



The

# HACKNEY TERRIER

THE FRIENDS OF HACKNEY ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

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## NEWS FROM HACKNEY ARCHIVES...

Opening hours have been somewhat restricted since the late summer, with both staff members on leave and limited relief cover from Library Services. It is hoped that by the time you read this a normal service will have resumed. The difficulties have been caused by the vacancy in the Senior Assistant Archivist post, which was advertised in August: it is hoped that the successful applicant will be in post by November, when Sue McKenzie goes on maternity leave. Current restrictions on recruitment mean that it looks unlikely that cover will be available while Sue is away, so the Department is likely to remain short-staffed until April. We hope to hold to the present opening hours, though leave and possible sickness may prevent this at times.

Current spending restrictions have also affected the Department's ability to purchase books and documents, and once again the Friends have stepped in to the breach. Recent purchases include two further catalogues from Shoreditch wholesalers, a deed for Homerton High Street of 1876, further records from Sindells the Dalston trimmings manufacturer, giving details of employees aged under eighteen, 1902-1938; a programme for a concert at All Saints, Dalston, in 1883 and the missing portions of the South Hackney title map from the Public Record Office. It is likely that restrictions on spending will last until April, so that contributions to the Friends' donations fund are more than ever welcome. (Before the freeze struck, we were able to purchase two volumes of the letters of Sir Ralph Sadleir, identified as the likely builder of Sutton House, so Sutton House researchers can be saved a trek to other institutions.)

David Mander

## ... AND NEWS FROM THE FRIENDS

In his bulletin opposite David has not chosen to disclose some important news, so I will do so. Just as our last issue was sent to print, he and Janice became the parents of Thomas David Williams Mander, who is doing very well (and in fine voice). Congratulations to both.

Congratulations also to all at Sutton House, now newly open to the public (the full story on page 7). No doubt Friends will hasten to see for themselves Richard Griffiths's remarkable transformation of "the old house on the corner". Anne Blackburn and Mike Gray have written a lively and fascinating new illustrated history of the house, available from the Sutton House shop at £3. And we hope Friends will join us for an evening of archive film in the Wenlock Barn (now much less barn-like) in Sutton House on Thursday 21st January at 7.30 p.m (address, page 8). I am sorry that the space required for our two topical main articles this time mean that the final instalment of the Loddiges story has had to be held over. It, and much more, is in hand for 1993.

Isobel Watson



Lucy Medhurst, National Trust paintings conservator, reveals another piece of Jacobean wall painting at Sutton House



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## THE REBUILDING OF ST JOHN -AT- HACKNEY: A BICENTENNIAL BULLETIN

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Given its grandeur and importance, it is odd that Hackney parish church has never been accorded a proper history of its rebuilding. St John-at-Hackney is one of Britain's most imposing churches of the 1790s - a civic symbol of a suburb at the height of its prosperity, and the masterpiece of its architect, James Spiller.

It also stands at a turning point in the awakening of Anglican religious life in London, after years of Georgian complacency. The 'Hackney Phalanx', the loose-knit group of High Anglican clergymen and businessmen who did so much to promote a national campaign of building schools and churches in the years after Waterloo, were just too young to have much influence on the rebuilding of the church. But many of their fathers, City merchants for the most part, were involved. At the time, church reconstruction on Hackney's scale of ambition was not yet common. The process whereby St John's was built must have had much influence, positive and negative, on the Phalanx's ideas when they set systematically about such tasks in the new century.

What follows amounts to little more than facts excerpted from the extensive records on St John-at-Hackney held at Hackney Archives Department, the Greater London Record Office and Sir John Soane's Museum. They appear just two hundred years after work started on the church in 1792. Perhaps someone may embark upon a full history in time for the bicentenary of the building's completion and consecration in 1797.

### *The decision to rebuild*

The origins of the movement for rebuilding the parish church go back to Hackney's long-term population growth in the 18th century. A first initiative of 1756 to enlarge or rebuild the overcrowded old church came to nothing. In 1779 it was revived, the architect-surveyor Richard Jupp suggesting a scheme for enlarging the church so that it could seat 1,480. But the idea was again dropped owing to the 'distressed situation of public Affairs'.<sup>1</sup>

The next time the issue came up was in May 1788, when a parish meeting appointed a committee to review the position.<sup>2</sup> This body, of uncertain size and membership, was chaired by the curate, J. Symons. It took its duties seriously, and came back to the meeting in March 1789 with a thorough report.<sup>3</sup> The committee found that there were some 1,500 houses in the parish, as opposed to under 1,000 in 1756. In the light of this rapid growth, they felt that church accommodation for 3,000 was needed. This figure, which was to prove controversial, was by no means casually arrived at. An anonymous document in the Hackney Archives contains careful

calculations working out the number of households, and the proportion of the parish that 'did not frequent the publick Worship in the Church' (reckoned at a third). Allowance is then made for servants, for the children brought from the parish's nineteen schools, and for families that 'go to Price's and Palmer's meetings who were bred to the Church of England's worship and would go to church if they could be accommodated there'. Comparisons with other London and suburban parishes are also appended.<sup>4</sup>

The references to 'Price's and Palmer's meetings' are interesting. They are a reminder of the strength of respectable nonconformity in Hackney at this time. Richard Price and Samuel Palmer were ministers of great persuasive powers and authors with high public reputations. Indeed Price's enthusiasm for the early phases of the French Revolution is said to have provoked Burke to write his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. The Hackney College was a training ground for pious nonconformists; and for a brief time in 1793-4 the famous Joseph Priestley was also a dissenting minister in the parish. Hackney indeed was the intellectual centre for religious independence in the London of the 1780s and 90s. In seeking to rebuild the parish church, the authorities knew they were up against formidable competitors.

For architectural expertise the committee of 1788-9 turned to William Blackburn (1750-90). This was a remarkable and surprising choice, and one would like to know who proposed it. Blackburn was a close friend of John Howard the prison reformer, and one of the few architects of the period one might define as having a social conscience.<sup>5</sup> He was also - and here is the surprise - a presbyterian; which is enough to show that the prime movers in the rebuilding cannot be identified with the High Church men who made Hackney so important in the religious revival of the early 19th century.

Blackburn, say the minutes, paid 'great attention to the business'.<sup>6</sup> He advised the parish to find a new site rather than reuse the old one, on the grounds that any rebuilding which used the old foundations would accommodate a mere 1,700 seats. He estimated the cost of land and of a totally new building for 3,000 at about £15,000. It was probably at this early juncture that Blackburn made three designs for the church, one 'in the form of a Grecian Temple', another 'with Modern Steeple', and a third 'with Gothick Church and Spire'.<sup>7</sup> These are specifically referred to in the *Dictionary of National Biography* as 'three elegant designs for a new church at Hackney.' They seem to have been lost.

The committee was confident that 'whatever it might be the sense of the parish to do, the expense would be very light, the rental being already more than double in the last thirty years'. Their report recommended that the cost of Blackburn's scheme could be met by advertising for capital in the form of annuities. These would then be



paid back at a rate of 5% per annum by means of a church rate of 3d per pound, a levy no higher than the one regularly exacted over the previous twenty years.<sup>8</sup>

The ratepayers voted decisively (313 in favour, 70 against) in April 1789 to proceed with this scheme and procure the necessary Act of Parliament. A new committee of 25 was now appointed to carry this through.<sup>9</sup> Blackburn helped present the bill to the House of Commons, and evidently expected to be appointed architect.

Not everyone applauded this decision. In February 1790 a printed leaflet was circulated to the 'landholders' of Hackney asking Parliament to reject the bill for the new church<sup>10</sup>. This leaflet alleged that the idea for a new church was the work of a few gentlemen whose 'abode in the Parish is fluctuating and temporary', and was not supported by the Lords of the Manor, the vicar or most parishioners. 'The Whole is only a Plan of a few Citizens, to gratify their pride and ambition, under the Pretence of a regard for Religion', added the objectors. Among them certainly was the local architect and district surveyor Jesse Gibson, who wrote to one of the two Lords of the Manor, Richard Benyon MP, regretting his original support for the scheme. 'From much consideration I think that building to accommodate 3000 persons in Publick worship will be far too large, and that no voice will enable the Congregation to hear,' argued Gibson. His own preference was to rebuild the church on the old site so as to accommodate 2,000 - no doubt to his own

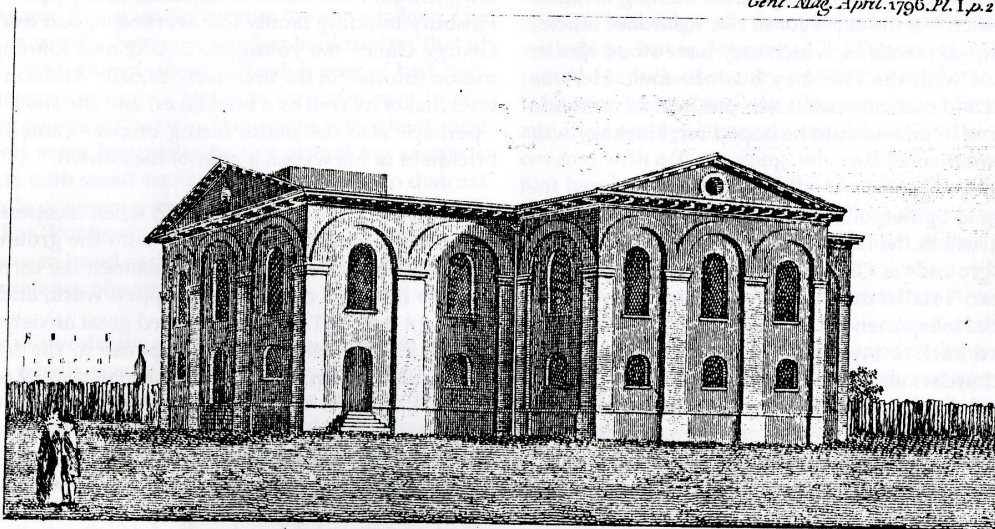
design.<sup>11</sup>

In April, however, some sort of 'conciliation' occurred<sup>12</sup>, as a result of which the bill passed into law later that year. But the sequel was to confirm that Benyon and his fellow Lord of the manor, the Revd. Peter de Beauvoir, had at least a guarded attitude towards the new church, and opposed extravagance.

The Act of 1790 set up trustees to finance and administer the building of the new church.<sup>13</sup> Their chairman was again the curate, Symons. The treasurer was the City banker Thomas Sikes, at first sight a typical example of the well-off, middle-class commuting merchants who inhabited and ran the parish at that date. But Sikes as also the father of Revd. Thomas Sikes of Guisborough and father-in-law of Joshua Watson, respectively the leading ideologue and organisation man of the Hackney Phalanx.<sup>14</sup> Among the large body of trustees was the City wine merchant John Watson, father of Joshua Watson and of the future vicar of Hackney, J. J. Watson, whose name starts to appear in the minutes from about 1791, when he was only 21, and eight years before he became vicar.<sup>15</sup> So the future High Church party was beginning, at any rate, to emerge.

Despite Sikes senior's expertise, the financial arrangements set up in 1790 were to prove inadequate; two further Acts had to be passed to raise more money by means of annuities and bonds. This, the trustees ex-

*Gent. Mag., April, 1796, Pl. I, p. 273.*



NEW CHURCH AT HACKNEY.



plained to the parish meeting in 1795, was because in church-building of the time, an Act of Parliament 'is the only mode to secure the lender'.<sup>16</sup>

Once the original Act was secured, the trustees quickly confirmed William Blackburn as architect in preference to Jesse Gibson, who also applied for the job. Two letters from Blackburn are written in to the minutes, expressed in the stilted English of strict nonconformity.<sup>17</sup> In one he apologises that 'the ill State of my Health hath prevented my making a personal application.' In October 1790 his clerk laid before the trustees 'sundry plans and estimates'. He was now asked to design a church for £10,000 - a cost well below that of the three designs he had made in 1788-9; so the remonstrances against the proposal had had their effect.<sup>18</sup> Plans preserved in the Hackney archives and signed by Blackburn show that variant positions close to the old church were being considered at this stage.<sup>19</sup>

#### *A new architect*

In November 1790, while on his travels, Blackburn died suddenly. Overwork was probably a factor, as he was constantly on the move from one new gaol to the next. Hackney therefore needed a new architect. Six men, mainly locals, now put themselves forward: Francis Carter, W. Fellows, Jesse Gibson, Samuel Robinson, James Spiller and an unknown Mr Wooding. Spiller was preferred to Gibson by a narrow vote in December 1790.<sup>20</sup> Why he was chosen is not indicated. He was a young man, probably not yet thirty, the son of a builder but with the advantages of a high-class training in James Wyatt's office. As the surveyor to two insurance offices, he had City connections, which may have stood him in good stead with the Hackney businessmen. He was principled and meticulous but nervous, and never made the showing in architecture he hoped for; Hackney was his great moment.<sup>21</sup>

According to Spiller, one of his first acts was to take up with the trustees the target accommodation of 3,000 on the same grounds as Gibson - that people would not be able to hear. 'I stated my difficulty which was treated as the result of inexperience,' he reminisced in 1818, 'and I was referd back to my task'. He then visited various London churches and the Sheldonian theatre at Oxford, only to find that the numbers they held were invariably far less than stated. As a result, he managed to bring down the pew seating at Hackney to 2,000 but no further. 'I was obliged consequently,' he confessed to his friend Soane, 'to build a Church in which it is difficult to hear unless it be very full and then I believe not in all parts.'<sup>22</sup>

Spiller spent the first three months of 1791 in drawing up alternative plans. These can be identified with designs for a church by Spiller preserved today in the Soane Museum, mainly but not exclusively in plan form.<sup>23</sup> At an early stage a plan 'upon the principle of an octagon'

was approved<sup>24</sup>; an interior perspective, showing a ring of fluted columns in the centre of the church, is among the Soane Museum drawings. There is also a handsome drawing for the north front and tower, different from what was built but recognisably the same basic composition. The most expensive of these drawings, with stone-cased elevations and oak timbers, was to cost £21,370. Once again the trustees seem to have grown lackadaisical about expense. But Benyon and de Beauvoir now put their feet down and insisted that the church should not cost more than £10,000. So Spiller had to go away and reduce his scheme to a church 'in the plainest manner of Brick, and Brick and Stone Tower'. There were later claims that the tower was an afterthought, but this was never the case. The roof was now to be of fir and the pews of deal.<sup>25</sup>

A specification (which does not seem to survive) was ready by the summer of 1791; there was then a delay attributed to the 'negotiations with Russia'.<sup>26</sup> Is this a reference to an inflation of building prices, or the absence of crucial merchant-trustees? In due course Spiller procured estimates from different building tradesmen. These were of a haphazard sort, in the 18th century manner - some for the whole work in a certain trade, some for part. By late November, Spiller had sorted these out and contracts were approved to a total estimate of £10,964; but this sum did not include the tower or the fittings. The main craftsmen were: William Hobson, bricklayer (presumably the Southwark builder of that name who had been William Blackburn's brother-in-law), £3,980; Peter Banner, carpenter (from a prominent Finsbury building family that worked a good deal with George Dance the younger), £3,600; and John Spiller, mason (brother of the architect), £1,520.<sup>27</sup> Hobson was a brickmaker as well as a bricklayer, and the stock bricks - perhaps also the malm facing bricks - came from a brickfield of his within a mile of the church.<sup>28</sup>

Work on site started in spring 1792, when 'sleepers' were put down because of difficulties with the ground. All went well for about a year. Then Banner, the carpenter, got into financial difficulties, stopped work, and went bankrupt in June 1793.<sup>29</sup> This caused great anxiety to the susceptible Spiller and extra expense to the trustees which, after totting up, Spiller estimated at £2,634. he claimed to have warned them at the outset 'of the incompetency of Banner's proposal [i.e. his low estimate], but they chose to rely upon the security which he was to bring forward and accepted his proposal accordingly.'<sup>30</sup> At the time of the bankruptcy, the roof 'was in a state of preparation only, no portion of the Timbers upon the walls.' So the trustees had immediately to get the walls covered to protect them from the weather. After dispute and delay, the trustees and Banner's creditors agreed to assign his contract to Edward Colebatch, who completed the roof. Negotiations over what was due to Banner's creditors went on for many months. The trustees tried to show a 'pacifick Disposition' and agreed



to arbitration.<sup>31</sup> But this turned out to be of a 'most troublesome and vexatious nature', according to Spiller.<sup>32</sup> James Wyatt, his old master, was chosen as arbitrator, but for some time showed 'total inattention' to the subject.<sup>33</sup> Further discouragement was caused by the death of James Spiller's brother John in 1794. By then the carcass of the building was all but completed. But the events of 1793-4 were doubtless those that called Spiller to speak of Hackney twenty five years later as 'the Church which unhappily for me I was chosen to build'.<sup>34</sup>

The pewing contract was let to Colebatch for £3,559 in June 1795. At this time Spiller was making plans for the gallery, so there was still some latitude. The following April he was designing the reading desk and the pulpit (for which alternative designs exist in the Soane Museum, showing that the original wine-glass base was supported on a hidden iron frame).<sup>35</sup> At this juncture, fifteen months still before the consecration, the *Gentleman's Magazine* devoted an article and an exterior engraving (page 3) to the church. The author and artist was the antiquary J. P. Malcolm, who remarked that the interior 'would be extremely plain, as there are no pillars to the roof'.<sup>36</sup> St John's was certainly an austere performance in comparison with its predecessors - for instance Islington parish church of the 1750s, or St James's Clerkenwell of 1788-92. But in that lay its strength.

Shortly after this Joshua Watson, his friend H. H. Norris and two other parishioners, B. Powell junior and Stephen Lee, agreed to pay for the organ case and produced some sort of design which Spiller did not like. In October 1796 it was agreed to put the organ over the west gallery. The following month there was another bankruptcy, that of John Kerrod, the plasterer.<sup>37</sup> Such a run of bad luck seems appalling now, but was far from rare in the building trades at the time. It explains why clients and architects were beginning to tire of making separate contracts with small craftsmen. Spiller came to distrust the whole contract system, declaring (rather impractically) that 'Public Contracts are nothing better than a race between fraud and vigilance or knavish preferences under pretence of economy'.

Further minor delays marked the run-up to the consecration, which eventually took place on 15 July 1797. Generally the relation between Spiller and the trustees seems to have been reasonable. But in May he threatened to resign because an unnamed 'artist' was hired to paint the lettering on the reredos. A Mr Adams was asked for a design for the communion table, so it is not certain this was Spiller's. On the other hand he seems to have designed the font. The new organ, built by George England, was installed at the end of 1799. In 1800, the year after J. J. Watson became vicar, an enlarged sounding board was called for.<sup>39</sup> There are alternative drawings for this in Hackney Archives, once very fancy with palm-frond pillars and an oriental top-knot.<sup>40</sup> These are not by Spiller but by W. H. Ashpitel (1776-1852), a



*One of Spiller's designs for a tower, 1810*

Clapton resident. Ashpitel went on to design the subsidiary church of St John's, South Hackney (1806-1810) and may have designed the organ case as well.

However, Spiller was retained to add the tower and spire. It had originally been intended to go straight on with these, but in February 1797 they were again postponed for lack of money and because of 'the present state of public Affairs' - in other words, the French wars and their economic consequences.<sup>41</sup> In 1799 the roof was covered with a 'tar pauling' where the tower was to go.<sup>42</sup> Not however till 1806 did the trustees direct Spiller 'at his leisure' to work out a design.<sup>43</sup> An obelisk-type spire was laid before them by him in March of that year but was not taken up. A more positive initiative began in 1810, when he was asked to prepare alternative designs with and without a portico.<sup>44</sup> Spiller produced five designs in June; these seem to correspond to drawings now in Hackney Archives.<sup>45</sup> The design chosen seems to be the one lettered E, and comprises not only the tower and portico but also the porches at the four angles. It also provides for a new stone skin for much of the north or main entrance elevation of the church; this was not, it appears, agreed to.

Tenders for the tower and porches were received from four builders in February 1812, with alternative figures for Portland stone and Bath stone.<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, the costlier Portland facing was chosen, and the lowest tender, from Thomas Pocock (£7,000) for some reason rejected; perhaps Banner's bankruptcy was too vivid a memory. The successful mason was Robert Streater of



Mare Street, who signed a contract for £7,999 in May. This time the specification and articles of agreement are preserved.<sup>47</sup> The specification is formidably full, proving Spiller to have been an exacting and meticulous architect. Every classical detail is fully spelt out in words and dimensions. The stucco within the portico was to be jointed and coloured in imitation of masonry; and the mortar was to be made from Merstham or Dorking lime with clear, sharp Fulham Hill sand.

One important change was made during the tower's construction. In July 1813 Spiller asked the trustees for permission to substitute 'trusses' for the urns intended on the corners of the penultimate stage.<sup>48</sup> There can be no doubt this refers to the strange and effective big volutes at the corners of this stage. They are the most distinctive features of the Hackney Tower, and one would be curious to know where Spiller got the idea for them. Generally the top of the tower is 'Soanic' - logically enough since Spiller was a friend of Soane. But the volutes are something altogether more baroque. There was some concern over the tower's safety during construction. On his dignity, Spiller suggested the trustees consult another architect if they were worried, but they declined to do so. The work was completed without incident in the spring of 1814.<sup>49</sup>

Earlier that year, Spiller made a scheme for heightened the reredos on either side of the east window and installing a stained window with an IHS symbol on a gold

ground, allegedly because of dazzle. The work seems to have been carried out only in 1816. The soffits of the window are painted red in his drawing; this may possibly give a clue to the church's former internal colouring.<sup>51</sup>

Broadly, Spiller must have given satisfaction, for in his old age (1827-8) he was brought back to rebuild the Hackney parsonage house for Archdeacon Watson, as the vicar then was.<sup>51</sup> But by then he had long declined into a deaf, chronically ill and bitter old man. As early as 1807 he was complaining to Soane that if he were to start all over again "I would rather commence Scavenger, as some architects have done, than enter upon a Science which I once loved and honoured".<sup>52</sup> In 1820, when church building on the state-funded model prescribed by Joshua Watson, H. H. Norris and the other framers of the Commission for New Churches was on the architectural agenda, Soane asked his friend for information on his Hackney church, and Spiller generously complied, sending full technical details of the job. These give, for instance, the most accurate estimate of the total cost of the building, which finally came out at some £28,479 5s 2d, reckoned Spiller.<sup>53</sup> But he would not to see Soane to discuss it all. 'The day is so sad and gloomy and my mind in a state so correspondent that I think it best to remain by myself', he said. He only hoped that the Hackney material would 'excite some serious considerations as to the manner in which our considerable Structures have been and are still continued to be erected'.<sup>54</sup>

Andrew Saint

## Notes

I am grateful to David Mander and Isobel Watson for help and suggestions in connexion with this article.

1. GLRO P79/JNI/157, 23 March 1789. A printed copy is at HAD, M. 4084/1.
2. GLRO P79/JNI/157, 5 May 1788.
3. *ib.*, 23 March 1789; HAD M4084/1.
4. HAD 4084/1.
5. H. M. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects* (1978), 113-4.
- 6-9: GLRO P79/JNI/157 23 March, 14 April 1789; 17 August 1793; HAD M 4084/1.
10. Copies in HAD M. 4084/1, D/F/TYS/10/55.
- 11-12. HAD 40484/1, Gibson to Benyon, 30 January 1790; letter from Richard Dann, 24 April 1790.
13. GLRO P79/JNI/174.
14. See A. B. Webster, *Joshua Watson* (1954) pp 18-32.
15. GLRO P79/JNI/169, 7 February 1791.
16. GLRO P79/JNI/157, 19 January 1795; GLRO P79/JNI/174.
- 17-18. GLRO P79/JNI/169 16 August, 6 September, 18 October 1790.
19. HAD V.184/1-2.
20. GLRO P79/JNI/169 15 November 1790.
21. Colvin *op. cit.*, pp 772-3.
22. Sir John Soane's Museum (SM) Spiller to Soane, 25 March 1818.
23. SM drawer 47, set 10.
- 24-7. GLRO P79/JNI/169 17 January, 4 April, 5 September, 26 November 1791.
28. SM, Spiller notes for Soane on St John-at-Hackney.
29. GLRO P79/JNI/169, May-June 1793.
30. SM, Spiller notes for Soane on St John-at-Hackney.
31. GLRO P79/JNI/169, 25 August 1794.
32. SM, Spiller notes for Soane on St John-at-Hackney.
33. GLRO P79/JNI/169 25 August 1794.-
34. SM, Spiller notes for Soane on St John-at-Hackney.
35. GLRO P79/JNI/169, 18 April 1796; S drawer 47 set 8.
36. *Gentleman's Magazine*, April 1796.
37. GLRO P79/JNI/169, 7 November 1796.
38. SM, Spiller to Soane, 25 March 1818.
39. HAD P/J/1, 19 May 1800.
40. HAD V.188/1 & 2.
41. GLRO P79/JNI/169/20 February 1797.
42. HAD P/J/1, 25 November 1799.
- 43-44. GLRO P79/JNI, 169, 10 March 1806.
45. HAD V.186, 187/1-2.
46. GLRO P79/JNI/169, 17 February 1812.
47. GLRO P79/JNI/174, bond and specification 6 May 1812.
- 48-9. GLRO P79/JNI 169, 5 July 1813, March 1814.
50. HAD V.177/1; William Robinson, *The History and Antiquities of the parish of Hackney*, 1843, 2 p.114 ff.
51. GLRO P79/JNI/178.
- 52-4. SM Spiller to Soane 6 April 1807; 22 October 1820; Spiller notes for Soane.



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## SUTTON HOUSE SHOWS ITS COLOURS

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On 16th September the National Trust opened the completed Phase 1 work at Sutton House in Homerton High Street. Following 20 months of work, predominantly in the West Wing, visitors are now able to see 16th century linenfold and other panelling, decorated stone fireplaces from the same period, the early painted 17th century *trompe-l'oeil* strapwork staircase, and a mid-18th century panelled room. However, these historic features are only part of the story, since the 20th century is also represented - the 1904 "Arts and Crafts" additions, the contemporary conservatory, and the upgrading of the Wenlock barn. Sutton House offers a rich variety of experience which can only be hinted at in the brief description given here.

*Terrier* readers will be familiar with the story of this important house - the oldest in East London - from its sad and serious decline during the mid-1980s, when it suffered from architectural theft, squatting and vandalism, through the campaigning period when Hackney residents fought a proposal to convert the house into private dwellings, to the optimism of 1989 when the Sutton House Community Scheme was first formulated. Now, three years later, the fruits of many people's labour can be seen.

The architectural approach to the restoration has been generally to follow the principles advocated by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, using traditional materials and methods of construction. However, wherever opportunity has allowed, the creative contribution of contemporary architecture and craftwork has been incorporated. As well as working to display the historic fabric of a house built in the 1530s, the scheme has taken into account the needs of modern-day visitors and, most importantly, users of the house, whether they be eating and drinking in the cafe-bar, attending a concert or conference in the 130-seat Wenlock Barn, confined to a wheelchair or needing to change the baby! All the rooms, including "show rooms", will be available for private or commercial hire, the art gallery will have shows of contemporary art concentrating on artists living and working in Hackney, and the shop will sell craftwork by local makers.

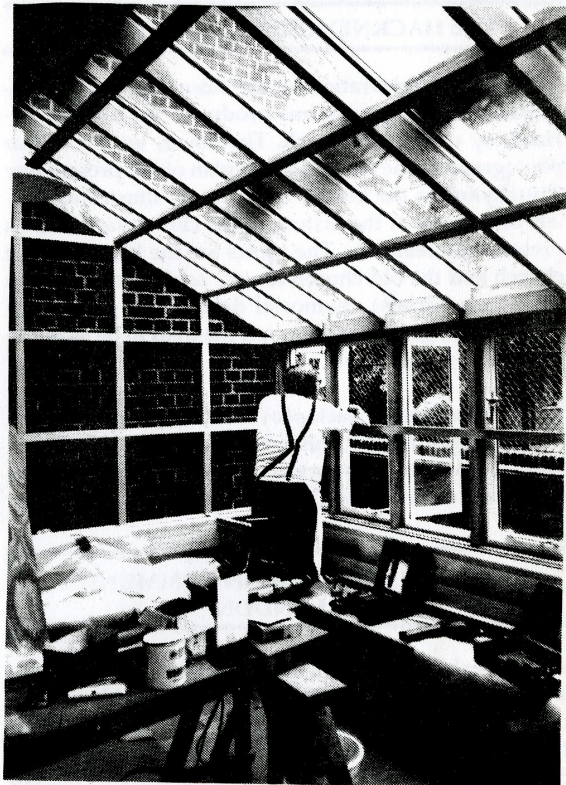
Although the contractors, Loe & Co., are from Maldon in Essex, particular effort has been made to commission local crafts people for artefacts and to obtain materials from Hackney businesses. Tables for the cafe-bar have been made by Ashwin Furniture workshop, and door furniture for the new oak plank doors by Sarne Forge, both in Dalston. Firebacks and a painted fireboard have come from Marianna Kennedy in Spitalfields, and brass sconces for one of the panelled rooms have been made by Michael Murray at the Metropolitan Workshops, Kingsland Road. Oak for floors and doors has been

supplied by Latham & Co. of Lea Bridge Road.

While the panelling was stripped from the walls, the fireplaces removed and the ceilings down, the opportunity was not wasted to learn as much as possible about the constructional history of this ancient building. For two years, surveyors from English Heritage's London division probed and measured to record as much as possible about the house without taking it apart. Similarly, where it was necessary to excavate, archaeologists from the Museum of London worked ahead of the builders to extract information and remains from areas which had formerly been the grounds of the house. The most impressive find was a Tudor well, and despite it being over 4 feet below the present ground level, it has been possible to preserve and display it (and include a basket suspended below the water level to collect coins!)

Alongside all this activity in the house, detailed research has been undertaken to uncover its social history. Starting at Hackney Archives, and moving on through all the main London collections, Mike Gray has put together most of the jigsaw. The new souvenir guide, published to mark the opening, will present this story within the broader Hackney context.

There is hardly a room (and until the final phase is completed in 12 months' time there are only six historic rooms to view) without a hinged panel, flap or peephole



*Finishing touches to the conservatory-cafe bar at Sutton House*



enabling you to see beyond the immediate surface to an earlier feature. Even the display fittings for the shop and gallery have been chosen to minimise their effect on the surface of the walls. At all times, respect for the building has been at the forefront of the Project Team's thinking.

Some difficult decisions have had to be made to make the house work for its intended future uses, and not all will be greeted with equal enthusiasm. But it can be nothing but good that such an investment has been made in one of Hackney's, and indeed London's, most important buildings, and that Sutton House is assured a bright future. And there can be nothing but praise for all who live or work in Hackney who put their shoulder to the wheel to avert the danger of Sutton House being lost to the local community.

**Carole Mills**  
*Project manager*

*Sutton House, 2-4 Homerton High Street E9 (tel. 081- 986 2264), open 16 September-29 November on Wednesdays and Sundays from 11.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. Admission £1 (under 17, 50p). Shop, cafe-bar and art gallery also open Thursdays-Saturdays 11.30 a.m. - 5 p.m., and during December. Full programme (concerts, craft fair, family days, exhibitions and other events) available on request.*

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#### THE HACKNEY CHURCHYARD PACK

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As part of the celebrations of the bicentenary of St John-at-Hackney, the parish has produced the St John-at-Hackney churchyard pack. The cover, with a colour photograph of the church, and a plan of the present day churchyard on the inside, contains six illustrated leaflets on aspects of the history of the churchyard and its present-day features. The topics are the history of the church and the old church tower, social history (from extant memorials), memorial design, the geology of gravestones, garden design, and the trees to be found in the churchyard today.

Taken together, the pack provides a useful guide to the churchyard and its history. It is available from Hackney Archives Department, Hackney libraries and from the Rector; price, £2.50.

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#### THE SEPHARDIC JEWISH COMMUNITY IN LONDON

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A small exhibition on the Iberian Jewish community in London has been put together by the Jewish Museum to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. The community included both Spanish and Portuguese Jews, and the early records of the community are more often written in Spanish than

Portuguese. The exhibition text covers the expulsion from Spain and later Portugal, and Jewish immigration into England before the readmission under the Commonwealth edict of 1656. It gives some idea of the variety of ways in which the immigrants made a living, including the diamond trade, wine importing, stockbroking, bullion broking and a host of less affluent trades. Some famous members are featured, including Daniel Mendoza, the 18th century boxer. Accompanying the text, exhibits include an illustration of the interior of the Bevis Marks synagogue, a wide range of silverware, ritual objects, coats of arms, family portraits, and some documents. The whole exhibition is contained in a single room at the Jewish Museum, Woburn House, Tavistock Square WC1.

It is a pity that the text writer, Edgar Samuel, did not mention the extensive presence in Hackney of many members of the community. Malcolm Brown's very thorough article *The Jews of Hackney before 1840\** links to Hackney some of the families named in the exhibition. In the 18th century Hackney was a very desirable address, not least because of its being so conveniently close to City businesses. In the early 18th century there was a nucleus of settlement in the Triangle area of Mare Street, which included the da Costa and Alvarez families, and later in the century the Francos and the Brandon families had large houses in Clapton. Indeed every member of the *Mahamad* (the governing body of the Sephardim) had a house in Hackney in 1760.

The exhibition continues at the Museum until 30th October; admission is £1, and entrance via an entryphone on the main door of Woburn House. A donated copy of the catalogue (£6.50) is now in the book collection at Hackney archives.

**David Mander**

\*Jewish Historical Society paper, delivered February 1986 (copy at Hackney Archives Department).

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#### A NEW LONDON BIBLIOGRAPHY

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The Centre for Metropolitan History is producing a valuable new research tool: a bibliography of printed works on London as it was up to 1939. An unpublished extract from the CMH database is now at Hackney Archives Department. If any Friend has some spare time, the Department would welcome a volunteer who could produce a subject index of this material. The Editor would also encourage anyone who has occasion to inspect or use the extract to review it for the *Terrier*.

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#### FOR YOUR DIARY

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January 21st - 7.30 p.m. - Sutton House  
An evening of archive film from the Borough's collection.