



Fig 4: Clapton Terrace c.1910 © Hackney Archives

2 Clapton Terrace

The main feature of the west side of the common is Clapton Terrace, a Grade II listed range of Georgian houses. The terrace is set back from the main road behind a rectangular green space, which is an extension of the common. The 3- and 4-storey houses have survived especially well. Most of Clapton Terrace was built by c.1800. Recently Clapton Terrace has been given a revamp as part of a pilot scheme to make roads safer, cleaner and more people-friendly. The DIY Streets project, led by Sustrans, offered residents a chance to get involved. They voted for a speed table to slow traffic; communal bins to replace wheelie bins; and more trees to be planted.

3 The former Swan Public House

Just north of Clapton Terrace, on the corner with Braydon Road, stands the former Swan public house (originally The White Swan). A pub had been in existence on this site since at least the middle of the 18th century. During the early 1960s the current building was refaced, after the top storey of the building was removed in 1959. Stage coaches ran from this inn to the Flowerpot in Bishopsgate up to seven times a day in the 18th century.



Fig 5: The White Swan in 1886 with Summit Place beyond © Hackney Archives

It was also an important livery yard and 'baiting' stables (where horses could be fed) on route to Waltham Abbey. When horse drawn omnibuses and trams arrived in Clapton Common it was a stopping point on the route. Some old outbuildings survive to the rear of the pub. The pub was purchased by the Orthodox Bobov community who plan to raise £3.5 million to turn it into a centre for social and religious activities – it is due to open in 2012. Pub regulars and local heritage campaigners fought a lengthy Save the Swan campaign, but Hackney Council granted permission for a change of use in 2009.



Fig 6: The north side of the common c.1910 © Hackney Archives

4 Twentieth-century housing

By the early 19th century the north end of Upper Clapton was considered to be a very genteel area. Today, there is much public 20th-century housing facing Clapton Common. Development started in the 1930s with the Fawcett Estate designed by Messrs Joseph – an architectural practice founded by Nathan Joseph that became well known for philanthropic housing. Completed in 1937, it was followed soon after by the Wigan Estate. But most public housing on the Common was constructed during the 1950s and 60s. Tower Court built c.1953, replaced some rather grand semi-detached villas. Designed by Harry Moncrieff – an acquaintance of Frederick Gibberd – Tower Court comprised of two blocks – one at four storeys and the other at nine. The nine-storey building had originally been eight storeys, but had grown due to the high cost of land. Tower Court was a clear departure from earlier council policy on high-rise buildings and paved the way for subsequent tall buildings in the borough. At the time George Downing (borough engineer) defended the building by stressing the fine setting of the Common, which would provide a 'focal point' at the top of the

common. Although higher than other buildings facing the common, Tower Court has relatively little impact on the character of the common because of its location at the short northern extremity of the open space. On the west side of the common the Summit Estate was built between 1955 and 1957.

5 The New Synagogue, Egerton Road

Egerton Road (just north of Clapton Common) was the home of the New Synagogue, which transferred from the City of London in 1915 because many members of its congregation were moving to the suburbs of north east London. Designed by Ernest M Joseph the building was apparently close to that of the original; however, its main elevation is in the Edwardian Baroque style with a Doric portico and two domed towers flanking the central pediment. The opulent interior, with stained glass and ornate plasterwork, has many of the fittings, including the bimah and Ark, from the old building. By the 1970s the Modern Orthodox Jewish community had moved further out to Golders Green and Edgware. Today, Upper Clapton and the streets surrounding Clapton Common are at the heart of the largest Ultra Orthodox Chasidic Jewish Community in Europe. In 1987 the New Synagogue was sold by the United Synagogue to the

Chasidic Bobov community. For over ten years it was redundant, and in 1996 was added to English Heritage's Buildings at Risk Register. But recently a grant and much hard work have resulted in a fine restoration of the building by the Bobov community who traditionally favour a 'shtiblach' (a house)

for their place of worship rather than an ornate synagogue like the one in Egerton Road.



Fig 7: The New Synagogue, 2010 © Inge Clemente

Fig 8 and 9: Church of the Good Shepherd, 2010
© Inge Clemente



Fig10: 96 and 98 Clapton Common, 2010 © Inge Clemente

6 Church of the Good Shepherd, Rookwood Road

The 155-foot spire of the Church of the Good Shepherd provides the most significant local landmark. The building, designed by Joseph Morris and Sons, was erected in 1892-95 and was known as 'The Ark of the Covenant' or 'The Abode of Love'. Agapemonites or the Community of The Son of Man was a religious sect existing from 1846-1956 and they built this magnificent church at the junction of Rookwood Road and Clapton Common. Seating about 400 people it was decorated with elaborate symbolism and extraordinary statues of nature at a cost of about £20,000. A complete set of beautifully intense stained glass windows, designed by Walter Crane in 1896, remain in the church. John Smyth-Pigott became the acknowledged head of the Agapemonites but in 1902, he proclaimed himself to be the Messiah. He said: 'God is no longer there' pointing upwards, 'but here' pointing to himself. In the ensuing riots Smyth-Pigott, the self-proclaimed new Messiah, had to be protected by the police from a mob. Unable to provide proof that he could walk across the Clapton Common Pond he left Clapton.



7 96 and 98 Clapton Common

On the east side of the common, between Craven Walk and Overlea Road, are two early 19th century villas (96 and 98 Clapton Common). Locally listed No. 96 (Stainforth House) and Grade II listed No. 98 (The Woodlands) are the last remaining examples of the villa suburb developed in Upper Clapton by the Tyssen family from 1820 onwards. These detached villas were to be found on both the east and northern sides of Clapton Common, but apart from these two buildings no other examples still survive. Their historical associations enhance their interest. Stainforth House was the home of William Walsham How (d.1897), suffragan bishop for London's East End and known variously as 'The Poor Man's Bishop' and 'The Omnibus Bishop'. He was a founder of The Waifs and Strays Society (now the Children's Society) and he established the Society's first boys' home in The Woodlands, next door to his residence.

Both buildings are now occupied by a school run by the Belz Foundation, who in 2009 submitted a successful planning application for the demolition of Stainforth House and the construction of a large extension to The Woodlands. Despite some insensitive alterations and neglect they contribute significantly to the historic and heritage interest of the Clapton Common Conservation Area and it will be a great loss to see one of them demolished.



8 Buccleuch House

Between Craven Walk and Overlea Road, Buccleuch House occupies the important central section of the east side of the common. The existing block of flats replaced the earlier Buccleuch Terrace in 1951. Historic photographic evidence shows Buccleuch Terrace (built c.1825) to have been a four-storey terrace plus basement, with a raised ground floor above a semi-basement level in the Georgian style. The terrace was set back from the common behind a carriageway and a narrow formal square. The fine Georgian Buccleuch Terrace was demolished and Buccleuch House, a six-storeyed range of 'self-contained bed-sitting room flats for single women', opened in 1951. Designed by Messrs Joseph this building currently awaits demolition.



9 The Common

In the 19th century families continued to flock to this outer suburb especially after a number of detached and semi-detached smaller villas were built along the eastern and northern side of the common in the 1870s and 80s. William Booth the founder of the Salvation Army purchased a new detached villa near the Common in the 1880s which he bought for £1,260, and which his wife 'longed for'. He continued to say that 'they look on to the Common, and the tram-cars passing in the distance, the children at play, the cows grazing, dogs swimming about the pond, all together make the outlook quite lively'. The London County Council later had responsibility for maintenance of Clapton Common, which was preserved in 1872 as public open space as a result of a successful public petition, which led to 180 acres in Hackney being protected from the encroachment of development. Public amenities on the common included a Keeper's Box and drinking fountain, and in the 20th century a small mock Tudor pavilion (now derelict) was built to provide a public toilet. The Clapton Common User Group has recently raised money to fund a new play area; and the Chasidic community plan to redevelop on the site of the other building, which lies to the north of the pond, to provide a Kosher café.



Fig 11: Horse tram outside the Swan Public House, c.1890 © Hackney Archives

Fig 12: Buccleuch House, 2005 © Chris Dorley-Brown

Fig 13: Model yachts on the Pond with the original Georgian Buccleuch Terrace behind © Hackney Archives



Fig 14: 26 Clapton Common © Inge Clemente

10 26 Clapton Common

Despite some insensitive alterations, 26 Clapton Common remains a very fine tall Renaissance red-brick structure with stone dressings. It has a strong façade with Baroque features and shaped dormers to the roof. Designed by A Rubens Cole, the building was used from 1933-86 as a residential home for deaf and dumb women. The British Asylum for Deaf and Dumb Females was founded by two women in Stamford Hill in 1851, and moved to various addresses in Hackney in the late 19th century. Their move to No. 26 Clapton Common came after the demolition of their former 18th century home at No. 179 Lower Clapton Road. Today, the building is used as a place of learning by the Kollel Congregation Synagogue. Externally many original features survive and it is an excellent surviving example of the large detached properties built for institutions that originally stood on Clapton Common.

Text by Ann Robey **Edited** by Lisa Rigg

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The Hackney Society is the borough's civic and amenity society. For further information log on to www.hackneysociety.org, email info@hackneysociety.org, or write to us at The Round Chapel, 1d Glenarm Road, London E5 0LY. Other walks are available in the series.

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