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## The Urswick School

**The Urswick School in Paragon Road was completely rebuilt between 2008 and 2011 as part of Hackney's Building Schools for the Future programme. The £17 million new building was designed by Avanti Architects and work was carried out by McLaren Construction.**

Originally considering a part refurbishment project, Avanti developed a solution that allowed a full new-build project to be completed within the original funding constraints. This was made possible by a land swap and phasing which meant temporary classrooms were no longer needed; construction and pupil areas were clearly segregated and the school's operations continued without wholesale disruption.

The first phase of the new building, which includes dedicated suites of rooms for the teaching of English, Mathematics, Science and Technology, was completed during 2010. New ICT facilities and a library were built during the second phase, and a third phase involved the creation of external play/sports spaces and landscaping works. The school, which specialises in sports and science, has five purpose-built laboratories

and a multipurpose sports centre with spectator facilities.

The building is made up of two elements linked by the forum, a covered double height space, which acts as the main social and ceremonial space for the school and allows for community access to the assembly hall, sports facilities and dining area. The location of the sports hall next to the main entrance approach also ensures the school's sports specialism is showcased to the community.

Atrium spaces allow light and views down to the ground floor and along the corridors, and a flat green roof provides an area for scientific research. The building has a manually controlled natural ventilation system.

Formerly known as Hackney Free and Parochial CE Secondary School, in 2011 The Urswick School was renamed in

tribute to Christopher Urswick, Rector of Hackney from 1502 to 1521. According to the school's website, Urswick founded free education in Hackney in 1520.

In the Hackney Design Awards 2012, The Urswick School was not only commended but was voted People's Choice Award Winner. The judges commented on 'the pleasing well-considered functionality with high quality robust detailing achieved within a tight budget'. In addition, the building was highly commended in the NLA Awards 2012 and received a commendation in the Civic Trust Awards 2013.

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# Building Watch

## An authorised vandalism? By David Shaw

The last few months have seen a disturbing level of damage to some of Hackney's increasingly threatened heritage, some of it even officially sanctioned.

In March, Hackney Council agreed to the total demolition of a row of Georgian shops and houses in Dalston Lane as part of a scheme to rebuild the terrace as part of a controversial 'conservation-led' scheme. The council, which owns the site, having bought it back from developers some years ago, had originally stated that they would retain the façades but then claimed that demolition was the only feasible solution. However, they promised to rebuild the façades in a style that will emulate the original.



The Hackney Society, local architect and campaigner Lisa Shell and others protested and intervened to halt a demolition which we claimed did not have full legal permission and insisted that the new proposals be put to the Planning Sub-committee and subject to public scrutiny. In spite of expert opinion stating that the façades could be saved with small changes to the scheme (removing the contested need for open-plan shop layouts), the council agreed to the demolition plans and the loss of the façades and Georgian interiors.

In Hackney Road, development for a number of flats to the rear of a locally listed building was granted permission with the caveat of façade retention. Yet in a matter of weeks the developer, claiming that the structure had become unsafe since the original survey, had demolished the façade without consent.

In Victoria Park Road, a number of shop fronts have been hidden behind hoardings for months to allow some consented works. However, it has become clear that the roofs and what appears to be much of the fabric of the buildings to the rear have been removed.

Whilst in the last two instances enforcement cases are being opened, it appears indicative of an increasingly cavalier attitude among some developers towards planning law which seems increasingly lacking enough power to fight back. As yet more legislation is introduced to favour developers and further extend permitted development, local authorities are left with outdated legislation and insignificant financial sanctions to resist the work of developers who choose to flout the law.

Yet it is perhaps not surprising that such actions take place when the local authority chooses to 'demolish to conserve' and seems willing to do so without engaging in open and clear debate on the options or submitting themselves to scrutiny that could place them beyond reproach.

Whilst more punitive sanctions and stronger legal frameworks would help, local authorities should not place themselves above the law and should be keen to ensure that heritage assets are protected. Better engagement and communication with the community is also essential and sadly Dalston Lane raises questions over process that remain unanswered.

## Wilmer Place By Nick Perry

As Spaces 42 went to press, proposals for 53 residential units above a 45,000-square foot Sainsbury's, on a plot of land hard by the southeast corner of Abney Park, were back before Hackney's planners.

This third formal application for the site was, in fact, identical to one which the Planning Committee had granted permission for just a month earlier, in August 2013, but which had subsequently been the subject of a High Court application for Judicial Review. The re-submission was an attempt, by the developers and Council, to make a fresh decision in a manner that might not be challengeable in the courts, and that might be resolved before the existing challenge was heard in court. The developer also agreed to withdraw an appeal on a slightly larger scheme which the Committee had refused in April, to avoid the significant costs to both the Council and applicant in participating in the subsequent public inquiry that would decide such an appeal.

It came as no surprise to the Stokey Local campaign, who are spearheading the opposition on behalf of local residents and groups, that the Committee came to an identical decision at its meeting before Christmas.

The group succeeded in getting the Secretary of State at the Department of Communities and Local Government (Eric Pickles) to temporarily halt any formal decision whilst he considered a request to 'call-in' the scheme. 'Call-in' is a little-exercised power of the Secretary of State to take over a decision from a Local Planning Authority, typically by asking the Planning Inspectorate to hold a local inquiry and then consider its report. Although the Secretary of State has wide discretion to do this, in practice he does so only very rarely – typically where there is significant controversy, issues of national importance and conflict between local and national policy.

Despite a deluge of individual letters from local residents and requests for call-in from senior Greater London Assembly Members from all four parties, including the current Chair, Darren Johnson AM, the National Planning Casework Unit of the DCLG informed campaigners that the Secretary of State would not be calling-in the decision, and the Council proceeded to issue its formal Decision Notice on Valentine's Day 2014.

Meanwhile, a few days after the Committee made its latest decision, Mr Justice Collins granted permission for the first Judicial Review to be heard fully in the High Court at a hearing listed for May 2014.

In the face of this apparent conflict – a first decision that the court thinks there may be issues with, and a second, identical decision with an identical outcome – a team of planning barristers, who are working at no charge to the campaign group, issued a second Judicial Review in the High Court on 27 March 2014.

This High Court has been asked by opponents of the scheme to hear both Judicial Reviews together, in May, and to limit exposure to the costs of the Council and developer, should the second review fail. Both the Council and developer have indicated they will resist these requests and vigorously resist the case put forward to the Court.

The Stokey Local campaign (which has the support of the local CAACs, The Hackney Society Planning Group, Abney Park Trust, etc) is facing increasing demands on resources, and depending on what decisions the Court makes, could be faced with a bill for tens of thousands of pounds. It has successfully raised over £15,000 since launching a campaign for funds last September.

The court will probably make its decision just after the local elections in May.

For more information visit  
[stockeylocal.org.uk](http://stockeylocal.org.uk)

## 195 Mare Street – Update

By David Shaw

Meetings between English Heritage, the Hackney Society and Hackney Council have taken place and English Heritage has expressed a high level of concern over the state of the building. The council, whilst sympathetic to the concerns that we and EH have expressed, have argued that the new owner should be given a reasonable amount of time to submit plans and to undertake immediate necessary repairs. Apparently a survey has now been completed and scaffolding is in place. We shall continue to monitor this building.

## Elizabeth Fry Refuge

By Claudia Jessop

No Hackney building is more vulnerable than the impressive brick villa at 195 Mare Street. Built in 1699, its graceful but battered façade is currently hidden behind hoardings, its future unclear.

Between 1860 and 1913 – after life as a Belgian merchant's home and before becoming the New Lansdowne Liberal and Radical Club – this was the Elizabeth Fry Refuge, which had been founded in 1849 in Cambridge Heath Road as a memorial to the great Quaker campaigner for prison reform. Here, young women just out of prison were given accommodation, food, 'non-sectarian' religious instruction, medical attention, and training in laundry and needlework, with the goal of securing them employment. It was administered by the Society of British Ladies for the Reformation of Female Prisoners, the first ever nationwide organisation of women. The residents, aged in their teens and twenties, stayed for between one and two years, before being found positions as servants, being passed to other philanthropic organisations, or emigrating to Australia or North America. Sometimes a short stay was arranged specifically to try to 'cure the habit of drinking'.

The emphasis was on rehabilitation and the right of the women to be free of the stigma of their crimes. Almost all these were first offences of theft of food or 'wearing apparel', with some disorderly conduct and prostitution. Occasionally, more serious crimes were involved, including assault or concealment of a birth; there are also poignant cases of conviction for attempted suicide.

Although the idea of cultivating the individual's moral conscience was important, the institution's ethos seems to have recognised the disadvantages facing girls who had come of age in dire poverty, and the goal of the refuge was to help them

leave their pasts behind. Admission – highly sought after as much preferable to entering the workhouse – was by recommendation from a prison chaplain, magistrate or respectable interested party, and was dependent on good conduct in prison.

The case books, held at Hackney Archives, give vivid glimpses of the lives of residents like 25-year-old Emma Harvey, a former lady's maid with a 'grateful disposition' who 'tried to get her living as a taylor ... had 1d left and took poison'; surviving, she stole to fend off starvation, was convicted and tried again to end it all by jumping from a prison window. Or Ellen Gunn, who 'feels she has disgraced her respectable friends and is afraid to show her face at home', or Lavinia Brown who 'was led to steal a small piece of cheese when in great want'.

What comes across forcefully is how easily a Victorian woman could lose her all-important 'character' – without which respectable employment was impossible – and how much harder it was to regain it. A single misfortune, bad decision or act of desperation could condemn women to destitution and pariah status. The Refuge sought to provide a safety net to break their fall.

This building is the last vestige of Mare Street's 18<sup>th</sup> century grandeur; this fact alone makes its neglect a disgrace. The place it holds in the history of social and penal reform, of the Quaker movement and of women's activism makes its preservation all the more urgent.

*A longer version of this article is at [http://www.hackneysociety.org/page\\_id\\_259\\_path\\_0p29p.aspx](http://www.hackneysociety.org/page_id_259_path_0p29p.aspx)*

## Bishop Wood's Almshouses



There are fears for the future of Bishop Wood's Almshouses, which were founded in 1665 by Thomas Wood, Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry. The buildings have been boarded up since the last residents moved out in 2012. The Trustees of the almshouses say they want to sell to a private developer for private flats.

## St Mary's Lodge

St Mary's Lodge, which has been empty for 12 years, remains in a derelict condition (see articles in Spaces 23 and 40). Tony Harms, Secretary of Stoke Newington Conservation Areas Advisory Committee, has criticised Mayor Jules Pipe for failing to make a compulsory purchase in order to acquire the building.

## Tram Depot

In 2011 Executec Ltd, who owned the Tram Depot in Upper Clapton Road, were given planning permission to demolish the buildings to make way for a mixed-use development, and all but two of the companies based there were forced to move out, leading to a loss of more than 50 jobs. It seems Executec has sold the site to new owners and its future is uncertain. Planning permission is due to run out in September. Ward councillors are concerned at the deteriorating state of the buildings and the air of dereliction and emptiness of a formerly thriving area. See Spaces 22 for more on the Tram Depot.

## Rarely Seen Hackney Murals

By Donna McDonald



©Jon Bolter

When a building is described as an 'unknown treasure', it usually means that only a few thousand people know about it. But the Church of St Andrew in Bethune Road really is an unknown treasure.

Designed by AW Blomfield, the fourth son of the Bishop of London, St Andrew's was consecrated in 1884. In conjunction with Heaton, Butler and Bayne, the Covent Garden firm that specialised in stained glass and murals, Blomfield designed a scheme for the whole of the church, co-ordinating the paintings with the windows. It thus has a coherence rarely seen in church decoration. Moreover, it seems that all the murals were painted by one man, Alexander Higerty.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup>, this part of Stoke Newington was populated by middle class families drawn to the area by the arrival of the railway which made commuting into London relatively easy. They pooled their resources to finish paying for the church and to pay for the elaborate decoration of the chancel.

*Continued overleaf...*

## Hackney Society Events\*

### Almost Lost

Friday 25 April 2014, 6pm

#### Exhibition with Polly Hudson

Many of London's most treasured historic landmarks were once threatened with demolition. Using the latest digital technology, 'Almost Lost' charts the highs and lows of a century of heritage protection in London, including Hackney.

This is another chance to see parts of the English Heritage exhibition that took place at the Wellington Arch earlier this year, accompanied by its curator and designer, Polly Hudson.

*Booking essential.* Book online at <http://billetto.co.uk/almostlost>

Meet at 6pm, The Gallery, 75 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EL

FREE

### Ghostsigs of Stoke Newington

Tuesday 10 June 2014, 5.30pm

#### Walk with Sam Roberts

This walking tour through Stoke Newington's historic conservation area features some of London's best ghostsigs (fading advertisements painted on walls) as well as many other points of interest.

These include a Banksy survivor, a lethal alleyway and a pint in the pub to finish it all off. The signs are used to explore local advertising, craft and design history, aided by additional photographic resources shared en route.

Meet at 5.30pm, Stoke Newington Station, Station Approach, N16 6YA.

*Booking is essential.* Strictly limited to 12 people. Book online at <http://billetto.co.uk/ghostsigns>

FREE for Hackney Society members, £5 for non-members.

### Rarely Seen Hackney Murals – continued from page 03

The reredos is painted on mahogany panels embellished with gold, while the rest of the decoration was described at the time as fresco. Technically, that is probably not accurate as frescos are painted on wet plaster and these were not.

The font was moved to the west end of the church in 1891 and the process of decorating all the surrounding walls and windows was initiated. As with the murals and windows along the nave, donations were sought from members of the congregation and many were consequently presented in memory of loved ones.

The arcade walls are not decorated, though the parish magazine implies that the congregation wanted images there as well. The vicar was obliged to remind his parishioners that 'the present gas

### North Stoke Newington

Saturday 19 July 2014, 11am

#### Walk with Sean Gubbins and Donna McDonald

Sean Gubbins will lead a walk from Abney Park to Clissold Park via the Stoke Newington Reservoirs. The walk will take in a visit to the Church of St Andrew in Bethune Road, where Donna McDonald will discuss the wonderful murals and windows by Heaton, Butler and Bayne.

Meet at 11am, by the main gate of Abney Park Cemetery, Stoke Newington High Street, N16 0LH

*Booking recommended.* Book online at <http://billetto.co.uk/northstokenewington> FREE for Hackney Society members, £5 for non-members.

### Publications

**Looking For** by Hackney Society trustee Claudia Jessop is the author's second collection of poetry. Cinnamon Press, £8.99. Despite its title, **The Jewish Communities of Islington, 1730s-1880s** by Petra Laidlaw includes much information about Hackney. The book traces a cross-section of the Jewish population in Islington and surrounding areas in the period before mass immigration in the 1880s. Islington Archaeology and History Society, £9.99 paperback, £29.99 hardback.

**The Gardens of the British Working Class** by Hackney Society trustee Margaret Willes is an illustrated history, spanning more than four centuries, which celebrates feats of cultivation by the working class in Britain. Hackney and the East End of London proved a rich resource for research on the subject. Yale University Press, £25.00.

**Hackney Child** by Hope Daniels and Morag Livingstone is an account of growing up in Hackney 30 years ago, and surviving poverty and the care system. Simon & Schuster UK, £6.99.

arrangements would spoil any decoration in a month'. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the congregation was beginning to agitate for electric light but was held back by the fact that, though neighbouring Hackney had introduced the means of electric illumination, Stoke Newington had not.

A bomb during World War II took out the clerestory windows on the south side and these are now clear glass into which fragments of the original windows have been incorporated. Virtually all the murals are intact, damaged only by water from the leaking roof. A grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund marks the first stage in making the building water tight so that restoration of these extraordinary images can begin.

*On 19 July, there will be a chance to visit St Andrew's. See Events section for details.*

### I've Lived in East London for 86½ Years

by Hackney writer and photographer Martin Usborne is a portrait of Joseph Markovitch, who has lived in Hoxton all his life. Hoxton Mini Press, £12.95.

**50 People of East London** by Shoreditch-based Adam Dant presents illustrations of different types of East Londoners. Hoxton Mini Press, £12.95.

### Noticeboard

#### Geffrye Museum

The Geffrye Museum is celebrating two anniversaries: it is 300 years since the building of almshouses by the Ironmongers' Company with a bequest from Sir Robert Geffrye, and 100 years since it opened as a museum. Some 50 pensioners lived in the almshouses until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Company sold the property to London County Council and rehoused the residents in a healthier area. In 1914 Shoreditch was renowned for the furniture trade and the museum focused on woodwork and furniture. Today it specialises in the history of the English domestic interior.

#### Former Hackney Central Police Station

The former police station in Lower Clapton Road is to become a Muslim free school. The Grade II listed building was bought by the Department for Education for £7.6m. Designed by John Dixon Butler and built in 1904, it closed in 2013.

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#### Kopykat Printing Limited

76 Rivington Street, London EC2A 3AY

Tel: 020 7739 2451 Fax: 020 7729 5925

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**Edited by:** Monica Blake

**Layout by:** [design@gloryhall.com](mailto:design@gloryhall.com)

**Contributors:** Monica Blake, Claudia Jessop, Donna McDonald, Nick Perry and David Shaw

**Photos:** Avanti Architects, Monica Blake and Jon Bolter

**The Hackney Society**

The Round Chapel,  
1d Glenarm Road, London E5 0LY

T: 07771 225183

E: [info@hackneysociety.org](mailto:info@hackneysociety.org)

W: [www.hackneysociety.org](http://www.hackneysociety.org)

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