

TOWER HAMLETS ARTS PR

booksho



The Tower Hamlets Arts Project Bookshop

On April 2nd the tape was cut and the shutters were lifted on the new community bookshop for Tower Hamlets at 59 Watney Street, London, E1. The opening ceremony was performed by several fabulous 'guest stars' from Bath's Natural Theatre Company, and was accompanied by much fanfare. It was a hectic afternoon, including as it did a community jumble sale, live music, street theatre, mobile photography exhibitions on sandwich boards, sideshows and tea — all to the greater glory of the new bookshop!

The shop is situated in the old part of Watney Street, and although it is partially overshadowed by the new efficient 'Shopping Centre', we hope that with the support of the local people we will be able to make it a success. The original idea for the bookshop evolved from two different directions. Firstly from a genuine need for a bookshop in the area, and secondly from the need of THAP for a permanent base for its operations. The THAP shop is financed jointly by the GLAA and the local council and is both financially and organisationally the child of the Tower Hamlets Arts Project, formed in 1976 by a GLAA/Thames TV grant.

It was originally planned to open a joint bookshop-coffee bar very much in the manner of Centerprise in Hackney, but it became difficult to find premises suited to both functions in a good location — so the coffee bar part of the plan was dropped. We were lucky enough to get the present premises in Watney Street when the West Stepney Law Centre decided to move to a larger place. Watney Street is not in many ways ideal — but what is — so despite the uncertain future of the street, we decided to move in.

The bookshop sells a wide range of paperbacks with a special bias towards children's books and local publications. We also carry a variety of art supplies for graphics and for children as well as running a book ordering service. The shop is not limited to regular shop hours; on Monday and Wednesday evenings the law centre is continuing to run its free legal advice sessions in the meeting rooms above the shop, while on Tuesdays the Basement Writers Workshop meets for aspiring local poets and authors to read and discuss

their work. On Thursdays the 'Off the Roadshow' theatre group read and rehearse their scripts.

The future of the bookshop is an ambitious one. We hope to establish a publishing project — again inspired by the success of Centerprise — giving local people a chance to get their work into print, we also would like to see — under the umbrella of the publishing project — research into local history and tape recordings of peoples' recollections formed into books for our publication.

On the bookshop side, we intend to

continue to enlarge our stock, including a growing selection of minority publications and magazines unavailable elsewhere in the borough.

The shop has two full time workers and a lot of often used (and abused!) volunteer help. A great deal of energy and time has been invested in the shop as well as the money of the GLAA and the Borough of Tower Hamlets. In order to survive, however, we need the support of the local community. We all hope that we get it!

*Alan Gilbey
Roger Mills
Alice Brett*



Photos: David Hoffman