



THE HACKNEY SOCIETY

SPACES 2025

News and views about Hackney's built environment

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Hackney Design Awards



The Portico in Linscott Road E9. Picture Paul Bolding

The Portico and the church of St John at Hackney were among the winners in the latest Hackney Design Awards.

The People's Choice Award went to the Portico, the remains of the London Orphan Asylum off Lower Clapton Road, with 44 per cent of the votes. It has been restored under plans by ADP Architecture. Lower Clapton GP surgery moved into the building last year in a deal between Hackney Council and NHS North-East London.

The practice, with 15,000 patients, gets 18 consulting rooms – double the number at its previous premises – six treatment rooms, one minor procedures room and new administrative, staff and patient accommodation and reception areas. (see Spaces 78).

St John at Hackney church, also in Lower Clapton Road, was given the Heritage and Restoration Award by the panel of judges. The Grade II listed church, which dates from 1792, was restored under plans by star architect John Pawson with Thomas Ford & Partners to create a flexible, minimalist space that's much used for gigs as well as church services. (see Spaces 67) It reopened in 2020.

Pawson said on his website: "The ambition for the refurbishment of this east London church was the creation of a 'cathedral of creativity', where architecture and people could come together in the richest ways

possible, for a variety of purposes and activities, sacred and secular. Such creativity is stimulated and fostered both by the detail of a physical environment and by the character of its atmosphere.

"As a critical aspect of the design, new architectural elements — distinct from the existing fabric of the church interior, but relating to the existing timber pews and organ — are used to define the different spaces and functions. These elements incorporate much needed storage, whilst also providing a framework for an integrated approach to lighting, acoustics and heating, clearing and simplifying the visual field."

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Other winners were:

Aden Grove, Green Lanes, Emil Eve Architects

– Transformation of a typical terraced house with the addition of matching rear and roof extensions clad in rich terracotta quarry tiles to create a reconfigured home for a young family.

Chowdhury Walk, Daubeny Fields, Al-Jawad Pike Architects

– Council led regeneration of a former garage site to deliver 11 affordable and social rent homes. The terraced houses are constructed using a modular system employing cross-laminated timber with red brickwork and mono-pitched roofs. (see *Spaces 85*)

House made by many hands, Connor Street E9, Cairn Architects

– Pioneering home demonstrating how a Victorian house



*St John at Hackney church interior
Picture Paul Bolding*

can be transformed with substantially reduced environmental impact, achieving a lifetime carbon figure 40% lower than if it had been built conventionally.

Tower Court, Clapton Common, Adam Khan Architects – High-density family living accommodation on the site of a former 1950s estate. It provides accommodation for both returning residents and large families in a culturally diverse neighbourhood.

Paul Bolding

On Monday February 24 at 6.30 pm the Hackney Society holds talks and discussion on 20 years of the Hackney Design Awards at the Portico, Linscott Road, E5. Tickets via Eventbrite.

As part of Hackney History Festival there will be a guided tour and discussion about the restoration work at St John's on Thursday 15th May at 6pm. Details will be on the festival website soon.

School declared ACV by Hackney Council

Hackney Council has declared the Grade II listed Colvestone Primary School building in Colvestone Crescent, E8, to be an asset of community value (ACV), the 13th such listing in the borough. The measure grants the building five years' protection, during which time a local group would have a limited time to bid for it if it were in line to be sold.

It would also influence any planning application. The school, which closed in 2024, is owned by Hackney Council.

The single-storey school was designed by Thomas Knightley in Gothic style and built in 1862. It was acknowledged as being of the "highest quality" and an "exceptional public building" in the appraisal of Dalston's St. Mark's Conservation Area in 2008.

It was one of four of Hackney's 58 primary schools closed by the council because of falling roll numbers.

A group called Colvestone Community called for the decision and identified a number of possible educational and community uses for the building including a children's nursery or crèche and café. "Several social enterprises with local connections have already expressed interest in using the asset to confer these community benefits, some of which offer particular appeal to young and elderly people," it said.

A consortium of social enterprises has made a bid to Hackney Council to re-

open the school as a community educational, cultural and social hub. They include two charitable museums holding national collections – Pollocks Toy Museum and the Bakelite Design Trust; two arts organisations that manage affordable studios for creative and art businesses – V22 and the Bomb Factory Arts Foundation; supporters of a Music Hub where young people can learn, record and produce their music; the Eastern Curve Garden, which manages community green space in Dalston; and a number of local independent businesses which specialise in teaching young people furniture making, clothes design and sewing, ceramics and meditation.

A council statement said: "The Authorised Officer's view was that it is realistic to think that there will be a time within the next five years when the main use of the building and land could further the social wellbeing or social interest of the local community."

While 11 different properties have been added to the ACV list (one, the Chesham Arms pub, twice) the school and its separately declared nursery playground are the only ACV listings still in force in Hackney.



Colvestone Primary School Picture Paul Bolding

Council minutes on the subject of school closures from December 2023 said: "The Council has been reviewing options for alternative uses. This is very challenging work in the current economic climate, because it is very difficult to find financially sustainable uses. This means we need to work through the potential for each site in their local context and we will do our best to steer these sites into locally relevant and valuable uses mindful of the extreme financial pressure the Council is under and the need to minimise the impact on our finances.

"We will take into account the views of the community, the needs of the local neighbourhood, and the need for financial sustainability."

Heritage in danger



Left, Stoke Newington Town Hall. Right, St James Lower Clapton. Below, Ethiopian Church Lower Clapton Road. Pictures Paul Bolding

There has been mixed news for Hackney from the latest Historic England Heritage at Risk Register.

The heritage body has added the former Stoke Newington Town Hall and the church of St James the Great in Lower Clapton Road to the list, both of them Grade II listed. Both are graded A meaning “Immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric; no solution agreed”.

The town hall, dating from 1935-7 and designed by J Reginald Truelove for the Metropolitan Borough of Stoke Newington, is described as being in very poor condition. “Whilst extensively restored in the 2010s, it has been largely vacant for many years and the roofs and rainwater goods are now failing, causing instability and damage to internal fabric and preventing full use of the building,” it said.

The condition of the church of St James the Great, dating from 1840, is described as poor. “The crossing and nave are roofed in

remarkably delicate but long-span trusses which are failing at some joints and bearing points, as confirmed by engineers. The Church is actively seeking funds for repairs,” it said.

The church is the work of two important ecclesiastical architects. Edward Charles Hakewill built the church with transepts and a slim tower but no aisles in 1840. It was extended with a chancel by William Douglas Carøe in 1902.

The good news is that Abney Park cemetery and its chapel, hitherto separately listed as endangered, have been removed from the register after extensive restoration work funded by Historic England and National Lottery Heritage Fund working alongside Hackney Council. Also removed is the Portico to the former London Orphan Asylum in Linscott Road, off Lower Clapton Road, following its restoration by Hackney Council. It is now used by Lower Clapton GP surgery.



Sadly, that still leaves Hackney with 33 buildings on the register, 12 of them churches.

- The Hackney Society has a Buildings at Risk group that now meets monthly by Zoom. All members are very welcome to join. Please email Janet Chapman on chair@hackneysociety.org to be added to the group. Among the buildings the group has focused on is the former Clapton Cinematograph Theatre, known as the Ethiopian Church, at 229 Lower Clapton Road E5.

Morning Lane plans discussed

Hackney Council held a “co-design workshop” in January to seek views on the future of 55 Morning Lane, the Tesco site and its car park. Participants were invited to break into discussion groups, each led by someone involved in the process, to thrash out thoughts on the future supermarket and public realm.

The site, possibly the most contentious in the borough, was bought by the council for £55 million in 2017. It has appointed north London architects Levitt Bernstein to lead a design team and its architects took part in the recent session.

“These workshops will make sure the plans reflect the community’s aspirations for the area,” the council says on its website. Further workshops on different themes are due in February and March. Details are here <https://hackney.gov.uk/55-morning-lane>.

The team led by Levitt Bernstein is due to develop up to three design options for the site by the end of March.



55 Morning Lane – participants discuss ideas at workshop tables Picture Paul Bolding

Noticeboard

Hackney Society Events

On Monday February 24 at 6.30 pm:
20 years of the Hackney Design Awards
– talks and discussion at the Portico,
Linscott Road, E5. Tickets via Eventbrite.

On Saturday March 22 we will have a morning visit to St Barnabas Church. Details to be advised.

Friends of Hackney Archives event

On Tuesday February 25 at 6.30 pm at Hackney Archives, 2nd floor, CLR James Library, Dalston: **Remembering The Rio Cinema** 'Tape-Slide' Project

New Website

Please check out our new website at www.hackneysociety.org and get in touch if you have any comments or suggestions for improvement

Looking forward to Hackney History Festival 2025

After the success of the inaugural festival last year, plans are well under way for this May's event. On **Saturday 10th May** we're at the (much bigger!) Round Chapel with talks including Hackney Council at 60 with Tony Travers; Tales from Hackney's Memory Palaces; Spotting local history everywhere; From Hooghly to Hackney: Hidden Histories of Empire, Race and Migration and the launch of From Hackney With Love: An Intimate History of Regeneration, Gentrification and Belonging by Richard Yeboah.

On **Sunday 11th May** we're taking over the whole of Sutton House, meaning we can have talks in three different rooms and so offer a wider range. Highlights include Laurie Elks's second installment of Hackney's Bloody Heroes; Sue Doe's highlights of Women from Hackney's History; High Art and Low Life in 1990s Hoxton; Hackney and the East India Company, plus many more. As last year, we'll end with Lucy's quiz.

On **Saturday 17th May** Hackney Archives is hosting a whole day of short talks and tours culminating with a talk by Laurie Elks about the Peace Mural. We'll then proceed to the Dalston Eastern Curve Garden for an "after party"!

On **Sunday 18th May** afternoon there will be a workshop session run by the Wikimedia Foundation on editing Wikipedia. We're particularly hoping to add more information about the women featured in our books, but it will be of more general relevance.



As last year there will also be a wide range of walks and satellite events throughout May, including tours of 195 Mare Street; the Town Hall; and the Mildmay Club. There will also be narrated boat rides from Laburnum Boat Club and film screenings.

If you have ideas of what you'd like to see at the festival, or can help with publicity and stewarding on the day, please get in touch.

Tickets will be released in early February. Many sold out quickly last year so ensure you sign up for news at <https://hackneyhistoryfestival.org/>.

Janet Chapman

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A bridge too low?

An unwelcome accolade has been accorded to Hackney. In a list of British railway bridges most frequently hit by vehicles, the one over Kenworthy Road in Homerton has been placed equal-seventh. It was hit 11 times in 2023-24 despite big day-glo height limit signs and a high vehicle detector system.

The bridge carries trains on the Mildmay Line of the London Overground as well as Greater Anglia services.

"After every incident the bridge needs to be examined to make sure it's safe and any debris needs to be cleared. This can cause significant delays to both road and rail users as well as disruption to the affected community," Network Rail said in a statement.

Moleman rides again

The Moleman of Hackney – aka William Lyttle, an engineer who tunnelled extensively under his De Beauvoir house – is fast becoming the stuff of urban legend. The Financial Times magazine made the tale its cover story in May last year and in

November, BBC Radio 3 broadcast an audio essay on the yarn. The programme, in a strand called "Between the Ears", included Hackney author Ian Sinclair, who had interviewed Lyttle.

Lyttle ran rings around Hackney Council's attempts to stop him tunnelling until he was evicted from the Mortimer Road house in 2006. The house – originally a pair of semis – has been restructured to a design by David Adjaye, preserving



some of its distressed look in homage to the Moleman.

Moleman's House in 2005 Picture Paul Bolding

Publications

Book plan

In March we are launching the eagerly anticipated second volume of *Women from Hackney's History*. This features 115 women whose stories illuminate the history of today's borough including Suffragettes, a magician, entrepreneurs, entertainers, politicians, and a boxing chimney sweep. One such woman is Alice Paul, militant suffragette. She was HUGE in US suffrage but also a militant suffragette here. She trained as an early social worker in Hoxton and worked as one in Dalston.



You'll be able to learn more and buy a copy at our launch events at Broadway Market on March 15th and outside St Augustine's Tower on March 30th.

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