



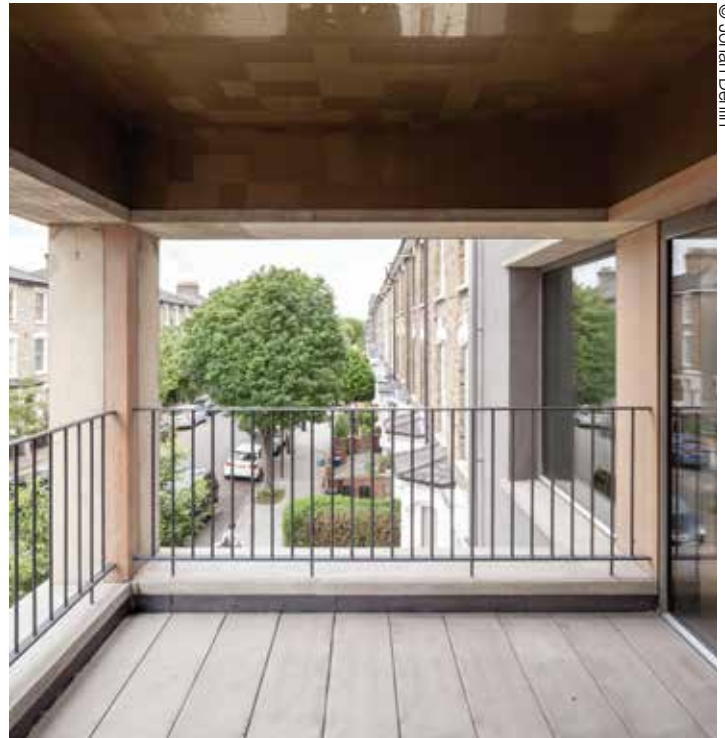
THE HACKNEY SOCIETY

# SPACES 2019

News and views about Hackney's built environment

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## Black Stone House



© Johan Dahlin



**Black Stone House comprises three apartments nestled tightly into an irregular corner plot in Wilberforce Road. Over the years, the plot has housed a brickyard, a butcher, a mechanic and a clock shop.**

Four floors are bound together by two concrete columns that rise through the building and help to define the primary rectangular living space from which other rooms unfold to fit the site.

Each two-bedroom apartment is approximately 100m<sup>2</sup>, yet each has its

own distinct spatial world. The semi-basement apartment draws daylight into a central living room via a top-lit double-height kitchen and walled courtyards, while the first floor flat provides lateral views through the width of the apartments. The top two floors form one apartment where courtyards of the lower floor are replaced by a brass-lined loggia. A double-height living space connects with bedrooms in the roof where a secret courtyard hides behind the parapet.

Loggias and terraces in each apartment form external rooms set within the building's

footprint. Fenestration allows a diverse array of views – of sky and garden, as well as wider vistas of North London and street scenes below. The concrete frame and slabs are the raw canvas on which lime-slurried walls, Douglas-fir plywood and ceramics add informal texture and warmth.

Designed by 6a Architects, Black Stone House was a winner of RIBA London Awards 2018. It has been shortlisted for the Hackney Design Awards 2018.

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## St John's Churchyard

**Laurie Elks**, Trustee of Hackney Historic Buildings Trust (HHBT) and a keeper at St Augustine's Tower, offers a personal reflection on how development is affecting the significance of the Tower.



**St John's Churchyard is Hackney's oldest public space: a consecrated burial ground for over six centuries and, since 1894, a formal public garden. It should be appreciated in its different seasons – in early spring with its carpet of crocuses; in summer when it is rampant with cow parsley; on misty winter nights when its medieval character is still palpable. It is also, of course, the setting of Hackney's oldest building, St Augustine's Tower, which I help to look after.**

Some years back, Hackney Council consulted upon its Hackney Central Area Action Plan (AAP). Both HHBT and English Heritage (EH) responded and helped secure provisions strengthening the Council's commitment to preserve the Churchyard's historic character. The Churchyard was itself recognised as a Heritage Asset and the importance of the setting of its historic buildings was emphasised. There was a commitment to retain the boundary wall enclosing and defining the churchyard. And restrictions were proposed on surrounding building heights. Pertinently for what follows, there was a commitment to:

Ensure that proposals on the Rectory Opportunity Site preserve the setting of the Church through sensitive scale (3 storeys), grain and design. Future development must also retain the character of appearance of the Conservation Area, having regard to buildings and their settings.

The old rectory and gardens lay adjacent to the churchyard and this was an important commitment. Alas, it folded before the brute realities of housing numbers. The scheme recommended for approval, just two years after the AAP was adopted, provided for a five-storey residential building overlooking the Churchyard (the 'St Augustine's Block') and demolition of an extensive section of the boundary wall close to St John's Church, effectively making that part of the Churchyard 'open plan' for the first time in centuries. EH objected to the partial removal of the boundary wall 'leading to a loss of intimacy in the churchyard', and to excessive height 'which competes for prominence with the surrounding listed buildings'.

Since EH lack resources to appear at planning meetings, I took the objector's seat to support the objection to demolition of the boundary wall, pointing out the

commitments in the AAP and asking that the scheme could be taken back to explore the possibility of making limited openings through the boundary wall, retaining the Churchyard's sense of enclosure. Hackney's then Conservation Officer responded by saying that EH were perfectly happy with the Rectory scheme and that the objections were the personal views of an EH employee who had come late on the scene. This remarkable assertion was unchallenged by the Committee who approved the scheme without one single comment on my eloquent objection!

I did not pursue EH's objection to building height. Apart from seeing that as a lost cause, I am frankly someone who cannot 'see' a building based on plans and I was taken in by assurances contained in the committee paper including the following:

The form and massing of the St Augustine's Block to St Augustine's Tower has been considered ... maintaining the visual link between the church's tower and rear pediment are not obscured from eye level views at the base of St Augustine's Tower and the need to be subservient in height and form.



As it happens that particular visual link has been part of my regular presentations to schoolchildren visiting St Augustine's Tower. Standing at the base of St Augustine's I would point to the Tower of the 'new' Church whilst explaining the history of our Tower. That view is now almost entirely obliterated by St Augustine's Block. Nearly all of St John's Tower and the whole of the pediment are now obscured. The Rectory development now visually divides the one Churchyard into two.

I raised this with the responsible planning

officer asking how an assurance which could easily have been verified or falsified from scale drawings came to be made. The planning officer responded by email saying that the building conforms with approved plans and points out that *glimpsed views still seem possible from some locations* which apparently makes things all right!

This episode makes me feel dispirited at how lightly Hackney Council sloughs off its commitments to heritage when they stand in the way of housing targets; at the

strong 'confirmation bias' making planning reports so tendentious; and at the lack of any meaningful scrutiny of most decisions at the Planning Committee. I feel sure that the Rectory building heights will inevitably become a minimum baseline when the bus garage site on the opposite side of the Churchyard is developed (notwithstanding restrictions proposed by the AAP). And I doubt whether it was worth putting so much effort into responding to the AAP consultations in the first place. I wish someone could convince me I am wrong!

## Boris Building By Paul Bolding

**The fate of the 1913 'Boris' building in Hertford Road and its neighbouring late Victorian church mission hall remains uncertain as the owner awaits the outcome of planning procedures. The red-brick 20<sup>th</sup> century building was erected for Willeys, a Devon gas equipment company. With its huge 'Boris Limited' sign, this has partly been used for storage in recent years. The mission hall was created as**

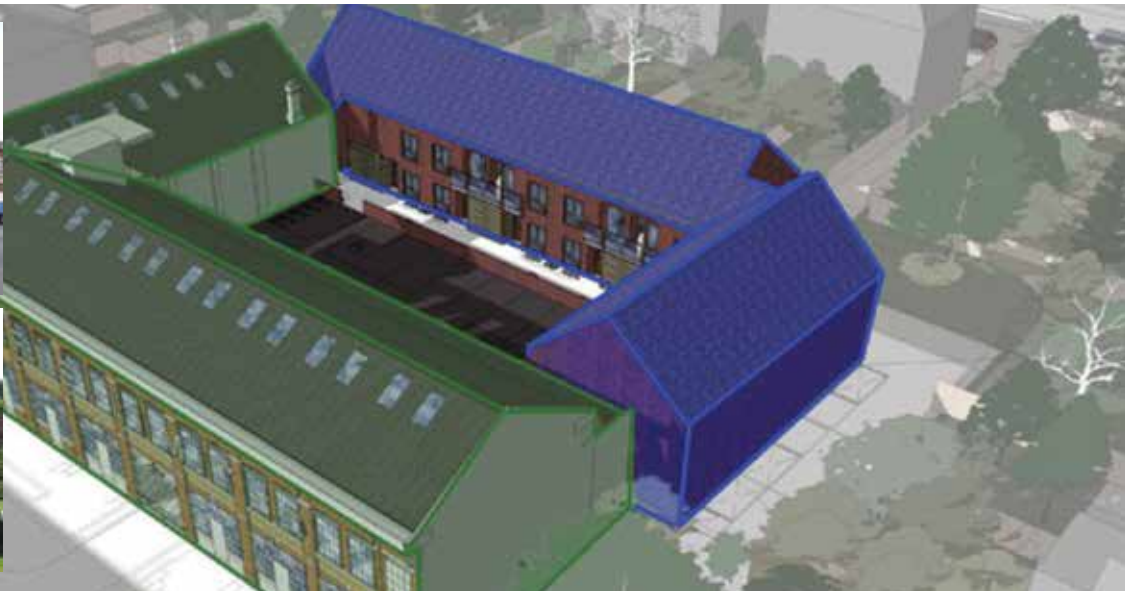
**an adjunct to the nearby St Peter's Church in 1887 and at one time housed plastic injection moulding equipment intended to make rigid suitcases.**

Both Boris building and mission hall are in poor condition, are locally listed and are in the same ownership as Boris Bags, a luggage wholesaler in Hackney Road.

Hackney's planning committee in 2010 approved plans for the Hertford Road

buildings to be restored for commercial use and the former factory to the rear demolished and replaced by nine houses but the applicant never paid Section 106 funds so consent was never formalised.

Attempts were made to revive the scheme in 2015 and again in 2018, the latter with further documents that adjust the plans and attempt to comply with changed council priorities. The outcome is awaited.



## Hackney Society Events

The AGM in September 2018 agreed that from January 2019 the charge for events will be £5 for members, £10 for non-members. This will bring in some funds which can be used when we may be asked to pay for a venue or speaker expenses.

### Hackney Disinfecting Station

February 2019, tbc

#### Talk with Tim Walder

Tim Walder of Hackney Council will tell us about some listed buildings in Millfields Road, built by the Metropolitan Borough of Hackney between 1900 and 1901. Their main function was to reduce the spread of disease in slum housing in Hackney by the use of high-pressure steam disinfection with formalin to cleanse bedding and soft furnishings. This is thought to be the last survivor nationally of this unusual building type. Booking essential. Book via [hackneysociety.org](http://hackneysociety.org). £5 for Hackney Society members, £10 for non-members.

### South Hackney Churches

9 March 2019, 11.00am

#### Visit with Louise Goodison and Laurie Elks

We will visit two neighbouring and contrasting places of worship in South Hackney. Hampden Chapel was completed in 1847 for the Congregationalists and is now an independent evangelical church. St John of Jerusalem is a huge Anglican church completed in the following year; this early Gothic Revival church was described by Pevsner as 'in places curious rather than good'. We can also climb the tower of St John's to the bell ringers' room.

Meet at Hampden Chapel, Lauriston Road, E9 7EU. Booking essential. Book via [hackneysociety.org](http://hackneysociety.org). £5 for Hackney Society members, £10 for non-members.

### 4% Housing

Saturday 6 April 2019, 11.00am

#### Walk with Jerry White

Jerry White, author of *Rothschild Buildings*, will lead a walk introducing the subject of '4% housing', the first wave of social housing built by semi-benevolent organisations to provide for thrifty and respectable working-class tenants. The walk will take in Navarino Mansions, Evelyn Court and Coronation Avenue, built by the Industrial Dwellings Society for Jewish tenants.

Meet at Navarino Mansions, E8 1LB. Booking essential. Book via [hackneysociety.org](http://hackneysociety.org). £5 for Hackney Society members, £10 for non-members.

### Here East

Thursday 9 May 2019, 6.30pm

#### Walk with Ralph Ward

Ralph Ward will lead an exploration of the Here East building in Hackney Wick. Built as the media centre for the 2012 Olympics, it threatened to become a huge white elephant

but is now taking off as a home for digital business start-ups and media companies.

Meet at Hackney Wick Station. Booking essential. Book via [hackneysociety.org](http://hackneysociety.org) £5 for Hackney Society members, £10 for non-members.

## Publications

### Regeneration Songs: Sounds of Investment and Loss from East London

by Alberto Duman, Dan Hancox, Malcolm James and Anna Minton is about how places are turned into simple stories for packaged investment opportunities, how people living in those places relate to those stories, and how music and art can render those stories in many different ways. Repeater Books, £16.99.

**East London Photo Stories** is published to celebrate the fifth birthday of Hoxton Mini Press. The publisher has collected the highlights of its first 13 books about East London. The book features original text by Rachel Segal Hamilton and a map showing the area in which each project was photographed. Photographers include Chris Dorley-Brown, Freya Najade and Andrew Holligan. Hoxton Mini Press, £19.95.

## Noticeboard



**Liberty Hall:** Clapton Commons Community Organisation (CCCO) has raised money to turn the abandoned toilet block on Clapton Common into a community hall. The group's plans for the building include a community cookery school, a bike repair clinic, coffee shop, a space for community meetings and a food growing space.

**Plaque for Joseph Beck:** An official local heritage plaque has been installed on Barton House to commemorate Joseph Beck (1828-91), who led the campaign in the mid-1880s to save Clissold Park from development.

While there's a commemorative fountain in the park to honour Beck and his 'partner-in-crime' John Runtz, local historian Amir Dotan felt it would fitting to commemorate Beck's important achievement outside the park, at the house where Beck had lived. The plaque has become a reality thanks to donations from the Clissold Park User Group and Beck's family. It was unveiled



on 10 November 2018 by Beck's great-great-great grandchildren.

**Parklets:** Hackney Council's parklets scheme (see *Spaces* 62) was shortlisted for the Transport Planning Society's inaugural People's Award. The award recognises planning initiatives that make a positive impact in their local area. Hackney has parklets in Trehurst Street, Princess May Road, Marcon Place, Malvern Road and Nightingale Road.

**WWI mural:** A mural that pays tribute to people who served their country in the First World War was unveiled in Shoreditch to mark Remembrance Day. It was the work of the street art collective Blank Walls.

**Peace symbol:** A brown plaque to honour the designer of the peace symbol has been unveiled at Fish & Cook Stationers on Blackstock Road. The artist Gerald Holtom first presented his design at this address to people in the Direct Action Committee against nuclear war.

**Stik artwork:** A sculpture by the Hackney-based artist Stik has sold at Christie's for £150,000. 'Up on the Roof' was auctioned to raise money on behalf of Cardboard Citizens, a theatre company for homeless people.

Thanks to Kopykat for sponsoring this issue

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