenting the lives of these people and researching into the half a century of evolution of the community?

If the answers are yes, please come to the launch of this new project by East End Connection to find out more about the initiative and how you can get involved. [Book your place here.](#)

I Am Who I Am Now



Photograph by Julie Begum, 1990s. Courtesy Bengali Photo Archive

Opening soon at [Four Corners](#) in Bethnal Green, **I Am Who I Am Now: Selections from the Bengali Photo Archive** offers a unique insight into the everyday life of the Bengali East End of London. The exhibition focuses on vernacular photographs taken of and by Bengali people over the past 50 years. Accompanied by oral histories and collaboratively produced archival interpretations, it offers a powerful and intimate perspective on the community's histories. From the microcosms of the family to the transformative power of community spaces, it illuminates the intricate interplay between individual experiences and the broader sociopolitical landscape in the East End.

The images are drawn from the Bengali Photo Archive, a new collection featuring personal and family images donated by local people. The exhibition also features work by photographers Raju Vaidyanathan, Mayar Akash, Anthony Lam, Paul Halliday, Sarah Ainslie, David Hoffman, Paul Trevor and others, which documents the community's working lives, activism, and anti-racist struggles.

[Click here to book your place](#) at the launch event on **Thursday 4 July**. The exhibition runs from 5 July until 3 August at Four Corners, 121 Roman Road, Bethnal Green.

Collections news



'A Plan of an Estate situate in the Parish of St Mary White Chapel belonging to Messrs. Buckleys Esqrs. Survey'd and Delineated by Joseph Manning, 1747'

We will sign off another bumper newsletter with details of a recent auction purchase. We're very pleased to have acquired for the public a unique hand-coloured plan of Whitechapel from 1747 which gives much detail on street layout and use of premises. This is now available to consult in our Reading Room (Ref: [P/BUC/1](#)). It is contemporaneous with the construction of the London Hospital, the building which is now our Town Hall, and documents the arrangement of a plot of land to its west, about 5 acres in size.

The following streets in Whitechapel are shown:

- Buckley Street [later Buckle Street]
- Church Lane [later Commercial Road East]
- Colchester Street [later Braham Street]
- Lead House Yard [later site of Camperdown Street]
- Little Aliff Lane [Little Alie Street, became Alie Street]
- Plough Street [Plough or Plow Street]
- Quiet Row [or Were Row, was renamed as Nelson Street in circa 1810; later Beagle Street in 1893 and enlarged as Braham Street in 1964-1966]
- Red Lyon Street [Red Lion Street - later became Lemman Street].

The plan shows ale houses, bricklayers yard, carpenters yard, coach houses, lead house, 'silk throusters', skittle grounds, stables, stabling yard, sugar houses, gardens and 'Horse Ride'.

You know where to come if you want to have a butchers at this plan - and much much more!

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 15 June
- Saturday 6 July
- Saturday 20 July
- Saturday 3 August

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.

Stay Connected with Idea Store on social media:

