



THE HACKNEY SOCIETY

# SPACES 2021

News and views about Hackney's built environment

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## St Mary's Centre



© David Grandorge

**St Mary Stoke Newington has two churches: the old church dating from the mid-16th century and the 'new' Victorian one. The latter was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott and completed in 1856. The spire and a further vestry were added by his son John Oldrid Scott in 1890. The church is Grade II\*; the adjacent rectory, which bounds the landscape in the south, is Grade II listed. In 1996 the vestry was partially enveloped by a small community centre extension.**

The new centre was designed by Erect Architecture. Their brief was to transform and extend the existing centre, which was felt to severely limit the community through a lack of capacity, functionality and accessibility. The new building infills the courtyard area of the 1996 extension and frames, together with church and rectory, the large open space between church and

rectory, into which the community spills out during events.

The architects' key conceptual approach considered the new building as an extension of the existing narrative of the 'collection of buildings' – connected by a circumferential route, which historically existed.

The new core is inserted to define a cloister route along the fabric of the historic buildings, with natural conversation niches between its large stone buttresses. Strategic openings illuminate these cloister spaces with intimate natural lighting.

The large multi-purpose hall is suitable for various activities and events including eating and community learning. Very different group and privacy requirements informed the design of the various spaces. The main hall can be sub-divided into two smaller spaces and is connected to a semi commercial

kitchen and a service core comprising WCs and showers, staff office and storage.

The centre was one of the winners of the 2020 Hackney Design Awards. The judges commented: 'The new façade emphasises the grand scale of the volume; set against views towards the stained glass vestry window this combination creates a series of welcoming, inclusive and intimate spaces'.

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# Christchurch Estate By Laurie Elks\*

As many *Spaces* readers know, our current government has something of a ‘thing’ about planning, and a conviction that relaxing controls will somehow unharness the country’s economic dynamism. To this end it passed regulations in 2020<sup>1</sup> designed to permit owners to install roof extensions ‘up to two storeys’ generally avoiding normal planning rules. There is a provision that local planning authorities must give prior approval to confirm that the detailed provisions of the regulations are satisfied.

The reach of these new regulations has been tested in a recent application to add an additional roof storey to a maisonette, part of an unlisted terrace in St Agnes Close on the Christchurch Estate beside Victoria Park. The estate was designed for the Crown Estate by the architect John Spence and built in the 1970s.

Spence has become a minor cult celebrity among housing architects and Christchurch Estate is widely considered to be the finest modern housing estate in Hackney. It is an assembly of squares, terraces and intimate spaces skilfully combining traditional elements such as stock brick with restrained innovations including the extensive use of aluminium windows and roofs, and melded by superb landscaping. Much beloved by its residents, its architectural integrity has been protected by covenants taken by the Crown Estate which has ensured that the estate, and also the superb adjoining streets – Victoria Park Road and Gore Road – have been free of piecemeal and discordant development. It sits on the edge of two conservation areas. The estate is partly locally listed and the Twentieth Century Society has advocated designating the entire estate as a Conservation Area.

The sought-after roof extension would stand out in an unaltered row of maisonettes and disrupt the streetscape of Victoria Park Road and the integrity of the estate. If allowed, it would also open the way to numerous similar applications. The balance of local sentiment was shown by 46 letters of objection and the Hackney Society and the Twentieth Century Society both made submissions against giving prior approval.

Hackney planners have taken a principled stand in declining prior approval. They have taken the point that that the proposed additional floor ‘appears as a pop up’ which disrupts the composition of the terrace and also the ‘wider picture of a planned and harmonious development’ as well as intruding on the setting of the adjacent Conservation Area. The planning officer’s instructive report can be viewed on the Hackney Planning Portal under reference 2021/0950.

Due to possible ambiguities in the regulations, this may not be the end of the story and an appeal is possible. The picture is also unfortunately clouded by the somewhat ambiguous position of the Peabody Estate which had taken over the Crown Estate’s properties and has so far resisted giving firm assurances that it will enforce the covenants previously taken by the Crown Estate.

Nevertheless, this is a welcome decision taken by Hackney planners. Local architect Dr Patrick Lynch, who is writing a book about Spence, has commented:

‘We’re very lucky to have such a coherent and intricate example of the humanist art of architecture in Hackney. It can cope with sympathetic re-calibration from similarly sensitive architects, but is also terribly vulnerable from Permissive Design regulation.’

We hope that Hackney Council will keep up the good work.

We hope to arrange a visit to Christchurch Estate, led by Patrick Lynch, attendant on the publication of his book in 2022.



<sup>1</sup> The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) (Amendment) (No2) Order 2020

# The Laburnum Mosaics and the Legacy of Freeform Arts in Hackney

By Brian Longman

If you pass along the Regent's Canal towpath through Hackney, you may have noticed, partly hidden in the undergrowth on Haggerston Bridge, a large mosaic mural. The mural is a life-size laburnum tree with a scroll at its base that reads 'Laburnum School' and 'Miss Hewlett 1958-1982' – a dedication to the long-serving and much-loved infants' headmistress at Laburnum Primary School which once stood on the opposite side of the canal (the school was demolished in 2006 and replaced with the Bridge Academy).

Accompanying the tree is a series of large oval-shaped mosaic artworks mounted along the canal towpath wall depicting children's faces and the narrowboat 'Opportunity' (owned by the nearby Laburnum Boat Club). Some of the artwork has been vandalised, painted over or ruined, but much still survives and is in good condition. The vibrant artwork was created in the mid-1980s by Freeform Arts in collaboration with pupils of Laburnum School and the faces of the children in the mosaics are self-portraits.

Freeform was set up in Newham and moved base to Dalston in 1973. In the 1980s it became Freeform Arts Trust and had over 30 artists working nationwide with much of the work funded by Grant Aid and commissions. Freeform's mission was 'to find opportunities to work with local people and do imaginative things'. Its work brightened up dull spaces, dead areas and dark end walls on council estates, mostly murals, but also some sculptures (notably the flower sellers and sheep on London Fields). In 1982 Freeform produced four artworks in Hackney that were funded by Hackney Council, three of these remain: The Island Evering Road, Daubeney Road Garages and Snake Park Haggerston.

The Island mural has been the subject of a campaign by local residents who want it listed. It is a huge sparkling mural in open view. However like the Laburnum murals some of Freeform's real gems lie undetected, hidden away by 40 years of unkempt climbing shrubs. Surely they deserve to be revealed, restored, and on show again to a new generation of communities reminding them of what is possible when they come together to enhance their local surroundings.

## Note

In 2007 Hackney Council Conservation did an appraisal of the Regent's Canal towpath stating 'During the 1980s Laburnum schoolchildren worked with Freeform Arts on a public art project that created extensive mosaics which still embellish the canal walls of this stretch of the canal. Unfortunately graffiti and vandalism have damaged many of the plaques and a restoration or removal programme is now needed if they are to contribute to the overall nature of the conservation area'.



*Top image:* Historic photo of Laburnum schoolchildren aboard a narrowboat with the Laburnum tree mosaic resplendent on Haggerston Bridge in the background © Jim Armstrong

*Middle image:* Example of the Regent's Canal towpath mosaic with the self-portrait faces of Laburnum School pupils

*Bottom image:* 'Opportunity' narrowboat mosaic in very good condition, but covered by foliage

## CAAC Volunteers Wanted

If you are interested in heritage and conservation issues in the built environment and can volunteer a couple of hours or so every month, you might consider joining one of Hackney's six Conservation Areas Advisory Committees (CAACs), which advise the Council on planning issues and applications within the borough's conservation areas.

The six groups cover Shoreditch, Kingsland, Dalston, Stoke Newington, Clapton and Central & South Hackney.

Professional experience in an urban design, architecture or heritage field is not essential, but is welcomed.

For further information visit <http://hackney.hk/caac> or contact: Matt Payne, Conservation, Urban Design & Sustainability Team. Tel 020 8356 8106 or email [matt.payne@hackney.gov.uk](mailto:matt.payne@hackney.gov.uk) or one of the CAACs directly.

## Noticeboard

### Museum of the Home



The Museum of the Home, formerly known as the Geffrye Museum, reopened on 12 June 2021 after redevelopment. Wright & Wright Architects have created more space for exhibitions, events and collections. A new library and study space will open in September 2021; it will have up to 12 pre-bookable spaces. The museum also has an informal reading space and a street-facing café. Protestors have demonstrated against the museum's decision to retain a statue of Robert Geffrye above the entrance; Geffrye had made some of his money from the transatlantic slave trade.

### Newington Green Meeting House



With support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Newington Green Meeting House has undergone a major renovation. It has been transformed into a fully-accessible, free heritage space. The building has now been taken off Historic England's at-risk register

### Temporary Snoozebox

Hackney Council has given temporary five-year permission for a Snoozebox development in Haggerston. The new hotel and office complex will be built of shipping containers.

### An Viet Foundation Archive

The largest known archive of British/Vietnamese history has been saved from destruction thanks to intervention by Hackney Chinese Community Services and Hackney Council. The documents, which were stored in An Viet House on Englefield Road, will receive emergency conservation treatment. They include rare



self-published poetry and biographies, papers documenting the work of the An Viet Foundation and posters produced to promote Vietnamese events.

### Garden of Earthly Delights

A community garden is to be relocated to make way for a new entrance to Hackney Central station. The Garden of Earthly Delights, which was created by Extinction Rebellion Hackney, will move from 231-237 Graham Road to 161 Graham Road.

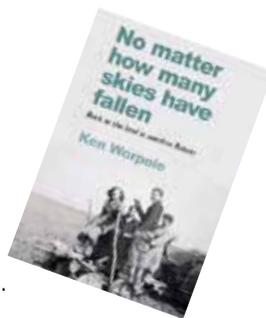
### Renaming of Cassland Road Gardens

Cassland Road Gardens is to be renamed Kit Crowley Gardens in memory of Kathleen 'Kit' Crowley, a popular member of the community who died in 2018. The street had been named after John Cass, director of the Royal African Company, which was involved in slavery. The renaming follows a vote by local residents.

## Publications

### *No Matter How Many Skies Have Fallen:*

*Back to the Land in Wartime Britain* by Hackney writer Ken Worpole tells the story of Frating Hall Farm, a community set up by pacifists in Essex in 1943. One of its volunteers and supporters was the opera singer Charles Craig (1919-97), who was born in Hackney and practised his singing on Hackney Marshes. He became the lead tenor at Covent Garden and often stood in for Placido Domingo. Little Toller Books, £14.



### *One Hundred Years: Portraits of a Community Aged 0-100*

by Jenny Lewis is a collection of 101 portraits and stories of Hackney residents at every age from birth to 100. Hoxton Mini-Press, £17.95.

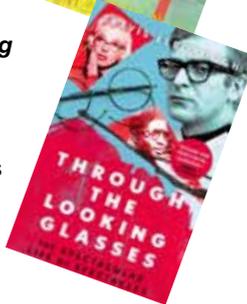


*Common Ground* by Stoke Newington novelist Naomi Ishiguro is a story of friendship across classes and cultures. Tinder Press, £16.99.



### *Through the Looking Glasses: The Spectacular Life of Spectacles*

by Hackney author Travis Elborough traces the history of glasses. Little, Brown, £16.99.



*N-Zine!* is a forthcoming poetry and flash fiction publication to showcase writing from Hackney and Islington. The deadline for the first issue is 15 August 2021 (contact [n-zine@new-unity.org](mailto:n-zine@new-unity.org)).

### *Life Under Lockdown, Mehetabel Road and Isabella Road, Hackney 2020*

by Eithne Nightingale documents the lived experience of 45 households on two adjoining streets and the nearby estate in Hackney between mid-March and mid-June 2020. UEL Archives, £25; available from Pages of Hackney.

## Hackney Society Events

As the future course of the Covid pandemic remains uncertain, we are still presenting events online for the time being. 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.

### AGM – date for the diary

Wednesday 22 September 2021, 7.00pm  
Newington Green Meeting House.  
Further details will be posted on the website.

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

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