



THE HACKNEY SOCIETY

# SPACES 2019

News and views about Hackney's built environment

Issue 66 autumn 2019 // ISSN 2047-7465

## De Beauvoir Block By Tom Feary\*



© Nicholas Kane

**The architects Henley Halebrown have established roots in the De Beauvoir area. In addition to their ongoing work on the De Beauvoir estate, they have expanded their growing portfolio of work across the borough to include a sensitive renovation and expansion of a row of Victorian warehouses along De Beauvoir Road: De Beauvoir Block.**

Putting to one side the conventional option of converting the block into luxury loft-style flats, the client (The Benyon Estate) chose to convert these warehouses into a series of workspaces. Using a simple palette of cross-laminated timber, metal frames to the openings and thoughtful removals and additions to the

existing fabric maximise the natural light which fills the internal spaces.

Perhaps the most obvious and striking 'new' elements come at roof level of the first phase (nos. 92-96 completed 2017), with the addition of jet black studios accessed off a generous, open access deck. This borrows ideas from other Henley Halebrown projects and the use of synthetic rubber to clad the offices creates a strong, definitive edge to the roofline, seemingly without any unnecessary detailed fussiness.

The decks are perhaps the ideal opportunity for chance meetings and a space for the holy grail of workspace design to take place – *collaboration* – between otherwise unconnected small businesses.

The programme of the spaces offers a range of workspace products, from affordable cafe space at ground floor to more formalised units on upper floors.

Number 98 of the row recently completed construction and no. 100 is due to start on site later this year.

De Beauvoir Block was one of the winners of the Hackney Design Awards.

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## New Gravel Pit Burial Ground By Sean Gubbins

**On 30 July, despite threatening rain, there was a good turnout of members to visit the New Gravel Pit Burial Ground. You might well ask what and where is that? It is behind Chatham Place, around the corner in Mead Place, an open space largely hidden by ivy-covered fencing. Peek through the railings and you will be able to make out tombs amidst the undergrowth.**

This space was the burial ground of the New Gravel Pit Chapel. The chapel's roots go back to the beginnings of nonconformity in Hackney. The first dissenting congregation in Hackney was worshipping by the late 1660s in a chapel on the west side of Mare Street. The election of a new minister in 1714 caused a split within this Presbyterian congregation (not a rarity amongst nonconformists). The site the seceders moved to was close by a gravel pit, hence the name of the chapel which they built on the east side of today's Chatham Place, north of Morning Lane. It was at this chapel where Joseph Priestley, scientist and theologian, was pastor in 1791.

In 1809 the congregation, which was edging towards Unitarianism, built a new octagonal shaped chapel further south along Chatham Place. The Chapel was rebuilt in 1858 in a traditional Gothic style. With its now Unitarian congregation, the building survived until 1969, when it was demolished for the extension of the Frampton Park Estate. Barbrook House stands on the site of the chapel, with part of the burial ground now a children's play area on Chatham Place and the rest of it wrapping round the chapel site in an 'L' shape.

The site was saved from development because there had been a burial within the preceding 100 years. After the surrounding flats were built, the GLC laid out the ground as a public space with paths and grass. Today the site is owned by Hackney Council

and managed by Hackney Housing. Occasionally the undergrowth has been cut back, the last time being in October 2018. But it has vigorously grown back, making it tricky to walk through. The metal fencing now bordering the site on Mead Place was installed in 1999. Inspired by the history of the chapel, it was designed by Cazenove Architects along with pupils from nearby Morningside School. Depicted on one of the panels is a sketch of the chapel. Another lists some of the people buried here. These include Daniel Whittle Harvey, founder of *'The Sunday Times'* and first Commissioner of the City of London Police, who erected a monument to him. Not listed is Thomas Briggs, buried here in July 1864. He was the first person murdered on a British railway, on the North London Line between Hackney Wick and Hackney Central.

The purpose of the meeting on 30 July was to consider ideas for the future of the site. We met with Tim Walder, Hackney's Conservation Officer. Also with us was the Chair of the Frampton Park TRA. Tim is keen to establish a new use which will see the site more accessible to local people, providing for on-going maintenance and sustainable use. The site is an Archaeological Priority Area in the emerging new 'Hackney Local Plan' and has also recently been proposed as a Locally Listed Building. The site has no other heritage designations and is not in a Conservation Area.

Various ideas came up in discussion about the ground's future: maintain it as a nature reserve; put it under the management of Hackney's Parks Service; create a park



Courtesy Hackney Archives



© Sean Gubbins

with through access from Mead Place to Chatham Place; clear the space to record the surviving graves; make it a place to celebrate Hackney's non-conformist tradition. Whatever is decided will need the approval of local residents, who have recently been facing a lot of new building on their estate. If you have any suggestions about the future of this site, get in touch with Tim Walder ([timothy.walder@hackney.gov.uk](mailto:timothy.walder@hackney.gov.uk)).

## London's Anatomy By Wendy Forrest

**Hackney revels in Victorian brick, iron, typography, stone, terracotta, glass and tile and so we were delighted by an invitation from the Heritage of London Trust to a conference exploring these materials and the craftspeople that created them.**

Held in July 2019, the meeting, 'London's Anatomy: Victorian Buildings from Top to Toe', kicked off with a Hackney Society favourite, building regulations. While party walls and cess pits have been subject to regulation since at least 1189, it was

the Victorians who gifted us hundreds of improvement acts and, importantly, the inspection and enforcement framework to give them teeth. The conference was a very practical reminder of the ways utility and aesthetics, craft and art, are interlinked.

Doulton family profits from sewer pipes and sanitaryware underpinned the production of Tinworth friezes and Harradine figurines. The business of local brickmaking and the logistics of brick transportation enabled the polychrome of architects like William Butterfield (1814-1900). Wall painting, especially in churches, flourished during the Gothic revival but the examples we celebrate, such as St Andrews Bethune Road, were



# Bohemia Place By Laurie Elks

**Hackney is a challenging place for practitioners in the art of regeneration. Over some 30 years there has been a pattern of premediated regeneration plans falling flat, whilst unplanned improvements have taken off. Shoreditch Tech, Hoxton Hip, Broadway Market have all been fired by native entrepreneurialism. Dalston Square has fallen flat whilst Ashwin Street has thrived. The Council, playing catch-up, has sometimes sought to corral these spontaneous developments into new regeneration blueprints. The Council's proposals for Dalston, currently subject to a new 'Conversation' are a case in point.**



In this context, Hackney's Bohemia Place provides an interesting nascent case study. It is a cobbled street squashed between the Victorian railway arches and the bus garage, until recently home to countless car body shops, cut off and somewhat threatening, particularly to traffic wardens who never set foot there. A classic regeneration opportunity if ever there was one, especially in Hackney!

Hackney's aspirations, at least for the public record, are set out in The Hackney Central and Surrounds Masterplan, a supplementary planning document adopted in 2017. Their plans would sweep away the tall stock brick bus garage (which will unalterably change the 'vibe' of Bohemia Place). The Masterplan promises a permeable space, joined to the redeveloped Tesco site through opened-up arches offering:

A vibrant, lively street with strong local identity and character reflected by the mix of commercial uses. Active street frontages which invites people to explore inside, open threshold between commercial units and public realm for adjacent activity space.

In the meanwhile, the railway arches have been transferred by Network Rail to the venture capital owned Arch Company which aims to establish viable commercial future uses. The car businesses have been turned out and the arches are on short-term lease

(till 2023) to the developers Hackney Walk, who were previously the developers of the Morning Lane Fashion Hub and also have an option to acquire the Tesco site.

So what will lift this interesting street to take off? Key elements of the Fashion Hub are clearly struggling. Nearly all of the luxury fashion brands installed in David Adjaye's golden arches have folded up their tents and stolen away. Meanwhile, Paper Dress Vintage, at the entrance to Bohemia Place, thrives on an improbable business model of vintage clothing by day and music venue by night. Hackney may one day host an inner city Bicester Village but not yet!

Hackney Walk's aspirations, as they stood at the start of 2017, were set out in their Bohemia Place Design and Access Statement. The proposals formed part of the Hackney Fashion project described 'as a major regeneration scheme focussed on destination fashion outlet retail stores together with workspace, leisure and hospitality'. These aspirations have required revision as it has become clear that fashion brands are not seeking the opportunity to lease further space in Hackney's railway arches.

Meanwhile, in Bohemia Place, things on the ground are changing – Hackney style. A Hackney Christmas Market was a huge success and there are now regular markets alternating between fashion, ethical and

vegan themes. There are now three breweries on this strip. The largest, the improbably named Hackney Church (previously St John at Hackney) Brewery, exhibits vast brewing tanks adjacent to its Brewpub. After a shaky start (beer-wise), the brewery is now working to capacity supplying a wide range of brews as well as Sunday roasts to Hackney's 'new demographic'. Night Tales is a successful night club occupying arches which undoubtedly benefits from the still edgy feel of Bohemia Place by night. Regeneration wise, these may not be quite the businesses the Masterplan envisaged but they do provide significant employment. I am informed that 90% of the staff at Church Brewery and Night Tales are local to Hackney. Other local businesses include a refill shop offering a wide range of products to customers who hate single-use packaging.

And then there is Brew Club, a business providing tutoring to DIY brewers, giving the possibility of newly marrieds offering guests their very own local brew. What could be more Hackney than that?

Hackney Walk tell me they are still working out what will 'fly' in Bohemia Place and that seems eminently sensible. Meanwhile, the Council has launched a 'Hackney Central Conversation' (see <https://hcc.commonplace.is/overview>). The Council has canvassed views in particular 'about transport issues, affordable workspaces, crime and safety, community spaces, public realm and the retail and commercial offer in the area' and has promised to come back with 'worked up views' in the near future. We can await this with interest, and a little trepidation.

considered commerce rather than art. Unlike painters such as Lord Leighton, these producers were termed executants, their names unrecorded.

London emerged as the centre of international networks of production and consumption. Clerkenwell was already an established world leader in clockmaking and Thwaites and Reed exported clocks across

the empire. Their architectural clocks, as at Eastbourne's town hall, might account for a third of the final building cost. The construction of London landmarks powered industrial innovation. Paxton's Crystal Palace required around 300,000 sheets of cast plate glass to be made and delivered in less than 40 weeks. Chance Brothers of Smethwick only managed this with French expertise; the 1848 revolution displaced

enough migrant workers to meet the order. It seems the Hyde Park glass could not be successfully removed and transported for reconstruction at Sydenham and at least 80,000 squares of the original glass were auctioned off. These were offered in small lots, including as fractions of the original panes. This glass would have been reused all over the capital, another element of London's Victorian anatomy.

## Noticeboard

### Springfield Park

Work has begun on a project to improve Springfield Park. As part of the work, Springfield House will be restored, workspace will be created in the old stable block, and there will be a new playground. The project is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (£3.3m), Hackney Council (£725,000), the London Marathon Charitable Trust (£250,000) and the Historic Houses Foundation (£20,000). Springfield Park was formed from the grounds of three private houses, of which only Springfield House remains. It was opened as a public park in 1905.

### Homerton Roof Garden



Core Landscapes has created a new roof garden at Core Arts in Homerton. The roof garden site includes a teaching and workshop space, micro plant nursery, greenhouse, water-harvesting and demonstration roof top garden plants that can withstand heat, exposure and drought (<https://www.corearts.co.uk/>).

### The Acorn

The Acorn pub in Queensbridge Road is to be demolished. This is despite its designation as an asset of community value. Built in 1839, the pub is one of the few buildings in the area to have survived bombing during World War II. It is thought to have been used by workers on Regent's Canal.

### The Laundry

The Laundry in London Fields is to be demolished to make way for flats and a slight increase in commercial space. Currently the building is used as workspace for people involved with music, arts, fashion and photography.



### Gasholders

The gasholders by the Regent's Canal near Broadway Market are under threat of demolition. The East End Waterway Group has launched a petition to save the structures, which date from the second half of the 19th century.



## Hackney Society Events

### Council Housing in Hackney after WW2

Thursday 28 November, 6.30pm

#### Talk with John Boughton

John Boughton is our foremost chronicler and champion of social housing. His recent book, *Municipal Dreams*, was very well-received. Both this book and the Municipal Dreams blog draw closely on the Hackney experience, one that John knows very well. The talk will show how Hackney shares – and sometimes shapes – the national story with a detailed review of local developments. Meet at Hackney Archives, CLR James Library, Dalston Lane E8 3AZ.

This is a joint Hackney Society/Friends of Hackney Archives event and is free to all. Booking will be available through Friends of Hackney Archives (<http://hackneyhistory.org/>).

### The Hackney Anthology

Tuesday 17 December 2019, 6.30pm

#### Social event

This December we have a very special event – a performance of the Hackney Anthology in Wenlock Barn at Sutton House. Anthology is a collection, originally brought together by the late Mike Gray, of writings by authors from Hackney or writing about Hackney. Among the astonishing gallery of characters featured are Erasmus, Rafe Sadleir, Milton, John Evelyn, Samuel Pepys, Daniel Defoe, Joseph Priestly, Charles Dickens and Marie Lloyd going up to more modern writings by Harold Pinter, Arnold Wesker and Will Self. There will be a talented cast of performers including Lissa Chapman and Peter Mudge with our own Laurie Elks standing in for Mike Gray's role as narrator. This will be a wonderful pre-Christmas treat in Hackney's oldest domestic building. There will be a licensed bar during the evening. Meet at Sutton House, 2 and 4 Homerton High Street, E9 6JQ.

Booking essential.

Book via [hackneysociety.org](http://hackneysociety.org)  
£5 for Hackney Society members, £10 for non-members

## Publications



**East London Homes** by Sarah Bagner with photographs by Jon Aaron Green portrays the interiors of architects, florists, film makers, upholsterers and many more who don't play by any rules other than their own.

It features 29 homes and includes introductory texts by art historian Charles Saumarez Smith and SCP founder Sheridan Coakley. Hoxton Mini Press, £30.



**The Doll Factory** by East End-based author Elizabeth MacNeal is a thriller set win Hackney during the Victorian era. Picador, £12.99.

**Spaces** is published by the Hackney Society. Views expressed in the articles are not necessarily those of the Society.

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