

local studies and archives

 LONDON ARCHIVES  
PARTNERSHIP

# WHY ARCHIVES, WHY NOW?

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# FOREWORD

Archives can play a vital role in local communities and in the city’s wider cultural offer. They are crucial to our sense of place. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in Londoners having a renewed interest in their local communities and the ways in which they can connect with each other. Archives are therefore more important than ever, helping to bring people together, introducing them to new ideas and concepts, instilling a sense of pride in communities, and improving quality of life.

Culture and heritage play vital roles in the social, economic, environmental, physical and mental wellbeing of our communities. They also contribute significantly to London’s status as a world-class, vibrant, diverse and resilient city that looks forward and back, examining its past to inform its future. In challenging times, archives can be at the heart of a resurgent cultural life, having a positive impact on residents.

There are archive and local studies services in all London boroughs either run by or supported by councils. Archives and heritage can contribute to many local priorities by boosting economies, developing workforce skills through volunteering and fostering community cohesion. This document shares examples of how archives are having a significant positive impact in local areas around London.

There is also a growing body of evidence for how archives can contribute to wider agendas such as health and wellbeing and engaging young people. Councils and councillors have a critical role to play in helping to broker partnerships between archives and health organisations, local businesses, tourist attractions, education and regeneration to achieve outcomes for communities. London Councils represents the 32 London boroughs and the City of London and works to improve the lives of Londoners. We work across cultural services in London local government including archive services to support local service delivery, and its important contribution to London’s vibrant cultural life.

**Dianna Neal**  
Strategic Lead: Enterprise, Economy and Skills,  
London Councils

# INTRODUCTION

Archives matter. In a climate of continuous change, whether we are tackling a pandemic or threats to the environment, the challenges of inclusion and diversity or the serious and regular financial pressures on local government services, they are a foundation of democracy and accountability and a meeting point for communities. They are unique and irreplaceable and every borough holds part of the jigsaw that maps how our city has evolved over a thousand years, and is still evolving.

Archives reach into every corner of London – its governance, people and environment. They don’t just document the distant past – they are where today’s and tomorrow’s stories will be kept too – recording our challenges, our achievements and sometimes our failures, but always focusing on the issues that matter to us. Archives, and the services that look after them on behalf of each local authority, sit at the centre of their communities and provide invaluable connections to the people, places and stories that make up each London borough.

Every London local authority has a legal responsibility to collect, preserve and make available to the public the records of its activities. In fulfilling these responsibilities, our archive services achieve so much more. This document showcases some of the ways in which these services help deliver on key council priorities and bring enormous added value to their authorities and their

communities. Its case studies show how they contribute to a range of crucial agendas such as diversity and inclusion, education and community engagement, trust and openness, place-making and regeneration, and public health and wellbeing. They are able to do this because of the dedication, professionalism and expertise of those who work in each archive service. It is very clear that in those boroughs where these staff are effectively supported by their local authority we see the real benefits and opportunities of archives being realised.

The London Archives Partnership was formed in 2013 with a vision *to enable a collaborative, creative and cost effective approach to the management of London’s local authority archive services, increasing access to the city’s history, preserving its heritage and reflecting the changing character of London and Londoners*. It is free to join and is open to all of London’s local authority archive services. It provides regular training and networking opportunities and helps coordinate collaborative projects. Since its formation, it has been strongly supported by the City of London Corporation, through London Metropolitan Archives, and receives both funding and support as part of The National Archives’ strategic vision for the archives sector, *Archives Unlocked*.

As Chair of the London Archives Partnership, I hope you find the case studies here both enlightening and inspiring. I hope too that it encourages you to think about the value, relevance and potential of your own archive service and the collections it cares for.

**Tamsin Bookey**  
Heritage Manager,  
Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives,  
Chair of the London Archives Partnership



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“Putting a wider range of people at the heart of heritage is core to all our projects. It is important to remember and champion the historic contributions from London’s LGBTQ+ community; the stories of everyday lives who, through extraordinary passion and determination have helped to shape a more equal society. All three of these schemes have received Fund support and I am delighted that thanks to National Lottery Players, we share these rich local histories with pride.”

**Stuart McLeod**  
Director, England – London & South,  
The National Lottery Heritage Fund



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# LGBTQ+ ARCHIVES: EMBEDDING INCLUSION

London borough archive services are playing a key role in uncovering and promoting the often hidden histories of diverse audiences, attracting new audiences, and including parts of local communities that have long been underrepresented in the historical record. The work of London’s archive services with the LGBTQ+ community is benefiting from both the support of community members and the expertise and collections of other archive services, as well as funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF).

**London Metropolitan Archives** hosts an annual LGBTQ+ History and Archives conference, bringing together heritage professionals, academics and grassroots organisations to share LGBTQ+ histories from archives within and outside London. It is also home to ‘Speak Out London – Diversity City’, an award-winning community-led LGBTQ+ oral history project started in 2014, and holds records of prominent activists, campaigning groups and organisations such as rukus! Federation Limited, a Black LGBT arts and heritage charity.  
<https://www.speakoutlondon.org.uk>

The ‘Haringey Vanguard’ Project was developed by community members and facilitated by **Haringey Archive and Museum Service** with support from London Metropolitan Archives and funding from NLHF. From 2019 to February 2021 it explored

existing collections relating to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic LGBTQ+ community activism between the 1970s and 1990s, as well as providing opportunities for participants to deposit their own digitised, physical, or oral history material. The project culminated in an exhibition at Bruce Castle Museum and Archive. <https://www.hqbh.co.uk>

Several key events in UK LGBTQ+ history occurred in Islington, including the first public gay rights protest in Britain in 1970. **Islington Heritage** has created a dedicated LGBTQ+ Archive and accompanying educational resources through its NLHF-funded ‘Islington’s Pride’ project. The project also includes the development of a Digital Landscape trail highlighting relevant locations around the borough. <https://islingtonspide.com>



© Islington Local Studies Centre/Tim Haines





© East London Mosque Archives, Rehan Jamil

“The East London Mosque’s trustees stand indebted to Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives for providing invaluable expertise and guidance at a strategic and operational level from the outset of its archive project in 2012...Thanks to this support, the East London Mosque and associated Muslim community organisations...have been able to secure their more than one-hundred-year-old heritage, whilst also ensuring today’s current data is preserved for future generations.”

**Dr Muhammad Abdul Bari MBE, DL**  
Chairman of the Board of Trustees,  
East London Mosque, 2002–2013



© East London Mosque Archives

# TOWER HAMLETS AND EAST LONDON MOSQUE ARCHIVES: CREATING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

**Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives** works to ensure that the collections it holds accurately reflect the rich diversity of its communities, both past and present. It is also committed to working with partners, sharing specialist expertise and skills to safeguard archives within the community.

When, after over a century of activity in the area, the East London Mosque began looking to preserve the records of its history, Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives became a key partner. The Mosque’s history is especially important to Tower Hamlets as it is the local authority with the highest percentage of Muslims in London, and is home to the largest Bangladeshi community in the UK. From the small room hired for Friday Prayers through the auspices of the London Mosque Fund in 1910, and the construction of a purpose-built Mosque in the 1980s to the creation of the London Muslim Centre and the Maryam Centre, the Mosque’s development has been interconnected with that of the borough and its residents.

After some initial discussion over whether the Mosque’s archive collection might be

transferred to the Local History Library & Archives, the Trustees decided that the importance of the Mosque’s heritage meant that they wished to retain their historical records at the heart of the organisation. The Tower Hamlets Heritage Manager assisted the Mosque with a successful project funding bid; joining its steering committee and providing expert advice on recruitment, technical solutions, room design and risk management. The support of Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives meant that, in 2017, the Mosque became the first in the UK to have its own online archive catalogue and purpose-built strongroom. The Council continues to support the Mosque’s aim to fund and create a dedicated Reading Room and exhibition space.



“Actively promoting and preserving the history of an area is crucial, especially during periods of great change. We know how important local history can be to our residents, and having the guidance and support from our experienced partners at Bexley Local Studies and Archive Centre, Royal Greenwich Heritage Trust and London Metropolitan Archives has been essential to making the Community Archive a success. Working together, we were able to secure external funding, and broaden the audiences for the rich historical material that is held across the area. We hope that the Community Archive makes local history feel more relevant and accessible, and brings an added community dimension to the valuable materials already held by those institutions.”

**Adriana Marques**  
Head of Cultural Strategy for Thamesmead,  
Peabody



# THAMESMEAD COMMUNITY ARCHIVE: CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE

**Bexley Local Studies and Archive Centre** and the **Royal Greenwich Heritage Trust** acted as partners and advisors during Peabody’s ambitious project to create a community archive for Thamesmead, which took place between 2018 and 2021. The impetus for this project was not solely the 50th anniversary of ‘London’s first New Town’, but also the recognition that preserving local history and reinforcing Thamesmead’s unique identity was an integral part of the extensive regeneration programme that will build thousands of new homes in the area over the next 30 years.

Supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the project built on previous activities such as the 2016 ‘Made in Thamesmead’ collaboration with **London Metropolitan Archives**, where material from the Greater London Council archive including posters, maps, information leaflets and a film from the 1970s were displayed locally. The Thamesmead

Community Archive project collected original materials from the community, primarily for digitisation, which joined digitised material from partner organisations to create an online community archive which was launched in 2020. This now includes hundreds of items such as photos, videos, posters, brochures, architects’ drawings, documents and audio interviews spanning more than five decades. <https://thamesmeadcommunityarchive.org.uk/>

The project also trained members of the community to collect oral histories, and artist-run initiative Thamesmead Texas was commissioned to help enrich the archive’s collection by holding events and workshops with underrepresented local communities. The collection now includes a further wealth of physical and digital material that can be added to the online archive and used in future exhibitions. Volunteers working with the archive will help to ensure the collection continues to grow as Thamesmead evolves.



© Peabody, Thamesmead Community Archive  
(Ref: TMCA\_PB\_007\_2)







“Working on the collection made me realise how well the community in Croydon responds when faced with an event like this and how important it is to record this process for future generations to understand.”

**Lindsay Ould**  
Borough Archivist,  
London Borough of Croydon Archives



© London Borough of Croydon

# LONDON BOROUGH OF CROYDON ARCHIVES: MEMORIALISING THROUGH COLLECTING

On 9 November 2016, a tram travelling from New Addington towards central Croydon overturned near Sandilands tram stop. Seven people lost their lives: Dane Chinnery, Donald Collett, Robert Huxley, Philip Logan, Dorota Rynkiewicz, Philip Seary and Mark Smith. The local response to this terrible incident was swift and memorials developed near to the site of the disaster containing items such as flowers, notes, cards, candle holders, scarves and football shirts. Croydon’s archivist took a key role in ensuring the memorials to the dead would not be forgotten.

Sensitive to the need to collect and preserve these objects, the archivist met with members of the London Borough of Croydon’s Resilience team to discuss how best to record, collect and preserve the non-organic offerings. The archivist prepared archival boxes, and crates for larger items, for Council staff who then collected objects on a regular basis. Once the memorial sites were fully cleared, all items were sent for specialist treatment and were returned to **London Borough of Croydon Archives** in July 2017.

The archivist, with help from Museum of Croydon volunteers, then listed and re-boxed the objects for permanent storage. The archive service also received the condolence books opened after the incident and created copies of the amalgamated books to give to the families of the deceased. The archivist was present at the memorial ceremonies held in 2017 to answer questions from the families and friends of the deceased, if required. The Museum of Croydon created a story in its gallery to mark this significant event. The whole collection, including the condolence books, is now accessioned into the Museum of Croydon Collections to ensure that records remain accessible to the community.



© London Borough of Croydon





© London's Screen Archives

“Going to the cinema is a social activity that can help to combat the isolation often associated with dementia, so it’s essential to ensure that screenings are welcoming and supportive places to visit for all. There is mounting evidence, commissioned by both arts and health bodies, that creativity and the arts make a significant difference to people’s physical and mental health and wellbeing and we were delighted to deliver dementia-friendly screenings through London’s Screen Archives. Following the success of this project it is our ambition to develop a screening programme which has local communities and the involvement of people with dementia and their families and carers at its heart.”

**Adrian Wootton OBE**  
Chief Executive,  
Film London and the British Film Commission

# LONDON’S SCREEN ARCHIVES: ENHANCING WELLBEING

**London’s Screen Archives** is a distributed network managed by Film London, involving over 70 organisations that hold heritage film collections across London. ‘London: A Bigger Picture’ was a three-year project aiming to engage more Londoners in 15 outer boroughs with their local social history through film. One strand of this project was to provide ‘dementia-friendly screenings’. These sessions were designed to give those with dementia and their carers time to connect and counteract the loneliness that comes with the condition or caring for someone with it, as well as an opportunity to learn more about London’s past.

The aim was to enhance the well-being of people with dementia and their carers by producing sessions in care homes, community centres, cinemas and dementia cafes across London. Unlike a traditional film screening, these were interactive reminiscence sessions where each group was encouraged to talk

during the film and share stories afterwards. The interactive sessions focused on themed film programmes such as childhood and school days, domestic life, working life, fetes, fairs and weddings, sporting fun, London landmarks, and the local area. The facilitated discussion was supported with artefacts and still images.

The project reached over 500 people with dementia or caring for someone with the condition across 22 screenings. The success of this strand has encouraged London’s Screen Archives to begin developing these dementia-friendly screenings into a standalone project that can play an important part in the wider aspiration to make London the first dementia-friendly capital city.





© City of Westminster Archives Centre

“Takeover Day programmes like that at Westminster give children and young people a unique behind-the-scenes perspective on the work of an archive service. By involving them as active participants, it inspires children and young people to learn more about heritage and enables archive services to find out more about what interests young people in their collections. Children and young people learn new skills and build confidence, which encourages them to become regular visitors and volunteers and feel a greater sense of ownership of their local heritage. This kind of access also promotes better awareness of the range of careers that are available in archives and the heritage sector more widely, promoting future workforce diversity.”

**Alison Bowyer**  
Executive Director,  
Kids in Museums

# CITY OF WESTMINSTER ARCHIVES: ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE

**City of Westminster Archives** run a number of cross-curricular history projects throughout the course of the academic year and has a dedicated Archives Education and Interpretation Officer. It often works with partner organisations to deliver a diverse outreach programme with archival material at its heart.

‘Towards a New Jerusalem’ was a collaboration with the Westminster Community Reminiscence and Archive group (WCRAg), the Royal College of Nursing, Digital Works and the Abbey Centre to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the NHS. As well as producing KS2 education packs, a short documentary film was produced in collaboration with Servite Catholic Primary School. ‘Saving Samuel Godley’ is another education project in partnership with the Household Cavalry Museum, National Army Museum, Cartoon Museum, Lord’s Cricket Ground, Digital Works and Barrow Hill School. Through the story of one soldier recognised for his heroism at the Battle of Waterloo, it explores the period of the

Napoleonic Wars with outreach sessions and a KS2 education pack.

**City of Westminster Archives** has, for several years, been taking part in the Takeover Day organised by the charity Kids in Museums. This day gives children an opportunity to go behind the scenes and learn what an archive is, how a service runs, and the kinds of tasks archivists and conservators need to carry out. For example, Year 6 pupils from St Matthew’s School, Westminster have been invited to help run the archive service for the day. Activities on the day have included helping the conservator repair damaged items in the theatre programmes collection, working with an archivist in the Reading Room to answer a “mystery shopper” enquiry and writing catalogue descriptions of building plans of their school, photographs, and newspaper clippings.



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# CONCLUSION: GOOD GOVERNANCE

Archives play a vital role in supporting good governance by collecting, preserving, and making accessible decision-making documents from across their parent organisation. This especially helps councils fulfil their obligations under the Local Government Acts, the Data Protection Act, and the Freedom of Information Act.

Some key documents, such as council minutes, are legally required to be kept, while other documents are selected for permanent preservation depending on what kind of information they hold. The importance of ensuring records are transferred to archives, and the kind of value they can have for future communities, has been underlined by the use of records from schools and care homes in several boroughs within investigations of historic sex abuse allegations, where they have provided vital evidence that could not be found elsewhere.

The expertise of staff within archive services means that they can help colleagues throughout the parent organisation, for example in information governance and senior management, to select the most appropriate records for permanent preservation; they can also advise on best practice for record-keeping before transfer to the archive. For instance, the Heritage Manager at Tower Hamlets participates in bi-monthly meetings of the council's Information Governance

Group, reviews corporate retention schedules for each directorate on a regular basis and publicises transfer procedures on the council's intranet. This kind of holistic approach means that records are properly ordered and documented, and those that are worthy of permanent preservation can easily be selected and transferred to the archive.

Good records management from the moment of creation is central to ensuring that a council's records are deposited with the archive service, and that they are able to be accessed by future generations. By doing this, London's local authorities can support the local communities of the future city and demonstrate their commitment to trust and openness in governance.



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# LONDON ARCHIVES PARTNERSHIP

The London Archives Partnership (LAP) was formed in 2013 with a vision to enable:

“a collaborative, creative and cost effective approach to the management of London’s local authority archive services, increasing access to the city’s history, preserving its heritage and reflecting the changing character of London and Londoners.”

Its regular network meetings act as a forum for those working within archive services to share knowledge and good practice, discuss current and future projects, and provide opportunities for collaboration as well as training and funding initiatives.

The partnership is free to join and open to all of London’s local authority archive services.

For more information, please visit: [www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/london-archives-partnership](http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/london-archives-partnership)

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