

Matchmakers Wharf Studios



Artists' studios at Matchmakers Wharf were formally opened on 25 September 2012. Designed by Stock Woolstencroft, the new studio block consists of 49 studios ranging in size from 223 to 559 sq ft. It forms part of a scheme providing retail, commercial and residential units.

The studios are owned by Acme Studios, a charity that supports the development of fine art practice by providing artists with affordable studio and living space. They were built in partnership with Telford Homes and were part-funded by Arts Council England's Grants for the arts capital programme. The presence of Acme Studios in Hackney dates to the charity's beginnings in 1973 with short-life housing in various parts of the borough including Beck Road, Westgate Street and Broadway Market.

Matchmakers Wharf was built on the site of the Lesney factory in Homerton Road. Founded in 1947 as an industrial die-casting company, Lesney Products

became known for Matchbox Toys. The company began in a pub, The Rifleman, in Edmonton, with the Homerton factory being opened in 1969 as part of a great expansion in Lesney's capacity. When the company went into liquidation in 1982, the Matchbox brand was sold, but the Homerton Road plant continued to produce castings and plastic parts for electrical appliances for a number of years. The factory was demolished in 2010.

To celebrate the importance of the site, Acme has established a residency for an artist to bring the history of the factory and the people associated with it to life. The Hackney Studio residency is a collaboration with Hackney Council's Cultural Development Team and the arts organisation PEER. The Hackney-based artist David Murphy was selected as artist in residence from 98 applications. The 18-month residency provides a free studio and a bursary. David would welcome readers' memories of the old factory. Contact him at dwmurphy@gmail.com or call the Acme office on 020 8981 6811.



Moirá Sinclair (Arts Council England), Jules Pipe (LB Hackney), David Panton (Acme Studios), David Murphy (Acme Artist in Residence).

Photos by Greg Goodale/Morley von Sternberg for Acme Studios.

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Developing Hackney

By Laurie Elks

In August, under the big top of Hackney House in Shoreditch, Hackney Council sponsored its *Developing Hackney* conference, a showcase of its development plans addressed to an audience of development professionals.

The message was upbeat. In South Shoreditch, Hackney is home to a world-class cluster (or clusters) of creative high-tech businesses ranging from Google at one end to numerous thriving start-up design and IT businesses at the other. New developments and flexible workspaces have helped to make Shoreditch the workplace of some 39,000 people. Furthermore, the mutual support and cross-fertilisation of ideas that goes with high-tech clusters is creating a virtuous high-tech circle – the so-called ‘Silicon Roundabout’ phenomenon.

Beyond Shoreditch, the message conveyed by Graham Loveland, Hackney’s acting Director of Planning, and Guy Nicholson, its Cabinet member for Regeneration, was equally positive. Hackney has exceeded its own housing target – 7,883 new units in the past five years – with more in the pipeline, including the vast regeneration scheme at Woodberry Down led by the builders, Berkeley Homes. The new Core Strategy is in place and Area Action Plans are being finalised. The main growth areas will be Woodberry Down, Dalston, Hackney Town Centre, Hackney Wick and – of course – South Shoreditch. Much development will focus on the East-West (Dalston to Hackney Wick) and North-South (Dalston to Shoreditch) corridors created by the Overground network. The Council’s planning service is geared up and ready: the Design Review Panel is available to provide guidance; ‘Opportunity Sites’ are helpfully designated in the Area Action Plans; and the Council’s Regeneration Team is available as a first port of call to intending developers. As one speaker from Berkeley Homes put it ‘[Council] officers are prepared to take a flexible proactive stance to development in their Borough’.

Cllr Nicholson introduced Vincent Stops to delegates, assuring them that Cllr Stops’ lengthy tenure as chair of the planning committee ensured ‘consistency’ of approach and – by implication – no nasty surprises for developers.

Should conservationists be concerned? Well, no and yes. ‘No’ because dynamic cities need to change in order to move forward. No one but the extremist dirigiste surely would want to restrict the hive of activity in Shoreditch which is spawning the kind of

businesses that are vital for the UK’s future competitiveness. And ‘no’ because Hackney palpably needs to create more housing, both to rent and to buy, to accommodate a rising population and alleviate the upward pressure on cost that goes inevitably with shortage of supply. And a further qualified ‘no’ because, as Mr Loveland pointed out, the Council absolutely ‘gets’ the Hackney Factor: that creative bohemian buzz which draws in creative, wealth-generating entrepreneurs. Although the metaphor was not actually used at the conference, the Council understands that the wrong scale of development could kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. And Mr Loveland told the conference that it is at the core of the Council’s thinking that the ‘Victorian warehouse aesthetic is a key part of what’s happening in Shoreditch’.

So where are the countervailing concerns? Well here are a few – and HacSoc members may add some others.

Collateral Damage

It is clear from planning disasters of the past that areas of character and heritage assets can be irreparably damaged by insensitive and overscale developments on adjacent sites. The development at Corsham Street, discussed in *Spaces 36*, which breaks down the barrier between the busy traffic arteries serving the Old Street roundabout and adjoining intimate streets is a case in point. And in Hackney Central, planners collaborated for many years with Tesco over the retailer’s plans to develop its Morning Lane site without regard for the impact on Hackney’s ancient churchyard. A proactive Council understandably looks to facilitate the more intensive use of ‘opportunity sites’ to create additional housing and employment. It is sometimes necessary for conservationists to call attention to the possible collateral damage.

Asymmetry of Access and Planning Purdah

Hackney Council rightly offers developers the opportunity to meet planning officers; refine their plans collaboratively; put in pre-planning applications; and receive guidance on design. But the result can be huge sunk cost and effort on the Council’s part in helping developers work up their schemes, before they are exposed to critical review from a conservationist perspective. And whilst the planning sub-committee members exercise ultimate democratic control over development proposals, they are insulated from views contrary to officers’ recommendations by the system of planning purdah. In principle Conservation Areas Advisory Committees can redress this balance but in practice consultation with

the CAACs is often merely a box-ticking exercise from the officers’ perspective. Legitimate concerns about development proposals need to be understood by officers *and* members before matters are resolved in the somewhat gladiatorial arena that is the planning sub-committee.

Sufficiency of Democratic Oversight

There is also a distinct lack of capacity in arrangements for democratic review of planning proposals. Hackney now receives some 2,500 planning applications per year of which 7% are categorised as ‘major applications’. All important matters go before the planning sub-committee which meets once or twice a month to tackle an agenda which typically includes some 20 items and a mass of supporting documentation. Members are prevented by planning purdah from opening their ears to any views but those of officers before meetings take place. They do their duties conscientiously but it is not an effective system of democratic scrutiny.

The Design Review Panel

Developers’ design proposals are scrutinised by the Design Review Panel – a somewhat unaccountable body. The process of tripartite negotiation between developers, planners and the Panel means that effectively any proposal supported by officers comes with the imprimatur of approval of the Design Review Panel. The entire system is full of aesthetic and moral hazard particularly where conservationist concerns about a development proposal are rebutted by incantation that a building has been adjudged a ‘good’ building by the Panel.

Sufficiency of the Conservation Service

Hackney maintains a tiny conservation team to provide specialist advice to a planning service handling some 150-200 major applications per year. And review of Conservation Areas has virtually ground to a halt at a time when the boundaries of a number of conservation areas urgently need to be reviewed to protect the character of Hackney from overscale development.

A Sense of Place

Finally, conservation-minded members of the community often have a sense of place that transient council officers and developers may not grasp. It was ironic in this context to hear Mr Tibaldi of Berkeley Homes extol the Stoke Newington Reservoirs as the focus of regeneration of Woodberry Down. Mr Tibaldi did not mention, and may not have been aware, that it was a vigorous community campaign in the 1980s which saved the reservoirs from development. Today’s conservationist fossils may prove to be tomorrow’s heroes – a point which the Council’s regeneration team would do well to ponder.

A Building Worth Fighting For

By David Shaw

The Hackney Society is increasingly concerned over the future of the old Queen Elizabeth Children's Hospital on the Hackney Road and Goldsmith's Row as the developers have revealed plans to demolish all but one façade of the building.

The hospital was founded in 1867 by two Quaker sisters following a devastating cholera epidemic, and moved to Hackney Road in 1870, where it shone a light on the needs of sick children in East London. The hospital grew in size and stature until it was closed in 1997 and has remained empty ever since.

The building along Goldsmith's Row is very much a local landmark with its ornamental brickwork and many interesting features, whilst the interior retains some fine

staircases, panelling and fireplaces which would all be lost in the new scheme.

It is disappointing that the developers' proposals have not attempted to retain the main building, choosing demolition as the only option.

We disagree. Particularly since the design of the new buildings is uninspiring and bland, and fails to integrate the Hackney Road façade. With talk of the use of reconstituted stone in favour of brick, the proposal looks increasingly unattractive. With key local developments, such as the Arthaus on Graham Road and the Town Hall Hotel on Patriot Square, highlighting the wealth of benefits of reusing historic buildings with modern design, the proposal to demolish an iconic local landmark appears out of touch and nonsensical.



Whilst few will shed tears for the 1960s concrete rear, the loss of the Victorian building will be great. Although the fate will be decided by Tower Hamlets, local residents from both boroughs should be arguing for better design and more innovative approaches in order to ensure that we do not lose any more historical buildings in a rush to blander new builds.

Harold Pinter Plaque

Lady Antonia Fraser Pinter unveiled a plaque, sponsored by Clapton Pond Neighbourhood Action Group (CPNAG), on 22 September 2012. The plaque marks the house in Thistlewaite Road where her husband, Harold Pinter, was born and grew up. He died in 2008.

Among those who turned out to mark the occasion were actor, writer, director Steve Berkoff, who – like Pinter – had attended Hackney Downs School; playwright Tom Stoppard; actor Julian Sands, who movingly read out a poem written by Harold about his Hackney Downs School teacher Joseph Brearley; and Diane Abbott, MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington.

'Harold would have been very happy about this. He was extremely proud of his origins – and quite rightly so. As his work makes very clear, they had made him what he was.

Plus of course that extra dash of inspiration which was entirely his,' said Lady Antonia.

Julia Lafferty, a trustee of the Hackney Society, gave a brief talk on the history of Clapton, the landscape of Pinter's childhood. After pointing to the observations of Samuel Pepys in 1666 and those of Daniel Defoe in 1722, she described Clapton's long tradition of religious non-conformity and dissent, including the establishment of New College in the 1780s. She went on to pay tribute to Hackney Downs School and Joe Brearley, the English teacher there who had fired Pinter's imagination. Following the talk, Julia presented Lady Antonia with a copy of the Hackney Society publication *Hackney: An uncommon history in five parts*.

Ian Rathbone, Chair of CPNAG, commented: 'This particular plaque brings us a reminder

of how someone from here in inner city Clapton can go on to make a significant contribution to the cultural and political life of the whole world. A wonderful model for our young people here, so often written off in the past and told no-one who comes from here ever did any good or got anywhere. Well, Harold did! And so can they.'



Noticeboard

Hackney Design Awards 2012

The shortlist for Hackney Design Awards 2012 has been published on the Council's website (<http://www.hackney.gov.uk/designawards.htm>). The 19 buildings shortlisted include Clissold House, Hackney Picturehouse and Haggerston School. The deadline for

nominations for the People's Choice Award is 5 November. The awards ceremony will be held on 22 November.

Morning Lane

Plans are afoot to develop Morning Lane as a fashion outlet hub. A Pringle of Scotland shop is to open shortly in the former Duke of Wellington pub, and there

are proposals for David Adjaye Architects to convert railway arches into retail units. Currently the Burberry outlet in nearby Chatham Place attracts visitors from all over the world.

Thames House

Architects Levitt Bernstein presented proposals for a development scheme in Dalston for consultation on 3 October.

They plan to build 77 flats and offices in three buildings on the site of Thames House off Dalston Lane.

Aske Gardens

Improvements have been made to Aske Gardens in Shoreditch. The revamp includes installation of double-sided benches, bird boxes, bike stands and recycling bins.

Book Review by Ken Worpole

The Art of Dissent: Adventures in London's Olympic State, edited by Hilary Powell & Isaac Marrero-Guillamón, Marshgate Press, £14.99

After the party, the hangover and the bill. Even those sceptical about the Olympics and Paralympics should be pleased and relieved that the games passed safely and enjoyably. Even so, it remains important to remember what seemed so disturbing at the time – the suspension of routine planning and policing procedures, the swathe of compulsory purchase orders, the frequent misrepresentation of the site and the people who lived and worked there as being in a state of near dereliction – amongst a proliferation of other dubious practices. This collection of essays, photographs, artworks is an invaluable *aide-memoire* to what the fuss was all about, particularly as developers set about creating a 21st century model of urban living bearing little relation to what existed before. Given that there are over 60 contributors, the editors have adroitly shaped the argument of the book into a coherent narrative under the themes of 'Incursions', 'Excavations', 'Displacements' and 'Aftermaths'. It repays close reading.

Oliver Wainwright and Juliet Davis separately provide an unnerving glimpse of what may yet come. Wainwright suggests we note what is happening in Stratford immediately adjacent to the site. High rise apartment blocks in gaudy colours are mushrooming everywhere, mostly owned by overseas investors keen to get into the 'buy-to-let' market, often characterised by high tenant turnover, multiple occupancy, and absentee landlordism. Things may turn out better in the five new Olympic communities, subject to much more stringent regulation we are told, but here the story goes the other way. In the imagery of the lifestyles portrayed in the promotional literature, there are no libraries, charity shops, betting shops, corner cafés, queues for buses, skate-boarders, dogs or cats, mosques or churches, just shiny happy people walking pristine streets. Really?

The disillusion with a dominant corporate visual imagery and code is expressed by many artists, who remain fascinated by the power of entropy and unregulated use (the ideas of American land artist Robert Smithson inform the work of a number of contributors). There is more sadness than anger, though sometimes humour is the best revenge. Photographer Chris Dorley-Brown describes a series of hilarious engagements with police or security guards who try to prevent him from photographing near the site, revealing that the security personnel were often as confused as everybody else as to what was really going on. The comradeship of the former Manor Gardens allotment gardeners is remembered fondly, as are the self-sufficient lifestyles of boaters and members of the Clays Lane housing co-operative. If the spirit of the book can be

summarised in one phrase it was coined by the architectural group Studio Superniche who argue for 'the cause of the niche against the tide of the generic'. Niches are at the heart of biodiversity, as they are of complex social systems, and the River Lea was once the home of a multiplicity of ecological, industrial and elective social niches. This eclectic, kaleidoscopic collection offers a terrific defence of the untamed and unregulated, without the hubris of 'we told you so'.

Haggerston Routes

by Patrice Lawrence

From buns to bombs to buildings, what are the stories of Haggerston? Every Generation is working with the Building Exploratory, Hoxton Hall and the Geffrye Museum to discover the untold history of Haggerston before the old estate disappears. Every Generation is exploring the impact of migration – how it shapes buildings, family life and social history. We are running family history workshops to help people trace their family's journey to Haggerston, be it from across the world, the UK or London. We would also like to interview people from Haggerston who have a story to tell. We are capturing the stories on our Haggerston Routes blog (<http://haggerstonroutes.tumblr.com>). The blog is open for anyone to contribute, particularly with photographs and anecdotes. For further information contact patrice@everygeneration.co.uk.

Open Letter to Hackney Society Members

I was reminded at the recent Hackney Society AGM that involvement in the society seems to be limited to all or nothing. Either one becomes a committee member or one remains an ordinary member. I am a slightly frustrated ordinary member. I have some pertinent skills and a limited amount of time to offer, but apparently no means of making use of them within the society's context.

The exception to the rule, in my experience, was the local listing survey that was recently concluded. It was a project that enabled many ordinary members to get effectively and productively involved. I was fortunate

enough to be one those surveyors and enjoyed the task greatly, as well as meeting many like-minded people and learning a great deal in the process. (Curiously, few of my Love Local Landmark colleagues attended the AGM. I wonder why?) How Hackney Council uses the survey remains to be seen, but the foundation it has lain to help protect Hackney's heritage must be invaluable.

I am sensing that the long-term health of the society may be more robust if we can find a variety of projects or activities (like the Love Local Landmarks project) that can take better advantage of the skills and time of more of its members more of the time – something between the extremes of being elected to the committee and remaining a passive member.

I appreciate that projects offering this opportunity to our members are rare and may rely upon both funding and a great deal of organisational resources to come to fruition, but the rewards in the long term may be great in terms of garnering support and maintaining healthy involvement in the society.

I have no idea what 'involving' projects might be and so finish on an appeal to our members for ideas.

Jerry Cooper (*Member ordinaire with aspirations*)

Publications

Just Like the End of the World: Stories of the Coronation Avenue disaster

edited by Camilla Loewe is written in memory of 160 people who died when a bomb hit their building during the Blitz in 1940. TimeLine, £15.

Stranger in a Borrowed Land: Lotte Moos and her writing

by David Perman is an account of the life and writing of Lotte Moos, who lived in Hackney from 1966 until 2003. Grendel Publishing, £9.99.

Mapping the Change: Recording changes in East London towards the 2012 Games

provides information and photographs from a Hackney Museum project showing how the host boroughs for the 2012 Games changed between 2008 and 2012. Hackney Council, £4.50.

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