

Pond House By Julia Lafferty



On 1 May 2014 representatives of the Hackney Society and Clapton Conservation Areas Advisory Committee joined Cllr Ian Rathbone, Chair of the Clapton Pond Neighbourhood Action Group, on a visit to Pond House on Lower Clapton Road. The building has been newly converted into four apartments for sale by One Housing Group. The adjacent old coach house has been converted into a three-bedroom residence, and six new town houses have been built along the southern edge of the garden facing Mildenhall Road on the site of former St John Ambulance garages.

Pond House is a Grade II* late Georgian detached villa overlooking historic Clapton Pond, which dates from the 1600s. The pond was re-landscaped for public use in the late 1800s to the pattern that largely survives today. At the time that Pond House was built, Clapton was a fashionable semi-rural suburb of London and Lower Clapton Road was lined with detached villas. The house is flanked by two older buildings: the 17th century Bishop Wood Almshouses to the north and two late 18th century

four-storey terrace houses to the south which originally formed part of six properties known as St James' Terrace. Together these buildings form the historic core of the Clapton Pond Conservation Area, and Pond House is considered to be one of the finest examples of late Georgian domestic architecture in the borough.

Built around 1800 for Benjamin Walsh, a city stockbroker and son of a governor of the Bank of England, the historic house suffered decades of neglect during the latter part of

the 20th century, and in recent years had featured on the Heritage at Risk Register maintained by English Heritage.

The architect who designed Pond House remains a mystery, though certain elements of the house are reminiscent of the work of Sir John Soane. Built in the Greek Revival style, Pond House was obviously a residence of distinction, as befitted a gentleman of means, with a handsome carriage approach enclosed with iron gates and palisades. The architect emphasised the villa character of the front of the building by recessing the dormer windows into the

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shallow mansard roof, so that the front elevation appears to be two storeys over a basement, rather than three storeys.

Having settled into the house with his wife Mary and started a family, Benjamin Walsh took up his seat in Parliament for the constituency of Wootton Bassett in 1808. But it would appear that this was a useful expedient as shortly afterwards he was declared bankrupt. As an MP he had immunity from arrest for debt, but his financial situation necessitated the sale of Pond House in January 1809.

Expelled from the Stock Exchange, in 1811 Walsh went on to commit one of the biggest frauds of the century against fellow MP Sir Thomas Plumer, the Solicitor General, who had entrusted him with £22,000 to buy exchequer bills. Walsh however used the money to play the lottery and lost. He was arrested while trying to flee the country and put on trial at the Old Bailey. Although the jury found him guilty of felony, which could carry the death penalty, the judges ruled that there was insufficient proof of felonious intent and he was given a King's Pardon.

During the 19th century, Pond House remained in family occupation. The longest running occupants during this period were the family of Samuel Child, a wealthy merchant trading worldwide in dyestuffs, who lived in the house for 23 years. In 1877 a girls' school was established in the house by a Miss Pearce. When the school closed in 1904, the house was used as a clothing factory and in 1939 ownership passed to the Hackney Volunteers Social Club, comprised of men who were volunteers in the Hackney Rifle Regiment. Various alterations and repairs were made to the house during the latter half of the 20th century which were out of keeping with its historic character, and at the beginning of this century the rundown state of the house was causing concern to English Heritage who placed the property on their At Risk Register. Finally the financial burden of retaining the property proved too much for HVCS and the property was sold to development company Dellmount Estates in 2008.



Following the rejection of two planning applications by Hackney Council's Planning Sub-Committee, the property was acquired by One Housing Group who received planning permission for their scheme which was considered of a sufficiently high quality for one of Hackney's most important heritage buildings.

The main house is entered through a central double door with lions' heads mounted on circular medallions and flanked with timber-fluted Doric columns on a raised Portland stone semi-circular porch. The front *façade* has been painted a delicate shade of light blue-grey, a colour much favoured in the late Georgian era. Entering the house, visitors find themselves in an impressive stone-paved entrance hall from which rises a spectacular curving stone staircase leading to a balcony on the first floor.

The staircase has retained its original elaborate wrought iron balustrade with mahogany handrails and the walls and ceiling display a wealth of Georgian decoration. In an alcove halfway up the stairs is a full-size classical statue of a woman bearing a drinking vessel which adds dramatic impact to the ascent to the first floor.

The constraints involved in the provision of four apartments in the main house, including the need to provide modern kitchens and bathrooms for each apartment, have meant that there has had to be some sub-division of original room spaces, but One Housing Group has retained many of the original features, including the original

vaulted wine store with a flag floor in the basement, a mysterious staircase leading nowhere and carved ox skulls embellished with drapery above the doors in the two side wings of the house. The unsightly 20th century extension, which formerly obscured the handsome bow windows of Pond House overlooking the rear garden, has been removed to reveal the original rear *façade*, and there is a splendid view across Hackney to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park from the top floor. The coach house on the northern side of the main house, which once included stabling for four horses and a harness room, has been converted to a high standard into a three bedroom residence overlooking the gardens of Clapton Pond to the front and the 125 metre long communal gardens to the rear.

After many years of neglect it is very gratifying to see Pond House coming back to life and once again enhancing the townscape around Clapton Pond. It is hoped that the same can soon be said for the neighbouring Bishop Wood Almshouses which have fallen into a sad state of disrepair since the Almshouses trustees decided to relocate the residents in 2012.

For more information about Pond House see Ann Robey's article in *Hackney History*, No. 16, 2010, pp. 16-25.

The Hackney Design Awards – 2014

By David Shaw

The deadline for this year's Hackney Design Awards was 14 July (although if you're quick the organisers may just be kind and accept some last minute suggestions) with the shortlisted nominations to be announced in the autumn. The biennial awards, which have been running since 2004, celebrate great design in architecture,

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Saving Dalston Lane By Lisa Shell



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In *Spaces 44* David Shaw reported Hackney Council's (or more precisely the planning committee chair's) disappointing recent decision to approve the complete demolition of Dalston Lane Terrace to make way for a new-build mixed-use development. So why are we not now printing photographs of the wrecking ball in motion, and Boris at the controls of his water-canon blasting protestors along Dalston Lane? Most planning approvals come with conditions, many of which require further, often detailed, submissions to the council for 'discharge' before a development can commence. Technically Murphy, the developer, are still awaiting Hackney's further approvals.

But during this delay campaigners have continued to work to find a way that these buildings might still be saved. These are just some of the reasons that it is believed the decision to demolish, in the name of regeneration, cannot be justified:

- The preservation of these historic buildings, which make up almost 50% of the buildings within the Dalston Lane (West) Conservation Area, was clearly supported in Hackney's recently published adopted policy.
- The Council's planning decision was based on the fact that the London stock brick, with which the buildings are constructed, is *porous and lacking in compressive strength*: true but irrelevant. Such an argument would see the whole of central London bulldozed. Moreover it may be true that the integrity of the original upper level masonry could not withstand the removal of all ground floor walls to achieve open plan shops which is an essential ingredient for any developer to attract major chains. But why should a commercial desire override conservation imperatives? Hackney are still hailing this development as 'conservation-led'.

- The mixed-use development, to be built by, and leased to Murphy (the infrastructure specialists), includes 44 residential units for private rental. It apparently remains unviable to include affordable or social housing, irrespective of the adjusted status of the development as new-build, and the cost savings that would achieve.
- The cabinet approved the procurement of a regeneration project for the terrace that involved partial retention of the buildings, not total demolition.

So campaigners have raised sufficient funds for OPEN (Organisation for Promotion of Environmental Needs Ltd) to instruct a planning barrister and solicitor to prepare and make an application to the courts for judicial review of the decision. And OPEN are poised to apply for an injunction to halt works if the need arises – after all a successful judicial review will be hollow if the buildings are already lost.

Meanwhile the charity, Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust, whose trustees include the notable Dan Cruickshank and Will Palin, former Director of SAVE Britain's Heritage, wrote to Hackney as follows: 'The Spitalfields Trust has monitored the decline of these houses over many years. We feel we cannot now stand by and see these buildings demolished. We are therefore prepared, at this late hour, to enter into negotiations with your Council and Murphy Homes Limited to purchase them and subsequently repair them'.

Their proposals involve the careful restoration of the seven significant properties by private owner/occupiers. The remaining nine (three of which have already been lost to arson, and six of which are in a severely dilapidated condition) would be handed to a housing association (with whom the Trust

are in discussions), free of charge, to build new affordable homes. Clear design criteria and site monitoring by the Trust would ensure that the terrace retains a coherent and desired appearance. Their repeated successes with just such projects over the last 35 years leaves them fully confident of the feasibility and viability of their proposals.

Despite a Hackney officer's initial response that 'there is no realistic prospect of the Council re-opening the procurement process for this site', local councillors are pushing for cabinet consideration with enthusiasm. After all why would Hackney dismiss an opportunity to fulfil their own policy?

I very much look forward to reporting the removal of the Murphy hoardings and the opening of a happier chapter in the dismal recent history of this modest, but historically important, set of buildings.

Wilmer Place

By Nick Perry

In May, the new Planning Court (which is within the High Court) considered some procedural matters on the challenge made by the Stokey Local campaign to the two identical permissions granted to build a 44,000sq ft Sainsbury's beneath four storeys of housing, hard by Abney Park Cemetery.

In a written judgment, Mrs Justice Patterson granted permission for judicial reviews of both applications to proceed on all the grounds that had been argued in the claim. Both judicial reviews will be heard together at a three-day hearing on 14-16 October 2014.

However, on a separate, but related point, Patterson J. refused the campaigners' request to see the developer's financial viability statement in which it is argued the scheme could only sustain 12% affordable homes. Although the campaign is considering appealing this specific point, it does not affect the ability to argue in the judicial review that the public should have had sight of those reports at the planning stage. But it clearly prevents any points being raised on the specific content.

Realistically, the site is unlikely to be developed until the court has ruled on the two judicial reviews. The five shopfronts on Stoke Newington High Street which would form the entrance to the supermarket now lie vacant, and many of the residents and businesses of the approximately 70 units on the part of the Wilmer Place site which would be demolished have moved on.

Northchurch Road

By Michael Rank

Under pressure from about 40 objections by neighbours, a planning application has been withdrawn to excavate a basement under a Grade II listed building on Northchurch Road in the De Beauvoir Conservation Area. Excavating such a basement would have set an extremely worrying precedent for Hackney and could have led to the digging of countless more basements all over the borough, with all the noise and disruption that would have caused as well as serious implications for the social mix of people living in Hackney. But the application continues to include plans to build a two-storey rear extension with a large balcony that is not in keeping with this semi-detached 1840s Victorian villa (Planning app 2014/0253).

The Hackney Design Awards

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urban design and landscape architecture. They are open to everyone to nominate their personal favourites.

The judges will be looking for projects that embody not just good design but are showcase examples of sustainable development. The scope for nominations is wide ranging – encompassing public or private, new buildings, extensions or refurbishments and even outdoor spaces that include structural design elements. In assessing the entrants the judging panel will be considering not just the quality of design in terms of build and materials, but also the visual contribution it makes to a location, the level of innovation, whether in response to constraints or in pioneering techniques or new materials and also how each project embodies principles of sustainability.

The 2012 winners were Hackney Marshes Centre (Stanton Williams Architects for Hackney Council) and 2012 Handball Arena (Make) from a shortlist of 19 schemes and over 50 nominations. Previous winners have included The Barn and Eco Garden at the Eastern Curve and Adelaide Wharf. There is also a People's Choice Award, selected from the shortlisted nominations, which was won by Urswick School (Avanti Architects for Hackney Council) in 2012.

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Noticeboard

Geffrye Museum

The Geffrye Museum has appointed Wright & Wright Architects to lead the design of its £14m development scheme. The project will create new spaces for the museum's collections and library – set to feature a gallery, café and conference facilities. A planning application will be submitted by 2016 and the opening of the redeveloped museum is set for 2020.

Holborn Studios

Hackney Council has added Holborn Studios to its local list. This will give the building some protection from demolition in the future.

Pickwick Bicycle Club



Members of the Pickwick Bicycle Club gathered at the former Downs Hotel on 22 June 2014 to unveil a new plaque to mark the club's founding in the hotel in 1870. A previous plaque disappeared when the hotel was converted to flats (see Spaces 40). The club is the oldest existing cycle club in the world.

Hackney Society Events

Shoreditch Furniture Trade

Saturday 6 September 2014, 11am

Walk with Ray Rogers

From the 1850s to the 1950s South Shoreditch was both the centre of production and the commercial heart of the English furniture trade as it underwent a transformation from a craft-based industry to one serving a mass market. This walk will explore some of the history of the furniture trade as evidenced through its surviving buildings (also looking at some new architecture along the way).

Meet at 11am at the junction of Worship Street and Clifton Street, EC2.

Booking is essential. Book online at <http://billetto.co.uk/shoreditchfurnituretrade>

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

Tales from the Refuge

Thursday 25 September 2014, 6pm

Talk with Megan Webber and Claudia Jessop

Joint event with Hackney Archives. Talk about the Refuge for the Destitute, a charitable institution which opened in

Hackney in 1807 with the aim of providing 'a place of refuge for persons discharged from the hulks, unfortunate and deserted females, and others... who cannot procure an honest maintenance'.

Booking essential. To book, email archives@hackney.gov.uk or phone 020 8356 8925

Meet at 6pm at Hackney Archives, Dalston Square, London E8 3BQ
FREE to all.

Publications

99 Balls Pond Road: The Story of the Exploding Galaxy

by Jill Drower is the story of a collective of artists, musicians, poets and dancers from its inception in March 1967 to its dispersal at the end of 1968. Scudge Books, £59 + £9 p&p.



The New Arrival

by Sarah Beeson is the memoir of a nurse at Hackney Hospital from 1969 until 1975. HarperCollins, £7.99.



I Am China is a novel by Hackney-based writer Xiaolu Guo. Chatto & Windus, £14.99.



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