



THE HACKNEY SOCIETY

SPACES 2015

News and views about Hackney's built environment

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Writer's Shed



Photos © Wai Ming Ng

A shed at the bottom of the garden is a dream for many a writer. Roald Dahl, Virginia Woolf and Dylan Thomas were among those who worked in such a place.

The architects Weston Surman & Deane were commissioned by an author and illustrator to design and build a garden studio in Greenwood Road, E8. They were allocated a budget of £31,000.

According to the architects, the design 'sought to satisfy the client's need for a functional workspace, but moreover to create a building that reflected his passion for children's literature and mythologies. The space was conceived as a haven in the city; a fairy-tale hut at the bottom of the garden

where the client could retreat and immerse himself in his work'.

Externally, the cedar façade, shingle cladding, log store and chimney all play a part in creating this world. Inside, a large north-facing skylight floods the workspace with natural light. On the gable wall, a bookcase surrounds a wood-burning stove, providing a centrepiece for the client to store his books. Looking back out over the garden, a glazed sliding door gives onto a covered verandah.

Oiled OSB (oriented strand board) and painted pine tongue and groove were used for the floors, walls and shelving, while utilitarian garden taps and brass splash-backs surround a reclaimed Belfast sink.

The offset pitch of the roof allowed for a large north-facing skylight that provides the workspace with natural light.

The Writer's Shed was one of the winners of the Hackney Design Awards 2014. The judges were very impressed with this small scheme, commenting that its 'unique character and simple solutions perfectly match the client's brief for light and space. The joy of the "shed" reflects the commitment of the team of young architects who conceived and built it.'

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Building Watch



Old Street/City Road looking east original

Junction of Old Street and City Road By Oliver Schick*

Transport for London (TfL) has published a vision for how it wants this important junction to look. Their design is a 'peninsula' made from the existing roundabout by closing the northwestern arm. When this sort of design was originally proposed by Islington Council, responsible for three quarters of the junction, in 2006, there was a plan to provide public space in the centre. TfL have now publicly admitted that they have been investigating the construction of an extremely tall building in the centre of the junction. This follows years of evasions and secrecy about it and a Freedom of Information request by Hackney Cycling Campaign, which revealed that the number of emails sent within TfL relating to 'over-station' development at this junction was too great to be released.

Among the reasons we are opposed to this plan are that: it would cause very indirect journeys for pedestrians and cyclists; cut back some of the footways; and maintain the already excessive number of cars travelling through the junction along the 'Inner Ring Road', the boundary of the Congestion Charging Zone, which runs along City Road north and Old Street east of the junction – the one corner of the junction that is Hackney's; the other three are in Islington.

An even bigger issue is TfL's plan for developing the land in the centre of the junction. The traffic scheme being proposed is meant to prepare this, with development occurring a few years later. The proposed layout very much goes against what a junction is, creating instead many smaller, poorer-quality sub-junctions. The proposed over-dimensioned tower would block views along Old Street and City Road and cement in a strong sense of severance of the urban environment at this junction. It would dominate its surroundings and generate very little active frontage. In short, it is appalling urban design. An existing very negative example of a similar development (although nowhere near as tall as that planned at Old Street/

City Road) is the Park Plaza Hotel at the eastern end of Westminster Bridge, next to County Hall.

The traditional simple intersection of Old Street and City Road was swept away in favour of the well-known 'roundabout' (which is actually a diamond shape) design in the 1960s. It has long been acknowledged that this has been a blight on the urban landscape. Now it is merely a throwback to a time when planners thought that high levels of motor traffic were the future of cities. TfL's plans would maintain a sense of a gap in the urban fabric.

All of this is not to say that development at this site would be entirely unwelcome. Of course the corners of the junction should be developed well. There is even precedent for tall forms here, and development would be lucrative even if a unified central site with a disproportionate tower were not realised.

We are delighted to have received the support of both the Islington Society and the Hackney Society in our campaign against this ill-conceived scheme.

**Oliver Schick is a member of the London Cycling Campaign in Hackney*



Old Street/City Road looking east with building



Old Street/City Road looking west original



Old Street/City Road looking west with building

Photos © Trevor Parsons

Old Schoolhouse

By Julia Lafferty*

Following discussions between the Clapton Arts Trust and developers Vision Homes to secure a community use for the Grade II listed former Victorian Schoolhouse at 142 Lea Bridge Road, the developer made a commitment to lease the building to the Trust for use as a River Heritage and Arts Centre. An educational project was undertaken with Museum of London Archaeology and Hackney Community College taking the Old Schoolhouse as its focus, and a number of community events took place in the building. However, as reported in *Spaces* 42, in June 2013 Vision Homes submitted a planning application for private residential use of the building. As the developer then took no action to proceed with the application, maintaining that the application was merely a fall-back measure in the event that Clapton Arts Trust was unsuccessful in its endeavours to raise funds, the Trust made a successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant to undertake a feasibility study and options appraisal prior to the preparation of a full bid for the building's restoration.

Just as the Clapton Arts Trust stood poised to submit a full Heritage Lottery Fund bid, the Vision Homes planning application resurfaced last month when the Trust was given a week's notice that the 2013 planning application for conversion of the building into two self-contained flats was to be determined by Hackney's Planning Sub-Committee on 11 March. Following representations by The Hackney Society, Clapton Conservation Areas Advisory Committee, Clapton Arts Trust and members of the public, the application was withdrawn at the last moment. The developer had not undertaken the required work to identify the impact of the development upon protected species of wildlife and plant life, nor had there been a flood risk assessment, despite the close proximity of the Old Schoolhouse to the River Lea. The strength of community support for the Clapton Arts Trust project can be gauged by the petition organised by local residents which has attracted c. 1,000 signatures and which asks Hackney Council to ensure that the developer's commitment to provide the former Schoolhouse building for community use as a River Heritage and Arts Centre is upheld. A copy of the petition can be found at:

<https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/save-hackney-s-early-victorian-old-boaters-schoolhouse>

There is great concern that the subdivision of the old stone building into two luxury flats, which would result from the Vision Homes planning application, would destroy the historical integrity of the Grade II



listed building. It would lose the defining characteristic of an early one-room Victorian schoolhouse and hence an important factor in its national listing.

However the significance of the building goes far beyond the value of its architectural fabric: its historical, communal and evidential values make essential contributions to its Grade II listed status.

The Schoolhouse was an important part of the everyday lives of the families of the boatmen and bargemen who made up the 'floating population' of the River Lea Navigation, providing free schooling for their children at a time when education was dependent upon private provision. It also served as an evangelical outpost of the Anglican Church in an isolated riverside community without its own place of worship and social welfare provision.

In addition, its association with the Ashpitel family, who played a significant role in national life and that of the borough and whose imposing family tomb is still a feature of St John-at-Hackney Churchyard, lends the building an added heritage value. The Schoolhouse was designed by the celebrated Victorian architect Arthur Ashpitel and it was built on land acquired by his father William Hurst Ashpitel from Henry Greville, Earl of Warwick at the beginning of the 19th century. W.H. Ashpitel designed and built the inland dock around which the original community and industries of Lea Bridge developed and which lay at the heart of what is now the Lea Bridge Conservation Area. His son, Arthur Ashpitel, whose numerous churches and municipal buildings are dotted throughout the south east of England, provided Lea Bridge and neighbouring Homerton with the Schoolhouse and St Barnabas Church and was engaged to

oversee improvements to the old Hackney Workhouse.

It was in the best traditions of Victorian philanthropy that Arthur Ashpitel gifted the land on which the Schoolhouse was built to the parish and to which he lent his architectural skills. Were it not for the fact that a clause in the deed of conveyance of the land to the parish was later ignored, the Schoolhouse might still have been used for public benefit up to the present day. The clause stated that should the parish no longer require the building for its original charitable purposes, it should be offered back to Arthur Ashpitel or his heirs. However in 1920 the parish sold the Schoolhouse to a commercial concern without reference to the Ashpitel family.

That this early 19th-century one-room stone Schoolhouse has survived into the 21st century in an inner city borough such as Hackney is remarkable. Its rarity is enhanced by its association with people living and working on the river who the Victorians called 'water gypsies' and whose vanished culture and heritage has only recently been recognised as having historical significance.

The fact that the Heritage Lottery Fund has lent financial support to Clapton Arts Trust's proposals for a River Heritage and Arts Centre for the digital age is proof of the Schoolhouse's potential for providing education and skills opportunities for local people and as a heritage destination for East London. The Trust's scheme would bring greater economic and regenerative benefit to the area as well as utilising the building in a way which better respects its significance as a nationally recognised heritage asset in a designated conservation area.

**Julia Lafferty is a member of the Clapton Arts Trust.*

Dalston Conservation Area – Public Consultation

By Ray Blackburn*

The council is set to announce a six-week consultation on a new conservation area based on Kingsland High Street, but excluding the 'cultural area' around Ashwin Street. Development pressure is high here; a new conservation area should give additional protection to the remaining commercial and residential buildings which add to its character and atmosphere.

The consultation period is likely to be 13 April to 24 May, and will include some public events. If you live in or near Dalston or ever use Dalston Town Centre, do have your say. Keep an eye on the council web page (<https://consultation.hackney.gov.uk/>) for announcements.

* Ray Blackburn is Secretary of Dalston Conservation Areas Advisory Committee.

Hackney Society News

Horticultural Hackney

The Hackney Society has created PDFs of two new walks (<http://hackney.hk/hswalks>), funded by Discover Hackney. Horticultural Hoxton by Margaret Willes is already on the Hackney Society website and Horticultural Clapton by Julia Lafferty will be available shortly. Corresponding walking tours, mentioned in *Spaces 47*, were booked out very quickly. The walks are being repeated on 6 and 28 June (see Events section).

Lee Valley Fundraiser

Don't forget our sponsored walk. Set up a fundraising page and/or bring completed sponsor forms (see <http://hackney.hk/sponsorform>).

Noticeboard

Talks at the Tower 2015

Hackney Historic Buildings Trust has organised a series of talks from 15 to 19 June. Apart from Iain Sinclair on 15 June in the Round Chapel, the talks will be held in St Augustine's Tower. Other speakers are Simon Inglis on Sport in Hackney, Linda Wilkinson on Thomas Fairchild, Sean Gubbins on Rhodes Town and Andrew Carr and Eva Griffith on Shakespeare in Shoreditch. For more information, see <http://hackney.hk/tower15>

77 Shacklewell Lane

Sam Roberts – of Ghostsigns fame – has noticed an interesting development at 77 Shacklewell Lane, one of the buildings covered by the Hackney Society's Love Local Landmarks project (<http://hackney.hk/77sl>). Removal of the black paint covering the old painted shop fascia has revealed the lettering J.R. BREWER. Sam's research indicates that Mr Brewer was a butcher. For more information, see Sam's blog (<http://hackney.hk/jrbrewer>).



Mike Gray

Mike Gray, a noted Hackney historian and activist, died recently at the age of 76. Mike was instrumental in saving Sutton House from development when the National Trust had plans to convert it into flats. He also successfully campaigned to secure the former Homerton Library building as a community arts centre and came up with the name Chats Palace. For more information, see <http://hackney.hk/mikegray>

Hackney Society Events

Lea Valley

Saturday 9 May 2015, 10.00am

Walk with Laurie Elks

Sponsored walk along the Lea Valley – see 'Strictly for the Birds?' article in *Spaces 47* or contact Laurie Elks at l.elks@btconnect.com for details.

Meet at 10.00am (or 9.30am for refreshments) at St Augustine's Tower, E8 1HR
Booking essential. Book online at <http://billetto.co.uk/leavalley>

Horticultural Clapton

Saturday 6 June 2015, 11.30am

Walk with Julia Lafferty

Explore Clapton's horticultural heritage, beginning at the beautifully-landscaped parkland of Springfield Park and ending at the twenty-first century garden attraction recently opened at Sutton House. Supported by Discover Hackney. Meet at the cafe in Springfield Park, 11.30am

Free to all, but booking essential.
020 7749 6024.

Further details and the booking link will appear on our website.

Horticultural Hoxton

Sunday 28 June 2015, 2.30pm

Walk with Margaret Willes

Follow the footsteps of gardeners and nurserymen to trace the horticultural history of Shoreditch and Hoxton from the Tudor period to the present.

Supported by Discover Hackney. Meet at the Geffrye Museum, 2.30pm.

Free to all, but booking essential.
020 7749 6024.

Further details and the booking link will appear on our website.

Up and Down the Chatsworth Road

Saturday 18 July 2015

Walk with Laurie Elks and Julia Lafferty

Explore this lesser known but up-and-coming area with two people who have been keeping a close eye on its buildings and open spaces for many years.

Further details and the booking link will appear on our events web page (<http://hackney.hk/chatsworthrd>).

Publications

Futures by John Barker is a novel by the former Angry Brigade member who was arrested in Amherst Road. PM Press, £9.99.

Ghosting by Jonathan Kemp is the Stoke Newington-based author's second novel. It explores grief, memory and transformation. Myriad Editions, £8.99.

Made in Nirvana by Clapton writer Emanuela Cooper is a novel based in India. CreateSpace, £11.50.



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Tel: 020 7739 2451 Fax: 020 7729 5925
www.kopykat.co.uk

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Edited by: Monica Blake

Layout by: design@GloryHall.com

Contributors: Ray Blackburn, Monica Blake, Julia Lafferty and Oliver Schick

Photos: Monica Blake, Wai Ming Ng and Trevor Parsons

The Hackney Society

The Round Chapel,
1d Glenarm Road, London E5 0LY
T: 020 7175 1967

E: info@hackneysociety.org

W: www.hackneysociety.org

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