

# Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives



## Gemma Collins visits Bancroft Road



Make sure to watch **Who Do You Think You Are?** this evening on BBC1 to see Gemma Collins gracing us with her presence.

Many famous residents of Essex have ancestry in Tower Hamlets - but is the GC related to Jack the Ripper? Find out on the 26th...

Did you know?? Over the years we have also featured in the Who Do You Think You Are episodes for Patsy Kensit, Tracey Emin and Danny Dyer.

## Cockney Rebels exhibition and events



Check out the events below which have been programmed as part of our current exhibition Cockney Rebels.

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. **More events coming in the new year!**

"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.

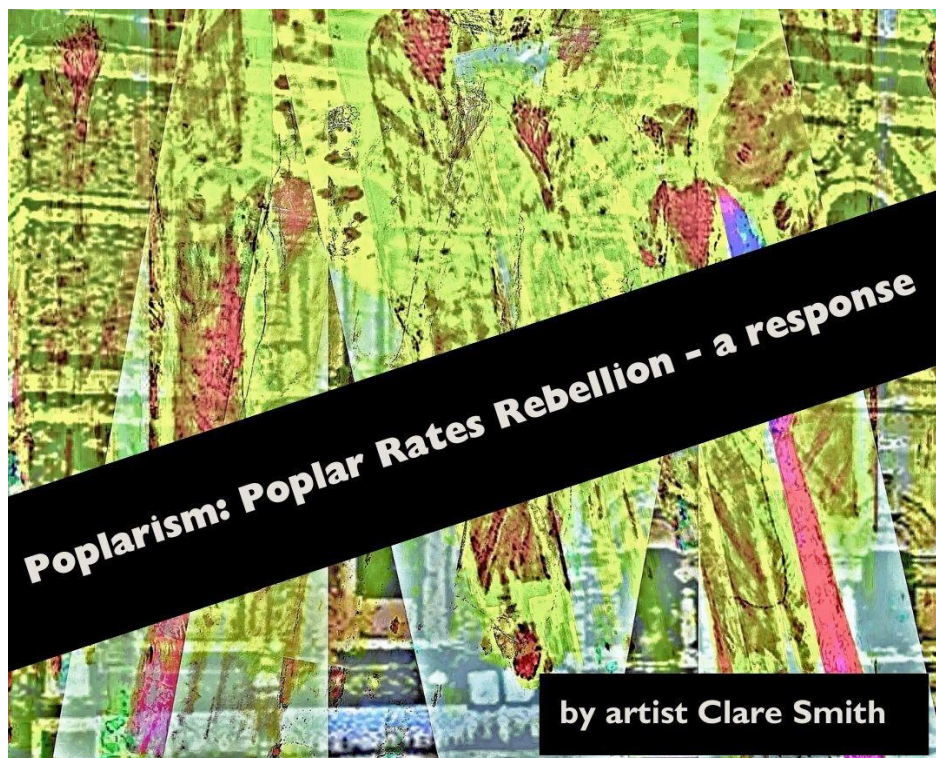
## The Life & Times of the Music Hall and Marie Lloyd

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.

Both 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.

## Poplarism: a response



### Exhibition by artist Clare Smith

**Venue: Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives (first floor landing)**

We are now in the final weeks of this exhibition by local artist [Clare Smith](#) responding to events and themes of the Poplar Rates Rebellion of 1921. Alongside her artwork there are selections of archival material from our collections exploring this history of defiance by local politicians and social reformers in Poplar. Visit soon - the last day of this exhibition is Monday 30 September.

The exhibition has been curated especially for the first floor landing space at Tower Hamlets History Library and Archives, outside the Reading Room.

## Black History Month

Black History Month is an annual, nationally recognised initiative which runs throughout October. This year, the theme is [Reclaiming Narratives](#) and marks a significant shift towards recognising and correcting the narratives of Black heritage and culture.

Here at the Local History Library we are hosting three events and launching a new exhibition on our landing for Black History Month 2024.



## Caring for Your Collections

with [The New Black Film Collective](#) & [London's Screen Archives](#)

Thursday 10 October | 6.00-8.00pm | [Book your free place here!](#)

**Venue: Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives**

Did you know that videos start deteriorating after 30 years?

[The New Black Film Collective](#) and [London's Screen Archives](#) present an evening of films from the 1970s-2000s filmed in Tower Hamlets on the themes of love, community, protest and racism.

The event will also explore why it is important to protect and preserve your own personal collections. Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives and London's Screen Archives will host a workshop on how to care for your documents, photos and films (digital, VHS, super 8mm etc), including a chance to get hands on with old film formats.

This workshop is part The New Black Film Collective and London's Screen Archive's project 'Undocumented', delivered with the support of the BFI, awarding National Lottery Funding; and Tower Hamlets Council.

## Wh'appen?

Black Music in Tower Hamlets, 1970-1999

Saturday 19 October | 2.00-4.00pm

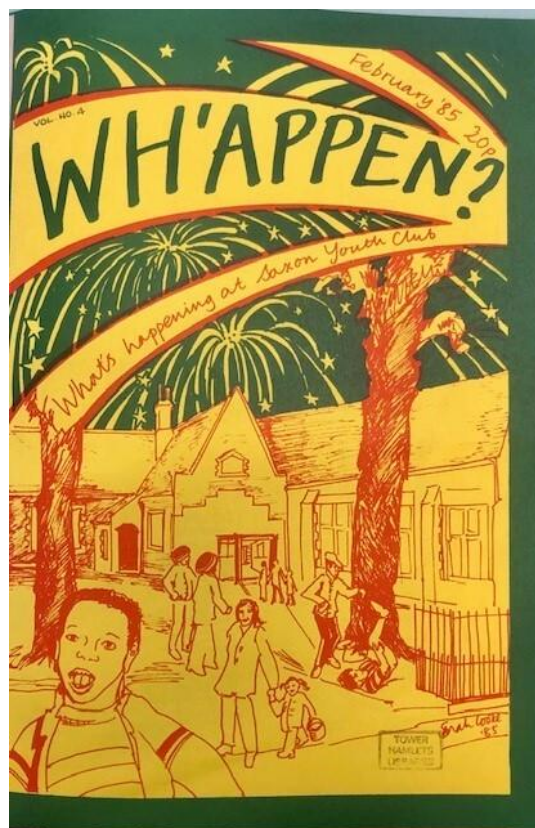
**Exhibition launch | Drop in, no need to book**

This new display of collections at Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives will explore the intersection between space, place, fashion, and music in Tower Hamlets' Black music scene. Through youth clubs, bands, blues/shubeens (house parties), festivals, record shops and pubs, we aim to uncover the diverse ways people recollect Black music in the borough from 1970-1999.

Do you remember what you wore to house parties in the 80s? What record shops did you go to for the latest tunes? Was there a favourite sound clash you still talk about? Come and share your stories with us.

With contribution and research from local residents **Keira Blasse** and **Nick Friday**, this exhibition narrates an intimate story of joy through Black music culture and heritage in Tower Hamlets.

The exhibition has been curated especially for the first floor landing space at Tower Hamlets History Library and Archives, outside the Reading Room. It will run until the end of the year.



# Ijaw People's Association

## Heritage project and book launch

Thursday 24 October | 5.30-8.00pm

### Venue: Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

The Ijaw (Izon) people are from the Niger delta region of southern Nigeria, with a substantial diaspora community living across London and beyond. A National Heritage Lottery Fund project titled '**Immigrant to citizen: the Ijaw (Izon) people of London from the earliest times to the present**' aims to bring awareness and celebrate the diverse communities that have made London their home.

The early Ijaw community established their roots in Tower Hamlets with the purchase of a building in Mile End that provided a communal gathering space for pastoral care and cultural occasions. The project documents many of these early Ijaws, who arrived from the 1930s and lived in Tower Hamlets, through oral history interviews and written testimonies. We are very pleased to be taking in the materials generated by the project for permanent preservation.

This event will celebrate the launch of a publication that documents the history and heritage of Ijaw people in London. **Drop in - no need to book.**



## East End History Club: Parent and Baby Edition

Friday 4 October | 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](mailto:localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk) for further information. No booking required.

## Remembering Derek Morris | 1932 - 2024

We were sorry to hear that Derek Morris, historian and retired geophysicist, passed away on 14 July 2024. He had spend nearly three decades researching, writing and lecturing on 18th century Stepney, beginning in 1993.

He made extensive use of our collections, and those in other archives, in the series of books he wrote on early modern Stepney which were published by the East London History Society.

Anyone seriously interested in the history of Tower Hamlets should own a copy of these works.



- **Mile End Old Town, 1741-1790: A social history of an early modern London suburb** (2002)
- **Wapping, 1600-1800: A social history of an early modern London maritime suburb** (2002)
- **London's Sailortown, 1600-1800: A social history of Shadwell and Ratcliff, an early modern London riverside suburb** (2009) with Ken Cozens
- **Whitechapel, 1600-1800: A social history of an early modern London suburb** (2011)

As a student, Morris read Geology at Queen Mary College (now Queen Mary, University of London). During this period, he lived in St Margaret's House in Bethnal Green, an 18th Century merchant's house. Around 1988, Morris discovered that in the 1760s his forebears had lived on the north side of Mile End Road. The resulting body of research into his own ancestry led eventually to the publication of his first book. He deposited copies of his research cards of the Mile End Old Town inhabitants of this period with us (collection reference P/MOR).

Derek had a special interest in Captain James Cook and his links with Stepney. We attended an online talk he gave only five months ago in which he argued vigorously against the characterisation of the East End as being historically poor and deprived, highlighting some of the wealthy merchants who lived here.

Read more about Derek's work [on his website](#), which continues to be maintained by his family. Our condolences to his loved ones and gratitude for his major contribution to local history in Tower Hamlets.

## Finding family in Limehouse Chinatown

We love it when researchers visiting our Reading Room find exactly what they were looking for. **Sally Chang Warburton** and her cousin **Jacqueline Culliton** visited us back in June to explore our collections on Limehouse Chinatown. Sally writes,



*"In June this year my cousin and I visited Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives to research our family history. We hoped to find photographs of the road and area where we had grown up. We were not disappointed. The staff were so helpful and the archives so well organised that within minutes we were presented with a pile of photographs to inspect.*

*Imagine our delight when we found photos of not only my father but my cousin as a young girl. There were even more treasures that came to light and we were able to identify homes and add some extra historical details to our family's life.*

*We have not finished our research as there are more records that we have not yet looked at. So we are looking forward to a return visit."*

Sally recounted how her father, **Say Hee Chang**, came to London as a Chinese seaman. He married Sarah Lynch and had eight children including Sally. She found him depicted in the 1927 photograph below, with Reverend W.J. Simmons, Vicar of St. Matthias' Church, Poplar, outside the shop of Sing Quong Yuen and Company, grocers, 53 Pennyfields (corner with Turners Buildings).





*Say Hee Chang, Chinese seaman (and father of researcher Sally Chang Warburton), on the right. Ref P18735*

Sally's aunt married Wong Fat Hing who lived at 5 Pennyfields, the grandfather of her cousin Jacqueline. Mah Jong and Fan Tan gambling took place at this house but 'police took golden sovereigns to turn a blind eye.' according to Jacqueline. 'The Chinese kitchen was situated in the basement where "Cookie" cooked for the family and others.'

In the second photo discovered by the pair, Jacqueline is pointing to her mother pictured in the centre - Lyn Hing who lived in Birchfield Street as well as at 5 Pennyfields. She later emigrated to Australia. Unfortunately we cannot reproduce the original photo in this newsletter due to copyright restrictions but you are welcome to visit to look through the whole collection.

### **More about Limehouse Chinatown**

Between the 1800s and early 1960s Tower Hamlets was the centre of London's Chinese community. Many early settlers were seamen finding temporary accommodation in the Limehouse area. Many later settled and married local women.

Limehouse was called 'Chinatown' from the early 20th century as many Chinese businesses emerged. These were in the food and laundry trades and the street names reflected the community. Slum clearances, new post-Second World War housing provision and new migrations to London led to its gradual disappearance. Chinatown in Westminster grew from the 1960s and communities grew across other London boroughs.

Check out our collections guide [Limehouse Chinatown: The Chinese Community in Tower Hamlets](#) to explore further. You can also search descriptions on our [online catalogue](#).

We would like to thank Jacqueline and Sally for visiting and for adding details of their family to our catalogue descriptions.

## **News from our friends**

### **Whitechapel Stories - website launch**

A project set up to create a new mural at the heart of Whitechapel, has now launched [its website](#).

The project team is led by [John's Place Tenants' and Residents' Association](#), working in partnership with [Walk East](#) and [Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives](#). The project is leading a series of history workshops, guided walks, and research sessions to inform the content, design and style of the final mural.

Once designed, the mural will be painted on Sidney Street, near Sidney Square and Clark Street, covering a flank wall and bringing colour and life to a previously blank canvas.

# OUR STORY

## 01 COMMUNITY



Our project is community-led and will provide a focal point to broaden and deepen bonds between residents and local groups involved in uncovering our shared heritage and creating a public artwork in celebration of who we are. Older generations hold living memories of important historical moments, and we want to capture these while we still can.

## 02 DIVERSITY



The research we gather and the mural itself will promote understanding of the past in the context of today's Whitechapel. The project will foster a sense of pride in the rich cultural make-up of our neighbourhood. Bringing together a range of people from different ethnicities, cultures and faiths will demonstrate how our part of Tower Hamlets is a welcoming and inclusive community to all.

## 03 HISTORY



From the Siege of Sidney Street to the Battle of Brick Lane, from rag trade workshops to life sciences laboratories, Whitechapel is a unique London neighbourhood at the forefront of social change and cultural exchange. Over centuries, rural migrants, Huguenots, Irish, Jewish, Bengali, Somali and other communities have come to the area seeking refuge or a new life. Many historical figures have

## 04 LEGACY



Our project will create a lasting legacy that preserves community heritage and provides a focal point for community identity. As well as creating the Sidney Street mural itself, we'll work with our heritage workshop participants to produce a Whitechapel Stories booklet, to share their research findings and other stories with our friends, neighbours and those further afield. We're also planning an

## 05 SUSTAINABILITY



At all points, the project will ensure best practice in terms of sustainability. We'll use eco-friendly materials in the painting of the mural, print our booklet on paper from sustainable sources (with an online version too) and minimise our carbon footprint wherever possible.

As well as these green measures, we hope the mural will enhance the ambience of the neighbourhood, generate a

Screenshot of the Whitechapel Stories website

## New project seeks to create digital archive celebrating the legendary Yiddish poet A.N. Stencl

### Appeal for materials and memories

Did you know the Polish-born Yiddish poet Avram Nachum Stencl (also known as **A. N. Stencl**) who was once famous in East London for selling his celebrated Yiddish magazine *Loshn un lebn* (Language & Life), for running his Friends of Yiddish Saturday afternoon literary society and for his many acclaimed publications of Yiddish poetry? If so, we would love to hear from you!

A new project has been launched to track down and digitise previously undocumented material relating to Stencl's life, work, and Yiddish activities. This two-year project, led by Dr Rachel Lichtenstein of Manchester Metropolitan University and funded by Arcadia, will result in a website that shares digital copies of all this material. High resolution digital copies of everything collected will also be deposited with the Center for Jewish History in New York and become part of the permanent online collections of their partner organisation the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, which will be accessible to researchers via their online digital holdings discoverable at [search.cjh.org](http://search.cjh.org).

**If you have any archive material (photographs, recordings, pamphlets, letters) or memories about this poet and his Yiddish activities, which you would be willing to share as part of this important project preserving Yiddish cultural heritage, please contact [stenclarchive@outlook.com](mailto:stenclarchive@outlook.com)**

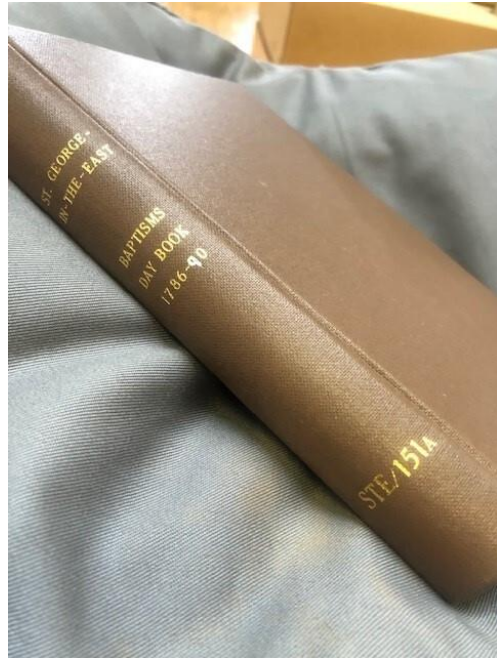
## Check out our new podcast!

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](mailto:localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk)



## Contact us

- Email us: [localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto: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 21 September
- Saturday 5 October
- Saturday 19 October
- Saturday 2 November
- Saturday 16 November

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.