



THE HACKNEY SOCIETY

# SPACES 2023

News and views about Hackney's built environment

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## 'That House on Mare Street' New Beginning for 195 Mare Street



© Elizabeth Prochaska

By Elizabeth Prochaska

**After decades of neglect - documented with despair by the Hackney Society - 195 Mare Street finally has a bright future ahead of it. A local family have bought the house and are planning to restore it to its original use as a single house, with a community arts space on the lower ground floor.**

Built in 1697, 195 Mare Street is one of Hackney's oldest buildings, and its second oldest house after Sutton House. It was originally the country residence of the Dolins family, wealthy Dutch merchants who descended from glass manufacturers. Between 1809 - 1852, Thomas Wilson, the MP for the City of London, lived in the house with his family. Wilson was known for representing the interests of slave owners during the debates over the abolition of slavery in the 1820s. In 1860, as Hackney industrialised and Mare Street was no longer a desirable place for a country house, it was sold to the Elizabeth Fry Society, which had established a refuge for women

leaving prison at the Triangle in 1849. In search of more space, they moved the Refuge to 195 Mare Street, where up to 30 women and girls stayed at a time. Over the next 50 years, thousands of former female prisoners, some as young as 11, resided at the house and learnt the skills needed for domestic service. In 1913, the house became the New Lansdowne Liberal and Radical Club, a working men's club. By 2004, the club was suffering declining membership and could no longer afford to maintain the house. It passed through the hands of multiple developers, who allowed it to become derelict. Squatters moved in, running community events and holding notorious squat parties. It was bought by a local property developer in 2018, who demolished the bar and music hall on the land at the back of the house to build flats and put the house on the market with planning permission for office use.

The new owners bought the house in September 2022. They worked with conservation architect, Jon Bolter, who wrote a history of the house in Hackney

History in 1997, to submit a planning application for sui generis residential and community use. The application was granted by Hackney Council in March. The owners have appointed Lynch Architects, who are based in Hackney, to undertake a sensitive restoration, preserving as much of the original fabric of the house as possible. Remarkable features survive inside the building, including multiple panels of historic walnut wood graining, a Georgian cast iron range and some fragments of Georgian hand-painted wallpaper.

While waiting for planning permission, the owners donated the space to local artists to use for studio and exhibition space. The house has been full of life, with a very well-attended visit from the Hackney Society, a weekly Make Club by local artist, Emily Tracy, inviting children to imagine stories about its former inhabitants, and a first exhibition by Sam Hodge, who made work with bricks from the house. The temporary

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## New Beginning for 195 Mare Street *continued*

hoarding outside the house has been painted by Claire Ward-Thornton with ferns taken from the Loddiges catalogue, to reflect Mare Street's botanical history. In July, members of Studio Upstairs, the Dalston art therapy charity, will be exhibiting their work in the house.

The house will close while building works start in the Autumn and reopen with a dedicated community arts space in around 18 months' time.

Follow progress on Instagram – Search for – [that\\_house\\_on\\_mare\\_street](#), or on the website [www.195marestreet.co.uk](http://www.195marestreet.co.uk).



## Visit to Shoreditch Church

By Philip Whitehead, Licensed Lay Minister

**On 30<sup>th</sup> April members of the Hackney Society assembled on the forecourt of St Leonard's Church, Shoreditch for a guided tour of the building.**

St Leonard's Church stands on possibly the oldest site of continuous Christian worship in England. The site is at the convergence of several Roman roads and adjacent to the (now underground) Walbrook River; there was a Roman military settlement here from c45BC. It is likely that the first Christians in England were Roman soldiers, and it is possible that worship was already taking place at Shoreditch at the time St Luke wrote his gospel.

The current church building dates from 1740, and it was designed by George Dance the Elder. Although its light and graceful style is praised today, it was criticised at the time, being considered "feminine" contrasting as it did with the then popular Hawksmoor style of which an example is nearby Christ Church Spitalfields. The current building replaced the 12<sup>th</sup> century church which became structurally dangerous in the early years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – a collapse occurred in 1716 during morning service. The church forecourt was the site of an architectural dig undertaken by MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) in 2018 which sought to investigate the remains of the Medieval church.

The group moved inside the building, which was rebuilt at the turn of the (present) century. The galleries, which were removed in 1870, when the church was "restored" by Butterfield, were structurally important, and needed to be replaced; this was done in 2000.

Of note in the main church building are

1. The font, carved from a single piece of marble, put in place when the new church was built, and its cover (dating from 1914)



with a carving of a dove, representing the Holy Spirit.

2. A portrait of George Dance the Elder.

3. The stained glass window behind the communion table. At first sight it appears ancient but a figure in 20<sup>th</sup> century dress reveals that it was installed in the 1950s, replacing the original window which, although it survived the Blitz, was destroyed towards the end of WW2 by a flying bomb.

4. The wooden dole cupboards, which held bread for dispensing to the poor.

The group climbed the stairs in the southwest corner of the church, past the Burbage memorial, commemorating those of the Elizabethan theatrical fraternity who are buried in the medieval church, and viewed the galleries. At the west end, between the two galleries, stands the Bridge Organ. Not currently operational, it may well have been played by Handel.

The group then split to climb the spiral staircase leading from the porch to the bell tower. 13 bells are hung for change ringing in the bell tower and are regularly



rung by members of the Royal Society of Cumberland Youths. They were recast in 2000 by John Taylor and Co of Loughborough.

Beneath the church is a twelfth century crypt. The aspiration for the future is to reopen it in such a way that it will be possible to walk the floor that Shakespeare walked and maybe see the last resting place of those early English actors. However the crypt is not currently in a condition suitable for visiting. The group therefore reassembled in the church building and viewed a slide show of photographs of the crypt in its current state.

# Ash Grove Bus Garage

By Nick Perry

At the borough's southern boundary with the Regents Canal, lurking between Sheep Lane and the railway viaduct is a rather plain yellow stock-brick wall with two tall, chamfered brick stairwells at the Sheep Lane end where a protruding smoked glass structure can be seen over the top of a large vehicular entrance to the building.

Ash Grove Bus Garage, first opened in 1981 as one of five new bus garages to come out of London Transport Executive's (LTE) architects department. Keith Makinson and Barrie Aldridge designed this, the first new bus garage for London in 27 years. Ash Grove's contemporaries (Norbiton, Uxbridge, Plumstead and Westbourne Park) are quite different in form and certainly not as bold. That's largely because Ash Grove was surrounded by residential buildings so had to be uniquely low-key – at least from the ground. It's from above that Ash Grove stands out – views easily afforded by a trip on the Overground between Cambridge Heath and London Fields. Anyone familiar with the route will know the extraordinary prismatic glazed roof structure which protects two sets of five perpendicular triangular roof trusses – 48m and 54m in length – whose ends are exposed and delicately balanced on stanchions that peek over the wall on Sheep Lane.

The Hackney Society and Twentieth Century Society think the building is worthy of listing but Historic England do not agree and a decision on listing is currently with the Secretary of State (DCMS) to decide. It would be highly unusual for the SoS not to side with Historic England so we aren't particularly hopeful, but nonetheless the process has uncovered the background to a rather special time in the history of LTE's (now Transport for London - TfL) very notable sponsorship of design and architecture.

The architecture department at LTE came under the leadership of railway architect Sydney Hardy in the mid 1970s. He recruited young designers and architects to help bring back some of the world-class design ethos that Frank Pick and Charles Holden had that had made London Transport famous. Hardy's output included the London Transport Museum in the already-Graded II-listed Covent Garden flower market buildings, and interior designs for the Central Line. Only some of their work saw the light of day, much of it being caught in the crossfire of the political war waged



© Nick Perry



between Margaret Thatcher's government and Ken Livingstone's GLC.

This makes Ash Grove Bus Garage all the more notable and worthy of listing. The site is earmarked for mixed-use redevelopment (with another bus garage being provided in any such development) in Hackney's Local Plan, and a developer has already begun consultation with TfL and the Council on the matter. Whatever the decision on listing it is clear that the site is of architectural and heritage value and will need to be considered carefully in any plans to redevelop the site. It is the Council's intention to develop a more detailed 'Planning Brief' for the site and the Hackney Society Planning Group will be offering its input on that emerging policy.



Section thru covered bus park

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## Noticeboard

### Talks at the Tower

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Doors open at 7, talks start at 7.30

St Augustine's Tower, on the Narroway, Mare Street will host a series of evening talks on Hackney history. The annual event resumes after a break caused by the Covid pandemic.

Each talk costs £5 plus booking fee, refreshments will be provided. The remaining talks are:-

6<sup>th</sup> July **'Mare Street, the Heart of Hackney'** – Carolyn Clark

13<sup>th</sup> July **'Who Lies Beneath?'** (Stories of those buried at St Augustine's Churchyard) – Sue Doe

Booking is via Eventbrite, search for Hackney Historic Buildings Trust.

### Springfield Park History Walks

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A series of free (but donations welcome) walks led by Julia Lafferty

For dates, please see Eventbrite

**Prehistoric Springfield Park** - from the last Ice Age to the turbulent period of occupation by Roman, Viking and Germanic invaders.

**Industrial Springfield Park** - investigating the local industries which were the basis of the development of Hackney in the 19th and 20th centuries and the factors that contributed to their decline.

**The People of Springfield Park** - offering a glimpse into the life and times of four generations of the Bros family on whose estate the park was created and the role that local people played in the creation of the park in 1905.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/springfield-park-38935633853>

### Award for 98-100 De Beauvoir Road

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The Edwardian industrial buildings with the 'Collins & Hayes' ghost sign, have been transformed into workspaces and have won 'Best Workplace (£5-10 million)' in the Architects Journal Retrofit awards. The buildings have retained many original features and have been designed by Henley Halebrown.

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## Publications

Those interested in the bicentenary of John Passmore Edwards's birth may be interested in Dean Evan's book and website about the philanthropist. The book can be purchased directly from the publishers at the original price of £20.

### Funding the ladder: the Passmore Edwards legacy

2011, Francis Boutle Publishers

[thepassmoreedwardslegacy.org.uk](http://thepassmoreedwardslegacy.org.uk)

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## Hackney Society Events

### Dates for the Diary

**July 29<sup>th</sup>**, morning start, afternoon finish (bring a picnic). Walk the Hackney Brook.

**September 20<sup>th</sup>**, evening. Visit to Perseverance Works and AGM.

Booking pages are announced in various ways: follow Hackney Society on Eventbrite, watch out for *Spacelets* emails (sign up on the web); keep an eye on our web site [hackneysociety.org](http://hackneysociety.org). Tickets cost £5 for members and £10 for guests (plus Eventbrite booking fee.)

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