



THE HACKNEY SOCIETY

# SPACES 2020

News and views about Hackney's built environment

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## Peer Gallery



**PEER Gallery is a community-focused, independent arts organisation that seeks to engage the local community in ambitious and artistically significant exhibitions and projects. Trevor Horne Architects were commissioned to help the gallery deliver a vastly improved public space and long-overdue gallery refurbishment.**

The architects transformed the area in front of PEER Gallery on Hoxton Street from a drab, neglected and unloved area into an open and welcoming public space. They began by removing dilapidated and unwelcoming municipal brick planters and creating a new community garden with a

planted vertical wall and new public plaza with trees, seating, bike stands and art installation. The garden – Khadija's Garden – was named in memory of the artist Khadija Saye, an intern at PEER who died in the fire at Grenfell Tower.

The gallery façade was renovated with floor-to-ceiling windows making exhibitions more visible from the street and integrating the organisation further into the local environment. A four-metre high freestanding pedestal clock was installed on Hoxton Street. PEER's first annual clock commission is Black Hands by Chris Ofili. Local groups have planted and cared for the planter bed.

PEER Gallery was commended in the Hackney Design Awards 2018. The judges were impressed 'by how much had been achieved with a very limited budget'. They 'particularly liked the community aspect running through the whole project'.

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# The Clapton Portico By Hedy Parry-Davies

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*The Portico, September 2020*

**The Portico is a majestic and arresting building at the end of a small cul-de-sac in Clapton. Researching its history, a constant thread revealed itself. From the outset, this site has been used for the education and care of children.**

A girls' boarding school, built in the 1630s, was the first building to occupy the site. The building then became a famous boys' private school known as Dr Newcome's Academy, one of the most fashionable of all 18th-century private schools. It was established by Benjamin Morland in 1685. Distinguished pupils included Augustus FitzRoy, 3rd Duke of Grafton, Prime Minister (1768-70), and several Members of Parliament. The school closed in 1815.

In 1821 the London Orphan Asylum acquired the site. It provided relief to destitute orphans though children whose parents had been in respectable circumstances had the first claim on the charity.

The old building was demolished and replaced by a neo-classical design with a frontage of 19 bays, the central three projecting beneath a pedimented Tuscan Portico designed by the architect William Southcote Inman (1798-1879). The new buildings were completed in 1825 and opened on 16 June by Prince Adolphus, Duke of Cambridge. The Asylum was extended in 1846 and included a chapel

seating 400 in 1851. It accommodated 453 pupils in the 1860s. During that time it was famous for having had some 2000 hymns written for it by the English architect and hymn writer James Edmeston, a frequent visitor to the Asylum.

In 1867 the Charity left London due to the typhoid epidemic and the buildings were occupied by the Metropolitan Asylums Board (c.1873-76) and in 1882 it became the 'National Barracks' of the Salvation Army. The three-day lying in state of its founder, William Booth, occurred there in 1912. The chapel was demolished and the quadrangle excavated and roofed over to create a massive hall capable of seating more than 4500 people. The wings of the building were used as training barracks for 300 cadets with classrooms on the ground floor, workrooms below and bedrooms above.

The building was listed grade II in April 1951 as the 'Salvation Army Congress Hall'.

In 1970 the Salvation Army moved to Lower Clapton Road and the building was subsequently bought by the London Borough of Hackney. In 1975, the Council permitted the demolition of the majority of the building leaving only the Portico and the colonnade wings, giving way to the expansion of Clapton Girls School which had moved to the adjacent site in 1916. Without being used by the school, the Portico rapidly deteriorated and was



*Top, Dr Newcome's Academy c1800  
Middle, London Orphan Asylum c1823  
Bottom, Portico in use by the Salvation Army c1910*

listed on English Heritage's Risk Register. Its striking appearance caught the eye of Turner Prize winning artist Martin Creed who installed a white neon artwork: 'EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE ALRIGHT' on the entablature as part of a collaboration initiated by the PEER UK arts trust working with the Hackney Historic Buildings Trust, and with the support of the school.

In 2002, a brief was drawn up for the repair and restoration of the Portico and the addition of a new extension to the rear to create a centre for teaching computer and IT skills. A limited architectural competition was won by Brady Mallalieu. The building was re-opened in April 2006 by the Rt Hon. Estelle Morris, Baroness of Yardley.

Twelve years later, Clapton Girls Academy deemed it surplus to their requirements, and in early 2018 it reverted back to the Council's property estate.



Portico Extension by Brady Mallalieu Architects, c2006

Sources of text and images: British History Online: <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/vol10/pp148-165#highlight-first>; Clapton Girls' Academy website: <https://www.clapton.hackney.sch.uk/our-academy/history/portico-history/>; Brady Mallalieu Architects website: <https://bradymallalieu.com/project/clapton-portico/>; The Portico

## The Portico today

By Patrick Hammill\*

The Portico including the colonnades to each side remains as a prominent memory of times past in Lower Clapton and Hackney. Recently I was able to visit both the Portico and the new building behind it. Caring for these buildings is proving a major challenge. As an interim measure the Council has found a short-term user for the new building to the rear ensuring the site is secure and

monitored whilst a new user is found. The entrance to the new building is through the Portico, and both need repairs. For the new building this would normally be a more straightforward decision, repairing a modern building to secure a future user. For the Portico the finances are much more difficult. A comprehensive work package is clearly needed for the conservation and repair of this important building, particularly for the stonework, last repaired in 2005. This could well be a significant cost at a time when the Council's funds are very stretched. I think it

is doubtful if any user of the new building will pay for this work or take on long-term liability for the Portico. Any prospective user of the new building might be cautious about signing up, when the front door is literally part of an unrepaired Portico. This is a building that needs both friends and funding, now and in the long term. Support and bright ideas are needed. Befriend this historic building by asking your Councillor what is next for the Portico.

\*Hackney Historic Buildings Trust

## Statue of Sir Robert Geffrye

**The Museum of the Home (formerly the Geffrye Museum) is facing criticism for failing to accede to the outcome of a community-wide consultation on the removal of the statue of Sir Robert Geffrye from a niche at the centre of the building on Kingsland Road.**

Geffrye died a decade before the former almshouses were built in 1714 using money from his estate. A statue followed a few years after they were completed but was replaced with a replica at the turn of the 20th century when the almshouses were sold to the London County Council who opened the Museum there in 1914.

Geffrye was a director of the Royal African Company, a member of the East India Company and part-owner of the slave-ship *China Merchant*. It is apparent the bulk of his wealth was likely derived from forced labour and the slave trade. In light of that and Black Lives Matter putting the spotlight on statues of slave-owners, the Museum began a public

consultation on the statue's future placement.

Despite overwhelming support for its removal, the Museum declared that the statue would stay in its current position and it subsequently emerged that the Culture Secretary, Oliver Dowden, had put pressure on the Museum to keep the effigy. This interference has been criticised by Hackney's Mayor and the Cabinet member for Employment, Skills and Human Resources in a recent letter.

On this issue, the Hackney Society's Chair, Nick Perry, said 'Whether Geffrye's heavy involvement in slavery was a sign of the times or not is immaterial and we can't dismiss what we now know about the trade on which his wealth was founded. The statue of Geffrye, who has no tangible connection to the work of the Museum, is seen by many residents as offensive given its central position elevated over Kingsland Road. Its careful removal reflects our clearer

understanding of philanthropy derived from human enslavement. This would respect the overwhelming view emerging from the local consultation.

'There remains a valid debate around details of what, if anything, goes in its place and where the statue goes after removal, but those are details. The Hackney Society Planning Group supports the principle of removal of the statue and stands willing to help in any practical way to bring that about.'

Separately, the Council has started its own project to look at other legacy names and monuments within the borough. Nick Perry said that 'The Society is equally supportive of the Council's separate project and is in-touch with the working group to offer practical advice. We recognise our own lack of diversity makes judgements on the relative offence caused by each instance something on which we must defer to those most affected'.

## Noticeboard

### Morning Lane

The Morning Lane People's Space (MOPS) campaign has launched a consultation and survey to find out what the community would like to see built at the Tesco site in Morning Lane. The site is up for redevelopment after being bought by Hackney Council for £55 million. A preliminary plan from the developer Hackney Walk includes 'affordable' workspace underneath 530 homes in tower blocks as high as 19 storeys, with 20% 'affordable' housing. Members of MOPS, who would like to see more social housing, are distributing surveys outside Tesco throughout September and October on Saturdays from noon until 1pm and Sundays from 11am to 2pm.

### Stik Sculpture in Hoxton Square

Hackney Council has unveiled the first ever public sculpture by the Hackney street artist Stik. Holding Hands in Hoxton Square is four metres tall and cast in bronze. It is the result of a collaboration between Stik and Hackney Council.



### Millfields Disinfecting Station

Hackney Council is attempting to save the Disinfecting Station on Millfields Road, which is at risk. The Grade II-listed building is falling into disrepair. The Council aims to prop the building up and prevent its condition becoming any worse while options are explored to bring it back into use. For more on the building, see *Spaces* 65.

### West Reservoir Centre

Hackney Light and Power, Hackney Council's publicly-owned energy company, has launched a new solar panel scheme at the West Reservoir Centre in Woodberry Down. With freshly installed panels on its roof, the centre can now generate all the power it needs through renewable solar energy alone. Any excess power will be fed back into the grid.

### Frampton Park Estate

Tenants on Frampton Park Estate have warned of 'serious and irreversible consequences' if their community hall is demolished. They have written to all Hackney councillors, and Hackney South and Shoreditch MP Meg Hillier, to caution that the loss of the hall could exacerbate inequality in the community. The hall is one of four sites on the estate earmarked as

part of the construction of over 100 homes, around two thirds of which are planned to be social rent or shared ownership and prioritised for families already living there. The charity Hackney Quest has occupied the hall for six years in a no-rent arrangement with Young Hackney.

### Old Baths

Hackney Council has secured an extra £116,000 to reconstruct the sports cage behind Hackney Wick's Old Baths. The funding, secured by council officers from the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC), is part of an ongoing council project to provide workspace, and sports, culture and training opportunities for locals at the Baths. The former Gainsborough Road art deco/modernist public baths were built in 1934, and saw a restoration to their current state in 1994, now hosting a cafe, community garden, studios and event spaces.

### New Unity

New Unity, a non-religious church on Newington Green, is fundraising to compensate for loss of income caused by the coronavirus pandemic (<https://www.new-unity.org/donate>). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Mary Wollstonecraft was a member of the Newington Green Meeting House.

### Windrush Statues

Hackney Council has announced that two new public artworks will be erected in the borough next year to honour the Windrush Generation. Individual sculptures by Veronica Ryan and Thomas J Price were chosen by a panel of residents, campaigners, artists, architects and local councillors. They will be the first permanent monuments in the UK to honour the Windrush Generation

## Hackney Society Events

As Covid restrictions continue we are hoping to lighten some of your winter evenings with some interesting talks which will be available online. There is no charge for members or guests. You can register on the Hackney Society home page ([hackneysociety.org](http://hackneysociety.org)) and nearer the time we'll send you the link to join.

### A Glimpse into Hackney Archives' photos of Stoke Newington

Tuesday 20 October 2020

#### Amir Dotan

Hackney Archives hold close to 2500 digital copies of old photos and drawings of Stoke Newington. Amir Dotan (aka Twitter's @HistoryOfStokey) will take us on an online visual tour of Stoke Newington's past to a time when the New River ran along Church Street and detached mansions were a common sight. He'll also show how slum clearance and road widening in the 1930s had a considerable impact on Stoke Newington's streetscape.

### Hackney in the 1970s and 1980s

Thursday 10 December 2020

#### Alan Denney

Alan Denney has been photographing Hackney for close on half a century. In this event he will be presenting a selection from his photo archive documenting Hackney in the 1970s and 1980s and sharing a personal view of our recent past: places, events and people.

### The Lee Valley Regional Park: A Two Dimensional Tour

Wednesday 13 January 2021

#### Laurie Elks

Laurie Elks has been campaigning for the preservation of the Lee Valley Park since the 1970s. In this talk he will conduct you through a temporal tour of the history of the Regional Park (first proposed by the Hackney mayor, Lou Sherman) and a geographical tour of the Park with some digitised slides from the 1980s showing long-lost features including Lathams Timber Wharf and the Leabridge Aqueduct.

### 'Down with the Fences!' Popular Protest and Open Space Preservation in Victorian London

Thursday 4 March 2021

#### Mark Gorman

The extraordinary growth of London in the Victorian age swallowed up huge areas of green space. Fields, commons and woods – the leisure spaces for ordinary Londoners – were built over at an unprecedented rate. Across east London, much loved and heavily used open spaces like Epping Forest and Hackney Downs were under threat, and local campaigns were started to save 'the people's playgrounds'. The story of these struggles usually concentrates on the actions of middle class 'respectable' campaigners, while the key role played by ordinary Londoners has been forgotten. This is their story.

All events will start at 7.00pm

**Spaces** is published by the Hackney Society. Views expressed in the articles are not necessarily those of the Society.

**Edited by:** Monica Blake

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

**Contributors:** Monica Blake, Patrick Hammill and Hedy Parry-Davies

**Photos:** Monica Blake and Hedy Parry-Davies

#### The Hackney Society

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

T: 020 7175 1967

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

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

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