



THE  
**VICTORIAN VILLAS**  
OF  
**HACKNEY**

BY  
MICHAEL HUNTER

A HACKNEY SOCIETY PUBLICATION





THE  
**VICTORIAN VILLAS**  
OF  
**HACKNEY**

BY  
MICHAEL HUNTER

A HACKNEY SOCIETY PUBLICATION 1981

**1-3 Meynell Road E9**

This terrace, in a prime position overlooking Well Street Common, was built in 1876. The houses are double-fronted and their prominent decorative features include the porticoed porch to the nearest house and the pedimented windows beyond.





# Contents

Introduction	5
The growth of Victorian Hackney	9
The developers	13
The first inhabitants	23
The houses	31
Details, inside and out	37
The streets	51
The transformation of Hackney	59
How to find out more	63
Ways in which you can help	69
Further reading	71
Glossary	72

## **Cover illustration**

Front: Doorcase at 92 Graham Road E8, part of a terrace dating from 1861 (see below, pages 46-47)

Back: 28-29 Meynell Crescent E9. The building application for this typical late Victorian terrace was approved in November 1894.

## IMPORTANT NOTE

THIS ELECTRONIC EDITION is a produced from a scan of the original publication and is provided for historical, personal and educational use only. A substantial amount of time has elapsed since publication and some information in this book may no longer be valid or sensible. No warranty is provided nor can any responsibility be taken for any reliance upon it. For further information or to purchase an original copy email [bookorders@hackneysociety.org](mailto:bookorders@hackneysociety.org)



**Fairford Villas**

**174-6 Richmond Road E8**

This unusually ornate pair of semi-detached houses of the 1850s illustrates well the inventiveness of builders adapting the 'Italianate' style, as mentioned on pages 41 and 43, below. Note how a feature has been made of the attic storey, with prominent eaves and elaborate brackets rising from a string-course (for a glossary of architectural terms see page 72).

# Introduction

Most of the buildings in Hackney are houses and most of the houses are Victorian. This book is about these Victorian houses. It explains who built them, when, why and how, and it also says something about the people for whom they were built. Its illustrations show how well-designed and ingeniously decorated many of the houses were, and how much care was taken about the new suburban environment that they formed. We find these houses and streets interesting and potentially very attractive, and we feel that they merit wider appreciation and enhancement. We hope that after reading this book those who live in and among these houses will understand and appreciate them better. We also hope that residents and others will be encouraged to investigate the history of their own home and street, and guidance is provided at the end of this book on how to do this. Lastly, we want co-operation in recording unusual and historic features of Hackney's Victorian houses – name and date plaques, ironwork, unusual decorations – and we hope that this book will illustrate what we are looking for and will encourage others to draw attention to similar features throughout the Borough.

Michael Hunter  
for the Publications Committee of the Hackney Society

Text and captions by Michael Hunter: copyright © 1981 Michael Hunter  
 Map on page 11 by Israel Renson: copyright © 1981 Israel Renson  
 Photograph on page 41 by John Henry: copyright © 1981 John Henry  
 Photographs on cover and pages 7, 19, 32, 40, 52, 55, 70 by Ian Irving:  
 copyright © 1981 Ian Irving  
 Photographs on pages 17, 24, 50, 54 by Mike Lovelock:  
 copyright © 1981 Mike Lovelock  
 Photographs on pages 4, 39, 45, 46, 47, 64 by Margaret MacDonald:  
 copyright © 1981 Margaret MacDonald  
 Photographs on pages 12, 30 by Rosemary More:  
 copyright © 1981 London Borough of Hackney Planning Department  
 Photographs on pages 2, 49, 57, 68 by Mark Pilkington:  
 copyright © 1981 Mark Pilkington

Thanks are due to the following for permission to reproduce here material in their custody, or of which they hold the copyright:

Centerprise Trust Ltd for the photograph on page 15, from *A Second Look* (1975)  
 Bill Eltham for the auction particulars on page 60  
 The Greater London Council for the diagrams on page 8, from *L.C.C. London Statistics*, 31 (1925-6)  
*The Hackney Gazette* for the extract from the issue of 31 May 1871 on page 22  
 London Borough of Hackney Library Services for the items on pages 20-1, 53, 58, 66  
 The Keeper of Public Records for the extract from the 1871 Census Returns on page 27

The following have also generously assisted in different ways in the writing and production of this book:

William Arnott, Ronnie Barden, David Batchelder, David Bebbington, Victor Belcher, David Coe, Roger Dixon, the staff of the Greater London Council Record Office, Paul Joyce, Philip Kennedy, Alexia Matthews, Angela Norris, Julian Osley, Andrew Sanders, David Sulkin, Amanda Taylor, Claire Tarjan, Stanley Tongue and his staff at Hackney Borough Archives, Mrs M. Willmore.

Designed by Peter Gladwin  
 Printed by Expression Printers Ltd, London N7  
 Reprinted 1984  
 ISBN 0 9506558 1 3

#### **4-14 Bentham Road E9**

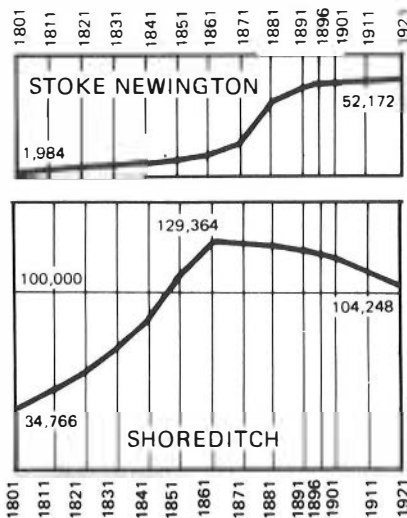
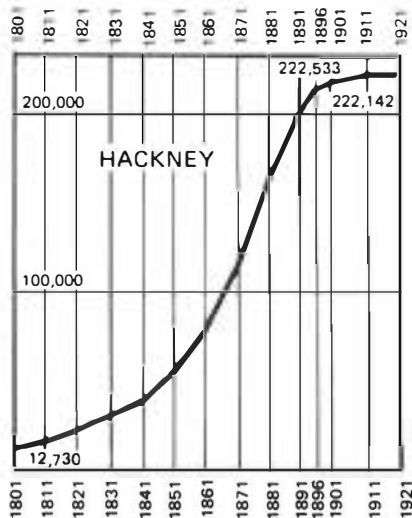
This terrace dates from 1861. Its details mark a transitional point in the shift in fashion from Italianate to Gothic referred to on pages 43 and 45, below, with a continuous cornice at the top of the facade but also with applied mouldings of Gothic type over the first-floor windows. The porches supported on columns are also of an intermediate style.



### THE POPULATION OF HACKNEY, 1801-1921

	Hackney	Shoreditch	Stoke Newington*	Total
1801	12730	34766	1984	49480
1811	16771	43930	2758	63459
1821	22494	52966	3360	77720
1831	31047	68564	4192	103803
1841	37771	83432	5522	126725
1851	53589	109257	6134	168980
1861	76687	129364	11297	217348
1871	115110	127164	17452	259726
1881	163681	126591	37561	327833
1891	199277	124533	47988	371798
1901	219110	118637	51247	388994
1911	222533	111390	50659	384582
1921	222142	104248	52172	378562

\*These figures include the population of the area formerly known as South Hornsey.



# The growth of Victorian Hackney

In 1837, when Queen Victoria ascended the throne, Hackney and Stoke Newington were hardly more than villages. In his *New Picture of London*, the publisher Samuel Leigh explained in a section on the city's 'environs' how 'Hackney is an extensive and populous village, about two miles from Shoreditch church, having for its hamlets, Upper and Lower Clapton, Shacklewell, Dalston, and Homerton'. Though the book first came out in 1818, this statement was no less true when included in new editions in the 1830s than it had been twenty years earlier. A number of large mansions in extensive grounds had been erected in the eighteenth century, and there had also been some 'ribbon development' of terraces and villas along the main roads. This continued in the early nineteenth century, but its scale was tiny and most of the area was still open country, much of it used for pasture, market gardens, nurseries and brickfields.

In 1831 the parish of Hackney was inhabited by only 31,047 people and Stoke Newington by as few as 4,192, though Shoreditch, on the fringes of the City of London, already had a population of 68,564. By 1901, when Queen Victoria died, almost the only fields left were public parks and the total population of Hackney\* had risen to 388,994, most of them living in houses built within the last half century. Details of the rise in population are provided by the table and diagrams on page 8.

When, how, and by what stages had this change occurred? First, let us plot the building up of the area geographically. This will show how suburban development gradually extended further and further outwards in a north-easterly direction from the parts already built up in Islington and Shoreditch, though various local factors ensured that this growth was not wholly uniform. The general process is illustrated by the map on page 11, on which the preponderant date of development of each area is shown by different coloured shading.

The earliest large-scale development began in the 1830s in the area west of Kingsland Road now known as De Beauvoir Town; this continued in the 1840s, while the land immediately east of Kingsland Road was rapidly built up in the same

---

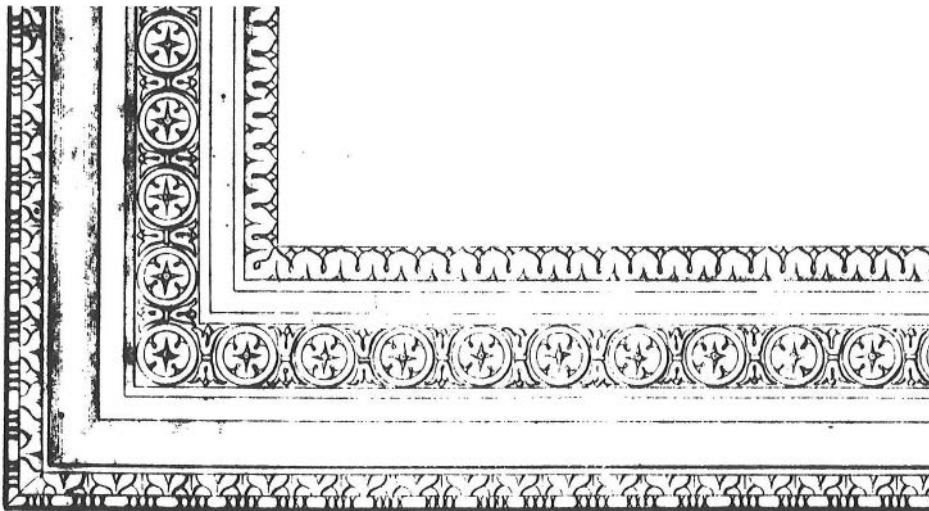
\*Unless an explicit statement is made to the contrary, 'Hackney' refers throughout this book to the area of the present London Borough as established in 1964, including the old Metropolitan Boroughs of Shoreditch and Stoke Newington. Shoreditch was already substantially built up, and most of the comments made here refer only to its northern parts. 'Victorian' normally refers to the reign of Queen Victoria from 1837 to 1901, but the adjective has here been used to include developments that took place shortly after her death.



decade. In the 1850s the 'Mapledene' area between Queensbridge Road and London Fields was laid out and covered with houses, and smaller developments took place in the Shakespeare Walk area of Stoke Newington (at that time partly in the parish of Hornsey) and in the neighbourhood of Morning Lane, though little of the latter now survives. Meanwhile a more traditional ribbon development pushed its way out into other parts of the Borough.

Building activity accelerated in the 1860s, as did the increase in population. Much of South Hackney, north of Victoria Park, was developed at this time, and so was the land north and south of Dalston Lane. Both neighbourhoods were virtually complete by the mid 1870s, and by this time large-scale building operations were under way north of Hackney Downs and east of Lower Clapton Road, where developments in the 1860s had been on a small scale. Numerous streets between Stoke Newington Road and Lower and Upper Clapton Roads and to the east of Lower Clapton Road date from the 1870s, while building now took place on a more significant scale than hitherto to the west of Stoke Newington Road and Stamford Hill in the parish of Stoke Newington.

In the 1880s development moved further north-east towards and across Upper Clapton Road and towards the Lea marshes, while building also continued in Stoke Newington. The last decade of the nineteenth century and the first few years of the twentieth saw the virtual completion of the process by which the Borough was covered with streets of houses, extending the suburban spread to its northern and eastern boundaries and filling in such empty land as was left nearer its centre.



Map of Hackney, with shading to show when large-scale development took place in different parts of the Borough (see Key opposite). Data for this map has been taken from Caleb Turner's *Map of the Parish of Hackney* (1847), from *Stanford's Library Map of London and its Suburbs* (1862) and from Ordnance Survey maps of the area.





**2 Middleton Road E8**

A good specimen of a rather grander than average house, of double-fronted form, in the Italianate style. It probably dates from the 1840s. Note the porticoed porch, the elaborate surrounds to all the windows, and the prominent cornice along the top of the facade.

# The developers

What factors underlay this process? Most obviously, it resulted from the growth of London's population, or, to be more precise, the growth of that part of the population which had the choice of moving from inner city tenements to more spacious and private quarters on the edge of the countryside. The social composition of this class will be examined in a moment, but it comprised only a minority of all of London's inhabitants: the majority of Londoners never had the opportunity to emigrate in this way. As the formerly open spaces nearest to the centre were built up, those next furthest away naturally followed.

Chronologically, the general growth rate of London responded to fluctuations in the Victorian economy as a whole and especially to fluctuations in the building industry. The construction of houses was particularly dependent on capital, which was more easily available at some times than at others. There is, however, more evidence of over-building when capital was common than of under-building when it was scarce. Thus there were peaks in the building trade in 1853, 1867-8, 1880-1 and 1898; there were depressions in 1847-8, 1857, 1871-2 and 1891. These changes are reflected in Hackney as they are throughout the London suburbs.

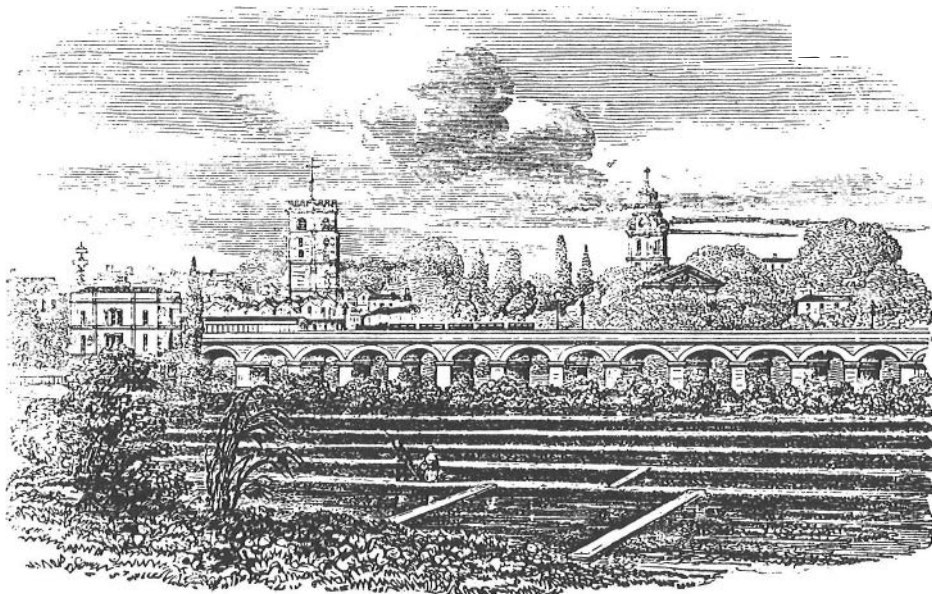
The most celebrated local stimulus to building was the opening up of railway lines. The North London Railway from Bow to Islington was opened at the end of 1850 and extended to Hampstead in 1851. The ease of access to Hackney by train was enhanced when a branch line from Dalston Junction to Broad Street in the City was opened in 1865. Then, in 1872, the Great Eastern Railway line from Shoreditch to Enfield via Stoke Newington was completed, with the branch to Chingford and Walthamstow via Hackney Downs and Clapton opening soon after. All these helped to open up the area for development as Hackney became easily accessible from many directions and a convenient place of residence for those working in the City.

When *The Illustrated London News* reported on a trip on the North London Railway on 15 November 1851, it observed of the area around Kingsland station: 'In this district, large tracts of land belonging to the Lord of the Manor, W.G.D. Tyssen, Esq., are now being laid out for building detached villas of a better class: the railway has, no doubt, greatly accelerated the profitable occupation of this very fine estate; for, although it has the advantage, from the nature of its soil, according to the Register-General's Return, of being decidedly the most healthy locality near London; yet, until the railway brought it into notice, and opened a communication for it, no measures taken for its improvement appear to have been successful'.

So the railways were important, but their significance can be overestimated. Their spread outwards from the centre of London had been preceded by that of horse-drawn omnibuses, which were in evidence from the 1840s onwards. Mid-Victorian Hackney was served by routes still traversed today by the Number 22 and 38 buses – either down Kingsland Road to Bank and thus to the West End, or down Essex Road and through Islington. Hence easy access already existed which the railways only enhanced. In any case, once development had begun it developed its own momentum, since the new suburbs themselves created much employment and many of their inhabitants did not have to travel regularly to central London.

If transport could create potential residential areas, what was crucial in determining which were developed, and when, was the state of the local land-market and the attitude of landowners. The speed with which much of western Hackney was built up owed much to the enthusiasm of the largest local landowners, the Tyssen-Amherst family. These were the descendants of Francis Tyssen, a Flemish merchant who acquired the manor in the early 18th century, and they readily released land on building leases when the market seemed ready for it. They were not slow to realise that building gave very much better returns per acre than did agriculture.

As far as smaller estates were concerned, circumstances differed in each case. Sometimes lesser landowners took hold of the opportunities offered by the spread of the metropolis as eagerly as the Tyssen-Amhersts. In other cases it was only the



**Hackney Station, and  
Watercress Plantation**

An illustration from the article  
on the North London Railway in  
*The Illustrated London News*,  
15 November 1851.



**A small Victorian building firm in action**

This contemporary photograph shows builders and others outside the house on which they were working in Clapton Passage E5 in the summer of 1882. As can be seen, the house nearest the camera is still incomplete, with no joinery yet placed in the window and with unplastered walls inside.

Plastering has, however, evidently been completed in the rest of the houses in the terrace, as can be seen by the splashes not yet cleaned from their windows. The applicant for permission to build these houses was one Christopher Ruthven, who is possibly the man with a frock coat and stick shown in the picture; the men in shirt-sleeves are presumably his employees.

death of a well-established landowner that released the land onto the market. Often the land sold for building had previously been used for fields and nurseries, as contemporary maps show, but in several cases earlier houses with quite large grounds were divided into building-plots and sold. An example of this is the estate between Clapton Pond and Hackney Downs shown in the 1861 sale particulars illustrated on pages 20 and 21. The auctioneer has indicated how the land could be divided into building-plots, and this gives a typical view of how the new suburban environment took shape.

The actual process of development was generally carried out, not by the landowners themselves, but by small-scale speculators. These were either the builders who put up the houses or minor capitalists who employed builders but made money for themselves by astutely investing in the development of the area. There were exceptions to this, the most notable being De Beauvoir Town, where the De Beauvoir Estate retained close control of the building operation and supplied most of the finance. But this was unusual, and the result is to be seen in the contrast between the relatively orderly layout of roads in De Beauvoir Town and the haphazard nature of most of the Borough's street-plan. In general, land for building was released in relatively small parcels – a few fields at a time – and as a result the streets were laid out in relation to the existing roads and the irregular shape of the individual plots.

Smaller still was the scale on which building operations were carried out. Most houses were built by firms of builders working only on a few at a time. In 1851-2, when the streets around Shakespeare Walk, N16, were being developed, the returns that the local district surveyors were obliged to make to the Metropolitan Building Office show that no fewer than 53 builders were active within those two years, constructing an average of less than four houses each. The largest operation was that of James Witcombe of Islington, who himself settled in Shakespeare Walk in 1852 and who built 35 houses during this period: but he was quite exceptional, and no other firm put up more than nine houses in this area, most building only one.

This pattern of building was common in Victorian London. In 1845 nearly half of all those engaged in house-building around the metropolis erected only one or two houses per annum, and it is clear that jobbing builders commonly broke off from repairs and alterations to put up a few houses. The scale of operations altered somewhat as the Victorian period went on, with an increase in the amount of work done by larger firms. By the last quarter of the 19th century, the proportion of firms that built two houses or less per year had dwindled from a half to a third, and the ratio of houses constructed by large firms was growing: by 1899, 3% of firms erected 40% of all the new houses in London. But even then 20% of houses were still built by tiny firms, and 60% of firms in the building trade put up less than six houses a year.

The result, as might be expected, was that developments were far from uniform although carried out in a short period. Even when firms built more than a couple of houses at a time, they were frequently scattered rather than being bunched in the

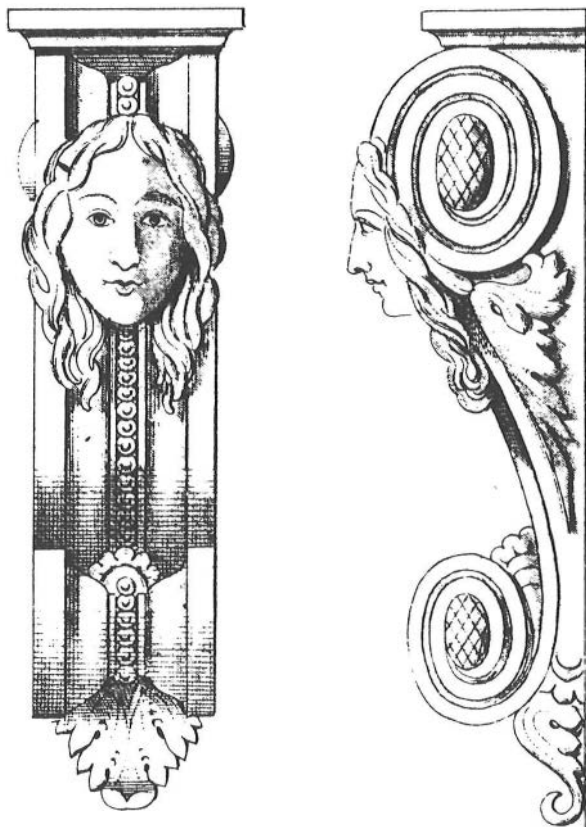


### 2-16 Albion Grove N16

This terrace was almost certainly erected in 1851-2 as part of the building operation referred to on page 16. It shows many of the 'Italianate' features typical of early Victorian developments, including a continuous cornice at the top of the facade, corner quoins, and cornices supported on brackets over the windows. Though still recognisably similar to a late Georgian terrace, it already shows greater freedom of composition in the way that some houses are brought forward from the rest.



same road. The variety in the design of houses within the same street is more marked in some cases than others. An extreme example is Queendown Road, E5, a street which has almost as many house-types as terraces: the houses shown on page 19 were erected in 1869-70 by five separate builders, each using a different design. But even in streets that appear superficially uniform, the houses frequently show slight differences in design reflecting the taste of the various builders who put them up. Builders had to put in applications before they began each house; these are generally preserved from 1855 onwards (when the Hackney District Board of Works was set up to deal with the administrative problems of the growing suburb), so that it is easy to discover who was responsible for the houses in any street and to see how disparate in many cases were the men involved.

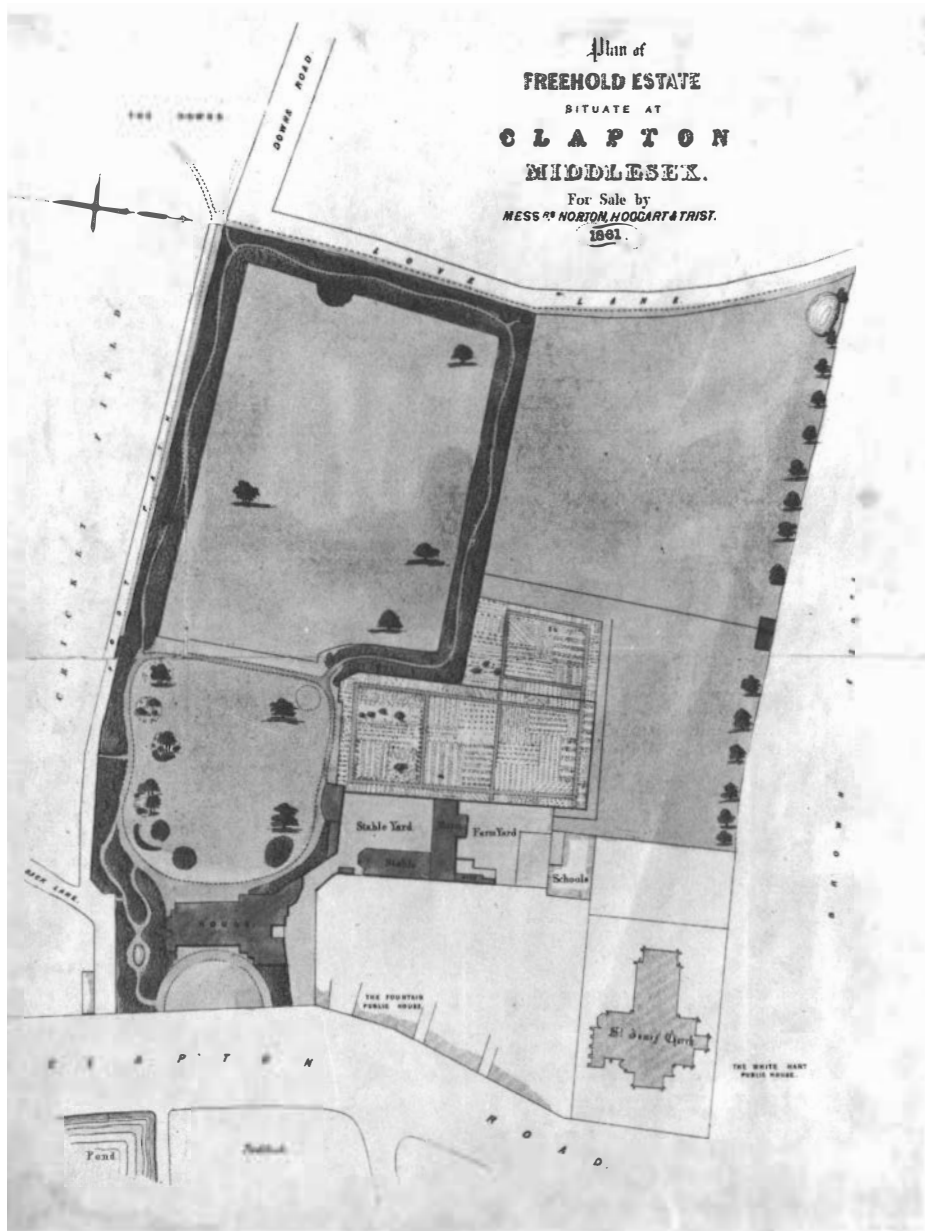


**4-16 Queensdown Road E5**

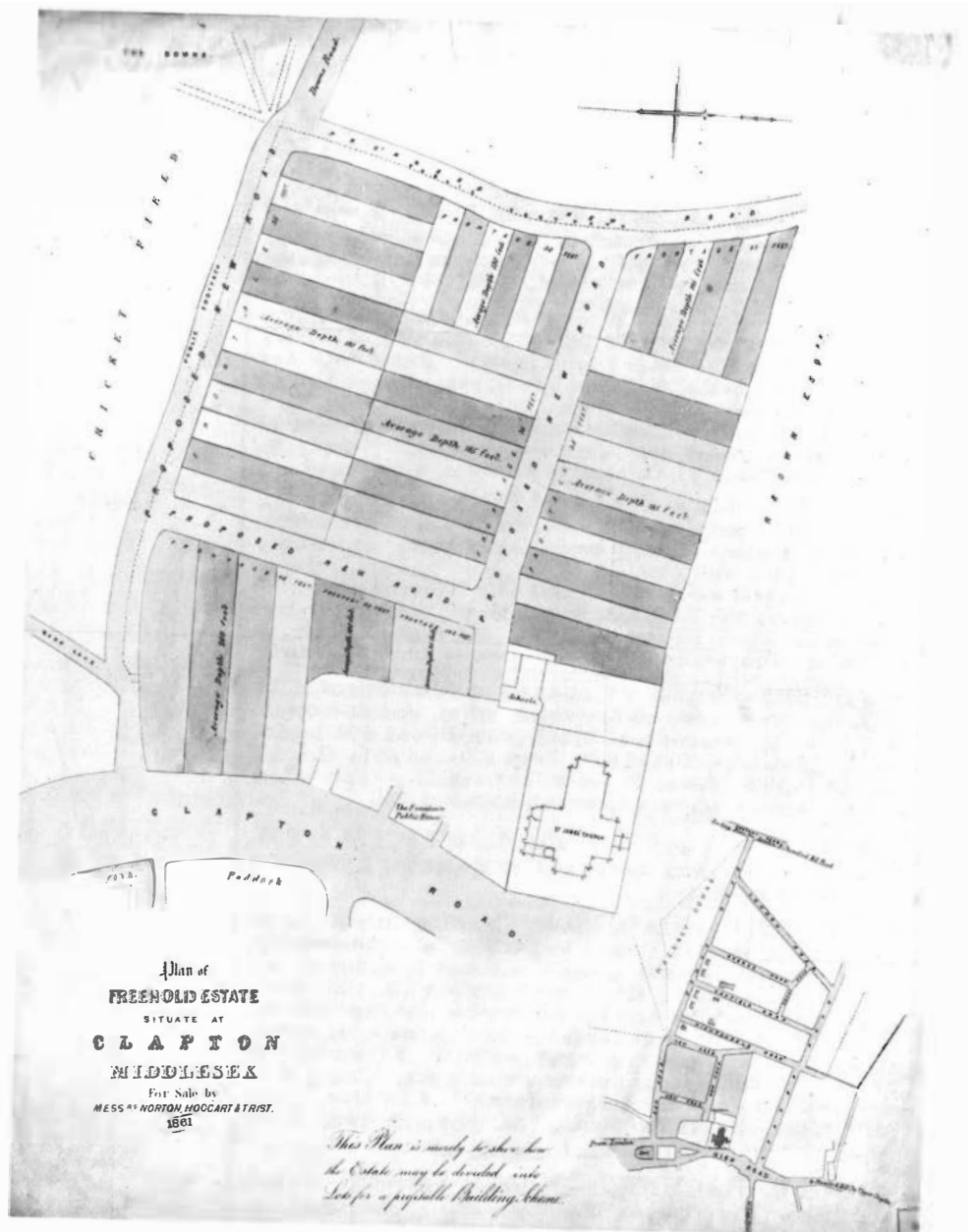
These houses were built in 1869-70 by five different builders, who were respectively responsible for no. 4, nos. 5-9, nos. 10-13, nos. 14-15 and no.

16. This photograph shows clearly the typical profile of mid-Victorian houses, with a semi-basement barely below street level and a ground floor reached by a flight of steps.





Sale particulars of an estate between Hackney Downs and Clapton Pond sold by Messrs Norton, Hoggart and Trist in 1861. The first plan shows the mansion on Lower Clapton Road with its grounds in their existing form, while the second illustrates how the estate could be divided up into building plots. This land is now occupied by Downs Road, Powell Road and Heyworth Road, which appear to the left of the foreground in the photograph on page 58.



Plan of  
**FREENHOLD ESTATE**  
 SITUATE AT  
**CLAPTON**  
**MIDDLESEX**  
 For Sale by  
 MESS<sup>RS</sup> NORTON, HOGGART & TRIST.  
 1861

*This Plan is made to show how  
 the Estate may be divided into  
 Lots for a payable Building Scheme.*

TO BE LET OR SOLD.

**A N EIGHT-ROOMED HOUSE**—South Hackney—  
Close to 'bus and rail, washhouse indoor, w.c., Con-  
servatory, venetian blinds and good garden. Rent 50s.  
Apply No. 4, Pensharst-road.

**HOUSE**—7 large rooms, venetian blinds, 2 w.c.'s—  
bay window, good garden, one minute's walk to rail  
to Moorgate-street—rent 50s. Apply on the premises, Acorn-  
villas, The Crescent, St. Ann's-road, Stamford Hill

**HOUSES**—St. Mark's Square, Down's Park, and  
Handingham-road—within 5 minutes walk of Dalrymple  
junction, containing from 7 to 12 rooms. Fitted with hot  
and cold water baths, Venetian blinds, gas, bells, and every  
other convenience. Large rooms, good gardens, with back  
entrance and conveniences for stable in the rear—portion of  
the purchase money can remain if required. Apply to  
Jordan and Paine, 17, Colvestone Crescent, Ridley-road.

**HOUSES**—Containing pair of Parlors communicating  
with folding doors, kitchen, wash-house, 4 bed-rooms,  
and long gardens. Very conveniently built, and nicely  
furnished; fitted with Venetian blinds, bells and gas. (Pipes  
laid in). Gravel soil, near to bus and Hackney station—  
N. Lk. Price 280. Rent 20s. Rent free till Midsummer-day.  
Also some larger Houses at 250 to 280 rents. Apply to  
E. Withers, Drayton-house, Lower Clapton, (near Mediau-rd.

**HOUSES**—Within six minutes of two stations, City  
or West—two eight-roomed Villas, double-fronted,  
with stone bay windows, all above ground—one with coach-  
house and stable—230 and 27. Price 280 and 270. Ground  
rent 25 and 25. Lease 99 years; or freehold.—Apply at the  
houses, Grove-road, St. Ann's-road, Stamford Hill

**HOUSES**—From 250 to 1500; to Let, 24 to 75.  
Mr J. Harwick, house and estate agent, 8, Banbury  
road, South Hackney

**LEICESTER ROAD, Stoke Newington**—A large  
double fronted House, and a pair of semi-detached  
Villas, containing each 6 bed-rooms and 8 sitting-rooms;  
kitchen and scullery, all of large dimensions, with every  
convenience, suitable only for respectable families—gas and  
water laid on, with large gardens—built in the most expen-  
sive manner, within easy access to all parts of town by 'bus  
or rail—two-thirds of the purchase money may remain at 25  
per cent. Apply to the Housekeeper, 75, Mark-lane; or of  
Mr. Rodda, 42, Chancery-road, or Bourne-road, Stoke  
Newington.

**SOUTH HACKNEY**—Desirable 8-roomed House.  
New. Bay windows. Folding doors. Venetian blinds.  
Garden; 12, Bishop-road, Cassland-road. Possession im-  
mediate; near bus and rail. Apply 8, Harding, No 2.

Advertisement column from *The Hackney Gazette*, 31 May 1871, giving details of houses for rent or sale. Note the stress on the accessibility of the area by train or bus, and the features in the houses that are singled out for mention, such as Venetian blinds.

# The first inhabitants

Houses were almost invariably erected on a speculative basis. In other words, the builder or speculator took the plot or plots of land involved on a building lease from their owner; he then raised capital to pay for the cost of erecting the house, often from a solicitor who would have the small savings of his client to invest; and, when it was finished or nearly finished, he put it up for sale or (more commonly) for rent, perhaps through an advertisement like those from the *Hackney Gazette* of 1871 shown on page 22. Only at this stage (if at all), therefore, did the house's first occupant have any say in its design. The builders consequently had to anticipate demand, not only in deciding where people would like new houses, but also in providing homes of a size and style to suit their clients. Yet there is no evidence that their judgment in such matters was bad. Their customers had predictable tastes and came from a fairly consistent social group – of which, indeed, the builders and speculators were themselves members. To this we must now turn.

Victorian Hackney was a middle-class suburb. Indeed, the growth of London's suburbs was in general a middle-class phenomenon: these were the sort who wished to establish themselves in their own homes away from the centre of the city where the heads of many suburban families worked and where the poor lived. In Victorian England such people were becoming more numerous, more wealthy and more leisured. They flourished on the opportunities provided by industry and commerce, and on the extension of services and public offices that these brought in their wake. In the 19th century there were not only more and more manufacturers, bankers, shippers and clerks, but also more surveyors, doctors, teachers and the like. Altogether, men in such occupations and their families made up some 15% of the population in 1851, and by 1900 this had grown to 20%.

Of course, it is in some ways misleading to speak of a single 'middle class' as if it was a unified group. In fact it was more a case of 'middle classes', ranging from an upper tier of industrialists, merchants and bankers, through a middle grade of members of the professions, lesser factory-owners and senior clerks, to a lower rung of shopkeepers, clerks and masters of workshops. Different suburbs tended to appeal to different levels within this hierarchy, though there was naturally some overlap. Hackney was, on the whole, a middle and lower middle-class suburb, while the upper middle-class lived elsewhere – in Bayswater or Kensington, perhaps. Many 19th-century commentators saw Hackney as the proverbial home of the clerk, and this view is borne out by the census returns of the mid-19th century which list



**23-38 Fassett Square E8**

These houses were built in the early 1860s and they are typical of their date. By now, terrace design was moving further from its Georgian origins than had been the case in earlier developments like that shown on page 17. The cornice at the top of the

facade has now been abandoned and instead the roof is clearly visible. The line of the facade of the houses is broken by bay windows which stand forward (though on the ground floor only), while the front doors are set back from the facade behind a decorated arch.



the inhabitants of the newly-built houses and their occupations.

Take, for instance, the streets built north and south of Dalston Lane in the 1860s, which first appear in the census of 1871.\* In houses like those illustrated on pages 24, 46 and 47, we find a succession of clerks, commercial travellers, merchants and master craftsmen, together with the occasional public official, artist and printer. Such people could afford to pay the rent of the three and four-bedroomed houses that are still so common in Hackney. They were sufficiently well-off to employ at least one servant and sometimes two, who recur continually along with nuclear families and occasional lodgers in the census returns for each property.

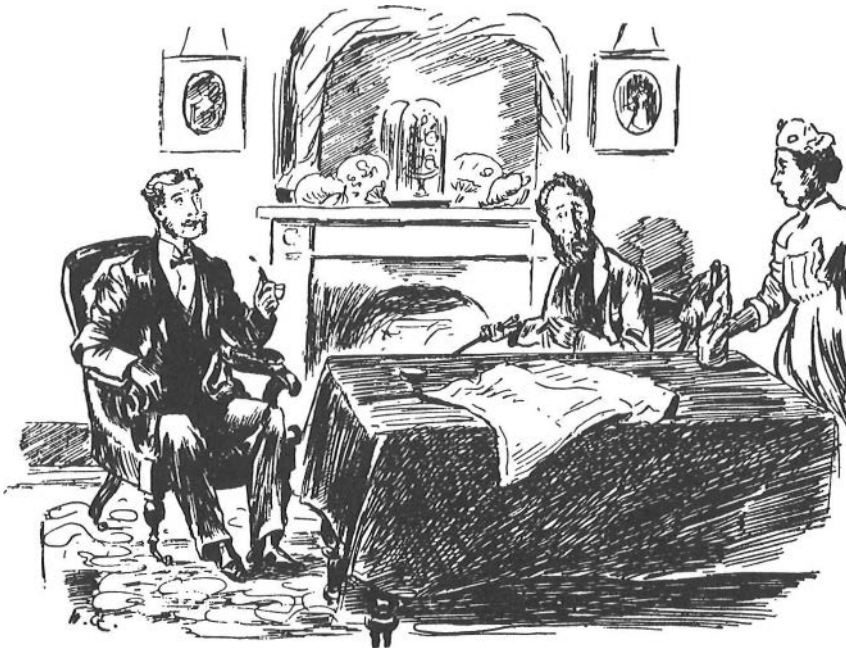
A page of the 1871 returns for Fassett Square, E8, is illustrated on page 27 and transcribed on pages 28-9; it itemizes the occupants of the houses towards the left-hand end of the row shown on page 24 and reveals the kind of information available. Many entries give hints of life histories in their records of the date and place of birth of men who had migrated from the provinces to London and had evidently there met their predominantly London or Middlesex-born wives. There are more occasional suggestions of where such families had lived before moving to the new suburb of Dalston: the Jones family at no.23 had evidently rented accommodation at Finsbury, nearer the centre of London, until at least eight years previously. The Jones' eldest son, Thomas, aged 16, was already working as a clerk, thus reinforcing the middle-class character of the street, while at no.25 was a young migrant to London, Harry Towers, a warehouseman who had not yet had time to set up house on his own. His hosts, Francis and Clara Tullock, were a couple in their twenties, probably only recently married and glad of the income from a lodger to help pay the rent. Mary Ann Hurley at no.27, on the other hand, was a widow who, to make ends meet and support her family of five, was evidently forced to run a business as newsagent and stationer. Details are also given of the domestics living in at most houses, young girls – often teenagers – from London and its neighbourhood who acted as general servants.

Interspersed among these more desirable streets were some, rather smaller and less fashionable, often nearer to main roads or shopping precincts, occupied by somewhat poorer families. These were the working-class families who 'serviced' the middle-class suburb in the midst of which they lived. Streets like Abbot Street off Kingsland High Street or Tyssen Street off Dalston Lane were inhabited by labourers, charwomen, dairymen, gardeners, bootmakers and plasterers living in cheaper and smaller houses. Less desirable parts of the area similarly attracted poorer housing, for example at Homerton, where two workhouses and a smallpox hospital had been erected in the early Victorian period, or Hackney Wick, where industrial activities were concentrated near the River Lea.

\*The 1871 census is unfortunately the most recent that is open to public inspection; census returns less than 100 years old are not available. The 1881 census will be made available in January 1982.

At the other end of the social scale, there were some inhabitants of higher status: gentlemen of independent means, manufacturers, and other members of the upper middle class. These tended to live in the few, grander houses that were built in Victorian Hackney, or in houses in the most desirable positions, looking over parks. They were the successors to the kind of people who had lived in large houses scattered through the area before it was built up on a concentrated scale.

A similar spectrum is reflected in the section on South Hackney in W.S. Clarke's *The Suburban Homes of London. A Residential Guide* (1881), which detailed the advantages and relative cost of living in different parts of the outskirts of London. According to Clarke, it was possible to find 'large and handsome houses' adjoining Victoria Park at a rental of £75 to £100 a year; 'a large area of smaller but still convenient villas from £45 to £75; and smaller residences, inhabited by a large number of *employés* (sic) and others engaged in the City, at rentals below £45'. These City men and their like were the typical clients for whom the new houses of Victorian Hackney were intended. Standing as it did beside the Lea marshes with (as yet) only villages to the east and north, it was a highly desirable and respectable neighbourhood – 'one of the handsomest suburbs of London', as G.R. Emerson put it in his *London: How the Great City Grew* (1862) – the equivalent in its time of Wembley, perhaps, in the 1930s.



Mr Pooter at home, entertaining his neighbour, Cummings; his general servant, Sarah, has just entered the room. Though fictional, *The Diary of a Nobody* (1892) gives some idea of life in a Victorian suburb. See below, page 71.

The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the

[Page 51]

No. of Schedule	ROAD, STREET, &c., and No. or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSES No. of Houses in the U.S. or Building (18.)	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CON- DITION	AGE of Male Female	Rank, Profession, or OCCUPATION	WHERE BORN	Whether 1. Deaf and Dumb 2. Blind 3. Imbecile or Idiot 4. Lame
235	23 Russell Square		Thomas Jones	Head	Mar	78	Master Parlor	Stardican Wales	
			Mary Jones	Wife	do	76		Stardican Wales	
			Thomas P. de	Son	Unm	16	Student	Stardican Wales	
			John L. de	do	do	8		do do	
			Henry W. de	do	do	6		do London	
236	25 do	1	Francis Matthews	Head	Mar	27	Commisariat Paymaster	Devon Devonport	
			Eliza M. de	Wife	do	22		Middlesex London	
			Henry S. R. Jones	Son	Unm	20	Marchioness	Wiltshire Marlborough	
			Elizabeth C. de	Serv	do	18	General Servant	Essex Poplar	
237	26 do	1	Phillip Leaman	Head	Mar	22	Genl. Servant	Essex St. Helens	
			Elizabeth de	Wife	do	28		Essex St. Helens	
			James M. de	Serv	Unm	6	Acting	Middlesex London	
			James M. de	do	do	3		do Dalston	
			Phillip M. de	Son	do	3		do do	
			William James	Serv	do	18	General Servant	do Poplar	
238	27 do	1	William Matthews	Head	Mar	22	Naval Officer	Essex St. Helens	
			Mary de	Wife	Unm	24		Middlesex St. Pancras	
			Eliza de	do	do	21		do London	
			William de	Son	do	11		do do	
			Thomas de	do	do	11		do do	
			Agnes de	do	do	11		do do	
			Elizabeth de	Serv	do	18	General Servant	do St. Helens	
239	28 do	1	Henry Matthews	Head	Mar	21	Banker Assistant	do Marlborough	
			Eliza de	Wife	Mar	31		do London	
	Total of Houses..	4		Total of Males and Females..		12 12			

\* Draw the pen through such of the words as are inappropriate.

Eng- Sheet H,

Note: the entry for the Matthews family continues on fol. 113 and shows that there were two daughters, aged 6 and 6 months, and a son aged 3; there was also a general servant, Jane Pith, aged 26, from Poplar.

A page from the original returns of the Census for 1871 (Public Record Office, RG 10 322, fol. 112): a transcription is given overleaf. Microfilms of all census returns for Hackney that are currently available to the public, including this one, may be seen at the Borough Archives.

<b>The undermentioned Houses are</b>					
<b>Civil Parish of St. Johns Hackney</b>		<b>Ward of Dalston</b>		<b>Parliamentary Borough of Hackney</b>	
No. of Schedule	ROAD, STREET, &c., and No. or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSES		NAME and Surname of each person	RELATION to Head of Family
		In- habited	Unin- habited		
235	23 Fassett Square			Thomas Jones	Head
				Margaret do	Wife
				Thomas W. do	Son
				John L. do	do
				Henry W. do	do
	24 do		1U	—	
236	25 do	1		Francis J. Tullock	Head
				Clara C. do	Wife
				Harry L.K. Towers	Boarder
				Eliza E. Patten	Servt
237	26 do	1		Phillip Le Sauer	Head
				Emily do	Wife
				Emily M. do	Dau
				Jane M. do	do
				Phillip H. do	Son
				Catherine Hanger	Servt
238	27 do	1		Mary Ann Hurley	Head
				Marian do	Dau
				Eliza do	do
				William do	Son
				Thomas do	do
				Frederick do	do
				Elizabeth Bridge	Servt
239	28 do	1		Henry P. Matthews	Head
				Eliza do	Wife
<b>Total of Houses . . .</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Total of Males and</b>	

situate within the Boundaries of the				
Local Board of Works Hackney			Ecclesiastical District of St. Phillips	
CON- DITION	AGE of		Rank, Profession, or OCCUPATION	WHERE BORN
	Males	Females		
Mar	45		Master Tailor	Cardigan Wales
do		45		Kent Deptford
Unm	16		Clerk	Middlesex Finsbury
do	8			do do
do	6			do London
Mar	27		Commercial Traveller	Devon Devonport
do		22		Middlesex Isleworth
Unm	23		Warehouseman	Lancashire Manchester
do		17	General Servant	Essex Poplar
Mar	32		Clerk Statistical Dept. Customs	Jersey St Helens
do		25		Surrey Lambeth
Unm		6	Scholar	Middlesex London
do		3	do	do Dalston
do	2			do do
do		17	General Servant	do Haggerston
Wid		53	News Agent & Stationer	Somerset Bristol
Unm		24		Middlesex St Leonards
do		21		do London
do	17			do do
do	14			do do
do	11			do do
do		19	General Servant	do Chelsea
Mar	30		Banker's Assistant	do Marylebone
Mar		31		do London
<b>Females . . .</b>	12	12		

**204-6 Queensbridge Road E8**

A typical pair of early Victorian semi-detached houses. Note how the two houses have deliberately been built so that their design forms a unity, with

prominent decorative features at the centre of the facade, and with the windows of each house symmetrically laid out to match the other.





# The houses

What sort of houses did the builders put up for these clients? Their taste, as the builders rightly saw, was for convenience, comfort, prestige and fashion: they wanted a house that was well laid-out, well-built and handsome-looking, advertising the substance and respectability of the family inhabiting it. The houses they got were terraced, semi-detached or (rather rarely, in lower middle-class Hackney) detached, ranging from two storeys to four and varying in design and detail according to price and date. In terms of lay-out and profile, the tastes of Hackney's new inhabitants were conservative: essentially they now aspired to the type of house in which their social betters already lived. But some attention was paid to recent trends in architectural design, advertising the sophistication of the occupants.

The types of house erected in Victorian Hackney all basically stemmed from those of the late Georgian period: since these were well-established and well-proved models, this is not surprising. The commonest type of Georgian house design in London had been the terrace, and this continued in modified form in the Victorian period. But, particularly on the outskirts of London, the Georgians had also liked the detached and self-contained villa, a sort of private, suburban retreat, and this too had occasional descendents in Victorian Hackney. Somewhere between the two came the poor man's villa in the form of the semi-detached house, of ten designed so that the two houses as a pair seemed to comprise a single, larger house under a common gable or pediment. This compromise proved very popular in Hackney, particularly in the early and mid nineteenth century, and examples are shown on pages 4, 30 and 64.

All these house-types were modified to some extent during the Victorian period, but most of all the terrace: the changes that occurred partly reflected changing tastes, partly the pursuit of greater comfort. Typical Georgian terraces are illustrated in The Hackney Society's book, *From Tower to Tower Block* (nos.12-13). These and their like epitomise what the Victorians disliked about Georgian architecture. Uniform and rigid, the standard terrace negated the individuality of each house within it while offering a restrained profile that was not at all to the Victorians' taste. In addition, the very tall and narrow form of the Georgian terraced house – with small rooms on several floors – seemed increasingly inconvenient. Hence the Victorian period saw a steady change. The basement below ground level of Georgian houses was now usually replaced by a semi-basement which could be better-lit, or, particularly in the 1880s and 1890s, by no basement at all. Instead, the kitchen and service-rooms that

**31-55 Fletching Road E5**

Building applications for the houses shown here were submitted in 1899 and 1902. They are typical of the fully-developed Victorian terrace. The bay is now carried up to the first floor and hence each house has a gable coming forward from the continuous roof of the terrace. The relative narrowness

of the facade is compensated for by the fact that the houses are very deep and have sizeable back extensions. The delicate subdivisions of the upper panes of the sash windows – where not replaced by inelegant substitutes – seem to show 'Queen Anne' influence (see below, page 48), though other features continue earlier traditions.



had been underground in a Georgian house were commonly placed on the ground floor behind the main reception rooms. It was possible at the same time to do away with a second floor, since bedrooms could be placed over the back extension. Hence by the end of the nineteenth century houses occupied more floor-space but had fewer stairs.

The principal change in the profile of the terrace was an increased stress on the individuality of each house rather than its subordination to the group as a whole. From the early Victorian period the strict rhythms of Georgian architecture were abandoned and the layout of the house's rooms instead reflected in its facade. More important was the increasing adoption of the bay window, which became almost universal in smart houses from the 1860s (indeed this feature became a sign of social prestige in itself). By the end of the Victorian period the bay was often carried to the first floor as well as the ground floor, hence necessitating a gable for every house: the ideal of the Georgian terrace with its emphasis on continuous unbroken flat walls could hardly have disintegrated further.

A related innovation was the adoption (particularly in the early and mid-Victorian periods) of pillared porches for individual houses, while a further, smaller departure from Georgian practice was to be found in the style of windows. These changed in form as large panes of plate glass became cheaper and hence the multiple glazing bars found in Georgian houses could be abandoned. At the same time, the grouping of windows as an architectural feature was encouraged by the abolition of the Window Tax in 1851. Such features are to be found not only in terraces but also in semi-detached and detached houses, where there was an equal pursuit of 'character' for each house. All these changes are illustrated in the plates to this book.

In the Victorian residence, the middle-class family found the privacy and comfort that it required. Separate rooms were provided for dining and receiving guests, while a 'parlour' was the scene of everyday living. Upstairs, sufficient bedrooms were needed for the servants as well as the family; separate bedrooms were provided for the children of each sex as well as for the parents, though servants were often consigned to attic rooms. In larger, detached houses there might be further segregation of function, with a study or smoking-room, and there might be further quarters for servants. Bathrooms were a rarity until the very end of the century: their growing adoption at that time is another illustration of the slow adjustment of essentially Georgian house-types to nineteenth-century tastes.

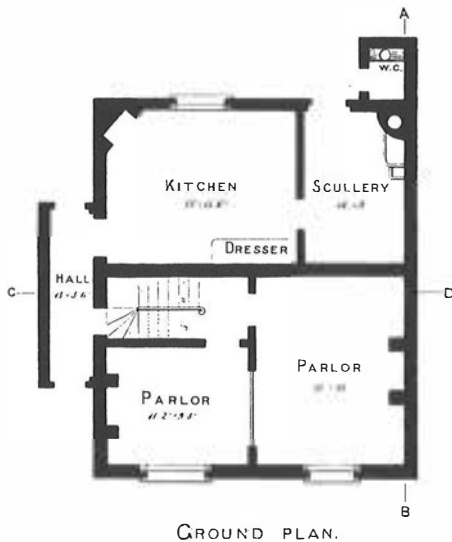
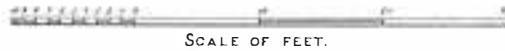
PLAN OF A FOURTH RATE HOUSE ADDITIONS.



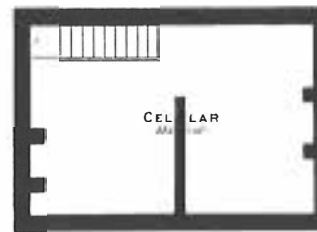
ELEVATION.



FIRST FLOOR PLAN.



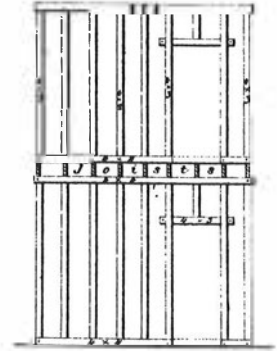
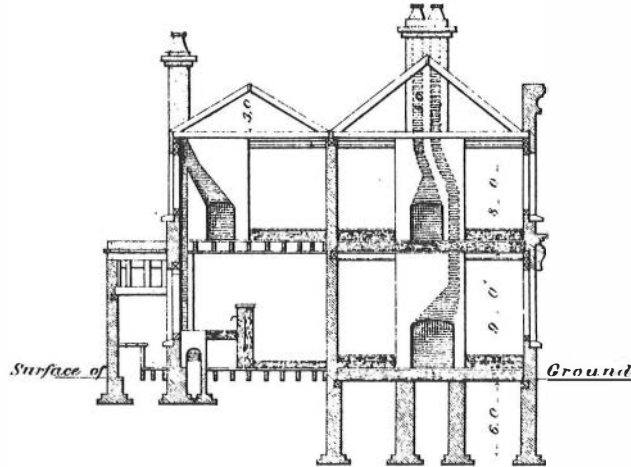
GROUND PLAN.



CELLAR PLAN.

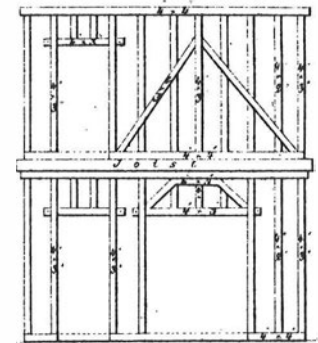
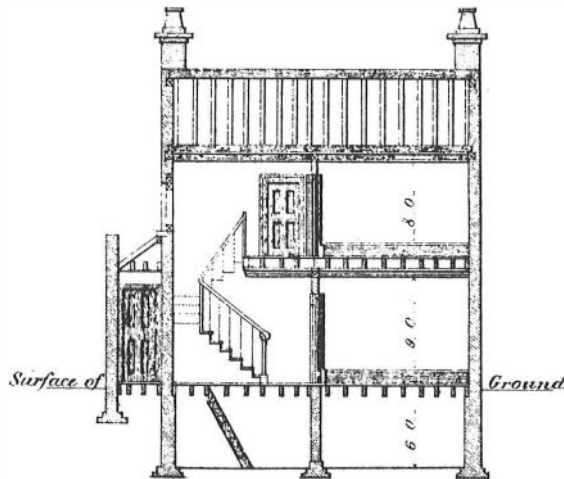
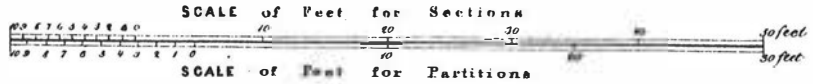
Plan, elevation and sections for a fourth-rate house from *The Builder's Practical Director* (1855-8), a typical Victorian manual on construction techniques for the small-scale developer. Houses were classified by 'rate' under the London Building Acts: the idea was to grade them according to value and floor area and thus to regulate standards, and the fourth rate was for the smallest houses. This four-bedroomed house with two reception rooms, kitchen, scullery, cellar and outside W.C. (but, it will be noted, no bathroom) would have cost £300 to build, and this gives an idea of the scale of expenditure involved in a house of this type.

**SECTIONS AND PARTITIONS FOURTH RATE  
HOUSE AND ADDITIONS**



*Naked Partitions between  
Parlor and Bedroom and Staircase.*

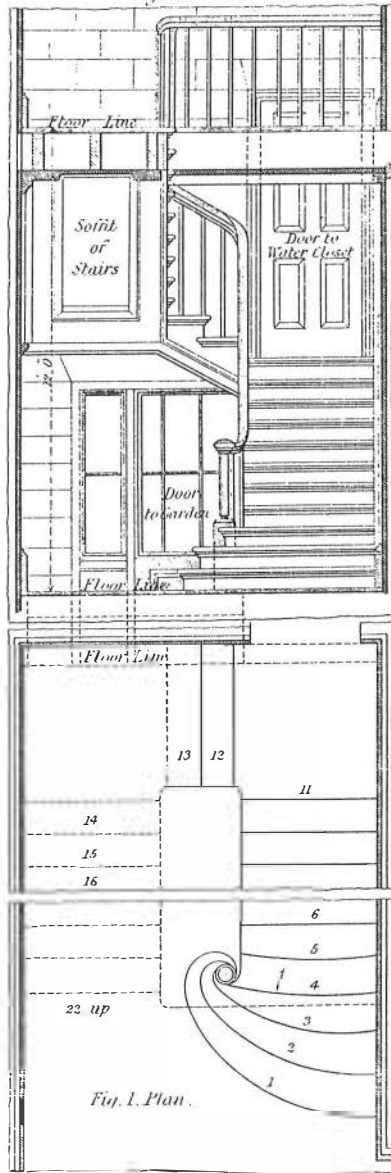
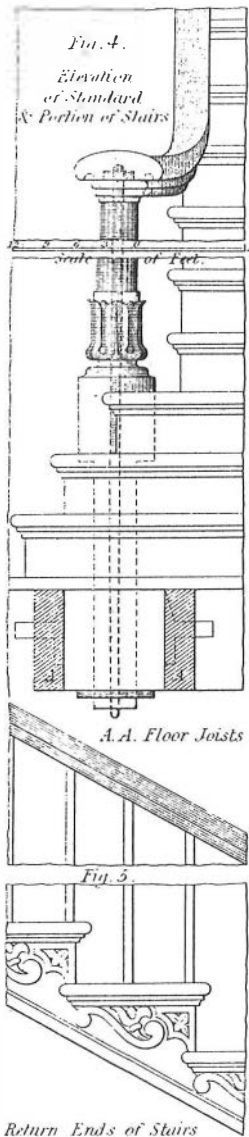
**SECTION AT A.B.**



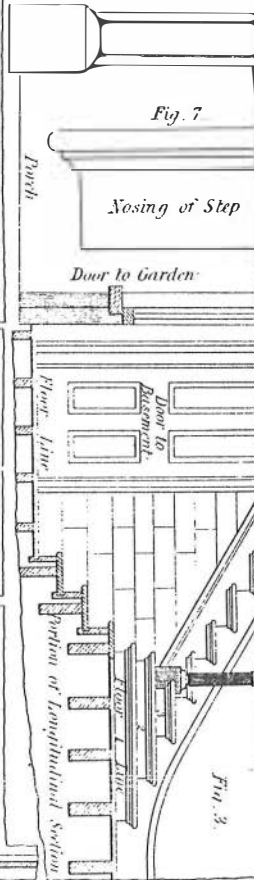
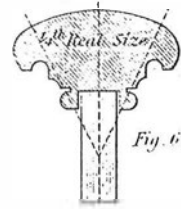
*Naked Partition between  
Parlors and Bedrooms*

**SECTION AT C.D.**

Details for Stairs.  
Fig. 2. Section.



Section of Hand Rail



S. H. Brooks, Arc<sup>t</sup>

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Scale of Feet

W. A. Beever, Sc.

London, John Weale, 1860.

A plate from *The Practical House Carpenter* (1860-1) giving a plan, sections and details of the 'principal stairs' for a 'small villa'. This was a revised version by the architect S. H. Brooks of a work originally compiled by William Pain in the 18th century, and it is typical of the way in which Georgian manuals on such subjects were revamped. It was published by John Weale of 59 High Holborn, who brought out many 'rudimentary' do-it-yourself manuals on building and numerous other subjects.

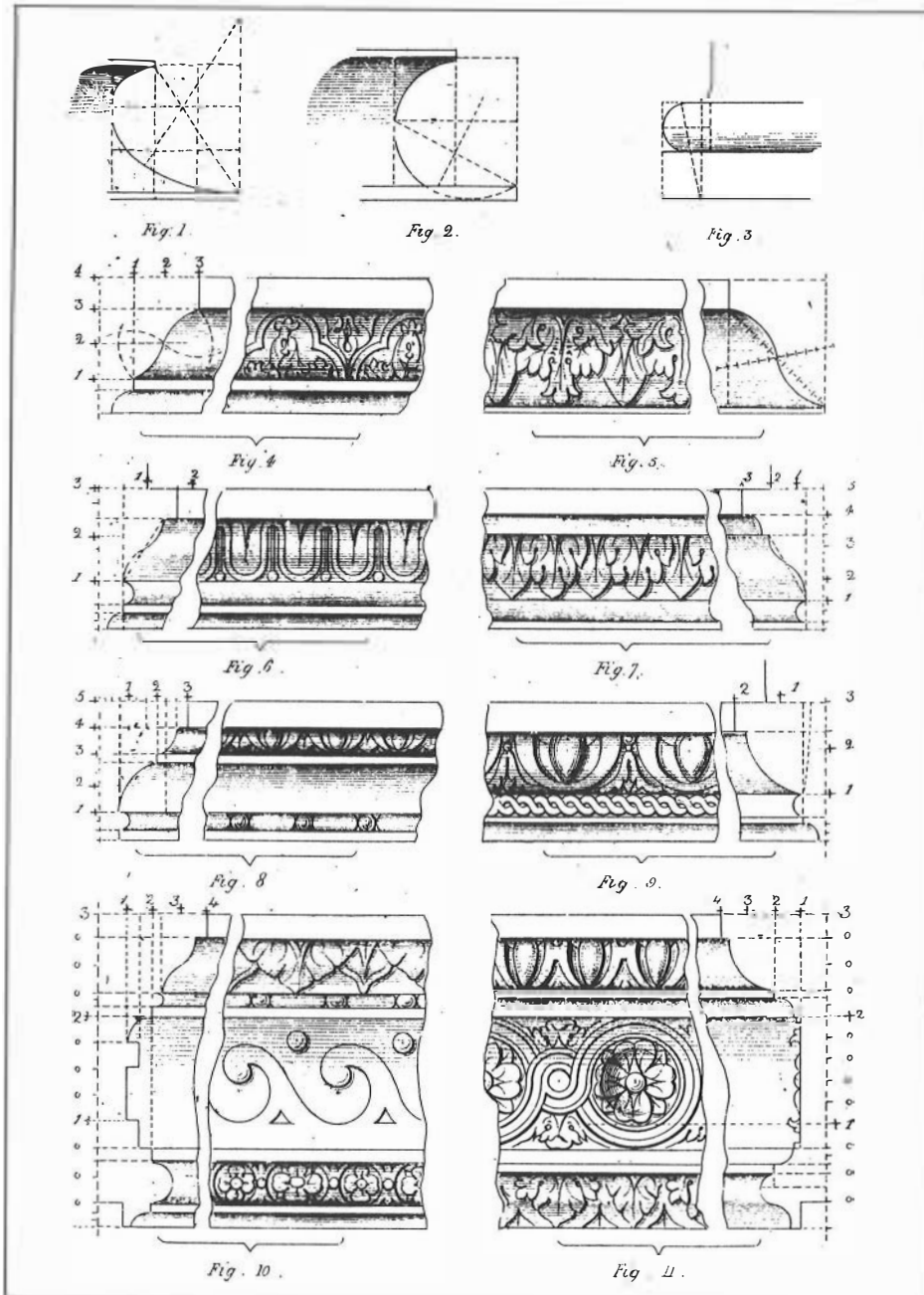
## Details, inside and out

The Victorian house was itself a piece of conspicuous consumption by a middle-class household, so it is hardly surprising that considerable care was taken over its 'finish', both its internal joinery and plasterwork and the ornamentation that it presented to the outer world. Inside, much time was spent in providing elaborate plaster cornices and central ceiling roses in rooms and plaster brackets in hall-ways: patterns for these from a contemporary building manual are shown on page 38, and a typical ceiling rose appears on page 39. No less care was taken on joinery, on installing moulded skirting-boards and door-frames, panelled doors and folding shutters, while, particularly in mid-Victorian houses, the main reception rooms were often separated by a pair of large doors.

Above all, attention was lavished on staircases with turned bannisters and a mahogany rail, and designs for staircases from a handbook of the time are illustrated opposite. As a volume on *Carpentry; being a Comprehensive Guide Book for Carpentry and Joinery* of 1849 explained, staircases were important because they were on view to everyone and hence 'their convenience or beauty readily appreciated, and their faults and defects instantly detected. More science is required in their plan, more ingenuity in setting out and adapting stuff, and more tradesmanlike skill in their execution, than in any other work about a building'. Though some coarsening of work may be observed towards the end of the century, generally high standards of finish in all these features were retained throughout the period.

The interior was also provided with lavish fittings like marble chimney-pieces of varied designs, which survive in large quantities where not removed by over-zealous modernisers. In the late Victorian period cast-iron fireplaces were sometimes inserted instead, while typical decorations in later Victorian houses include ornamental tiling and stained glass. The house was completed with heavy flock wall-papers and curtains, and, though more than scraps of Victorian wallpaper are rarely found, specimens from a house at Dalston are illustrated on page 39. A good idea of the decor of the period, complete with characteristic furniture and ornaments, is given by the Victorian room in the Geffrye Museum, Kingsland Road, Shoreditch.

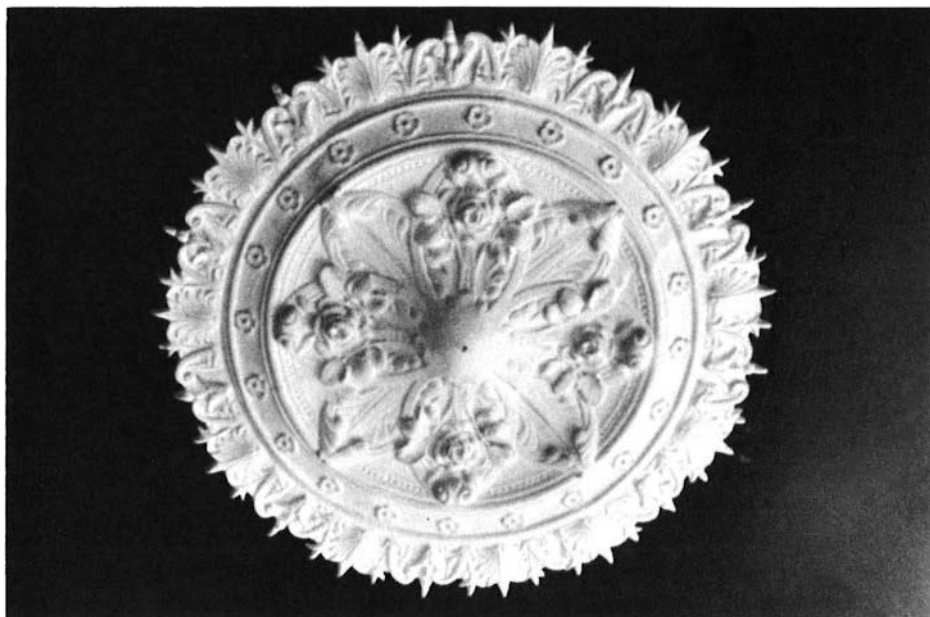
Hardly less care was taken over the exterior, the public face that the householder presented to the world. It is here that the most variety and development is to be seen in the Victorian architecture of Hackney and here that the ingenuity of the builders reached its climax. Since the terraced and semi-detached house changed so little in basic design during the Victorian period only conventional experience was needed to



Designs for plaster ceiling mouldings from *The Mason's, Bricklayer's, Plasterer's and Decorator's Practical Guide* (c. 1860) (see below, page 42)



Wallpaper from 106 Colvestone Crescent E8, originally called Freetown Cottage. The house was built in 1862-3, and the wallpaper on the left must have been put up soon after since it was covered by the paper on the right before both were preserved by the insertion of a fitted cupboard of Victorian date.



Central ceiling rose at 15 Grazebrook Road N16. This house apparently dates from the late 1860s and this detail is typical of the ornate plasterwork included in many houses.



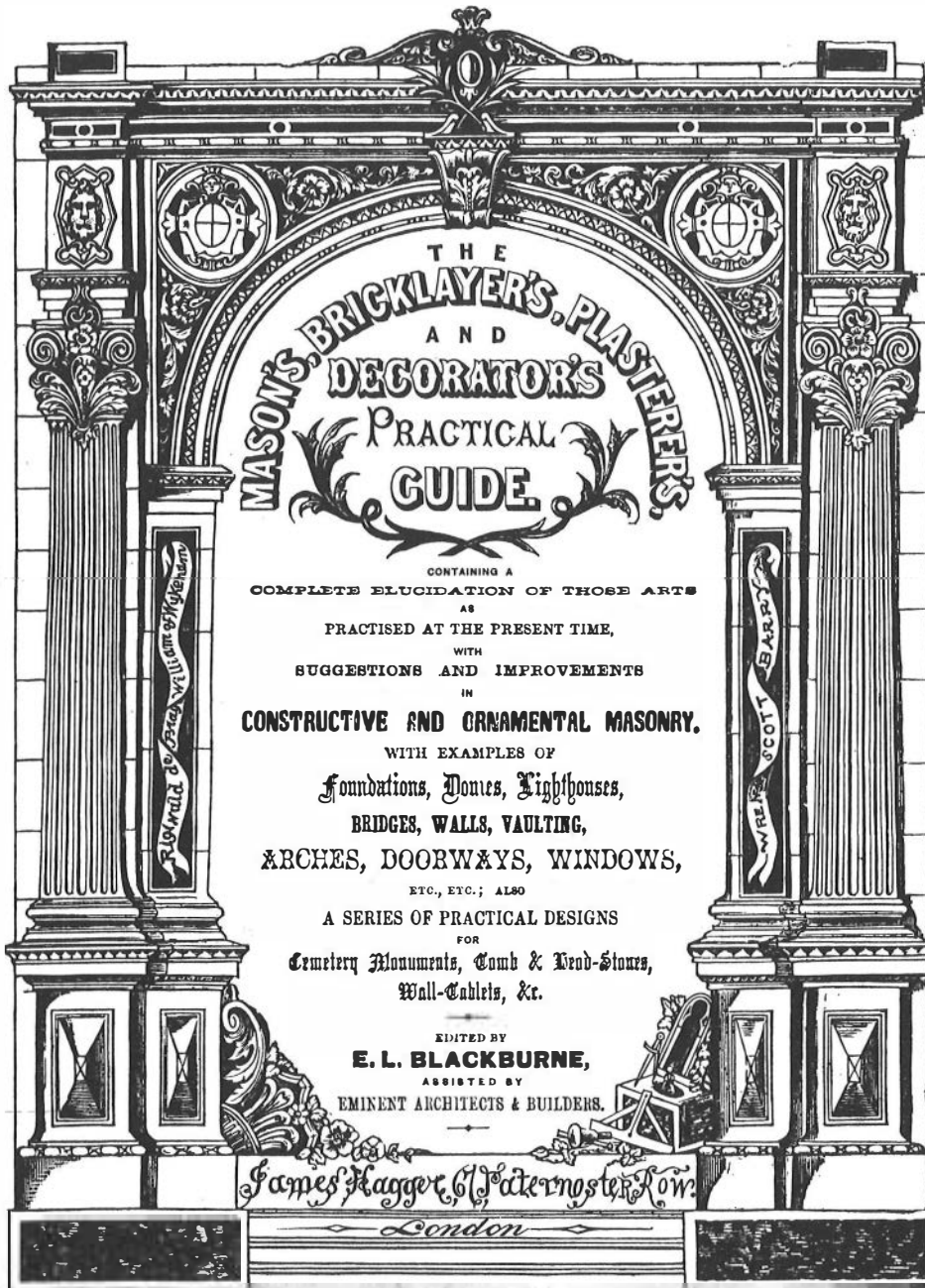
A cast-iron fireplace with tiles set into it at 125 Mildenhall Road E5: the building application for the group of houses of which this forms part dates from 1903. Cast-iron fireplaces became increasingly common in the later Victorian period; ornamental tiles are also a common decorative feature of late Victorian houses.

build them and architects were rarely involved. Small-scale builders could gain the necessary experience from practice or could glean it from the numerous handbooks that poured from the press in the mid-Victorian period: the title-page of a typical one is shown on page 42. These explained how to lay foundations and arrange sewage-pipes, how to calculate quantities and work out specifications for the workmen involved on the house, and how to shape the joinery for a staircase, a subject on which late Georgian manuals continued to be reprinted after a century. The traditionalism of the basic design, however, was compensated for by the elaboration of the houses' external details. In these, the builders deliberately broke away from the sobriety of Georgian design, using their own interpretation of ornamental devices that had first been employed by leading architects in public buildings.

As far as early Victorian houses are concerned, the basic source was the 'Italianate' style, derived from the Renaissance palaces of Venice, Florence and Rome. Reacting against the plainness of the architecture of the late Georgian period, this introduced much bolder shapes and details, though still using the columns, arches and pediments of the classical style. It was established by Sir Charles Barry, most notably at the Travellers' Club and the Reform Club in Pall Mall. Under the influence of these

Iron grate and marble surround in the main reception room of 79 Downs Road E5, built in 1863. Both grates and surrounds were easily available from builders' suppliers, and many that were installed were elegantly ornamented, like the one shown here. Also clearly visible in this photograph is the room's deep moulded skirting.





The title-page of a handbook for speculative builders put out by the publisher James Hagger. In this issue, the editor of the work is given as the architect, E. L. Blackburne (1803-88), one of the principal contributors. Among Blackburne's most important commissions were the additions to, including the upper part of the tower of, St Mark's, Dalston (1877-80) and the neighbouring school (now Parish Rooms) in Colvestone Crescent E8 (1874).

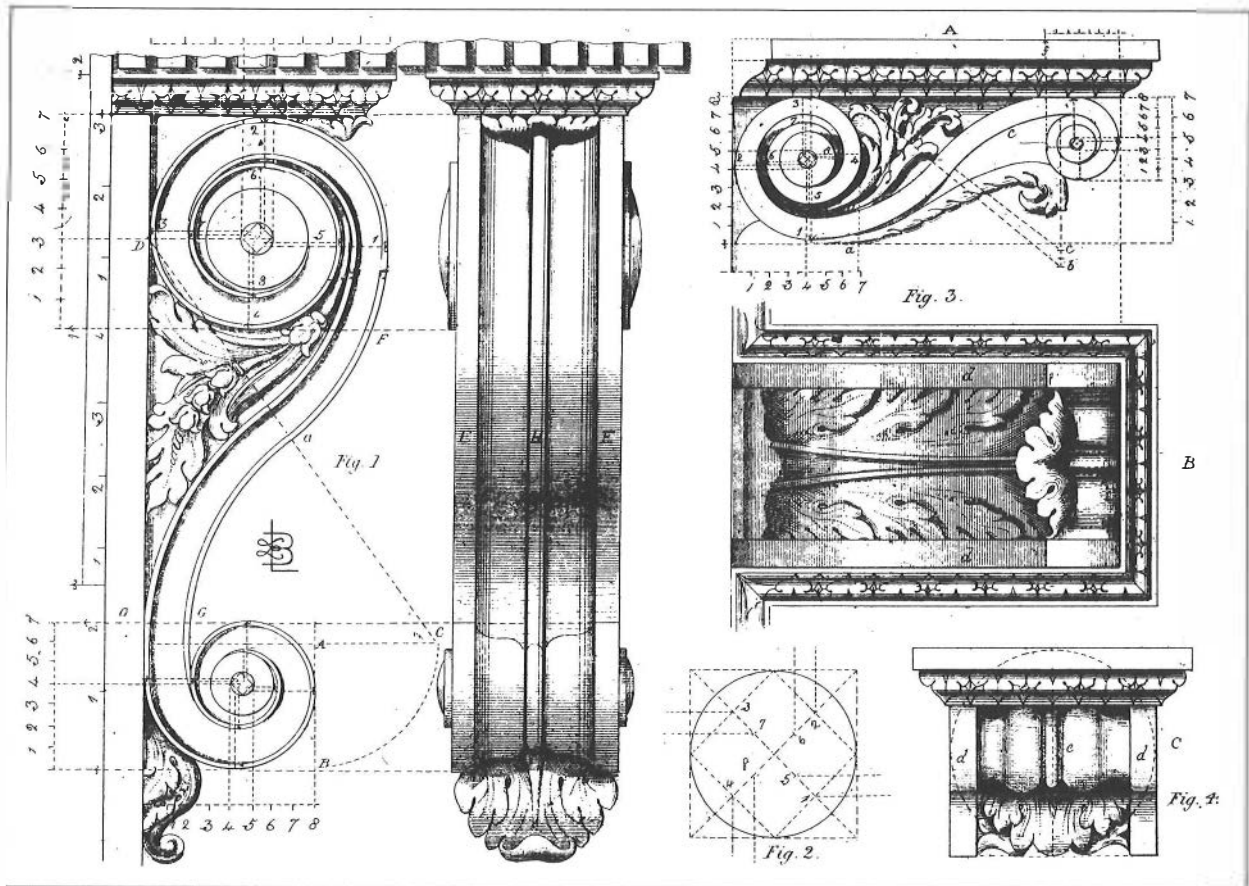
buildings a distinctive style of commercial architecture spread throughout London, but its details were also applied to domestic buildings, not least in suburbs like Hackney. Whether the builders learnt about the style from the buildings themselves or from books is unclear, but by the 1840s houses in Hackney and elsewhere constantly echo the designs of architects like Barry.

Typical are the houses in Albion Grove, N16, shown on page 17, with their elaborate cornice carried along the top of the facade, their prominent corner quoins emphasising the different houses within the terrace, and their windows with stuccoed surrounds decorated with overhanging cornices supported on scrolled brackets. Similar details appear on the house in Middleton Road, E8, shown on page 12, while the illustration on page 30 shows other features, including a recessed niche and a French window topped by a pediment. Such decorations are to be found on many houses in the 'Mapledene' and Shakespeare Walk areas.

As they passed into common use, these elements were adapted, often in highly original and creative ways. It would be difficult and probably misleading to name a precise source for such features as the ornate profile of 174-6 Richmond Road, E8 (page 4) or the bizarre doorcases of houses in Colvestone Crescent, Graham Road and Montague Road, E8 (pages 46 to 47). Indeed, in such houses of the 1850s and 1860s in the Dalston area builders reached a climax of ingenuity, which some students of architecture might consider debased but which possess a vigour and liveliness all their own. Some houses were even embellished with little gems of Victoriana, like the panels of children's heads in the keystones to the window-surrounds of nos 61-5 Greenwood Road, E8, shown on page 45.

Some features that achieved popularity can be traced to a specific source, such as the iron 'balconets' frequently placed on window-sills, which are of French derivation: a typical example is shown on page 45. But even here, they have been reused to serve a different function from that for which they were originally intended. As C.J. Richardson explained in *The Englishman's House. From a Cottage to a Mansion* (1871), 'in France these balconets are regarded as necessary protections at the window openings. In England they are used chiefly for holding flowers'.

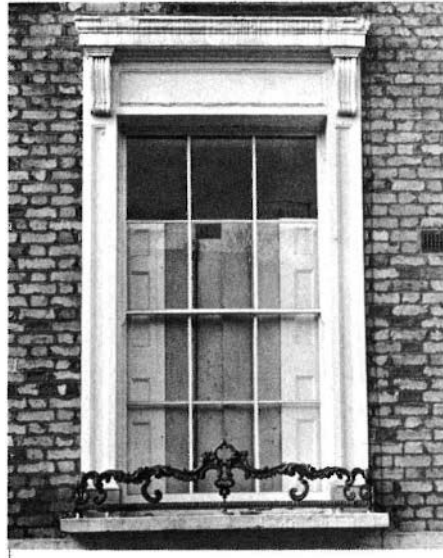
By the 1860s the Italianate style from which all these features ultimately derived had become unfashionable in advanced architectural circles. It was replaced by the Gothic, especially the flamboyant Gothic of multi-coloured brick with stone trimmings pioneered by the author John Ruskin and the architect William Butterfield in the years around 1850. Gothic forms had occasionally been used as a way of decorating suburban houses in the early Victorian period – for example in De Beauvoir Square, N1 – but they had never caught on to the extent that Italianate ones had. Now, however, Gothic details were commonly used in house decoration, while changes in fashion that perhaps reflect the Gothic Revivalists' insistence on truth in materials and design include the abandonment of the late Georgian and Italianate style of placing the roof of a terrace behind a stucco parapet. By the 1860s it



Designs for scrolled brackets or 'consoles' from *The Mason's, Bricklayer's, Plasterer's and Decorator's Practical Guide*. The use of such brackets is typical of the early Victorian Italianate style.

(Left) Balconet at 64 Milton Grove N 16

This house was apparently another of those erected during the building operation of the early 1850s referred to on page 16; the Italianate window surround is typical. Note also the characteristic panelled shutters inside the window.



(Right) Semi-basement window at 61 Greenwood Road E8, built in 1862 by George Needham, who himself lived in Greenwood Road. Many houses have window surrounds with decorative keystones and this child's head is a particularly attractive specimen.



became normal even in terraces to show the roof itself and to allow its eaves to overhang the facade of the house, thus taking up a practice found earlier only in occasional larger houses.

Gothic influence is more evident in details, in a tendency to introduce polychrome decoration – bands of different coloured bricks – into the facades of houses, to give doors and windows pointed heads, and to decorate porches and bay windows with foliage capitals carved from stone. The latter derived from the famous carvings which decorated the museum built at Oxford in the 1850s, which Ruskin helped to design: by the late Victorian period these were turned out from moulds in artificial stone and hence were relatively easy to produce and use.

An early example of the use of Gothic detail on a terrace in Hackney is to be seen at Bentham Road, E9 (page 7), built in 1861, especially in the applied mouldings in the shape of a Gothic arch with carved bunches of foliage at either end which surround the first floor windows. In houses in Queensdown Road, E5 (page 19), dating from 1869-70, more extensive use is made of decorations derived from medieval churches or cathedrals – including doorways with pointed arches and surrounded by clustered columns, columns applied to bay-windows, and ‘dog-tooth’ mouldings. All these details reappear again and again in houses erected in the 1870s and 1880s, especially in Clapton and Stoke Newington, where development was proceeding rapidly in these years; several are shown in the plates to this book.

In the 1880s and 1890s there are hints of the influence of new architectural developments of the late Victorian period. The plain brick doorways and tile-hung





Doorcases at 90-104 Colvestone Crescent E8 (left), 90-2 Graham Road E8 (above right) and 5-7 Montague Road E8 (below right), on houses built between 1861 and 1866. The terrace in Colvestone Crescent, named 'Hertford Villas', also has matching capitals under the eaves.

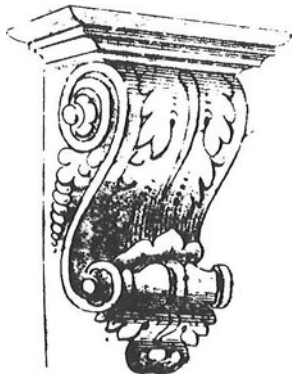
These extraordinary compositions seem to derive their inspiration from various sources. The idea of surrounding a door with a decorative frame and an overhanging cornice supported on brackets is essentially Italianate, though it is also reminiscent of the elaborate doorcases of late 17th and early 18th-century London houses in areas like Bloomsbury and Spitalfields. The Roman standards and lion-heads on the Graham Road and Colvestone Crescent examples presumably derive from pattern-books of classical architecture, the mermen at Montague Road perhaps from similar sources, but the extraordinary swags of solidified shells over the doors of 90-2 Graham Road defy analysis.





dormers of the houses in West Bank, N16 (page 68), perhaps show the influence of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, with its interest in the vernacular architecture of rural England. Another fashion which had some impact on suburban development in Hackney at the end of the Victorian period was the so-called 'Queen Anne revival' led by the architect Richard Norman Shaw and others. A local reflection of this is to be seen in the preference for red-brick over the yellow London stocks that had previously been used in all houses in the area; it is also the source of details like the terracotta panels of flowers on the houses in Seal Street, E8, shown on page 70.

In all the external details of Victorian houses considerable care was taken in an attempt to give each home a character of its own. This, combined with the predictable ordering of houses in terraces and streets, defines the essence of the Victorian suburb. These builders and residents would have hated the stark uniformity of much twentieth-century municipal planning in Hackney and elsewhere. There is something highly satisfying about the typical Victorian street with its combination of a basic pattern with profuse and varied detail at the level of the individual house.

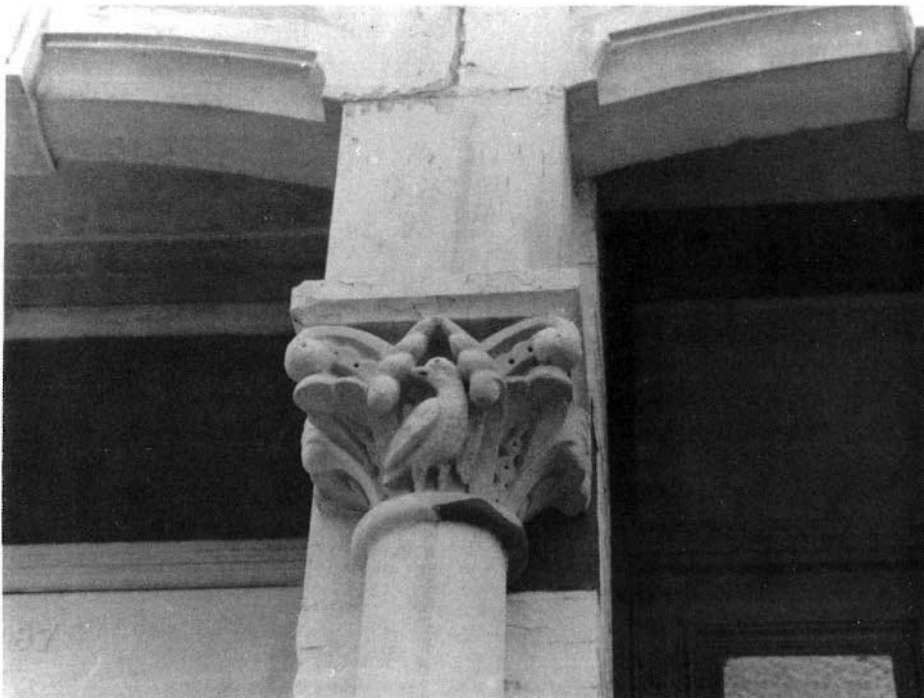




The front door of 245 Evering Road N16, part of a large group of houses for which a building application was made by William Osment of Palatine Road N16 in 1876. The paired columns and foliage capitals are typical of details derived ultimately from medieval ecclesiastical architecture. The attractive tiling of the front path is probably also an original feature.



Foliage capitals at 111-113  
Graham Road E8, part of a  
terrace for which the building  
application was submitted in  
1863.



A typical Gothic-style capital at  
87/9 Brooke Road N16: these  
houses were erected in 1879.  
Capitals of this kind are very  
common on houses of the later  
Victorian period; many were  
produced from moulds in  
artificial stone.

# The streets

The public face that these self-conscious dwellings presented to the world was completed by the names that they were given by their builders or early owners. Many of these are still proclaimed by neatly-carved stone plaques, while others are revealed by old street directories, maps and census returns. The small scale of Victorian suburban development that has already been referred to is seen here again, since the original addresses of these houses were often the names of the terraces rather than of the roads in which they were situated. These house-names reveal – even more than the street-names that have replaced them – the values of the original inhabitants.

Take, for instance, Northwold Road, E5, successive lengths of which were formerly called Nursery Place, Park Terrace, St Agnes Terrace, Thornbury Terrace, Brook Terrace, Woodbine Cottages, George Terrace, Peasant's Cottages, Sisters' Cottages, Stark's Cottages, Brunswick Place, Boston Place, Gloucester Place, Assembly Row, Valentine Houses, Myrtle Villas, Tyssen Place, Paradise Cottages and Reighton Terrace. Some of these names would merit further investigation, but among them is a selection of the characteristics of Victorian suburban name-giving. We have the emulation of the royalty and aristocracy (George Terrace, Brunswick Place) and of the local gentry (Tyssen Place); the assertion of a rural dream of suburban life (Woodbine Cottages, Myrtle Villas); the description of local sites and amenities (Park Terrace, Assembly Row); perhaps even an element of romantic medievalism in St Agnes Terrace.

This can be paralleled over and over again in the names both of houses and streets, not least those illustrated here. The patriotism of the Victorian builders shows through directly in names like Albion Grove or more obliquely in others commemorating colonial occupation like Freetown Cottage. Equally obvious is their social snobbery, seen especially in early and mid-Victorian names like Hertford Villas or Montague Road. A more local equivalent is perhaps to be found in the use of the names of local landowners, such as Graham Road, recalling Baron Graham, who owned much land in the vicinity, while others refer to the topography of the area before it was built up, such as Cricketfield Road or Downs Road. The suburban rural romanticism seen in early Victorian names like Paradise Cottages is sometimes later shown by the adoption of rural place-names like Fletching Road or Mildenhall Road. Lastly, a taste for self-improvement appears in the commemoration of famous people, as in Milton Grove (originally Road) and other streets in its vicinity.

The layout of the streets themselves – even when fitted onto an irregular site –



Typical name plaques: that on the left is on 'Sydney Terrace', 4-16 Cricketfield Road E5, dating from 1868, that on the right is on 'Ivy Villas', 3-13 Clapton Passage (off Clapton Square) E5, erected in 1896. Both specimens have the names neatly engraved on carefully shaped plaques; both illustrate the values of the houses' builders or early occupants, 'Sydney' being presumably an allusion to the aristocracy while 'Ivy' is perhaps intended to suggest rural seclusion.

also shows a care for decorum and atmosphere. Particularly in early and mid Victorian developments the land was often spaciouly laid out. Houses were set in large gardens in roads that are often very wide indeed, complete with 30-foot carriage-ways and 10-foot pavements on either side. Such liberality was encouraged by the relative cheapness of land in comparison with building costs. Each terrace was set back from the road behind a decorous front garden, often with a privet hedge and invariably with neat iron railings and ornamental gates separating the private territory of the household from the public domain of the street. The removal of many of these railings for salvage during the Second World War has done incalculable visual harm to many streets, since their haphazard replacements harmonise far less well with the houses behind them. Either in the gardens or outside trees were planted to give a suitably rural atmosphere to the thoroughfare, planes and horse chestnuts being preferred in the wealthier areas while limes, laburnums and acacias were planted in others more modest.

These suburban streets were deliberately intended to be respectable, and to this end attempts were made when the land was released for development to determine its subsequent character by the use of restrictive covenants. It was quite common for title-deeds to be accompanied by agreements in which the purchasers or builders were committed to erect houses only of a certain size (though such covenants rarely held out against market forces if the larger houses failed to sell). In addition, the occupants of houses were often forbidden to erect commercial premises or to carry on trade or industry in their dwellings. Industry was segregated from housing, tending to be concentrated in less affluent neighbourhoods such as Hackney Wick, if not banished from Hackney altogether to the poorer suburbs to the east and south. Even shops were often restricted to the streets within a neighbourhood which had a

**Bayston Road N16**

The building applications for the houses in this street date from 1876-77; most of them were erected by two local firms of builders. This photograph dates from c.1920 and gives an idea of how Victorian streets looked in their prime – with continuous railings and hedges dividing the front gardens from the street, no parked cars, and

Venetian blinds (rather than net curtains) in the windows. A Borough water-cart is spraying the road – which would have been gravelled rather than tarmaced – to keep the dust down. Today most of the houses remain intact, but four on the lefthand side were destroyed in the War and have since been replaced.



cheaper class of housing.

The streets were also embellished with larger, public buildings, which were often constructed on a grand scale in order not only to serve the needs of the new inhabitants of the area but also to add to the tone of the neighbourhood. Among the churches built amidst the new developments were St Matthias, Stoke Newington (1851-53), St Mark's, Dalston (1863-80) and St Paul's, Glyn Road, Homerton (1890-1). Some of these were bigger and more architecturally interesting than others: St Mark's is said to be the largest parish church in London, while St Matthias is a striking design by William Butterfield, one of the most original and influential of mid-Victorian architects. All were intended, however, as an integral part of the new suburban environment, being deliberately set off by the rows of houses that surrounded them: St Paul's is shown on page 55, illustrating how the church breaks and adds interest to the street line of Glyn Road, E5.

Hardly less impressive were the public houses that were put up at the same time. They were often designed by established architects, like the local churches, whereas the design of the houses was left to the builder. Thus Chester Cheston, Junior, who



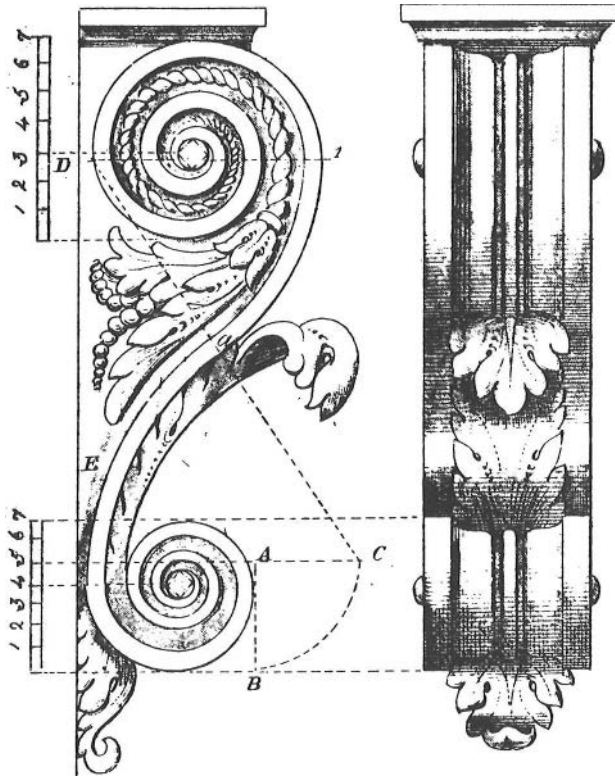
Iron railings and gate at 81 Median Road E5, part of the small-scale development carried out to the east of Lower Clapton Road in the 1860s; the building application for this house dates from 1866. Railings were mass-produced and formed an attractive, unifying feature in many streets; unfortunately, few now remain.



**St Paul's Glyn Road E5**  
Designed by Henry Cowell  
Boys, 1890-1, with, in the  
foreground, 97-101 Glyn Road,  
dating from 1892. This  
photograph illustrates how  
churches fit harmoniously into  
the Victorian streetscape,  
adding variety to long stretches  
of terraced housing.



designed St Mark's, Dalston, also designed a public house in the neighbourhood, possibly the Amhurst Arms in Amhurst Road, E8. As with the churches, the design of pubs was often more lavish than that of the houses among which they were set. They came closer to the designs of the great club-houses by Barry and others in Pall Mall on which they were modelled: these were, after all, local focal points for social life as the clubs were more central ones. Here Italianate details were more boldly used than on houses, as is shown by the Albion, Albion Drive, E8, illustrated on page 57. The Albion shares the same roof-line as the semi-detached villas among which it is placed, but it stands out by the elaboration of its details, including rustication on the ground floor as well as quoins and cornices above and a highly ornate porch.



**The Albion, Albion Drive E8**  
A typical early Victorian public house executed in an ostentatious Italianate style, with the houses of Albion Drive beyond.





# The transformation of Hackney

This book has so far been about Victorian Hackney as it originated – a suburb of well-built houses spaciouly laid out in broad streets. This was the suburb that G.R. Emerson thought so ‘handsome’ in 1862 and W.S. Clarke found hardly less desirable in 1881. But, even in the 1880s and 1890s, Hackney was changing, albeit more quickly in some parts than others. The alteration was noted particularly by the sociologist, Charles Booth, who made a minute analysis of the composition, characteristics and problems of the population of London between 1886 and 1902. In the third series of his *Life and Labour of the People in London*, published in 1902, he observed the general tendency in the late nineteenth century ‘for Hackney to become a poorer and much more crowded quarter’, pointing to a number of developments that have continued ever since. ‘The larger houses are turned into factories’, he wrote, ‘the better-to-do residents are leaving, or have left. In the homes and in the churches their places are taken by a lower middle grade . . . Each class as it moves away is replaced by one slightly poorer and lower’. Whereas until the mid-Victorian period he felt that Hackney had retained much of its pre-Victorian spaciousness and gentility, by the end of the century it was rapidly losing it\*.

The change was reflected both in the treatment of existing housing and in the type of dwelling that was now built. The houses erected in the early or mid-Victorian period to give spacious accommodation to a family with its living-in servants were often subdivided into flats by the end of the century. The new streets put up in the later Victorian period were often more tightly-packed and cheaply-built than previously. Hence more houses could be fitted onto a plot of land than had formerly been the case, and the rent at which they were subsequently leased lowered to fit the pocket of a poorer client. Though census statistics are not available in full as they are for the earlier Victorian period, there can be no doubt of the change in social tone of this area which impressed Booth and other contemporary commentators.

Why did this occur? To some extent it is the natural tendency of suburbs to be popular when they are nearest to the open countryside, and to suffer as they are themselves hemmed in by newer built-up areas. Much of inner London, both north and south of the Thames, has had the same experience as Hackney. But the phenomenon was particularly noticeable in Hackney, inspiring Booth to devote a special section of his book to the subject of ‘Hackney: Past and Present’.

View south-west across Hackney Downs, taken from the top of Gooch House, Kenninghall Road E5 in August 1963. Since then, the view has been transformed by the demolition of many of the houses shown here to make way for the Nightingale Estate and for Baden-Powell school, Charnock Road. This photograph gives a good sense of the harmony and attractive scale of typical Victorian suburban development.

---

\**Life and Labour of the People in London*, Third Series, ‘Religious Influences’, vol. I (1902), pp.73-9.

## LOT 4

**The Valuable Freehold Ground Rents**

AMOUNTING TO

**Per £40 10s. 0d. Ann.**

(IN NINE COLLECTIONS) Secured upon and arising out of

S P R I V A T E R E S I D E N C E S

KNOWN AS

Nos. 13 to 29 (odd), (formerly 9 to 1, Belgrave Terrace), OAKFIELD ROAD, CLAPTON

Close to the Public Open Space, Hackney Downs

The nine houses are Leased separately for a term of 97 years from Christmas, 1862, at £4 10s. 0d. per annum each, amounting to £40 10s. 0d. per annum, with Reversion in about 50 years to an Estimated Rack Rental of £270 per annum.

## LOT 5

**The Valuable Freehold Ground Rents**

AMOUNTING TO

**Per £11 Ann.**

(IN TWO COLLECTIONS) Secured upon and arising out of

T W O P R I V A T E R E S I D E N C E S

KNOWN AS

Nos. 40 &amp; 42 (Formerly 1 &amp; 2, Shrubland Villas), Oakfield Road, Clapton.

Leased together for a term of 94 years from Christmas, 1865, at £5 10s. 0d. each. Rent and Covenants apportioned, together amounting to per annum... £11 0 0

With Reversion in about 60 years to an estimated Rack Rental of £72 per annum.

## LOT 6

**The Valuable Freehold Ground Rent of****PER £11 : 0 : 0 ANNUM**

Secured upon and arising out of the

D E T A C H E D P R I V A T E R E S I D E N C E

known as

No. 44, "Elbion Cottage," Oakfield Road, Clapton.

Leased for a term of 98½ years from 24th June, 1861, at £11 per annum, with Reversion in about 50 years to the estimated Rack Rental of £45 per annum.

## LOT 7

**The Valuable Freehold Ground Rents of****PER £12 : 0 : 0 ANN.**

(IN TWO COLLECTIONS) Secured upon and arising out of

T W O P R I V A T E R E S I D E N C E S

known as

Nos. 46 &amp; 48, (formerly 1 &amp; 2, Dieppe Villas), OAKFIELD ROAD, CLAPTON.

Leased together for a term of 91½ years from 24th June, 1868, at £6 each, Rent and Covenants apportioned. Together amounting £12 per annum.

With Reversion in about 50 years to an estimated Rack Rental of £64 per annum.

Sale particulars for an auction held by Messrs. H. Donaldson & Sons of ground rents in Clapton, 1910. Owner occupation was less common than renting in the Victorian period, and hence ground rents often changed hands.

Hackney's difficulty was that it was not just enveloped by new suburbs, but that the suburbs which surrounded it were themselves very different from the old Hackney. The segregation between housing and industry attempted in Hackney itself, with industry concentrated by the River Lea, was carried out on an even larger scale in Victorian London as a whole. Industry was banished from the fashionable areas of West London and found its home to the east. In areas like Poplar, Plaistow, Stratford and West Ham there was a proliferation of industry with cheap, working-class housing nearby for those who served it. This itself impressed contemporaries, who saw here London's equivalent to the burgeoning growth of the northern industrial towns. Here, on a larger scale, was the type of suburban development that had long been familiar in Shoreditch and Bethnal Green, the classic 'East End' to which Hackney had hitherto been peripheral. In all these districts was to be found the concentration of industrial activities and cheaper housing which made for the least attractive of urban development.

Hackney was undoubtedly affected by its relative proximity to these areas, and it was affected further when it was enveloped to the north and east by poor suburbs made feasible by the introduction of workmen's trains in the late Victorian period. These were most widely introduced by the Great Eastern Railway, who by 1902 were carrying over 17 million workmen a year. It was particularly in the areas just beyond Hackney that the suburbs stimulated by them grew, in Tottenham, Edmonton, Walthamstow and Leyton, which had previously been small and secluded villages. Here the development in the late Victorian period was on a less generous scale than had earlier been the norm in Hackney, and the housing was intended for lower income groups. There is no doubt that this accelerated the social change in Hackney that had already begun.

The maps in Booth's survey of *Life and Labour*, which were coloured to indicate the social composition of each street, can be compared with census returns of twenty years earlier to illustrate the beginning of the alteration. Its continuation is shown by collating Booth's maps with the comparable ones compiled for the *New Survey* of the subject carried out by the London School of Economics in 1929-30. A lowering of social class is evident in most areas, with no upward swing anywhere to compensate for it. More and more streets are typified by the colours designating working-class occupation, and fewer and fewer by the red of the middle classes, except for genteel enclaves surviving in areas like Stoke Newington.

Thus instead of being separate from the East End, Hackney became incorporated into it. As the twentieth century advanced the original, middle-class character of the area was increasingly forgotten and the nature of Hackney seemed bound up with what was by then a predominantly working-class population. Today many residents of the area and commentators from outside seem unaware of the fact that the present character of the Borough – now, to many people's regret, itself changing again – is not timeless but the result of a transformation over less than a century.

The altering social composition of the area was mirrored by changes in its housing and environment. The industry which had previously been segregated away from residential streets increasingly invaded them, extending its tentacles to occupy gardens and backlands and often even the houses themselves. Similarly, more and more houses were crudely subdivided, and, as they became older and unfashionable, they entered into a prolonged era of neglect at the hands of absentee landlords. Many succumbed, too, to redevelopment plans before and after the Second World War which laid whole areas of terraced houses waste to provide more up-to-date units of accommodation in large estates.

Only recently has there been a welcome change in attitude. Public opinion and official policy have turned away from the policy of comprehensive redevelopment as wasteful and undesirable, and both the Borough Council and Housing Associations have in recent years begun to rehabilitate existing houses. At the same time there has been a growth of owner occupation which has also led to the restoration and enhancement of many homes. The official rationale of such rehabilitation is that these dwellings still have a useful life, that their replacement is uneconomic and that they are easily adapted to modern needs. Though their viability even in these terms is a tribute to their builders, however, it is the argument of this book that the suburban houses of Victorian Hackney have more to commend them than simple economics. In their individual and lavish detail, their distinctive character, and in the urban environment that they form, they merit not just acquiescence but positive appreciation.





## How to find out more

Would you like to know more about the history of the house or street you live in? It's like tracing the history of your family, but very much easier. If (as is quite possible) you live in a Victorian house, all the sources you need to look at have already been mentioned in this book and almost all are readily available to the public. Most of them can be found in the Reference Department at the Central Library in Mare Street or in the Borough Archives at the Rose Lipman Library, De Beauvoir Road, N1; only a few have to be traced further afield, mainly to the archives of the Greater London Council at County Hall. This section will explain what you should look at and where to find it.

First, you may be lucky enough to have or to know the whereabouts of the title deeds to your house, and, if so, these will provide a great deal of information about its date of construction and its subsequent owners. If not, or if you want to confirm and supplement what you find out from them, follow these instructions.

Start by looking at your house and comparing it with the photographs in this book. Does it have the Italianate features typical of early Victorian developments, as on pages 12, 17, 30 and 57? Is it similar to the houses in the freer style of the 1860s like those shown on pages 24, 46 or 47? Is it late Victorian, with Gothic details of the kind illustrated on pages 49, 50 and 55? Or does it appear later still and comparable to the houses on page 32?

Check the opinion you reach by using the map on page 11 to establish approximately when the area you live in was built up. This map is obviously only a rough guide, since sometimes a few isolated houses were built at an early date in a neighbourhood that was subsequently developed intensively, while sometimes gaps were left which were only later built up. In general, however, there is considerable uniformity of date within an area which the map is intended to indicate.

To confirm what you discover there, trace your street and house more precisely on the series of Victorian maps of Hackney to be found in the Borough Archives. There you can see a number of reproductions of printed maps of the area from the eighteenth century onwards, including a set of sheets of the 25 inch Ordnance Survey map of 1870 on which all houses that then existed are individually marked. From these you should get a good idea of the date by which your house had been built. Don't forget that, though you are always welcome at the Archives when they are open, it is best to make an appointment in advance and to let the archivist know what you are interested in, so that you can be sure that there will be someone

**Benyon Cottages, 101-3  
Hertford Road N1**

This pair of very plain, early Victorian semi-detached houses is still almost Georgian in style, though restrained use is made of Italianate detail. These houses

are dated 1839 on their facade, but in general it is harder to date early Victorian houses than those from the 1850s onwards for which the documentation referred to in these pages generally survives.



available to help you and prepared with the material that you need when you get there.

Your next task, if your house dates from the late 1850s or afterwards, is to trace its Building and Sewerage Application, which will date it more precisely and also give you the name of the firm who built it and a plan of the house and its original drainage. From 1855 onwards these were submitted to the Hackney and Stoke Newington District Board of Works and are now in the custody of the Borough of Hackney. They are currently being placed on microfilm and in this form will ultimately all be available at the Archives. At present, however, they can only be inspected in the Main Drainage section of the Technical Services Department in the Town Hall annexe; here, an appointment is essential. Applications are filed chronologically, but there is a topographical index which makes it easy to locate the application for any particular house.

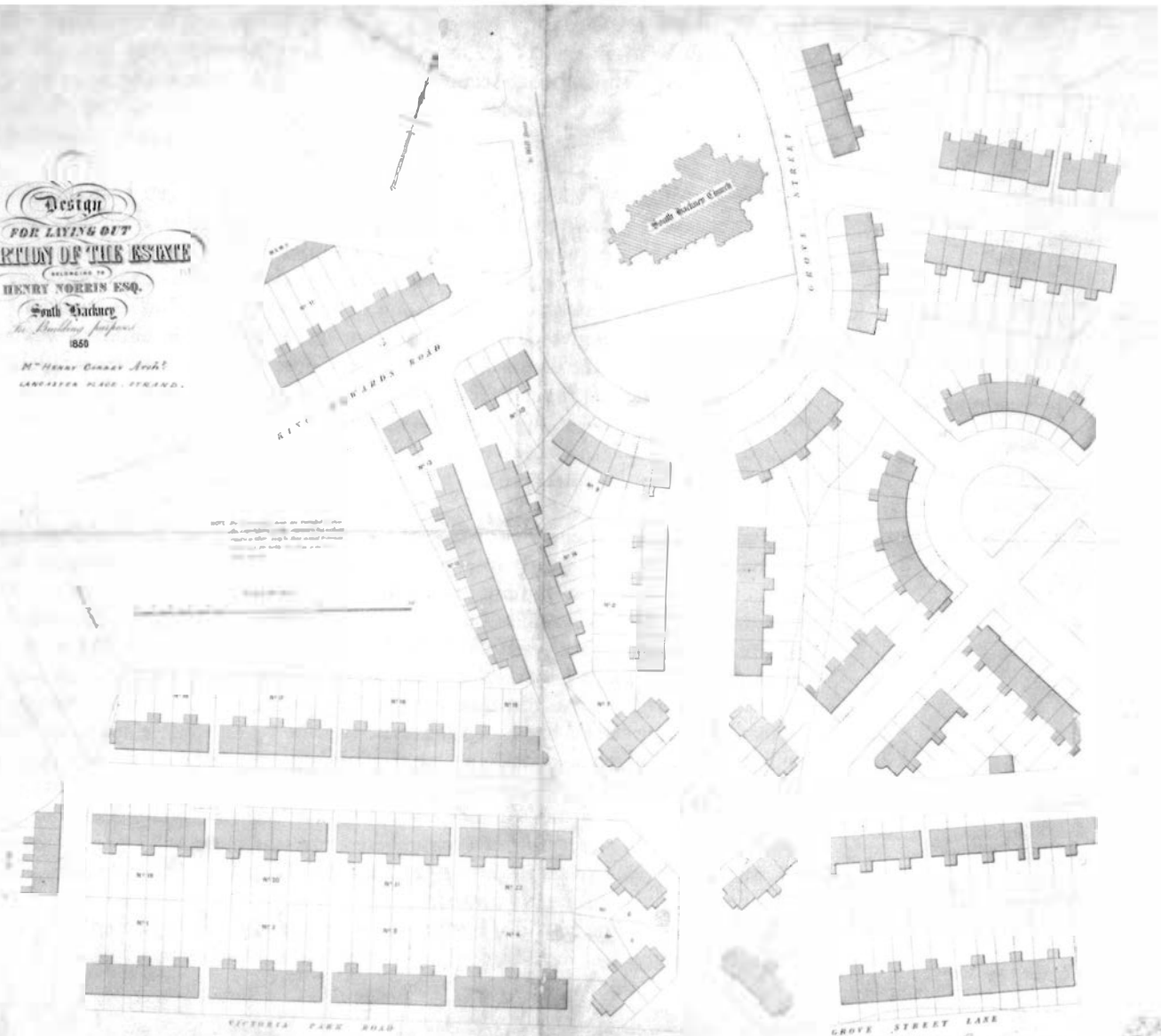
These building applications can be supplemented by the reports that the local district surveyors submitted from 1845 to 1855 to the Metropolitan Building Office and thereafter to the Metropolitan Board of Works. These give the names and addresses of owners and builders (though not the exact address of the properties being built within the street); they give some details of the type of house being built and the early returns give dates of subsequent inspections while building was in progress from which the date of completion of a house can sometimes be deduced. Unfortunately, the records from 1856 to 1870 have been lost, but the volumes for 1845-52 and from 1871 onwards can be inspected at the Greater London Council Record Office, while the loose sheets of returns for the years 1852-5 survive among the Middlesex Sessions Records and may also be seen there (if three full days' notice is given).

Details about the occupants of houses are available from the returns made for national censuses at ten-yearly intervals from 1801 onwards. As already explained, census returns less than one hundred years old are not available, but up to and including 1871 they are; microfilm copies of the returns for Hackney, Shoreditch and Stoke Newington are available at the Hackney Borough Archives. These documents give the name, occupation, age and place of birth of all residents; a typical section of the 1871 return is illustrated on page 27. In using census returns, beware of the fact that some streets have been renamed over the years, while many have been renumbered or given a continuous numerical sequence instead of a piecemeal succession of terrace or villa names. On renaming see page 67, below, while a telephone call to the Street Naming section of the Greater London Council will establish whether a street has been renumbered and whether it will be necessary to look at renumbering plans in the GLC's custody to find out a house's name and number at the time of the early censuses.

The full information provided by the census returns may be supplemented by the briefer details given in local Street Directories, and these directories also provide

Design  
 FOR LIVING OUT  
 A PORTION OF THE ESTATE  
 BELONGING TO  
 HENRY MORRIS ESQ.  
 South Hackney  
 in Building for  
 1860

M<sup>r</sup> Henry Conroy Arch<sup>t</sup>  
 LANGFLET PLACE, ENGLAND.



information about residents after 1871. Copies of most Directories for the Hackney area between 1843 and 1929 are available either in the Reference Library at Mare Street or in the Archives; the former set is fuller. These generally give the names of the head of each household and detail any occupation carried on from the house, though the information in some is more cursory.

Help in piecing together a sequence of names of occupants and a series of owners (if, as is likely, the two were different) can be gained from the Rate Books in the Archives. For the period that they cover these give a completer record than do Directories. Unfortunately, however, whereas the series for Shoreditch goes back to 1844, the early books for Hackney have been destroyed and the surviving sequence begins in 1910; for Stoke Newington, there is a complete sequence from 1914 and isolated survivals from 1900 to 1914.

More information on these topics can be obtained from the Middlesex Deeds Register at the GLC Record Office, which contains details of all freehold conveyances and leases for periods of twenty-one years or more (and assignments of such leases) in this area from the eighteenth century to 1938. Entries for newly-divided building plots frequently include detailed plans, including precise measurements of frontages. Unfortunately, however, the Register is indexed only by vendor or grantor, not by purchaser or lessee, so a property can only be traced if the name is known of an early owner of the house or of the land before it was built up. If you are really keen to know as much as you can about a house or area it may be possible to tackle this, and the Borough Archivist should be able to assist you in tracing the ownership of the land before it was developed.

On street names and their changes, see the London County Council's *List of Streets and Places within the Administrative County of London*, which is available at the Central Library or the Archives. The third edition, of 1929, includes an appendix of abolished subsidiary names such as those referred to above, while the 1955 edition supplements it concerning changes in the intervening period.

For the altering social tone of your street there are two fascinating analytical maps, both of them in books available in the Central Library. The first is in Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People in London*, 1st series, 'Poverty' (3rd edition, 1902); this shows the social state of different parts of the area in the late 1880s. The second is in *The New Survey of London Life and Labour*, undertaken in 1929-30 by a committee from the London School of Economics under the direction of Sir Hubert Llewellyn Smith; a map of north-east London coloured to show the predominant social class of each street will be found in volume 4, published in 1932.

In addition to these sources that are available for every street and house, some streets and areas are covered by additional sources of information, either manuscript or printed. For advice on these, contact the Borough Archivist, who is always ready to co-operate in research on local history.

Map of the estate of the Revd. H.H. Norris, Rector of St John at Jerusalem, South Hackney E9, and a prominent landowner in the surrounding area, as laid out for development in 1850. In fact, little development in the area seems to have taken place until the 1860s. This plan is interesting in indicating how a geometrical layout of streets might be introduced when a large area was planned all at once, in contrast to the more haphazard layout of a typical smaller estate such as that shown on page 21; only parts of this proposed layout were actually implemented. A number of estate plans like this are in the Borough's custody, either in the Archives or in the Reference Library at Mare Street.

**25-6 West Bank N16**

This pair of semi-detached houses is part of an unusual development put up in 1884-5 by Collins Builders of Clapton. The houses look out across the railway line to Enfield and their attractive features include tile-hung dormers and first-floor balconies.



# Ways in which you can help

1. Documents in archives are safe and easy to locate. But many interesting documents – such as the auction particulars illustrated on page 60 – are as likely to be in private as public hands. If you come across anything like this, it is worth getting it into the local archives so that more people can see it and so that it will be preserved for posterity.
2. One written source of evidence which cannot be placed in archives are the name and date plaques on houses. The names provide evidence of the values of the original builders and occupants, as already explained; the dates supplement dating evidence from documentary sources. The Hackney Society is compiling an inventory of all such plaques and would welcome details of any from anywhere in the Borough. We would also like to hear about further examples of out-of-the-ordinary features like those shown in some of the illustrations to this book – either inside or outside houses, and whether structural or decorative.
3. The Hackney Society is concerned about the preservation of outstanding Victorian buildings in the Borough, including a number of those illustrated in this book. This is part of the society's broader aim of keeping an eye on environmental developments throughout Hackney, which depends on the constant vigilance of the society's voluntary members. If you have found this book interesting and would like to join the society in its efforts to conserve and enhance the character of the area, apply for details of membership to the Chairman, 16 Meynell Gardens, London E9, or the Secretary, 115 Eleanor Road, London E8.
4. Above all, if you live in a Victorian house and are considering altering it in any way, please respect the aesthetic merits of this type of building which have been outlined here. Each Victorian house is, in its way, a period piece and worth respecting as such; many form part of terraces which have an aesthetic unity that is easily destroyed by piecemeal, unsympathetic alterations to individual houses. Bear this in mind when undertaking building work. A Design Guide to help you with the decisions involved has been prepared by the Hackney Society. This book is called *Hackney Houses*, and copies are available at local bookshops or by post from the Hackney Society, 16 Meynell Gardens, London E9.







## Further reading

- D.J. Olsen** **The Growth of Victorian London** (1976) (Penguin)  
[Best recent survey]
- H.J. Dyos** **Victorian Suburb: A Study of the Growth of Camberwell** (1961) (Leicester University Press)  
[Pioneering and fascinating case-study]
- H.J. Dyos** 'The Speculative Builders and Developers of Victorian London', **Victorian Studies**, vol.11 (1968), pp.641-90\*  
[Full of relevant details]
- John Burnett** **A Social History of Housing 1815-1970** (1978) (Methuen)
- Roger Dixon and Stefan Muthesius** **Victorian Architecture** (1978) (Thames and Hudson)  
[Housing placed in broader architectural context]
- Stefan Muthesius** 'A Re-appraisal of late Victorian and Edwardian Housing', **Architectural Review**, vol.166 (1979), pp.93-7\*
- Sir John Summerson** 'The London Suburban Villa', **Architectural Review**, vol.104 (1948), pp.63-72\*  
[About a larger type of house than is common in Hackney, but with many relevant points]
- George and Weedon Grossmith** **The Diary of a Nobody** (1892) (various paperback editions)  
[Mr Pooter, the fictional clerk who forms the subject of this book, lived at Holloway rather than Hackney, but this 'Diary' gives a convincing account of the values and concerns of middle-class residents of suburbs like this]

### 21-5 Seal Street E8

Part of a development of cheaper housing north of Shacklewell Lane E8, these houses are typical of the smaller dwellings for working-class inhabitants that interspersed the predominantly middle-class streets. Although the date plaque is inscribed 1881, the building application for these houses was not approved till 1882.

---

\*Available in Hackney Borough Archives

# Glossary

**Bracket:** Small supporting piece of stone, etc, to carry a projecting horizontal.

Curved brackets may be referred to as 'consoles'.

**Capital:** Head or top part of column.

**Cornice:** Projecting decorative feature along the top of a wall, window, etc.

**Facade:** Front of building.

**Gothic:** Architectural style, mainly employed in the Middle Ages, based on the use of the pointed arch.

**Italianate:** see pages 41 and 43.

**Keystone:** Central stone in arch.

**Moulding:** Shaped piece of stone, plaster, etc.

**Niche:** Arched recess in wall.

**Pediment:** Triangular shaped feature placed over doors, windows, etc.

**Portico:** Open porch supported by pillars.

**Quoins:** Blocks of shaped stone at the corner of a building.

**Rustication:** Stonework with the individual stones picked out; sometimes imitated in plaster.

**String-course:** Continuous horizontal band of stone, etc, projecting from a wall.

**Swag:** Decorative feature reproducing a piece of cloth suspended at both ends.

**Terracotta:** Unglazed burnt clay.



‘One of the handsomest suburbs of London’. So Hackney was described in the 1860s, and this book indicates why. It tells of what was then a new suburb of well-built and stylish houses spaciouly laid out in broad streets, to which many a middle-class family was attracted. It explains how suburban development took place, who built the houses in the area and what models they copied. It also describes the houses’ first inhabitants, and accounts for the social transformation that Hackney has experienced in the century since the neighbourhood was first built up.

This sequel to the Hackney Society’s previous publication, *From Tower to Tower Block* (1978), is lavishly illustrated with photographs and with reproductions from Victorian books. It is meant to help people to understand and appreciate the area, with its substantial and lavishly-decorated houses. It also provides instructions on how to find out more about your own home, its builder and its occupants over the years.

