

# SAVE TOWER HAMLETS LOCAL HISTORY LIBRARY & ARCHIVES AT BANCROFT ROAD

We the undersigned support the proposal that the Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives, remains at the Bancroft Road Library Building and that the old Poplar District Board of Works Building at 117 Poplar High Street is sold for the Wiener Library and the money used for improving the Local History Library & Archives, at Bancroft Road.

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Please Return this petition by Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2008 to Mr Tom Ridge  
7 Shepton Houses, Welwyn Street, Bethnal Green, London E2 0JN

[stepney.history@live.co.uk](mailto:stepney.history@live.co.uk)

## Letter from Tom Ridge to the East London Advertiser – Published on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2008

For years now, Queen Mary College in Mile End has wanted the Bancroft Library building in Bancroft Road, while a few Tower Hamlets council officials have been busy plotting how to give it to them.

Having got rid of the Bancroft public lending library to the Whitechapel Idea Store and neglected the building with its remaining contents and skeleton staff, the preferred plan was to move the local history library and/or archives to the Canary Wharf Idea Store, partly to bolster the ridiculous claim that Canary Wharf is the borough's 'town centre'.

But the Canary Wharf Idea Store was too small and there was no room at the Whitechapel Idea Store because one of its floors had been taken up by part of what had been the excellent Reference library at Bethnal Green Library.

The need to find a new home for the Wiener Library is now being used to justify the splitting of the local history collection from the archives, so that they can go to two places... neither of which is big enough, nor appropriate. As happened to the reference library, documents and books will disappear in the process, and dedicated professionals will be replaced by inexperienced and poorly-qualified staff.

As last week's superb photograph in the *East London Advertiser* showed the local history library is a purpose-built traditional library room where people study documents from the downstairs archive, in conjunction with maps, newspaper cuttings, photographs and books stored in the local history library. The old documents are stored in a state-of-the-art, environmentally-controlled, secure archive.

This was actually built and opened by Tower Hamlets Council back in the days when it knew that it had a duty to preserve not only its own records but all the records and the collections made by the three previous boroughs of Stepney, Poplar and Bethnal Green before 1965, and all the vestries and district boards which preceded them before 1900. These collections also include artifacts and pictures, many of which were and still are donated by residents, businesses and other organisations.

The Local History Library and Archives at the Bancroft are a priceless asset in one of the East End's finest historic public buildings. It must be maintained and improved for present and future generations. Any self-respecting society not only preserves its history, but makes sure its children are brought up knowing the history of the people and places where they live.

In our case, we probably have one of the longest and most interesting histories in London, a history which embraces many cultures and religions. Tower Hamlets council's Cabinet will surely realise it has a duty to care for and promote that history. It is only by knowing and understanding our history that we survive as a caring and tolerant society.

For the same reasons, a home must also be found for the Wiener Library. Why not sell the old Poplar District Board of Works building in Poplar High Street for a handsome sum? Use the money to refurbish the entire Bancroft building for an improved, extended and fully-staffed local history library and archives service. This would include proper microfilm and computer rooms, a separate schools room and a gallery to display and interpret items from the various collections, including artifacts and pictures.

**Tom Ridge**