



THE HACKNEY SOCIETY

# SPACES 2008

News and views about Hackney's built environment

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## Clapton Cinematograph Theatre

By Julia Lafferty



**Just opposite Clapton Pond is the former Palace Pavilion nightclub – a blot on the local landscape for a number of years due not only to the colour scheme of purple and black favoured by the nightclub owner, but also as a place which attracted a series of shootings and knife attacks both within the club and in its immediate vicinity.**

After years of campaigning, the local community finally obtained the support of Hackney Council and the Police in having the licence of the nightclub withdrawn, a decision upheld by the courts on appeal in January 2007. Since then the future of this former cinema has become uncertain with the threat of demolition and redevelopment on the horizon. At the beginning of 2007 a friends group was established with the aim of restoring the building and bringing it back into use as a cinema.

The building's 1930s frontage hides the facade of the old cinema, the Clapton Cinematograph Theatre, which is due to celebrate its centenary year in 2010.

The building was designed by George Duckworth, who was also the architect of the now demolished King's Picture Palace in Kensal Rise. In its early days it combined live music performances with one-reel silent films. A 1912 poster advertising the cinema announces 'A splendid Edison Drama', entitled 'At the Point of the Sword' together with 'The Famous Banjoists – Miss Hilda Barry and Mr Harry Stuart.'

The Clapton Cinematograph Theatre was one of a number of early cinemas which were established in response to the Cinematograph Act of 1909, which required film presentations to be shown under controlled and licensed safety conditions, due to the highly inflammable nature of nitrate film. Among other cinemas of a similar age are the Electric Cinema in Portobello Road and the Phoenix Cinema in East Finchley, both Grade II listed.

Early promotional material for the cinema shows a highly decorated facade, to reflect the decorative mouldings on the adjacent public house, the White Hart. The cinema's original facade is substantially hidden behind the later additional frontage, but some of the cinema's original mouldings may be seen (though painted black) on the

part of the original facade still visible. With an elaborately decorated barrel-vaulted ceiling, the interior of the cinema originally seated around 750 on one floor, though this was later reduced to 700 when it became the Kenning Hall Cinema in 1919. In the late 1930s the cinema was taken over by the Odeon. This takeover was with a view to demolishing the building and replacing it with a modern Odeon-style theatre.

Due to the Second World War, the redevelopment never happened and the Kenning Hall soldiered on, remaining one of the Odeon's lesser cinemas. The Kenning Hall was leased out to an independent operator D Mistlin from March 1958, but finally closed in June 1979. It lay empty and unused until 1983 when it was converted into the nightclub Dougies, later to be renamed the Palace Pavilion.

*If you are interested in learning more about the Friends of Clapton Cinematograph Theatre, you can visit the Friends' website at [www.saveourcinema.org](http://www.saveourcinema.org) or contact the Secretary Julia Lafferty at [saveourcinema@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:saveourcinema@hotmail.co.uk)*

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**We currently have 193 members, but only 50% of you have given us your email address and only 10% have opted for paperless membership. Help us to reduce printing and postage costs by giving us an email address – we can still send your copy of Spaces by post, but we can keep you up-to-date with other news and events by email.**

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# Post-war buildings in Hackney: Part I

## Woodberry Down By Suzanne Waters

### Woodberry Down Estate

In 1945, this area at 64 acres was the largest plot in London to be earmarked for redevelopment by the London County Council (LCC). Owing to bomb damage, re-housing was a priority after the Second World War. The LCC already had an active policy of slum clearance and moving people out of the congested inner city areas to the suburbs, and in the late 1930s this part of Stoke Newington was deemed suburbia. An estate of housing had been planned on a site overlooking the reservoirs near to the New River in 1936 and a scheme prepared, but the impact of the war changed much of the thinking on housing provision. The most important document to inform the provision of public housing after the Second World War was the *County of London Plan 1943*, written by the town-planner Sir Patrick Abercrombie and the architect to the London County Council, J H Forshaw. Covering the area of inner London – the area administered by the LCC, key problems, such as traffic congestion, poor housing and the inadequate provision of open space were addressed.

London was to be divided into a series of 'zones', in which a higher density of housing would be allocated to the central area and a lower density to the outer fringes. One of the principal recommendations of the *County of*

*London Plan* was to accommodate for different sizes of family by having a mixed layout of houses and flats. New housing would also follow the continental model of a mixture of apartment blocks and houses, of high and low rise.

Woodberry Down is the result of this revised thinking. Forshaw designed a series of eight-storey blocks set in parallel lines orientated north-south with the facades facing east-west, so that all rooms received sunshine throughout the day, and placed far enough apart to allow for plenty of light and air. Mixed in with these were lower more traditional style brick-built 'walk-up' blocks of five storeys, with long balconies and hipped roofs. There were also three-storey blocks with maisonettes and two-storey blocks of flats for older people. The eight-storey blocks were built of concrete, as steel and brick were in short supply after the war. Architectural expression was achieved through a series of breaks and projections in the larger blocks, with their deep eaves and cantilevered balconies on the upper floors giving them a continental flavour. Originally they were painted in a cream and light blue called 'Tyrolean roughcast'.

Accommodation was generous, each block providing 79 flats, ranging from four-bedroom to one-bedroom, all with a separate bathroom and WC and built-in



cupboards in the bedrooms. The first two blocks Needwood and Nicholls House (completed 1949) were centrally heated, albeit with one radiator in the largest bedroom and the living room, plus an electric fire. But when the second pair of tall blocks were built in 1952-53, owing to a cut in the housing subsidy coal fires were used instead.

Although the flats were criticised at their completion by some members of the architectural profession, who considered them 'deplorable' and launched a campaign against the scheme, their significance is architectural and social. Firstly, they represent a transition between the design of public housing by the LCC in the 1930s and the ideas for urban housing expressed by the authors of the *County of London Plan*. Secondly, Woodberry Down benefited from the community-orientated planning approach that had been adopted by the LCC from the 1930s onwards.

### The John Scott Health Centre

In keeping with the community-orientated planning approach was the provision of health care and education on the new estates. The John Scott Health Centre was the first comprehensive health centre to be designed by the LCC after the Second World War. In 1946, under the National Health Act, the Council was given responsibility for building health centres in its area. It was also given responsibility for the provision of maternity and child services (the education authority was already providing school health clinics). With these requirements in mind, the Council decided the best solution was to house all the above facilities in one building. Plans were drawn up by W J Durnford and A E Miller from the Architect's Department in conjunction with the Council's doctor, John A Scott. Surprisingly, the British Medical Association wasn't that keen on a health centre programme and it wasn't until the Chairman of the LCC Health Committee visited the Ministry of Health personally that Woodberry Down was given the go-ahead. On 16 March 1949, Aneurin Bevan (architect of the National Health Service) turned the first

sod on the site, the first ceremony of its kind in the country.

Owing to shortages of steel, the centre took three years to build. It was finally opened in October 1952 by the MP Somerville Hastings. *The Times* described it as 'a pleasant two-storey building in light brick embracing three sides of a square' with 'attractive special features', such as 'the toddlers' playground in the child welfare unit, the combined lecture hall and demonstration kitchen, the workshop for dental technicians, and the staff common rooms and restaurant'.

Health centres were not a new phenomenon. One of the most famous was the Finsbury Health Centre, designed by Berthold Lubetkin for the Metropolitan Borough of Finsbury (now part of Islington) in 1938. But Woodberry Down was the first one by the LCC. Its architects had been specialising in hospital work from the 1930s. Their design is more classical than modern, but quite spare and utilitarian. Modernist touches can be seen in the use of glass bricks in the side elevation, oval columns in the entrance hall and the lightness of the interior. There



were also some luxurious touches, the wood panelled entrance to the doctors' practice and the stone fireplace in their common room.

What was innovative at Woodberry Down was the scope and arrangement of the facilities. The site was large enough at one and a half acres to accommodate everything on two floors. In all the health centre contained five medical units. On the ground floor were the GP surgeries, maternity and child welfare clinics. On the first floor were the dental surgeries and a Remedial Exercises and Child Guidance Unit. Comparing this health centre of 60 years ago, and the proposals for the new 'polyclinics' under the NHS, should I hope ensure its future and remind politicians of the phrase 'nothing new under the sun'.



## CLR James Library By Monica Blake

The CLR James Library in Dalston Lane was built between 1957 and 1959 by the architects Burley & Moore in association with G L Downing, Hackney's Borough Engineer and Surveyor.

This library, which is built of exposed concrete and glass, replaced one destroyed during the Second World War.

The original Dalston Library dated from 1913 and was located in Forest Road. It was an imposing building with a tower and domed central hall. Funded by the philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, it was the work of the architect Edwin Cooper, who also built Clapton Library and the original Homerton Library (which is now Chats Palace). On 4 January 1945, Dalston Library was hit by a V2 rocket. Two library assistants – Harry George Sparks and Gertrude May Parish – were among the dead. They are commemorated in a plaque above the photocopier in the CLR James Library.

War damage payments covered some two-thirds of the cost of the new library, which was to be built at the junction of Woodland Street and Dalston Lane. This location

posed potential problems of noise and dust. The library was built back from the road and made use of a plenum system of ventilation, with the trunking housed in bookshelf units. Large unit windows of fixed double glazing not only provided a maximum of natural light but also excluded much dust and noise.

At the planning stage, the designers sought to avoid any institutional atmosphere by endeavouring to create a feeling of exhilaration and friendliness solely by the use of space, light and accent on bright colours.

The library was built with the adult library on the ground floor and the children's library above. The children's entrance was in Woodland Street between the main building and a single-storey wing containing the staff rooms and a meeting room with film-projection facilities. At the back is a small garden.

On 18 July 1959, the library was opened by the Labour MP Anthony Greenwood. Although a plaque to mark this was discussed by the library committee of the day, it is not in evidence now.



Initially known as Dalston Branch Library, it became the CLR James Library on 29 March 1985. A renaming plaque displays a 1960 quote from the distinguished writer from Trinidad: 'Mankind has today reached a stage where action is conditioned by thought and thought by action to a degree unprecedented in previous ages'.

The proposed development next to the new tube station at Dalston will provide a new library to replace CLR James Library as well as a new community Archives Service.

## Hackney Stories Week, 2 to 10 August

**The Hackney Society and Hackney Archives have joined forces to organise a series of FREE events for all the family, as part of Hackney Heritage week.**

### Heart of Hackney • Tuesday 5 August 2008, 7pm

Walk with Mary Sewell, Blue Badge Guide.

#### Starting at Hackney Museum

It will take in some historic buildings such as the Hackney Empire, St John-at-Hackney Church and the Round Chapel. The walk will end at Sutton House.

### Great Buildings of Hackney • Tuesday 5 to Friday 9 August 2008

Exhibition at Hackney Archives, free.

**Opening times:** Tues, Weds and Thurs 9.30am to 1pm & 2pm to 5.30pm; Fri 9.30am to 1pm; Tues late night opening to 8.00pm

An exhibition inspired by Hackney's great buildings - including creative writing by young people and their families and material from the collections at Hackney Archives.

### How to Research Buildings • Saturday 9 August 2008

Workshop at Hackney Archives, free.

**Times:** 2.00pm to 4.30pm

Ever wondered who designed your house, when it was built, or who may have lived there? This workshop will help you to uncover the history of buildings in the borough, using the resources at Hackney Archives.

### Every Great Building Has a Story to Tell • Saturday 9 August 2008

Storytelling at Hackney Archives, free.

**Times:** 2:00pm to 3:00pm and 3:30pm to 4:30pm

Two storytelling events for families with children aged 7 years and up.

Come and hear stories about Hackney's great buildings. Josh Gaillemin, a storyteller will tell you of the meeting between three illustrious buildings. You will then have the opportunity to imagine and create your own stories. Adults to be accompanied by child. To book a place contact Lisa Rigg on 020 8806 4003 or email [lisa.rigg@btinternet.com](mailto:lisa.rigg@btinternet.com). **For complete listings log on to [www.hackneyheritage.co.uk](http://www.hackneyheritage.co.uk)**

## Modern, restored, forgotten, ignored:

### 40 Buildings to mark 40 years

In collaboration with the Hackney Gazette, we are looking for nominations for our new community publication *Modern, Restored, Forgotten and Ignored: 40 Buildings to Mark 40 Years of The Hackney Society*. Over the next two months we will be profiling some buildings that we think should be included, but we would also like to hear from you. What is your favourite modern building? What is the best restoration of a historic building? What building needs some love and attention? What buildings have been lost, but not forgotten? And what is Hackney's greatest building?

A Judging Panel will then shortlist the nominations which will then be put to a public vote in early Autumn 2008. Everyone who nominates a building will be entered into a prize draw where they'll have a chance of winning a digital camera, one-year membership of the Hackney Society, and a full set of our publications.

We are also looking for contributors to help write the book. Contact Lisa on 020 8806 4003 or email [lisa@hackneysociety.org](mailto:lisa@hackneysociety.org)

# Building watch: dereliction of duty on Dalston Lane

By Marie Murray

If you have recently walked along Dalston Lane you can't have failed to notice the neglected terrace of Georgian houses and Victorian shops near the corner of Queensbridge Road.

How this once fine terrace was reduced to such a state of dereliction is a shameful story of municipal neglect and developer speculation. But it is also the tale of how a community got organised to fight to regenerate their neighbourhood.

Sixteen of the buildings came into Hackney Council's ownership in the early eighties. At the time, they were part of a thriving terrace of businesses, including restaurants, music and record shops, and the 'Star Bakery', which had been baking bread on the site since the 1940s.

By the early 1990s, leases had not been renewed by the Council and shops and houses were boarded up. The tenants who remained after their leases expired were left in an increasingly vulnerable situation.

When it was announced in 2002 that the buildings were to be sold individually at auction, a number of tenants including 'Sound & Music' made written offers which exceeded the auction guide prices. However, against Council policy, which was to offer properties for sale individually to its tenants, all of the buildings were then offered only as one lot. The result was that the terrace was sold for £1.8 million to a property company.

The new owners wasted no time in seeking increases in rent, terminating tenancies and applying for planning permission to demolish the terrace. Permission was refused on a number of grounds including sub-standard designs and the loss of heritage.

In 2004, in an attempt to prevent any further neglect, OPEN Dalston – an organisation made up of local people – called in English Heritage who advised that the terrace should be locally listed or designated a conservation area.



OPEN's campaign led to the Council forming the Dalston Lane (West) Conservation Area. But despite its new conservation status, fires and deliberate structural damage visited more destruction on the terrace. Unable to run their shops in such an environment, some businesses gave up the struggle. Others were evicted on the grounds that the new owners intended to undertake works.

Following an inquiry into the circumstances of the terrace sell-off, the Council resolved to begin work immediately to assess the use of its enforcement and compulsory purchase powers to regenerate the terrace.

In 2007 the Council began to carry out repairs on three of the buildings, under the 'Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990', which aims to make buildings which are in serious disrepair weather-tight and structurally sound. The 'urgent works' carried out have to date cost Hackney Council £400,000.

The Council have said that they would prefer to negotiate to buy back the buildings from the owners rather than pursue a Compulsory Purchase Order, which can take up to two years. To date the owners have not responded to Council invitations to negotiate a solution. For either route to proceed, endorsement is now needed from the Council's Cabinet.

As the deterioration persists, the community continues to press for urgent political commitment for the terrace to be bought by the Council and for fair offers to be made to the remaining tenants so that regeneration can begin and the blight to Dalston's environment can be lifted. For further information on OPEN's campaign contact: [info@opendalston.net](mailto:info@opendalston.net).

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

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## Hackney Society events

**2012 Discovering the White Lodge**  
Saturday 5 July 2008, 11am

Site visit with Kate Sutton, Community Archaeologist (MoLAS)

**Meet at the East Marsh car park on Homerton Road, E9**

Come and find out about the Community Dig on East Marsh that aims to find the secrets of the White Lodge – a 17th century building.

### Hackney Hike

**Saturday 12 July 2008, 10.30am**

Walk with Suzanne Waters from the Twentieth Century Society

**Meet outside Manor House Underground Station.**

This joint event will focus on Hackney's post-war housing. We will start by looking at the Woodberry Down Estate. We will also see the Somerford Estate, some private housing, and we will also visit two churches by Cachemaille Day and Sir Charles Reilly. Cost: £12. Members only.

### Regent's Canal

**Monday 28 July, 7pm**

Walk with Dr Ann Robey, Architectural Historian.

**Meet at the Dove Pub, 24-28 Broadway Market, London E8 4QJ**

Starting at the Dove this walk follows the towpath along the canal ending at the Narrow Boat, a canal-side pub just over the border in Islington. This walk will explore the historic landscape of this rapidly changing area.

Most events are free to Hackney Society members and £5 to non-members. For special and joint events there may be a charge for members (see individual listings). To avoid disappointment please contact Lisa Rigg on 020 8806 4003 or email [lisa.rigg@btinternet.com](mailto:lisa.rigg@btinternet.com) to book a place.

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