

April - May 2013

Island History Trust

Earlier this year, much-loved community heritage group Island History Trust left its home of many years, the Docklands Settlement on East Ferry Road. Despite the sadness of the occasion, Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives is honoured to accept the transfer of the trust's collections. This unrivalled collection of photographs of the Isle of Dogs and its residents has been built up for a period of over thirty years and contains over 5,000 images. The collection is very well catalogued and indexed and

will be immediately available for consultation when our library reopens after the completion of the current phase of building works. It is also planned to make the collection available digitally on the Idea Store website in due course. Here are some sample images:



A "beano" outing from Morton's confectionery factory c.1949



May Day at Glengall Road School, c.1936



VJ party, Malabar Street, 1945

New Trainee Joins the Team

Our third and final Opening Up Archives trainee joined us in March. Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, this programme aims to diversify the heritage sector workforce. Majeda Begum will be working on a project to collect oral histories and other archives of Tower Hamlets women who are of Black or Asian origin. Majeda says,

“Firstly I would like to say a big thank you to everyone for making me feel so welcome!

It is a privilege to be working on such a great project, and being a Tower Hamlets resident all my life, I believe that the ethnic minority women of Tower Hamlets should be celebrated, as they have such a rich history that hasn't yet been uncovered. This is exactly what this traineeship is about, to find out their story through the use of oral history and document it in the archives for future generations to use.

I see how important my job is, as it is an investment for the ever expanding Tower Hamlets Archives. I can't wait to see how this project comes together but the only way is up!”



Fundraising for new projects

We are thrilled to report that we have been awarded a grant of £55,600 from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards our new project *Land and Lives: home and property in Tower Hamlets* which will see our collection of over 8,000 title deeds, currently accessible only via card index, re-catalogued onto our CALM database and made available online. The funding will also provide for a varied range of volunteering and learning activities to take place. We will be recruiting soon for volunteers and a project archivist to take the project forward, so watch this space!

A new partnership with local disability arts organisation FilmPro has led to an Arts Council funding bid for a project to enable local disabled people to spend time with our collections in artist-led workshops this coming summer, during which participants will develop a creative response to an archive or collection of their choice. The resulting artwork and film produced by local disabled artists will be exhibited here during November and December as part of Disability Heritage Month. Contact us if you are interested in participating; we will find out in early May if our bid has been successful.

FilmPro's latest exhibition, *COnscription*, runs from 2nd -18th May at the Old Truman Brewery, and is an experiential multimedia installation by artist Caglar Kimyoncu inspired by stories from those in Turkey who don't 'fit the mould' for compulsory military service. Visit www.filmpro.net/conscription for more information.



Retired Somali seaman and veteran Ismail Ibrahim poses with his portrait, taken by photographer Sarah Ainslie, at the launch of the exhibition.

‘Don’t Just Live, Live To Be Remembered: The Somali East End’

March saw the launch of our groundbreaking exhibition, ‘Don’t Just Live, Live To Be Remembered: The Somali East End’ at Oxford House in Bethnal Green. The exhibition, which will now tour other venues in the borough, and associated events, including talks and a ‘Tracing Your Family History’ workshop received great feedback from both the local Somali community and beyond. We wish Simeera Hassan, our Heritage Trainee who worked on this project, all the very best for the future. Contact us for more information about this project or a free copy of the booklet.

Who Do You Think You Are? Live Event

At this year’s *Who Do You Think You Are? Live* family history extravaganza in Kensington Olympia, Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives hosted a stall offering a big selection of maps, books and information about London’s East End. Situated next to the East of London Family History Society, the stall received numerous visitors interested in researching their family history.

For more information about this event, which takes place in February each year, visit www.whodoyouthinkyouarelive.com. For family history enquiries relating to Tower Hamlets, email localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk or phone us on 020 7364 1290.



Borough Archivist Malcolm Barr-Hamilton and Heritage Manager Tamsin Bookey assist visitors at the THLHL&A stall during WDYT YA Live 2013

Over-50s Community Day

Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives enjoyed a presence at Idea Store Whitechapel's recent Over-50s Community Day. The variety of talks and stalls were well-attended by the local community and included a free Ancestry Library edition workshop.

For free online Ancestry.com webinars and research guides, visit Proquest's Ancestry Website (<http://proquest.libguides.com/ancestrylibraryedition>) or their genealogy Training website (<http://prq.st/genealogytraining>).



Heritage Officer Anna Haward meets Battle of Cable Street veteran Max Levitas at Idea Store Whitechapel's Over-50s Community Day

Upcoming Local History Events

'Old Ford Voices and Island Memories' Exhibition

Age UK Tower Hamlets, Appian Court Day Centre, 87 Parnell Rd, E3 2RS
April – June 2013

This oral history exhibition was created by Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives in 2012, to capture the voices of local Bow residents reflecting on life, work and play during the last century in Fish Island and Old Ford. This touring exhibition features archive images and oral history excerpts that explore the changing landscape of Bow.

Island History Talk

Cubitt Town Library, Strattondale Street, E14 3HG
Thursday 20 June, 10:30am – 12:00noon

50+? Enjoy a nice cup of tea while listening to this talk exploring the history of the Isle of Dogs. Featuring archive material and images from Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives, this is an opportunity not to be missed.

Coming Soon! Cockney Heritage Festival

Idea Stores, Libraries and other venues across Tower Hamlets
Thursday 18 July – Saturday 27 July 2013



The first ever Cockney Heritage Festival is coming to Tower Hamlets in July! Set to take the borough by storm, this festival has been developed by Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives in partnership with Cockney Heritage Trust. Celebrating and exploring the many facets of Cockney culture, past and present, we are planning a diverse and entertaining programme of talks, film screenings, children's events, exhibitions, workshops and much more! Keep an eye on www.ideastore.co.uk for further details...

Maps Preservation Project

During our closure period staff have been working with volunteers on a range of projects. One such project has been focused on the preservation of our maps collection. The aim of the project has been to remove the cardboard strips which were attached to the maps and to re-house the maps into archival quality polyester sleeves within our plan chests. Our readers refer to more items from our large map collection than any other, and many are fragile. Therefore, it has been a priority for us to tackle the issue of their storage during our closure period when we have the space and time to undertake this work which would not be possible when we are open to the public.

The project has involved assessing our overall collection of maps relating to Tower Hamlets. This extensive collection consists of a large series of ordnance survey maps (dating from the mid 1800s - 1990s) and a more general sequence of mixed maps (arranged chronologically and according to size). The majority of these maps have now been re-housed and re-labelled for preservation, identification and retrieval purposes.

Two of our regular volunteers, Tim Horton and Claudio Svaluto, have devoted many hours to assisting us with our maps preservation project. We would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their contribution. Both Tim and Claudio have undertaken invaluable work to progress the project which will help protect the maps from the regular handling they receive and preserve them for future generations.



Claudio Svaluto, volunteer on the Maps Preservation Project

Building Works Update

The scaffolding is up! There is drilling and shouting! It can only mean one thing... our roof replacement works are now finally underway! We apologise again for the recent delays resulting from discussions with our neighbours on the 1860 side of the building regarding permission to erect scaffolding. Work has now begun on site with the roof above the Carnegie reading room prioritised to enable reopening as soon as possible. We now expect this to happen in **June**, with the work to the roofs over the old lending library being completed afterwards. Sign up to our mailing list via localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk to receive our reopening date as soon as it is confirmed.



Archives Cataloguing Update: The Records of Poplar Methodist Church

The cataloguing of the records of Poplar Methodist Church held at Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives (reference: W/PMC) has recently been completed. These records consist of 20 boxes and 4 drawers' worth of material relating to the activities of the church from the mid 19th - late 20th century.



Re-opening of Poplar Methodist Church following major renovation work, 30th September 1933

The records include a wide range of material arranged into the following ten series:

- W/PMC/1: Congregation Records (1837-1987)
- W/PMC/2: Financial and Accounting Records (1919-1983)
- W/PMC/3: Administration Records (1846-1985)
- W/PMC/4: Legal, Property and Premises Records (1848-1998)
- W/PMC/5: Records of Church Ministers (1909-1976)
- W/PMC/6: Publications, Publicity and Promotional Records (1848-1984)
- W/PMC/7: Images (1865-1986)
- W/PMC/8: Selected Church History Records and Local History Projects (1909-1977)
- W/PMC/9: Circuit Records (1849-1989)
- W/PMC/10: Records of Related Methodist Churches (c. 1875-1999)

The collection is a really important record of activity in Poplar during the 19th and 20th centuries and, due to the extent and variety of material, has a wide range of potential uses for research purposes. For instance, the records include a lot of material relating to former Poplar Methodist Church minister, Reverend William Henry Lax (aka 'Lax of Poplar'), including his writings. The archive is also particularly strong in terms of visual material. Some highlights include photographs (many taken by the renowned East End photographer William Whiffin, who was a big supporter of the Poplar Methodist Church) and detailed architect's plans.

We have also created an online exhibition about Reverend Lax and Poplar Methodist Church soon to be added to our digital gallery (http://www.ideastore.co.uk/en/containers/digital_gallery/online_exhibitions) which will give you a taster of some of the varied material within this fascinating archive. If you have any queries about the Poplar Methodist Church records please feel free to contact our Heritage Officer (Archives) Natasha O'Neill: natasha.o'neill@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Please note that Poplar Methodist Church is still active, for further information please visit their website: www.mcth.org.uk/poplar.htm

New addition to the archives

We have been fortunate in acquiring an unusual account book of an oilman in Bow Road covering the period 1870-1887. Robert William Sherrard was established at 146 Bow Road (formerly numbered 1 London Road) by 1855 and remained in business there until his death in 1889. An oilman's business was concerned with the manufacture and mixing of pigmented paints. In addition to details of Sherrard's stock in trade as an oilman, the volume contains details of his investments and property which show him to have been a prosperous businessman.

Picture of the month

This month's picture shows the bombed-out shell of Christ Church Watney Street in 1943. Built to serve the rapidly expanding population of the district, the foundation stone was laid on March 11th 1840 and the church was consecrated just over a year later. The first vicar was William Quekett who had been a curate at the nearby church of St George in the East since 1829. The building of grey bricks with stone dressings was in the Romanesque style with two towers with slated pyramidal spires which can be clearly seen. The church was wrecked by a landmine in April 1941 but the ruins survived for around a further ten years before being cleared.

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Volunteering Opportunities - The Bethnal Green Memorial Project

University of East London are currently recruiting volunteers to take part in a large-scale community heritage and oral history project on the Bethnal Green tube disaster. There are a range of volunteering opportunities available and no previous knowledge or experience is necessary as full training will be provided.

On 3 March 1943 a crowd of people entered Bethnal Green tube station, which was used at the time as an air-raid shelter. After the searchlights went on and an anti-aircraft battery a few hundred yards away in Victoria Park launched a salvo of a new type of anti-aircraft rockets, the crowd surged forward. Someone tripped on the stairs causing many others to fall. 300 people were crushed into the stairwell within a few seconds. 173 of them died and over 90 were injured. This was to be the worst civilian disaster of the Second World War.

Despite the importance of the disaster in the history of the East End and in the history of the Home Front during WWII, there is still lots of work to be done in recovering exactly what happened and conserving it to teach future generations. If you visit Bethnal Green tube station you'll see that work is underway in constructing a new memorial to commemorate those who died. This is being carried out by the Stairway to Heaven Memorial Trust, who are fundraising to finish the memorial: www.stairwaytoheavenmemorial.org.

The University of East London and the Raphael Samuel History Centre are now undertaking a major 18 month heritage project to complement the work of the Trust. UEL are currently looking for:

- **Interviewing Volunteers** to record the oral histories of survivors, rescuers and family members of the victims.
- **Archive Volunteers** to help us find and catalogue photos, letters, documents and media articles about the disaster.

In the near future UEL will also be recruiting volunteers for events management, public talks, schools sessions, publicity and social media outreach, graphic design work, and website maintenance. If you'd like to be kept up to date with these opportunities, to apply for one of the current roles or to find out more, get in touch with UEL as soon as possible. Email Dr Amy Tooth Murphy: a.t.murphy@uel.ac.uk

Staff news

On Good Friday some members of staff from Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives (and colleagues from the Wellcome Library and London Metropolitan Archives) attended the historic annual Easter ceremony of the hot cross buns at The Widow's Son pub on Devons Road, E.3.

The Widow's Son is also known as 'the Bun House'. The pub's name derives from a story of a widow and her sailor son. As he was leaving on a sea voyage he asked her to bake a hot cross bun for him for his return at Easter. The son drowned during the voyage but although he would never return, the widow continued to bake a hot cross bun for him every Easter thereafter and hung these up for him in an act of mourning and remembrance. When a pub was built on the site, around 1848, the publican retained the custom and sailors to this day perform the ceremony, on Good Friday, of placing a new hot cross bun into the net suspended from the ceiling of the pub.



There was a great atmosphere at the event and the premises were filled by enthusiastic attendees watching while the youngest sailor was hoisted up by fellow sailors to undertake the act of throwing the hot cross bun into the net.

A film crew from the BBC programme The One Show filmed part of the ceremony, even capturing some of our own staff in the clip shown on that evening's show!

Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

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Library Learning Information