

Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives



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Researching African-Caribbean presence in Tower Hamlets



Tailoring class at the Stepney Institute, 1963

London's East End has been home to people of African and Caribbean origin since at least the 16th Century; their presence throughout the centuries reflecting Britain's imperial past and maritime history, in addition to the country's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade.

This user guide has been written to introduce some of the material available at Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives which may be of interest to those researching the African and Caribbean presence in the borough.

Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives continues to actively collect new material, particularly on themes and communities which are currently under-represented. If you would like to discuss depositing material at the archives, please call 0207 364 1290 or email localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk.

There are two main ways of accessing material in our collections:

Our Online Catalogue

Our catalogue contains descriptions of the holdings of Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives. These include books, periodicals, pamphlets, images and archive material. You can access the catalogue both in our reading room and online: <http://www.thcatalogue.org.uk/>.

When searching the catalogue, terms which you may want to consider using include 'African' / 'Africa', 'Caribbean', 'Somali', in addition to more outdated or offensive terms such as 'West Indian', 'Colonial' and 'Coloured'.

Our Subject Guide

The material in our library collection, which includes books, pamphlets, newspaper cuttings and photographs, has been organised by subject, all of which are listed alphabetically in our subject guide, alongside the relevant class mark. For example, you can ask staff to retrieve photographs, pamphlets and / or newspapers filed under 490, which is the class mark allocated to material relating to Black, African and Caribbean people. You can also search our open access bookshelves for relevant books shelved at this class mark. However, it's important to widen your search, as you will find material relating to African and Caribbean people dispersed throughout the library collections under a variety of different subject headings, such as War (080), Biography (100), Nursing (623) and Literature (870).

Hard copies of our subject guide are available in our reading room and you can also download a PDF version on our website.

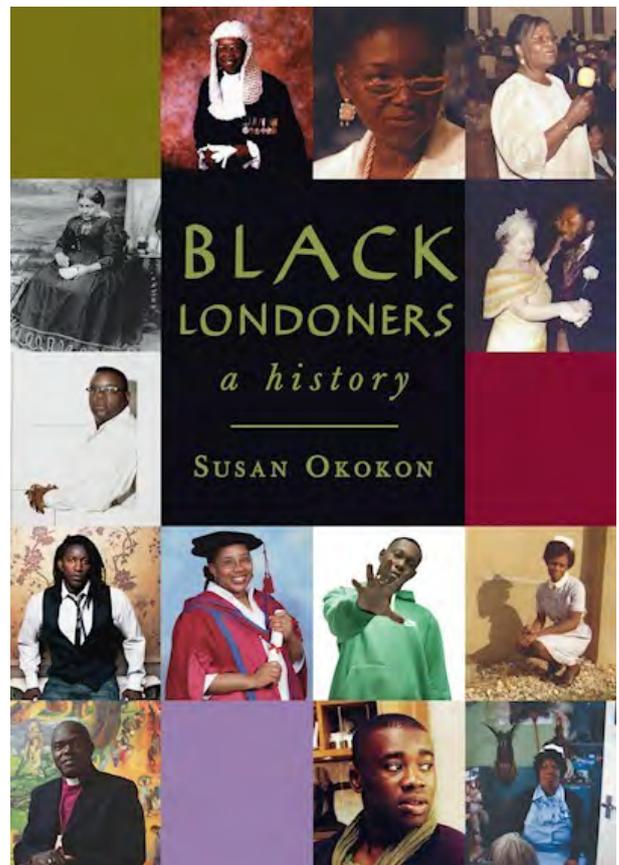
Library Collection: Highlights

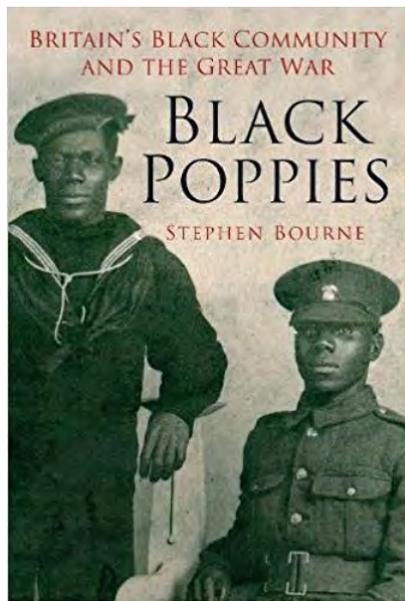
BOOKS

On the shelves, you will find a number of books on the black presence in Britain more generally, such as *Blackamoors: Africans in Tudor England, their presence, status and origins* by Onyeka (2013), in addition to books covering London specifically, for example, *Black Londoners, 1880-1990* by Susan Okokon (1998) and *Black London: the imperial metropolis and decolonization in the twentieth century* by Marc Matera (2015).

Of particular interest is *The coloured quarter: negro Immigrants in an English city* by Michael Banton (1955). Banton's pioneering social study of the Cable Street area of Stepney during the post-war period also includes a map showing cafés and lodging houses run by and catering for African and Pakistani people, among others.

There are also several books specifically about the Somali presence in both London and the UK as a whole.



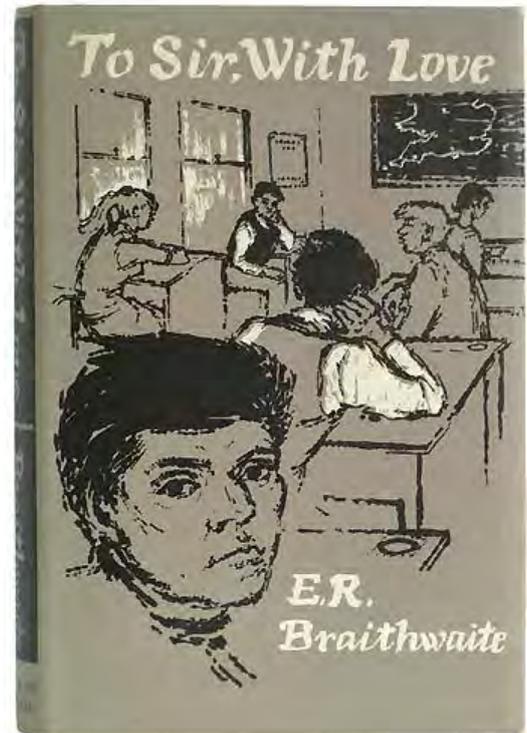


Elsewhere in the collection, you can read more about the black presence during military conflicts in, for example, *Black Poppies: Britain's black community and the Great War* by Stephen Bourne (2014) or *The Ethiopian patriots: forgotten voices of the Italo-Abyssinian war 1935-41* by Andrew Hilton (2007). Other topics you may want to browse include sport, where you will find *Fighting back?: Jewish and black boxers in Britain* edited by Michael Berkowitz and Ruti Ungar (2007).

E.R. Braithwaite's autobiographical novel 'To Sir, with Love' (1959) appears in our Literature and Local Authors section. Based on Braithwaite's experiences of being a teacher from British Guiana working at St. George-in-the-East School, near Cannon Street Road, the novel was later made into a film starring Sidney Poitier.

Our biography section includes books on notable local people, such as army officer and footballer Walter Tull, and former MP for Bethnal Green and Bow, Oona King.

Those hoping to research their African or Caribbean family history may be interested in *Tracing your West Indian ancestors* by Guy Grannum (2002).



PAMPHLETS

Our pamphlet collection includes a range of material relating to the history of African and Caribbean people in Tower Hamlets, the majority of which is filed under class mark 490. This includes booklets and articles on topics such as health, housing and the arts, dating mainly from the 1980s onwards and focusing particularly on the Somali community.

Other pamphlets and articles filed under this class mark explore earlier black history, such as the role of African sailors in the Royal Navy, from the 19th century up to and including World War Two. Others document well-known local figures, such as Chris Braithwaite, leader of the Colonial Seamen's Association, who was born in Barbados but lived in Stepney during the 1930s, and Kamal A. Chunchie, a Methodist minister who carried out missionary work among the transient African, Caribbean, Indian, Malay, and Chinese seamen in London's docks and helped to found the first 'Coloured Men's Institute', a religious, social, and welfare centre for Black and Asian people and their families, in Victoria Docks.

Also included in the pamphlet collection are newsletters, such as those produced by the Stepney Coloured People's Association (1954) and Black Women's Health and Family Support (2008), in addition to a copy of *Race Today* (1978), focusing on East End housing issues.

You will find photographs of notable local figures filed under Biography (100), including the singer, songwriter, entertainer and actor Kenny Lynch, who grew up in Stepney, the horse racing tipster, Ras Prince Monolulu, who ran a stall in Petticoat Lane Market, and Kofi Appiah, the first Black Mayor of Tower Hamlets.

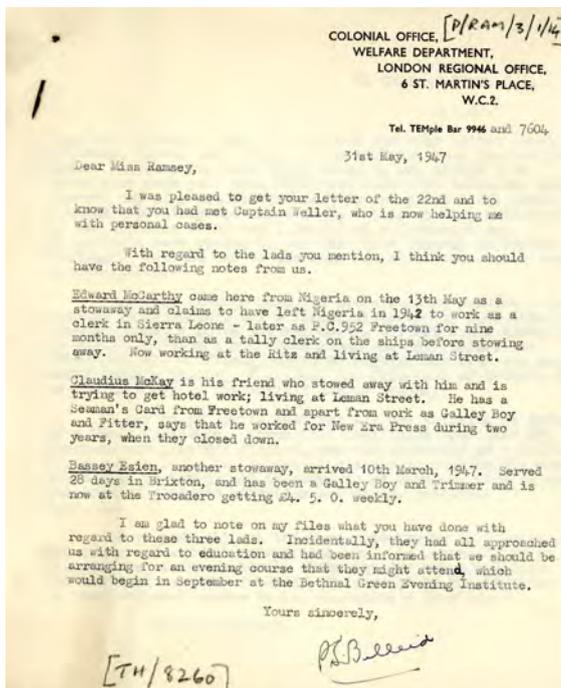


Ras Prince Monolulu
(class mark 100)



Whitechapel Bell Foundry,
1976 (class mark 680.4)

Archive Collection: Highlights



P/RAM/3/1/14

Letter to Edith Ramsey from the Colonial Office Welfare Department regarding three African stowaways, 1947

The primary material relating to African and Caribbean people in the archive collection are the papers of local educationalist and community worker Edith Ramsey (Ref: P/RAM). Ramsay was appointed Head of Stepney Women's Evening Institute in 1931 and held the post until her retirement in 1960. In the 1950s she was very active in the campaign against vice, particularly prostitution, in the Borough of Stepney. During her time in Stepney she undertook voluntary social work, helping children, alcoholics and immigrants. She was particularly concerned with the conditions of colonial seamen and served as a member of the Colonial Office Advisory Committee. Her papers include correspondence to and from African seamen, in addition to the Colonial Office. There are also various papers and reports relating to issues affecting the African and Caribbean population of Stepney during the 1940s and 1950s, particularly relating to housing and education.

We also hold the papers of Father Joseph (Joe) Williamson (1895-1988), who became the Vicar of St Paul's, Dock Street, Whitechapel, in 1952 (Ref: P/WLM). Williamson's campaigning on the two issues of slum housing and prostitution made him a national figure. His papers include photographs showing African and Caribbean people in the local area.

Other material of interest includes The Spitalfields Project papers (Ref: I/SPP), which contain material on the Somali Women's Association (1979-1980).



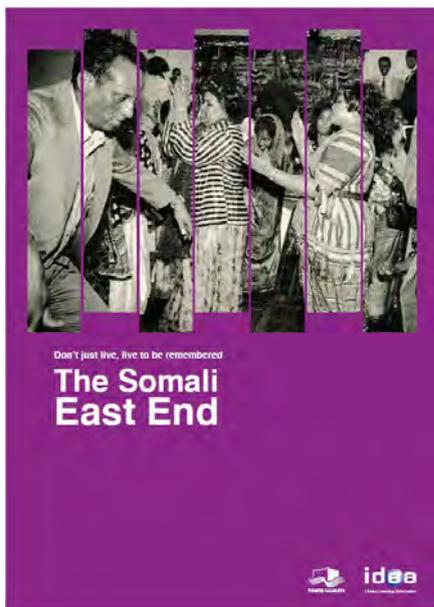
P/WLM/3/6

Cable Street, 1957. Father Joe Williamson in centre

Audio-visual material: Highlights

Since 2010 Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives has been engaged in several oral history projects, with the recordings created showcased in exhibitions hosted at the library.

'Don't just live, live to be remembered: The Somali East End' (Ref: O/DJL) explored the history of Somali migration to Tower Hamlets. Eighteen oral histories were carried out in 2013 with members of the borough's Somali community, who narrate their experiences as immigrants, the way in which they and their families lived, their years at school and their first jobs.



'Where I Belong: Black and Asian women's lives in Tower Hamlets' (Ref: O/WIB) was a project undertaken in 2014 which included thirteen oral histories with Black and Asian women living in Tower Hamlets. The interviewees describe their experiences as immigrants and their first impressions of England. The themes running throughout the interviews are education, faith, home life and belonging. These histories also address the main difficulties faced by these women, including leaving family behind, learning a new language and holding on to their cultural traditions.

'Mapping the Change: Old Ford Voices and Island Memories' (Ref: O/MTC) was a project carried out in 2011-12 which included oral histories focusing on the area of Bow known as Old Ford, including Fish Island, located in the north-eastern corner of Tower Hamlets. One of these interviews was conducted with Miss Anne, who arrived in the local area from Jamaica in the 1950s.

Also in the collection is a CD of oral history interviews with Black British LGBT people, carried out in 2012 as part of the 'Sharing Tongues' project.