

## Topic Page: [Tower Hamlets](#)

Definition: **Tower Hamlets** from *Collins English Dictionary*

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**1** a borough of E Greater London, on the River Thames: contains the main part of the East End. Pop: 206 600 (2003 est). Area: 20 sq km (8 sq miles)

### Summary Article: **Tower Hamlets**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Inner borough of east Greater London. It includes the districts of Limehouse, Spitalfields, Bethnal Green, Wapping, Poplar, Stepney, and the Isle of Dogs; population (2001) 196,100. Large parts of the borough's dockland areas have been redeveloped for business and residential use. The Tower of London, the Docklands redevelopment area (including Canary Wharf); and Billingsgate fish market are features of the borough.

Other features include Limehouse, the main centre of 18th- and 19th-century shipbuilding, which in the 1890s became a focal point for Chinese sailors working from West India Docks; Spitalfields, which derives its name from the priory and hospital of St Mary's Spital (1197), where silk weaving developed following the influx of Huguenot refugees to the area after 1685 (the industry collapsed in the mid-19th century); Spitalfields Market (formerly a fruit and vegetable market) is being developed by Norman Foster for LIFFE (London International Financial Futures Exchange); Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood (1872); and Victoria Park (1840s).

Industries in the borough include chemicals, matches, paints, glasswork, paper, foodstuffs, engineering, clothing. Canary Wharf is the focus for national newspapers: 12 papers are published and 8 printed in Tower Hamlets.

**History** Richard II met the Essex rebels at Mile End Green (now Stepney Green) during the Peasants' Revolt in 1381. In the 17th century, the name Tower Hamlets referred to the East London military district of 21 hamlets from which the Lieutenant of the Tower of London had the right to muster militia.

**Historical landmarks** Settlement in the area dates from the time of the Romans. **Stepney** was a London suburb as early as the composition of the Domesday Book, when it had a population of about 800. The Royal Mint and the Tower of London both lay just outside the City of London and within the borough. Another early foundation was the Royal Hospital of St Katherine by the Tower, which, founded by Queen Matilda in 1148, has always had queens as its patrons. It was founded for the sick and elderly, and in the 1820s, when the site was used for St Katherine's Dock, it was moved to Regent's Park. In the 1950s it moved back to Stepney and is now located in Butcher Row, partly housed in an 18th-century merchant's house. The chapel still has medieval stalls and carvings. St Dunstan's church dates from the Middle Ages, and the manor house at Bromley from the 15th century. Ratcliff, a Stepney hamlet, has long been a dock area and it was from here in the 16th century that the explorers Frobisher and Willoughby sailed to Russia while searching for the northwest passage. Later this section of riverside became notorious for its rowdy public houses.

**Wapping**, an adjacent hamlet, was the site of execution docks, where people such as Captain Kidd

were executed for crimes on the high seas. The Thames tunnel, built between 1824 and 1843, links Wapping and Rotherhithe. Blackwall docks were built in 1612–14, followed by the West India Docks in 1799–1802, the East India Docks in 1803–06, and Millwall Docks in 1868. The area of the West India and Millwall docks is a peninsula known as the **Isle of Dogs**. Ships were built here, one of the most famous being the *Great Eastern*, which was launched in 1858. The construction of Limehouse Cut in 1770 linking the River Lea and the Thames, and the Regent's Canal between 1812 and 1820, helped further the progress of industrialization.

**Limehouse**, an area adjacent to the docks, received the name from the lime kilns which were in use from the Middle Ages until the 19th century. Bow had a porcelain factory in the 18th century producing 'Bow China'. **Bethnal Green** was mostly farmland in the 18th century until, it became largely residential. Bells have been cast at Whitechapel Bell Foundry for over 400 years, and these hang in many famous churches including Westminster Abbey. The Liberty Bell, which was rung to mark the acceptance by the US Congress of the Declaration of Independence, was cast in Whitechapel in 1752.

### weblinks

Welcome to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets

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Tower Hamlets. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/tower\\_hamlets](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/tower_hamlets)

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## Chicago

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## Harvard

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## MLA

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