



THE HACKNEY SOCIETY

SPACES 2025

News and views about Hackney's built environment

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Major Dalston residential site planned By Bill Parry-Davies



Dalston Shopping Centre CGI of proposed development seen from St Mark's Rise with Ridley Road in the foreground. Picture provided. See comparison image.

Comparison image of Dalston shopping centre site today seen from St Marks Rise . Photo Paul Bolding

Dalston Shopping Centre proposed development. Picture provided



After years of discussions with Hackney's planners, an application has been made for the partial re-development of the Kingsland Shopping Centre. The owner, Criterion, proposes replacing the rear Matalan store and car park with three large blocks including 14-storey towers, and a fourth block with a 12-storey tower. The development will comprise 254 flats, which are estimated to house some 550 residents including 100 children, and a mix of commercial uses and workshops on the ground and first floors, on a site of just over 9,000 square metres.

The Hackney Society Planning Committee and the Dalston Conservation Area Advisory Committee have lodged a strongly worded objection to the application with Hackney's planners.

The towers will exceed the height of their tallest neighbours – Kinetica and 57East. Besides the anomaly of creating a little Manhattan in Dalston, and the disregard of the surrounding conservation area's heritage, such overdevelopment will inevitably have adverse environmental consequences. The carbon price tag rises significantly with building height – the embodied carbon footprint is at least twice that of a mid-rise building per square metre

of useable space. With an existing curtain of tall buildings, extending across the site's southern boundary, already taking an unfair share of the sunlight previously available, 24 per cent of the new flats will fail to meet the British Research Establishment's (BRE) Sunlight Exposure standard and what the application calls 200 "major", and numerous lesser, sunlight losses will impact flats in the surrounding buildings.

The canyon effect will result in the new public open spaces at ground level failing as a whole to meet even the BRE minimum standard for sunlight. Only 12 per cent of the key space planned for social interaction, and less than 50 per cent of the main playground's area, will receive two hours direct sunlight per day on average. Of all the "green" spaces and children's playgrounds, 75 per cent will be on a residents-only second floor raised concrete podium and the remainder on the 7th to 12th storey rooftops.

Of the 254 flats, 173 will be for sale at market prices and the remainder will be "affordable" of which 36 will be "intermediate" (for shared ownership) and 45 for "low cost rent". The affordable flats amount to 35 per cent of all habitable rooms but do not meet the official planning policy target of 50 per cent and the family sized homes will number less than half the policy target of 33 per cent. Although the

continues overleaf

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Email us at membership@hackneysociety.org or visit our
website www.hackneysociety.org

greatest local needs are for affordable and family-size homes, Criterion's consultant ULL Property claims these are not viable after accounting for the landowner's financial incentives and development profit.

Regrettably the new development will not integrate with the town centre because redevelopment of the remaining front part of

the Kingsland Shopping Centre is blighted for the foreseeable future by Crossrail 2's land safeguarding and Sainsbury's long lease on its premises. As a result, the residents of the new development will have no direct route through to the high street and Dalston Kingsland Station once the shopping mall is closed in the evenings.

You can view the application and make comments on Hackney's planning portal or alternatively email planning@hackney.gov.uk putting in the subject line Ref: 2025/0167 Matalan Plc, Dalston Cross Shopping Centre E8 2LX

Visit to Hackney Substation

When you turned the lights on to read this edition of Spaces, I doubt that you thought about whether or not they'd work. We're so used to the uninterrupted supply of our electricity, that we rarely even consider what is happening behind the scenes to make it so reliable. The recent Hackney Society visit to the Hackney electricity substation in Millfields Park was a welcome opportunity to see what is happening to keep everything running so efficiently.

If we go back a hundred years, Hackney had its own power station on the same site next to the Lea Bridge Road. Coal that came by barge up the Lea to be burnt to generate the electricity also contributed to the local smog. As Hackney's demand for electricity grew, so did the power station, with Hackney-B being added in 1957, before being decommissioned in 1976. Although some remnants of the Hackney-B station remain, the site is now the location of an important substation. Other than the high walls, and a persistent 50Hz hum which pervades the neighbouring park, most people are unaware of what it does.

The job of substations is to reduce the 275,000 volt feed that is brought in by the overhead lines coming from large, central generating plants to a lower voltage for distribution to local substations, which in turn reduce the voltage to the 230V which is supplied to our homes. From the Millfields site, a line of towers (apparently never called pylons by the engineers who maintain them) stretches out across Hackney Marshes, before bending northwards and following the Lea Navigation up to the next substation in Tottenham, and hence to Brimsdown and Waltham Cross.

From the Hackney substation, the cables go underground in two tunnels. One travels West to Swiss Cottage and the West End, whilst the other travels South to the Olympic Park and West Ham. Each is almost as large as a Tube tunnel, with a diameter of



Highly visible! Hackney Society members pose at the Millfields substation. Photo James Watson. Inset: Rob Briggs, chair of the society's Buildings at Risk group, poses in front of a cable tunnel. Photo Janet Chapman



more than 4 metres – large enough to walk down to inspect the lines, as we discovered at the bottom of a deep staircase.

There are around 40 major substations in London, which feed 30,000 more local substations providing our final supply. We rarely notice their existence, other than seeing a yellow "Danger of Death" sign on a door or a wall. The large transmission substations are maintained by a team of 180 engineers from National Grid who monitor and test them.

The Hackney site is dominated by the final tower bringing in the high voltage line from Tottenham before it's taken into the switch-gear. Here, very high-tech equivalents of your household fuse-box monitor the lines for any irregularities and automatically switch out and reroute circuits if faults are discovered. Their operation is automatic, monitored and controlled centrally by National Grid. After that safety stage, the cables head down to the tunnels. This is architecture for automation – designed to do its job, mostly without the need for human intervention.

At the southern end of the site are the last remaining buildings of the earlier Hackney

power station. Elsewhere it is very much a working substation, which gets on with the business of supplying Hackney and central London with its electricity. Starting in spring 2026, it will be getting a major upgrade, as this section of the distribution network is updated to operate at 400,000V. The rationale for this is that the higher the voltage used for distribution, the more efficient it is, as well as allowing more power to be conveyed down the cables. For local residents, it should also result in a reduction to the background hum from the giant transformer housed on the site, so Millfields Park will become even quieter.

Many thanks to James Watson and his colleagues from National Grid for organising this visit. His enthusiasm for his job is palpable and infectious, giving us a fascinating description of the substation's history and how it works. It's not often that we're able to see behind the closed doors of our critical national infrastructure. It was good to be able to appreciate what is going on, largely unseen and unheeded, but which is such an important part of keeping the lights on.

Nick Hunn

National and local listing; know the difference

The Hackney Society's Buildings at Risk Group (BARG) has been running since December 2024, meeting on Zoom on the second Monday of every month. The impetus for its foundation was the publication by Historic England last November of the annual Heritage at Risk Register, which included 33 designated heritage assets in Hackney borough: 31 nationally listed buildings or structures (railings, walls), and two conservation areas.

BARG is interested in understanding the present status of the buildings and structures, what (if any) initiatives are underway to restore them, and what else could be done by an organisation like The Hackney Society to help secure their long-term futures and removal from the register more quickly.

The interests of BARG stretch beyond the register and include a range of buildings and structures that hold heritage value and contribute positively to Hackney's built environment. Every month new instances of built heritage at definite or possible risk are covered in group meetings. These are sourced by a variety of means, including contact from people who are not group members. We encourage readers to help by being vigilant for historic buildings and structures that suffer from long-term neglect or sudden deterioration and to contact BARG at buildingsatrisk@hackneysociety.org to let us know about your concerns.

There are two broad types of listed building/structure, national and local. Each status

has its own implications for what level of heritage significance a listed asset is held to possess and what legal protections apply.

Nationally listed buildings/structures are entered in the National Heritage List for England (NHLE), available via the Historic England website at <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/> (search by postcode, street name etc). This designated status (whether Grade I, II* or II) gives them considerable legal protection, though it cannot by itself stop them from falling into disrepair.

Local listing is managed by Hackney Council, to recognise buildings or structures as heritage assets of local but not national significance, which nonetheless makes their conservation an objective as per national planning policy. An interactive map of locally listed heritage assets, plus a downloadable file with details of each one, can be accessed at <https://hackney.gov.uk/locally-listed-buildings>.

BARG is also open to being contacted about historic features absent from the



113 Stoke Newington Church Street has the rare honour of being nationally listed (as an 18th-century building) and locally listed (specifically the ghost signs on its front elevation). Something to bear in mind for a local history round of a Hackney pub quiz? Photo Rob Briggs

NHLE and Hackney Local List. We will assess each one based on its ability to meet the standard for local listing as set out by Hackney at the above webpage; those that pass this test can be discussed in our next monthly meeting and accorded as much consideration as any listed heritage asset.

Rob Briggs

Recording Hackney's historic troughs

The Buildings at Risk Group (BARG) of the Hackney Society is considering a participatory project to record the four animal drinking troughs in Hackney that have no form of listed status.

The Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association (MDF&CTA) provided more than 1,000 such troughs in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Often a trough was paid for using a private donation, the donor(s) and their motive being commemorated in an inscription on the trough's side.

Seven MDF&CTA drinking troughs, all made of granite, survive scattered across the borough. Two (on Mare Street and Pitfield Street) are nationally listed, and what remains of a third (on Pembury Circus) is locally listed. The other four — on Lauriston Road, De Beauvoir Road, Stamford Hill and Albion Road — currently have no formal recognition as heritage assets (although the first two are situated in conservation areas).

Hackney Council welcomes nominations for additions to its local list, so BARG has resolved to compile the information

necessary for nominating the four troughs. This will involve a site visit to each trough to take photographs, measurements and notes on its present state. Some historical research will also need to be undertaken. All this work is of a nature that means it can be opened up to anyone who is interested in participating.

It is envisaged each site visit and recording action will be preceded by a short introductory talk about the troughs for participants, and will be followed by a short guided tour of interesting heritage features in the immediate area, finishing up at a local cafe or pub.

The project is still being formulated and further details will be announced in due course. If you have an interest in or information about a particular trough, or troughs in general, please email



The drinking trough near the junction of De Beauvoir Road and Stamford Road in De Beauvoir.

buildingsatrisk@hackneysociety.org to be kept in the loop about the project.

Rob Briggs

Holborn Studios: Lessons to be Learned By Laurie Elks



Left: Holborn Studios Eagle Wharf Road entrance. Photo Paul Bolding. Right: Holborn Studios from the canalside showing the historic chimney. Photo Paul Bolding

The epic legal saga of the battle to save Holborn Studios (HS) from redevelopment reached its latest, and hopefully final, outcome in the High Court in July. Previous chapters have been described in Spaces 31, 51, 59, 64, 69, 76 and 85.

To recap, HS occupies an historic locally-listed waterfront site on the Grand Union Canal in Shoreditch, providing photographic studios of international standing. Studios where cars can be driven on set and facilities provided to meet every client's need. It also houses a colony of other creative businesses and is a much-loved meeting place and hub. In short, a resource for many other creative businesses and an important part of Shoreditch's creative economy.

A running theme through this legal saga has been the availability of replacement photographic studios ("reprovision") in any resulting development. The developers' contention throughout, generally supported by planning officers, has been that there would be sufficient facilities in the emergent scheme capable of providing photographic studios and that therefore whatever policy considerations there were to protect cultural facilities were satisfied, irrespective of whether any replacement studios satisfied HS's own requirements. HS has always argued that these proposals for reprovision were mere window dressing, first because no serious studio businesses could actually use the space proposed and second because there was absolutely no assurance that any studio businesses would actually be offered a space to rent.

The original landlords applied in 2015 to demolish most of the space (barring the historic chimney) for a mixed residential/employment development. The application had strong support from officers and was

approved by the planning committee in July 2016. That was successfully challenged in Judicial Review (JR) proceedings (JR1) on two grounds. First, the Council had accepted substantial changes in the scheme proposed by developers and omitted to put them on the website or re-consult as required by law. Second, the Council had seriously fudged the reprovision issue by holding up letters to the planning committee showing that there were two studio businesses expressing interest in using the replacement space for comparable businesses (but withholding the contents on the spurious grounds that the letters were confidential). The letters were considered at the JR hearing and actually showed nothing of the sort. This was serious concealment and far from the mere technicality asserted by Hackney Council after JR1 was announced

A further application (A2) followed from the new site owners GHL. Approval was recommended by officers and granted at the planning committee in January and overturned by JR proceedings (JR2) also on two grounds. First, the developers' planning contribution of £757,000 was well below that to be expected by planning policy but was said by officers to be the maximum that could be afforded by GHL on the basis of a viability assessment. This had been discussed between GHL and officers but was so redacted in its disclosed form as to be in the words of the judge "opaque" and "incoherent". Such withholding was

wrong in law. Second, planning committee members were provided (through the medium of the planning report) with a very comprehensive understanding of GHL's arguments and submissions but members were prevented by planning purdah from seeing or considering HS's submissions. That was also wrong in law – and the system of planning purdah has been ended as a result of the case.

Onwards and upwards: a third application (A3) followed and came to committee in March 2022. It was virtually the same scheme but with a reduced planning contribution and once again was supported by officers. By this time, a fresh planning consideration had arisen in the form of Policy HC5 of the London Plan 2021 providing that:

The continued growth and evolution of London's diverse cultural facilities and creative industries is supported. Development plans and development proposals should ... protect existing cultural venues, facilities and uses where appropriate.

This overlapped with Policy LP10 of the Hackney Local Plan, adopted in July 2020, providing that:

Development involving the loss of arts, culture and entertainment facilities will be resisted, unless reprovided in accordance with other policy requirements.

Given the importance of the cultural facility

provided by HS, this brought the re-provision question firmly to the fore and officers received strong representations from the Hackney Society among others that these issues needed to be given very serious consideration. The officers chose however to give cultural issues a fairly wide berth and their report was a virtual rehash of A2.

This was finally too much for the planning committee members who voted unanimously (bar the chairman Vincent Stops), to reject the application the first ground being

“the loss of existing photographic studio use, which is considered to be a cultural facility in use by creative industries, contrary to the objectives of policy HC5 ... of the London Plan 2021 and policy LP10 ... of the Hackney Local Plan 2020.”

The developers inevitably appealed and the Planning Inspector found in their favour. There were a number of issues in the appeal but once again the re-provision question stands out. The Inspector accepted that HS was a cultural facility which policy was designed to protect:

“Based on [its] history, client base, iconic output and range of work, it is of more than local renown and possibly of national or international significance ... [It is also] a space where industry creatives can meet, exchange ideas and

learn. Based on the evidence before me I am satisfied that the studio brings together people working in cultural or creative industries, [and] I accept the existing use could be described as a creative hub”.

So far so good but the Inspector went on to accept GHl’s argument that the redevelopment contained basement space which “could” be adapted to a photographic studio “or other creative business” and that therefore the requirements of policy were satisfied. The inspector steered well clear of considering whether such re-provision was practically likely or in any way equivalent to what would be lost.

This was challenged by HS (JR3) and heard by the Court in July 2025. In a most careful and painstaking judgment, Justice Jay said in effect that the Inspector’s analysis was shoddy and inadequate and quashed the decision on the basis that

the Inspector did not apply these cultural policies in a manner which secured acceptable re-provision of existing cultural uses and/or that her reasoning on this key issue is inadequate.

Whether the developers will have another go by appealing to the Court of Appeal or making a fresh application remains to be seen but it’s hard to see where they can go. Inspector and Judge alike found that HS is a cultural facility protected by policy and it is

hard to see how any redevelopment scheme can practically offer effective re-provision. Hopefully, that is the end of the saga.

The judgment also has important wider significance. It shows that the landscape has been changed by the cultural policies in The London Plan and the Hackney Local Plan and that these policies have teeth. Hopefully other cultural hubs will benefit in the future from HS’s brave battles through the courts.

Writing this article, I took down from my bookcase the delegate pack for a conference entitled *Hackney, The REAL Heart of London* hosted by the Council in the heart of trendy Shoreditch in August 2012 in the afterglow of the London Olympics. It was an invitation to investors to come and invest in Hackney. One of the glossy delegate packs is entitled “*Five ways that Hackney Council is supporting Tech and Creative Businesses*”.

My own take is that the Council has taken creative businesses for granted, boasting about them by not supporting them, putting brute housing numbers first when it comes to the crunch. Holborn Studios is the premier case in point. Do the Council “get it” better now? Let us hope so.

HS is kindly hosting a meeting in December when directors will talk about this long, exhausting and expensive battle, and we can all have a pre-Christmas celebration. Watch for details.

Tea Building to host AGM

Sturdy and elegant, the Tea Building in Shoreditch has been a one of the most prominent in the area since its construction in the early 1930s.

Then, as now, Shoreditch was a hub of innovation and industry. A century ago, it was printing, clothing, furniture, tobacco and food processing. Today, it’s the creative, media and tech industries, and a world-renowned food and drink scene. Many of the tenants of the Tea Building work in these fields.

So it was fitting that the Hackney Society chose to hold its AGM on 7 October in the Tea Building, where we will be hosted by the Shoreditch Arts Club. Amr Assaad, Director of architects and designers Buckley Gray Yeoman will talk about the long history of the building.*

The original Lipton Tea Factory, as it was initially known, was actually a state-of-the-art bacon curing plant built on the site of a tea storage facility, hence the name. The bacon factory, and an adjoining warehouse



Tea Building. Photo Paul Bolding

for tea-packing (known today as the Biscuit Building — home to Shoreditch House and Mother), were owned by the Lipton grocery brand, which distributed tea around the world and bacon across London.

Fast forward to the 21st century and the eight-storey Tea Building is filled with a vibrant mix of digital startups and creative

companies — more than 1,500 people now work in and visit it every day.

The building’s atmospheric internal street, paved with granite setts and designed by leading architects AHMM, links the original entrance on Bethnal Green Road to the new entrance on Redchurch Street and leads to its main reception. The new entrance replaced industrial shutters and its Crittall-style bespoke double doors and blackened steel finish hold true to the 1930s aesthetic.

*The AGM is at 6pm on 7 October. We will also hear from Gordon Shrigley about our plaques campaign, the work of our Planning Group, and his new book *Hackney Buildings and People*; from Rob Briggs on the Buildings at Risk Group; and from Chair Janet Chapman about some exciting ideas for 2026. Free – book on Eventbrite. Refreshments for sale.

Making SPACE for Art... in Hackney since 1971

We were happy to host the Hackney Society at SPACE this June and give some insight into who we are and what we do. For those who could not make it, here are the highlights.

To start with a basic background: SPACE is a charity providing artist studios and related support. Established by artists Bridget Riley and the late Peter Sedgley in 1968, our mission is to make space for art. Currently we operate 21 artist studio buildings in nine London boroughs plus Colchester, providing space for more than 900 artists, ranging from recent graduates to some of the most significant artists in the UK.

We have a longstanding and deep relationship with Hackney, where half of our buildings and artists are located. We first moved to Hackney in 1971, when the then Greater London Council offered us a former trouser factory building at 10 Martello Street at a peppercorn rent. The artists at the time collectively rolled up their sleeves to divide the building into individual studios, and make the factory floors suitable for working in. The site (and the time) was famous for artists experimenting with different materials and art forms, and Martello Street hosted painters as well as performance artists, musicians, and installation artists. Its history and illustrious pioneering artists are covered in the excellent 1971 chapter in Hackney Society's book 'Hackney: portrait of a community 1967-2017' by my predecessor Anna Harding.

Martello has a very special place in our hearts and history, so after having been



SPACE in Martello Street. Photo Chris Dorley Brown

there for over half a century, we were very excited to be able to buy the building in late 2024. Keeping artists in the city is a key priority for us, and acquiring Martello means that the building will remain in use for artists for generations to come, while safeguarding our little corner of history in Hackney.

Artist studio buildings are inherently somewhat hidden spaces, where the process of making art takes place: from conception to physical manifestation and everything in between. We like to say we

provide mental space as much as physical space. However, we do open our studio buildings to the public every year, on a rotating basis, and I would urge you to visit us during that time. You can then see what happens inside. To stay informed, please sign up to the newsletter on our website, www.spacestudios.org.uk. We very much look forward to seeing you there!

July 2025

Eline van der Vlist,
Chief Executive SPACE

Town Hall Square revamp announced

Hackney Council has granted itself listed building consent to revamp the square in front of the town hall in Mare Street. The proposals use part of a government grant of £19m announced in 2023 under what was the Levelling Up Fund.

The proposals including tidying up and repairs as well as new planting, lighting, signage and seating and play areas. The much-loved two palm trees remain. "Most trees are retained, with new ones added," it says.

"The Grade II listed walls and lamp piers that form a substantial part of the Town Hall Square are both a heritage and a community asset. The overarching aim of the project is to create a more inclusive space which supports diverse community uses, underpins the square's civic and political role and promotes climate resilience and sustainability," the listed building consent application says.



Hackney Town Hall Square. Photo Paul Bolding

Clapton ironwork identified

The Building London blog has noticed that close examination of a cast iron bay window support on a Victorian house in Linscott Road, Clapton, reveals the maker's name.

The column, left bare after a century of paint had been removed, bore the legend 'WELLS COMP', almost certainly a reference to Wells and Co of Shoreditch.

Wells and Co were ironmongers based at 125-130 Shoreditch High Street, known nowadays for the ornate façade of their former showrooms and works opposite St Leonard's church, which is Grade II listed. The Shoreditch building seems to date from 1877-80.

The houses with the iron columns on Linscott Road were built after 1882, on a new road leading to the Salvation Army's National Barracks. The barracks occupied the portico, which was all that remained of the London Orphan Asylum dating from 1823. After the Salvation Army bought the building, the surrounding area was developed.



Wells ironwork on bay window. Photo Glyn Harries

And that date fits very neatly with the builder having obtained the columns from Wells & Co in Shoreditch. The portico now houses the Lower Clapton NHS GP surgery.

Glyn Harries (The Building London blog is at <https://buildinglondon.blog/home/>)

Colvestone Crescent School – exciting proposal for its future



Left, Colvestone Crescent school, now closed. Right, Plaque on the site of the Parkesine Works in Hackney Wick where Alexander Parkes manufactured the world's first man-made plastic in 1866.

With Hackney's key role in the development of plastics in the 19th century, saving 12,000 elephants a year at the time, the idea to move the amazing Bakelite Museum into Colvestone Crescent School is exciting.

It would be a showcase for Hackney heritage, science exploration, and the search for alternatives to plastic and recycling. The project could support local education, broaden horizons and attract visitors to Dalston to support the market and the local economy. We await discussions with interest. Hackney Council has invited proposals for the re-use of the school and the museum is one of a number of possibilities that have been mentioned – **Carolyn Clark**

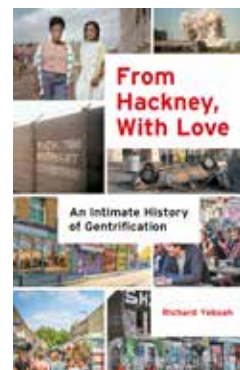


Publications

From Hackney, With Love – An Intimate History of Gentrification

By Richard Yeboah

How did Hackney go from being one of the poorest and most uninviting places in the country to being one of the most sought-after locations? In these pages, lifelong resident Richard Yeboah uncovers the borough's lively history, revealing the uncomfortable story of how gentrification has transformed Hackney, for better or for worse.



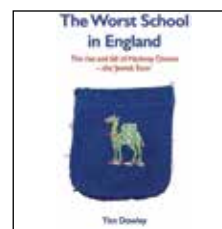
Examining some of the most contested issues facing the borough today – including housing and regeneration, politics, class, race, education, youth violence, culture and gender identity – Yeboah amplifies the voices of Hackney's new, existing and former communities and explores the relationship between gentrification and feelings of belonging and loss.

Hardcover from Biteback Publishing £20

The Worst School in England: The rise and fall of Hackney Downs – the 'Jewish Eton'

By Tim Dowley

The extraordinary story of an influential school that in its short life – 1870-1995 – progressed through an astonishing sequence of phases. Established as a fee-paying grammar by the Grocers' Company, Hackney Downs became one of London's leading schools, achieving outstanding academic results.



After a disastrous fire in 1963, the school converted early and successfully to comprehensive. During the 1980s, for political and demographic reasons, it declined rapidly to become 'the worst school in the country'.

In 1995, after months of inspection, disruption and protest, the school was summarily closed by the government. Distinguished alumni include Harold Pinter, Steven Berkoff, Sir Michael Caine, artist Leon Kossoff, entrepreneur John Bloom and former head of Mossad, Efraim Halevy – giving rise to the sobriquet 'Jewish Eton'.

This balanced history combines institutional records with former pupils' personal stories. It is a micro-history of secondary education in London, with vivid accounts of wartime evacuation, anti-Semitism, cultural achievement, curriculum innovation, classroom challenges and political conflict.

Hardcover from Clove Club £19.95

Noticeboard

Gail's opens in Old Town Hall

Gail's Bakery confirmed what many in central Hackney knew already – it has taken over the Grade II listed Old Town Hall, the former Hackney Tap bar until it closed suddenly last year. Gail's opened without fanfare in June, calling it the Hackney Castle branch. A nod to the neighbouring – and castellated – St Augustine's Tower?

Gail's has applied for listed building consent for a range of changes to the building, including signage which was erected before a decision was made. Other changes relate to grilles and ventilation as well as internal fittings and a sump pump to deal with basement flooding.



The Old Town Hall before rebranding by Gail's as Hackney Castle. Photo Paul Bolding

History Festival 2026

Next year's Hackney History Festival will be at Hackney Archives on Sat 9th May, Sutton House on Sun 10th May and Round Chapel on Sat 16th May 2026.

Videos from the latest festival are currently being processed and released. Subscribe on the festival's YouTube channel to be notified of new releases.

Guiding course

We are setting up a Hackney Guiding course to teach people about how to be a successful guide as well as have a deep understanding of Hackney's amazing history. It will be led by Hackney Society members John Finn and Sue Doe and be based on the Islington guiding course which John Finn led. It will last approximately 28 weeks and start in January.

Applications will be open in September and more details will be on our website shortly. Hackney Society has agreed to fund a 50 per cent bursary.

Archives being studied

We've started tracking down some of the archival records from the Society's amazing history. Did you know John Betjeman was our first president? He stated: "Hackney is the most interesting and least considered... borough" in the foreword to our first book, *From Tower to Tower Block*, published in 1979.

We will be adding more historical content to our website soon and also looking through the many boxes of historical documents at our archives over the coming months. If you would like to be involved, please get in touch.

Sutton House concerns

The society has written to the National Trust to express concern at reported staff cuts at Sutton House. The Trust has announced it is cutting six per cent of jobs, about 550 posts.

The letter pointed out that the house had hosted talks for the recent successful Hackney History festival.

"The Hackney Society is concerned at the impact that the current situation could have on the future of Sutton House which is a unique in being the oldest domestic building in Hackney and therefore an important architectural and historical monument in our inner city borough," said the letter.

"We urge you to reconsider your proposals and allow Sutton House to remain at the heart of our community," said the letter from chair Janet Chapman.

Wikipedia editing

The society is running a series of workshops on how to write and edit for Wikipedia. Apart from that as a useful skill, the aim is to get more of Hackney's history recorded on the online encyclopaedia. The next session will be on Saturday 6 September.

Hackney Central library and museum closures

Hackney Central Library will be closed from September to December 2025 for a redesign aimed to make the library more welcoming and accessible. Hackney Museum is undergoing a separate refurbishment, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and will be closed for most of 2026.

Signwriter Brian Walker on film

The life and work of Hackney signwriter Brian Walker has been celebrated in a short film made by Better Letters (www.bl.ag), an organisation dedicated to the craft of signs and lettering.

Second film celebrating women commissioned

The Hackney Society has commissioned a film celebrating some of the women featured in the book *Women from Hackney's History II*. Many members will have seen the film featuring some of the women from book I, *Women of Abney*, filmed by the late Nick Perry with actors from the Tower Theatre.

The second film will be directed by documentary filmmaker and Hackney Society member Barney Snow, again using Tower Theatre actors, and locations including Sutton House, Hoxton Hall and the Rio cinema. We hope to premiere it on International Women's Day next March and arrange screenings at next May's Hackney History Festival.

We are also looking for people to help with researching images to use, so if you're interested please contact Janet at chair@hackneysociety.org

OBE for architect

Hackney-based Julian Harrap was awarded a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the recent King's Birthday Honours for services to architecture.

Harrap's practice is in Kingsland Road. It works on the repair and restoration of historic buildings, estates and landscapes, and for the design of extensions and new buildings in historic settings. It has garnered many awards for projects across Europe and was part of a team that produced the redesign of the London Museum West Smithfield site opening next year.

Yard Theatre

The theatre at Hackney Wick (just outside the borough in Tower Hamlets) has closed for rebuilding to designs by architect Takeru Shimazaki. The project will double the size of the theatre and include an eye-catching tower bearing the theatre's name. The theatre began as a popup intended to last three months in a converted warehouse in 2011. It has spawned the careers of a number of actors has spawned the careers of actors including award winners Michaela Coel and Ncuti Gatwa.

First plaque to be installed

The Hackney Society's first commemorative plaque is to be installed later this year. It celebrates the life of **Edith Watson**, journalist and suffragette. The plaque will be installed at the former Hackney Workhouse site on Kenworthy Road where she was born, following a crowdfunder launched on 3rd September. The plaque is designed by Alice Sherwin and Harry Bennett from Studio Ground Floor, who developed a bespoke typeface called 'Hackney Daily', inspired by Hackney's community notice boards of the mid-to-late 20th century, with the involvement of Dinamo Typefaces.



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Edited by: Paul Bolding

Layout by: design@gloryhall.com

The Hackney Society

The Round Chapel, 1d Glenarm Road, London E5 0LY

E: info@hackneysociety.org

W: www.hackneysociety.org

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/TheHackneySociety>

Twitter/X: @HackneySociety

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