



THE HACKNEY SOCIETY

SPACES 2018

News and views about Hackney's built environment

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VEX



© Helene Binet

Vex by Chance de Silva is a curved concrete house in Maury Road, Stoke Newington. It is also an unusual collaboration between the architects and electronic musician/composer Scanner (Robin Rimbaud).

Architects Steve Chance and Wendy de Silva enjoy collaborating with artists. They commissioned Scanner to compose a piece – any piece – that could be played in the house once complete. The music/sound is fully integrated within and around the building.

Music and architecture both take as their starting point Eric Satie's 'Vexations' – a

looping, repetitive piano work which lasts around 18 hours in continuous performance. The house has a looping repetition of forms, a stack of irregular cylinders.

Vex is a three-storey studio house with top floor living spaces and a roof terrace accessed via a glazed roof pavilion. The overlapping of different floor planes provides opportunities for skylights and manages privacy/views. The entire concrete structure was cast *in situ*, the outer wall poured against corrugated steel sheeting carefully crafted to follow the complex, ever changing curves of the building's perimeter.



In 2014 Chance de Silva were invited to make a sound and architecture installation in Palazzo Mora as part of the 2014 Venice Biennale. The resulting installation was inspired by the Vex project.

Vex was shortlisted for Architects Journal House of the Year in 2017.

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Holborn Studios in Shoreditch ('Holborn') is the largest photographic studio complex in Europe. It is used for photography and film work, including fashion shoots and television programmes. It is also a place where creative people interact and exchange ideas. When I wandered in not long ago, the annual student model-makers' show was in progress, where graduates of model-making courses up and down the country exhibit their show pieces. Many go on to work for model-making companies in an arc across North London, serving other creative businesses in the process. Holborn epitomises the network effect of creative businesses which has served Shoreditch – and London – so well over the years.

But Holborn are leaseholders and the studios occupy prime real estate along the Regent's Canal. The freeholders, Executec, sought to redevelop. The developer's scheme was approved by the Planning Sub-Committee on 6 July. It included 50 new residential units and extensive (5644m²) employment work space. The approved scheme has obvious merits including retention of the most interesting historic features of the complex and an affordable workspace element (24%) which supports local employment and exceeds the guideline minimum requirement of 10%.

However, two important defects in the approval process were found when Holborn successfully challenged the decision in Judicial Review (JR) proceedings.

The first was this. Executec's original application had been significantly different in that it included substantially more housing units (64) and less employment space. Holborn had been consulted and (along with 131 others) submitted objections to the original scheme. The Council appended details of the revised scheme on its website four weeks before the planning committee but failed to draw attention to or re-consult on the revised scheme with the result that Holborn and other objectors only found out about the changes after the agenda was published. The Council submitted that the changes were not significant and moreover 'it was considered that the proposed revisions would not cause any significant adverse impacts and would create a positive change, with additional employment space provided'. Hence, it was reasoned, re-consultation was unnecessary. Indeed officers argued that the amendments

resolved the issues raised by Holborn's objections to the original scheme (but without giving Holborn the opportunity to say whether or not that was actually the case!)

The judge found that the Council erred in failing to re-consult. It was not for officers to make a unilateral decision that the changes were 'insignificant' or 'positive'. Changes of this magnitude must be consulted upon before decisions are made. Moreover, the judge pointed out, the alterations included elements which were not 'positive', including the total removal of affordable housing and the removal of structural columns in the basement studios.

That was a serious fault but the second defect is to my mind more shocking. In objecting to the original scheme, Holborn stated that the studio space provided was simply not suitable for the kind of business they conducted. The Planning Sub-Committee paper explained how this objection had been resolved to their satisfaction:

In response to [Holborn's concerns] the applicant has provided letters of interest from two photographic / film studios, both of which state that the proposed studio spaces are workable and that the layout is acceptable. As such, while Holborn Studios objections are acknowledged, the letters of interest provided suggest that the studio space is of a quality which would support the retention of the existing photographic / film studios use on the site. The quality of the proposed studio floorspace is therefore considered to be acceptable.

In effect, members were told that they could (to coin a phrase) 'have cake and eat it' – 50 units to go towards the Council's exacting housing targets and 'retention of the existing...use on site.'

Holborn knew nothing of these letters until the Committee papers were circulated a few days before the meeting and were finally given redacted copies 2½ hours before the meeting. The identity of the writers was concealed, on the grounds that the letters had been written 'in confidence' (although the judge could see no indication that the letters had been marked as confidential).

It was only at the JR proceedings that the weight to be afforded to these letters could be assessed. To cut a long story short, both letters came from parties quite unable to comment whether the studio space was suitable for 'existing use' or not. (Readers should go to the full judgement at <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/>

[Admin/2017/2823.html](http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2017/2823.html) for the rather shocking details.)

Executec are re-applying and at the end of the day may or may not get their scheme through. Whatever the outcome, Hackney Council should take to heart the lessons for democratic accountability. Time will tell if they do. In planning matters, the cards are wholly stacked against objectors. They may not approach Planning Sub-Committee members due to planning purdah; they have minimal opportunity to make their points (usually five minutes maximum) at Committee; they face officers' recommendations which are usually exercised in naked advocacy for the recommended decision giving scant justice to objectors' arguments. In this case, to cap it all, there was an element of active concealment which could only impair Committee members' understanding as to whether objectors' concerns had been met or not.

A spokesman for Hackney Council was quoted by the *Hackney Gazette* as saying that 'the judicial review was upheld on procedural grounds'. We very much hope that the Council will accept, on reflection, that it goes a good deal deeper than that.

Hackney Council is being deluged with 'major applications' which are transforming our communities, economy and built environment. They need to be subjected to effective democratic scrutiny. This case shows that there is some way to go before that is truly the case.

Hackney Council have seen a draft of this article and have asked us to make reference to the following points:

368 notification letters were sent to nearby occupiers. 132 objections were received and 2 letters of support, all of which were taken into account in deciding the application.

The decision not to re-consult on the revised scheme was based on the fact that the changes brought the scheme into line with adopted employment policies in the statutory development plan, did not create any new impact that would cause harm to any individuals nearby, the area in general or have a wider harmful impact on other planning objectives. This decision was reasonable and rational and in line with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.

It was never claimed that the space was suitable for occupation by Holborn Studios,

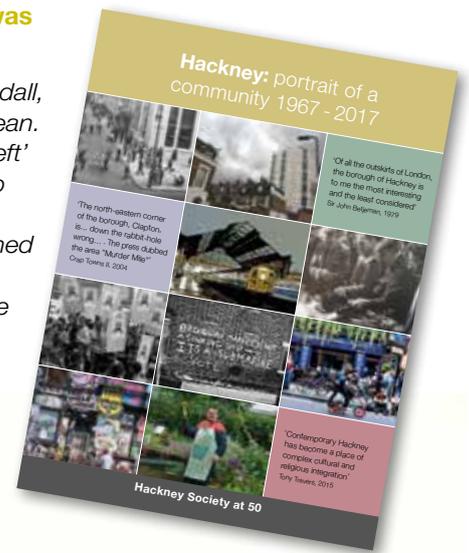
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Picture from a *Portrait*: Bums Poster

By Laurie Elks

Our 50th anniversary publication, *Hackney: Portrait of a Community 1967-2017*, was published in October 2017. This is one of the great photos from the book.

In 1982 the old guard were displaced from power in Hackney Council and Anthony Kendall, a community worker, became Leader. The following year he was succeeded by Hilda Kean. Whilst Hackney's politics became more radical, Mrs Thatcher was taking aim at 'loony left' councils and rate-capping was introduced in 1984. The Council took to the billboards to vent its dissatisfaction with the Bum Deal offered by government. Following complaints about this poster, Hackney Council wittily launched a new poster campaign with be-jeaned bums and the slogan 'there are some things you can't cover up'. Hackney's Labour Group split over the issue whether to defy Mrs Thatcher by refusing to set a rate and the Council's affairs descended into dysfunctionality. Jim Cannon's essay – 1982, *The Left Takes Control* – recounts this sorry story.



© Alan Denney

Holborn Studios` *continued*

and it was made abundantly clear to Committee that Holborn Studios considered the space to be unsuitable for their purposes. But it was equally clear that the space was suitable for some sort of photographic studio use. This is because the proposed space had greater than average floor to ceiling heights, a larger than average goods lift, and a basement location away from sources of light pollution.

The applicants asked that the 2 letters of support be kept confidential and only agreed on the day of the Committee to release redacted copies of the letters with personal information deleted.

The Council considers that the principal reason the judge quashed the planning permission was the failure to re-notify following the revisions to the scheme.

Telling the Story of Lower Clapton

By Carolyn Clark

The Lower Clapton Tales is a story of people and place published by Hackney Historic Buildings Trust. The book gives a fascinating insight into life in and around Lower Clapton in the 20th century, as told by people born and bred in Lower Clapton or living in the area for a long time. It is lavishly illustrated with photographs, maps and images from Victorian times to the Millennium. Over 50 local people contributed stories and photos never made public before.

Living memories are interwoven with historical accounts to tell humorous, moving, and often surprising stories of life in Lower Clapton. The book contains 140 photos, maps and illustrations from Victorian times to the modern day. It is written by Carolyn Clark, who also wrote *The Shoreditch Tales*.

The Lower Clapton Tales is a useful publication for those wanting an interesting perspective on the history of Hackney in general and Lower Clapton in particular. It will rekindle memories if you know Hackney; if you're new to the area, it's a great way to find out about the local history.

The Lower Clapton Tales is available from local retailers and online, priced at £9.95.

Hackney Society Events

Dynamic Dalston

Saturday 24 February 2018, 11am

Walk with Lisa Shell and Ray Blackburn

A walk around the 'hot spots' of Dalston, taking a look at the new development pressures and their impact on the townscape we have now. The Dalston Quarter, Eastern Curve Garden, Kingsland Shopping Centre, Gillett Square – how might they be affected by housing demand, Crossrail II, the night time economy, Hackney's Local Plan 2033, the London Plan?

Meet at Dalston Junction Station, Dalston Square entrance. *Booking essential.* Book via hackneysociety.org FREE for Hackney Society members, £5 for non-members.

Clapton Tales

Wednesday 14 March 2018, 6.30pm

Talk with Carolyn Clark

Joint meeting with Friends of Hackney Archives. The author of *The Tales of Lower Clapton* will relate stories of life in Lower Clapton in the 20th century.

Meet at Hackney Archives, Dalston Square, E8 3BQ. *Booking essential.* Book via hackneysociety.org

Hackney Wick

Thursday 24 May 2018, 7.00pm

Walk with Ralph Ward

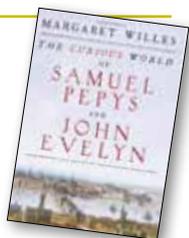
Hackney Wick is Hackney's most febrile hotbed of change. After becoming Hackney's last artistic frontier a few years ago, the Wick now faces an influx of housing developments. Meanwhile, artists and hipsters; cafés and brewers co-exist in a colourful graffiti-laden milieu. Ralph Ward's tour will finish at the Howling Hops Brewery where we will have a short introductory talk from the head brewer, Tim O'Rourke.

Meet at the foot of the entrance ramps to Hackney Wick station at 7.00pm. About 1½ hours + 15 minutes brewery visit followed by a beer. *Booking essential.* Book via hackneysociety.org FREE for Hackney Society members, £5 for non-members.

Publications

The Curious World of Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn

by Hackney writer Margaret Willes provides a portrait of two Restoration figures during a dramatic period of English history. The celebrated diarists were close friends. Yale University Press, £20.



East End Vernacular: Artists Who Painted London's East End Streets in the 20th Century

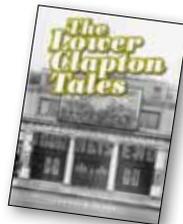
edited by the Gentle Author presents a selection of pictures revealing the evolution



of painting in the East End and tracing the changing character of the streets through the 20th century. Among the artists included are: John Allin, S R Badmin, Pearl Binder, James Boswell, Roland Collins, Alfred Daniels, Anthony Eyton, Doreen Fletcher, Geoffrey Fletcher, Barnett Freedman, Noel Gibson, Charles Ginner, Lawrence Gowing, Harry T. Harmer, Elwin Hawthorne, Rose Henriques, Dan Jones, Nathaniel Kornbluth, Leon Kossoff, James Mackinnon, Cyril Mann, Jock McFadyen, Ronald Morgan, Grace Oscroft, Peri Parkes, Henry Silk, Harold Steggles, Walter Steggles and Albert Turpin. Spitalfields Life Books, £25.

The Lower Clapton Tales

by Carolyn Clark provides a history of Lower Clapton (see p03). Hackney Historic Buildings Trust, £9.95.



Unseen London: The City Through the Eyes of Contemporary Photographers

by Rachel Segal Hamilton compiles the work of the following photographers: Thom and Beth Atkinson, James O Jenkins, Rut Bles Luxemburg, David Vintiner, Matt Stuart, Janie Airey, Vicky Grout, Ben West, Effie Paleologou, Stephen Leslie, Dougie Wallace, Anton Rodriguez, Simon Norfolk, Mark Sanders, George Georgiou, Andy Sewell, Lorenzo Vitturi, Carl Bigmore, Giacomo Brunelli, Cian Oba-Smith, Johanna Neurath, Lewis Bush, Shahed Saleem and Nick Turpin. The book includes a section on Purim in Stamford Hill. Hoxton Mini Press, £26.



Noticeboard

Hindle House War Memorial Project

Hindle House War Memorial Project now has a website: <http://www.hindlehousewarmemorialproject.co.uk/>. The project commemorates the residents of the Hindle House Estate in Arcola Street and the surrounding area who lost their lives during WWII (see *Spaces* 46 and 50).

Images of Hackney 'Another Time Another Place' is possibly the largest collection of unseen Hackney images from the 1970s and 1980s. It was a time when there was large-scale manufacturing and Hackney still bore the scars of post-war slum clearance. It was a very different place. This exhibition of photos by Neil Martinson covers working lives, protests, children and young people, homelessness, Jewish life, street markets and street scenes. There will be more than 60 images on display. A selection from the series will be published as a photobook by Café Royal Books at the end of January. The exhibition is open daily from 2-22 February, 9am-5pm, at the Stour Space, 7 Roach Road, E3 2PA; entry is free.

Restored Banksy A Banksy artwork in Shoreditch that was severely vandalised has been restored. After work by specialists from the Fine Art Restoration Society, the image – Snorting Copper – was returned to Curtain Road. It is secured to the ground in a reinforced case.

Haggerston Baths Hackney Council has approved plans to turn Haggerston Baths into shops, community spaces and offices. The plans for this Grade II-listed building, which was opened in 1904 and designed by Alfred Cross, do not include a swimming pool. This comes as a great disappointment to all who have campaigned to restore the pool (see *Spaces* 24, 33, 43 and 49).

London Fields Lido Following a series of delays, London Fields Lido reopened on 4 January 2018. It had been closed for significant refurbishment works since 9 April 2017.

Well Street Market Well Street Shopkeepers Alliance has issued a statement that it will be continuing to work with Hackney Council Markets Team to support the market 'in whatever way we can'. This follows the officers of Well Street Traders and Residents Association (WESTRA) stepping down. Well Street Market reopened on 3 December 2016 following a successful crowdfunding campaign by local traders and residents.

Thanks to Kopykat for sponsoring this issue

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