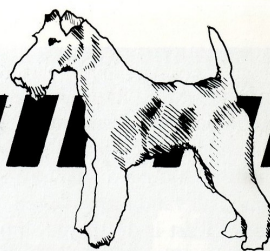


THE TERRIER



THE NEWSLETTER OF HACKNEY ARCHIVES DEPARTMENT

No. 6

March 1987

NOTES AND NEWS

The threatened closure of the Archives Department in February was averted with just three days to spare, when we managed to rent some space at the ILEA depot in Tottenham. Whilst it is by no means ideal that our records should be stored so far away, it does mean that we can stay open to the public (at least for the time being).

During our planned closure for stocktaking we managed to finish recataloguing the illustrations collection. We also reshelved some heavily-used archives, mainly rate-books and electoral registers, to make them easier to produce. This exercise also freed a few more shelves for archive storage.

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Our records management work continues, with the surveys of the Directorates of Finance and Housing nearing completion. Unfortunately we are still not able to provide a storage and retrieval service for the Council's semi-current records, as neither the storage space nor the computer program have yet become available.

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In January we were pleased to welcome an overseas archives student, Gracelyn Cassell from Montserrat. Gracelyn is studying for her archives Diploma at University College, London; when qualified she will be returning to set up an archives service for Montserrat.

Gracelyn's visit coincided with the very cold weather - quite a shock for someone from the West Indies - but she managed to make her way to us each day in spite of the lack of transport. We showed her various aspects of our work in archives and records management, and hope she found it useful.

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Our recent accessions include a set of "Sunday School" exercise books containing all the work done by one pupil at West Hackney Church 1911-1915. They include lessons on contemporary mission work ("the Portuguese (in Ceylon) were driven out by the Dutch and the Dutch confused the natives by teaching the Dutch Reformed Faith, more like the non-conformists"). Accession no. 1987/6.

Brownswood Library, which serves the northwest area of Stoke Newington, is twenty-five years old. There will be celebrations at the library on the actual anniversary, Tuesday 5 May, and all Friends are invited. The Library is in Brownswood Road, N4 (between Queens Drive and Wilberforce Road). The nearest station is Finsbury Park. Bus no. 106 stops in Brownswood Road.

David Pracy, the Branch Librarian (his article on South Hornsey appeared in the last *Terrier*) will give a talk on the history of the Brownswood area. He is also preparing a Neighbourhood History of Brownswood, and you will be able to order copies on 5 May.

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Alan Godfrey, who publishes the Godfrey Editions of old Ordnance Survey maps, has almost completed his coverage of this Borough. The Finsbury Park (1912) mpa has recently appeared, and now we only need the Highbury sheet which will cover the southern part of Brownswood.

We hope to be the first Borough to have a map published in all three editions: 1872, 1893 and 1914. This will be the Shoreditch sheet: 1893 was published some time ago, and the others are due out this autumn.

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The current issue of *East London Record* (No. 9, 1986) includes an article by John Harwood on the church and parish of St. Saviour, Hyde Road, Hoxton. Anyone interested in this area, or in the High Church movement in East London, will find it worthwhile to read Mr. Harwood's work.

East London Record is available from Hackney Archives Department or from Hackney or Tower Hamlets libraries, price £1.30.

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We have recently acquired more microfilms of local newspapers. We now hold:

Shoreditch Observer 1857-1915
Hackney Gazette 1869 - date
Hackney Mercury 1885-1910
North London Guardian 1888-1916
Hackney & Stoke Newington Recorder 1910-1925
North London Recorder 1927-1937
Stoke Newington & Hackney Observer 1939-1971

There are some gaps in these series

Jean Wait - Editor

THE OLD HOUSE AT THE CORNER

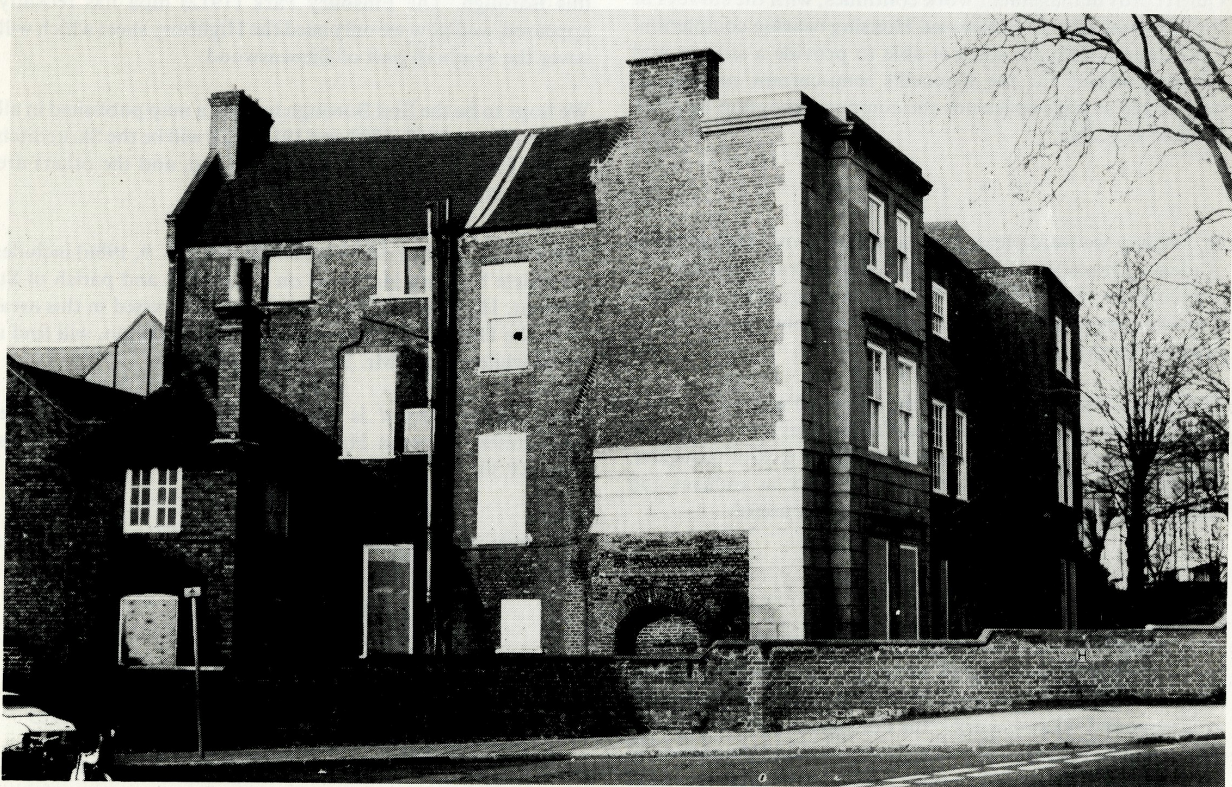
A sad story is soon to be told! Later this year Hackney Society plans to publish a book on Hackney's lost buildings; ¹ beautiful houses, churches and terraces which have been lost forever through enemy action, changes of fashion, speculation or what amounts to municipal vandalism. When a fine building is demolished a work of art is destroyed, but more than that a whole community is affected. Familiar, long established buildings in a town environment, when well cared for, foster a sense of security in a community: when those buildings are pulled down or neglected people feel threatened and uneasy.

In the nineteen fifties one of Hackney's most important and historic buildings, Brooke House, was finally demolished, when the L.C.C. completed Hitler's attempt to flatten the Elizabethan Manor House. In fact the house was almost certainly restorable but sadly a four hundred year old treasure was bulldozed to make way for a school that became redundant within thirty years!

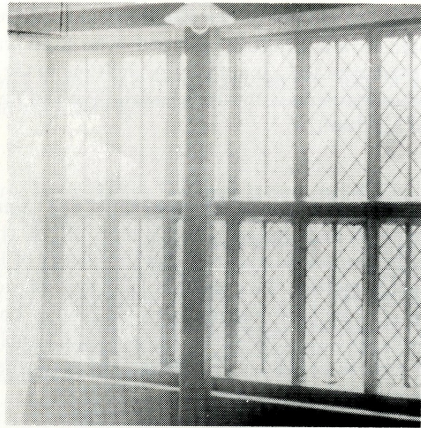
However Hackney still has one Tudor mansion left, the National Trust-owned Sutton House in Homerton High Street, but now that too is under threat. Threatened not perhaps with 'murder' but certainly with 'grievous bodily harm'. Plans have been formulated for the conversion of the ancient house into private flats. If this scheme is carried out it will end forever hopes that the building could be restored in its complete form and opened to the public for the benefit of all Hackney people and for that matter the 'Nation' as a whole.

In Hackney's *List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest* (published in 1975) the house is given a starred grade II rating. It is described as an H shaped early sixteenth century house with alterations about 1600 and early 18th century. The east wing was rendered at the front in the 19th century when other Victorian features were added. Recently extensive additions at the rear have created a central courtyard. Internal features include several pannelled rooms - one with beautiful, 16th century linen-fold panels. These were recently ripped out by thieves, who attempted to sell them to an architectural salvage firm in Shoreditch. By amazing good fortune the panels were recognised by the directors of LASSco and returned to the National Trust. Among other interesting features mentioned in the *List* is a large mullioned and transomed window dating from the 16th century, which, it has been said, came originally from a Spanish Galleon.

A building of that age and stature inevitably has a rich history to go with it, a history that, in this case, has yet to be thoroughly researched. It appears very likely that one of its early inhabitants was Thomas Sutton, founder of Charterhouse Hospital and School and said in his day to be the richest commoner in England. Sutton's wealth came from coal mining interests in Durham and through a profitable marriage to the rich widow of John Dudley, Lord of the Manor of Stoke Newington. Sutton moved to Hackney in 1602 on the death of his wife, dying there in 1611. His entrails were buried in Hackney Churchyard, but the rest of his embalmed body had to wait several months until the roads were in satisfactory



Sutton House today. Photograph by Mike Gray



The mullioned window in Sutton House, c.1900. S773

condition for a grand procession to Charterhouse, in the City, where he was buried in the Chapel. It must be said that against the great act of philanthropy of this foundation his bequest of £10 to the poor of the parish of Hackney seems a trifle mean!

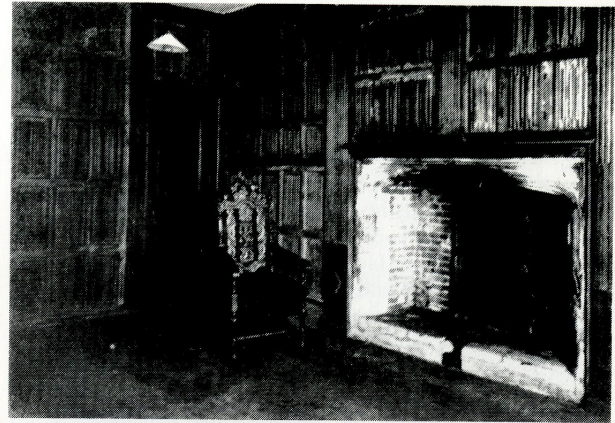
A small, beautifully produced book, in the Art Nouveau style of the early years of this century can be seen in Hackney Archives. Entitled *The Old House at the Corner* it chronicles other stories about the house, many no doubt rather apocryphal, but its main interest lies in the description of the building as it was in 1900 when it served the Parish as the St. John Institute. How sad it is now to look at the photographs of the beautiful restored rooms and compare them with the sorry state we see today. At the Institute, the writer colourfully relates:-

“men may play billiards, may argue and lounge and turn over evening papers and monthly magazines, that young men and maidens may dance and masquerade - Could they not do that as well in a Twentieth Century structure without all this expence of renovation? No, not a thousandth part as well! This house is the one link in Hackney with the great age”.

It sounds jolly good fun and translated into modern terms seems to be the sort of use to which the house might usefully be put.

The potential seems enormous. The old pannelled rooms could be restored and furnished in appropriate style, perhaps in co-operation with the Geffrye Museum. The rooms altered in Victorian and recent times could make fine galleries to display some of the considerable collection of water-colours, prints and photographs, at present out of sight in the Archives. A tea-room and restaurant with seats in the delightful inner courtyard could be provided, as could meeting rooms for local groups and perhaps a local history interpretation centre. One of the rooms is large enough to make a lecture room or small theatre.

Although Hackney Council has been slow to recognise Sutton House's value as a public asset, it was refreshing to read last year a letter in the *Hackney Gazette* from the Head of Arts and Entertainments in the Borough. He says:



The linen-fold panneling, c.1900 P10267/1

“Sutton House is a fine building. I would dearly love to see it restored and opened to the public. And I am sure that if it had been located somewhere like Hampstead, the National Trust would have found the funds to restore it. However, a restored Sutton House would complement admirably the Hackney Museum in nearby Central Hall. Together they would provide a real boost for the area and attract people from far and wide. I would be more than willing to help the National Trust to restore it to its former glory”. - **Sandy Craig**

Let us hope that the story of Sutton House will have a happy ending, not one which we will be ashamed to tell our grandchildren because we failed to protect their heritage.

Mike Gray

For information about the 'Save Sutton House' campaign write to Julie Lafferty, 32 Ickburgh Road, E5

¹ *Lost Hackney* by Elizabeth Robinson

ISRAEL RENSON

With the death of Mr. Israel Renson, Hackney has lost a familiar and friendly face. Mr. Renson walked the streets of Hackney and the purlieus of Victoria Park for many, many years and there wasn't much that he didn't know about the area.

His family left Russia over 95 years ago when his sister, the sole remaining member of the family, was a little girl. The family lived for a time in Bath and in Reading but for much the longest time in Hackney. Mr. Renson became a qualified pharmacist and owned a chemist's shop on the corner of Well Street and Tudor Road. Many people will remember him from that time in

the 50s and 60s. He refused to diversify into cosmetics and fancy goods and if a customer asked for some expensive proprietary medicine he would say, "You don't need all that. I'll make you up two pennyworth of the same stuff."

For many years he was associated with the Socialist Party of Great Britain (S.P.G.B.), then strong in the area. He never became a member as he felt it would be hypocritical for the owner of a business to do so. But he sold the Party's literature on the doorsteps of Hackney and also with a friend named Phillips wrote a book called *Money Must go*, which the S.P.G.B. sold. There has been talk recently of republishing it which pleased him.

From about 1968 Mr. Renson was a busy and active member of the Hackney Society and was Treasurer and Membership Secretary for eight years. He took many of the photographs and supplied captions for the book *From Tower to Tower Block*, published by the Society. He was a founder member of the Victoria Park Society when it was formed in 1970 and still held the position of Treasurer and Membership Secretary when he died. He was also one of the earliest Friends of Hackney Archives Department.

Mr. Renson gave talks, slide shows on Victoria Park and local history to both Societies, schools and numerous community groups and was always in demand for more.

He was an expert botanist and a member of the Chelsea Physic Garden. He gave a lecture at the Hackney Festival covering the history of horticulture in the borough. Hoxton had been particularly important in Mediaeval Times and Homerton in the Victorian period with men such as Loddiges.

Mr. Renson was involved with Centerprise Publishing Project from 1974 until his death. He was a member of the People's Autobiography Group which produced books like *The Island* for which he wrote the introduction. But his main interest was in the photographic books of old Hackney and it was he who worked on identifying all the old photos which appeared in *A Second Look* in 1975. Not only did he do a lot of research for these books but he also threw himself wholeheartedly into the job of selling the books as well. Over the years he sold thousands of copies of books published by Centerprise and the Hackney Society by going round to newsagents and small shops. The fact that *A Hackney Camera* is still one of Centerprise's best sellers after twelve years is largely thanks to Mr. Renson's expert salesmanship. His local knowledge and boundless enthusiasm made it difficult for anyone not to be interested in the books he was selling. His excellent memory for detail and his unromantic view of the past meant that people were constantly wanting to interview him about all aspects of Hackney's past.

He became involved in publishing himself when he produced a collection of poems by a local taxi driver entitled *Cockney Poems*. He was also a member of the East London History Group; and wearing his pharmacist's hat he was active in the anti-fluoridation campaign.

In recent years he did not go far afield because of his concern for his sister, now a hundred years old, who lived with him. Even so he still devoted a lot of energy and time to the various campaigns and projects with which he was involved right up to the time of his death.

All the groups with whom he was associated pay tribute to his encouragement and support and above all to the great contribution he made to ensuring that the history of Hackney does not get forgotten. We hope that Hackney will not forget him. He was a true local historian and his fund of knowledge was not only of local interest but of practical benefit in the campaign to preserve Hackney's heritage. He was an inspiration to all who knew him.

Peggy Temple
Victoria Park Society



Israel Renson outside his shop (date unknown). This photograph is among his papers which have been deposited at the Archives Department

HACKNEY TOWN HALL

Hackney Town Hall is 50 years old this year; it was formally opened on 3 July 1937.

The first Town Hall in Hackney is now the Midland Bank (Old Town Hall branch) in front of St. Augustine's Tower in the Narrow Way, Mare Street. Near this site stood once a building known as the Church House, reputed to have been built for the parish by Christopher Urswick, rector 1502-1521. This was used for various parish functions, and particularly for meetings of the vestry, the parish's governing body in both church and civil matters.

About the year 1802 this building was demolished and replaced with the present one (but without the stone cladding). The new building, like the old, served for meetings of the Vestry and the Trustees of the Poor, as the rate collector's office, and as the watch-house until the parish watch were replaced by the new Metropolitan Police in 1829. The Hackney Savings Bank, founded in 1818, operated in this building on Monday evenings. In 1837 the first Superintendent Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths was appointed, and had his office here. Directories of the 1840s refer to the building as the Committee Rooms.

In 1855 the Metropolis Management Act was passed. This created District Boards of Works, including one for Hackney and Stoke Newington, to carry out such functions as making and maintaining roads, pavements and sewers, and dealing with sanitary nuisances. By this time development in Hackney and Stoke Newington was proceeding rapidly, and the new Board had a great deal to do. It soon became apparent that new offices were needed.

A number of schemes were proposed. One, endearing but impractical, is shown right. The Old Town Hall would have been demolished so that the old tower could be incorporated in the new building. Another proposal was to use land at the corner of Dalston Lane and Amhurst Road. But in the end the Board purchased Hackney Grove, an open space fronting onto Mare Street, as a site for its new offices. The foundation stone was laid by the Lord of the Manor, William Tyssen Amhurst, on 3 November 1864. After the ceremony there was a collation for 140 people which cost the ratepayers £200; this excited indignant comment in the newly-founded *Hackney Gazette*.

The Superintendent Registrar's office continued in the Old Town Hall; he was employed by the Guardians of the Poor, not the Vestry. Ownership of the Old Town Hall was disputed between the Guardians and the Vestry (later the Borough) until the Guardians were abolished in 1930; but the two sides had an agreement concerning the management of the building. In 1872 part of it was occupied by the Charity Organisation Society (a body which aimed to channel charitable donations towards the deserving poor). The Midland Bank first took a lease of the basement and ground floor in 1899.



The Old Town Hall (right of the trees) about 1875. P10351



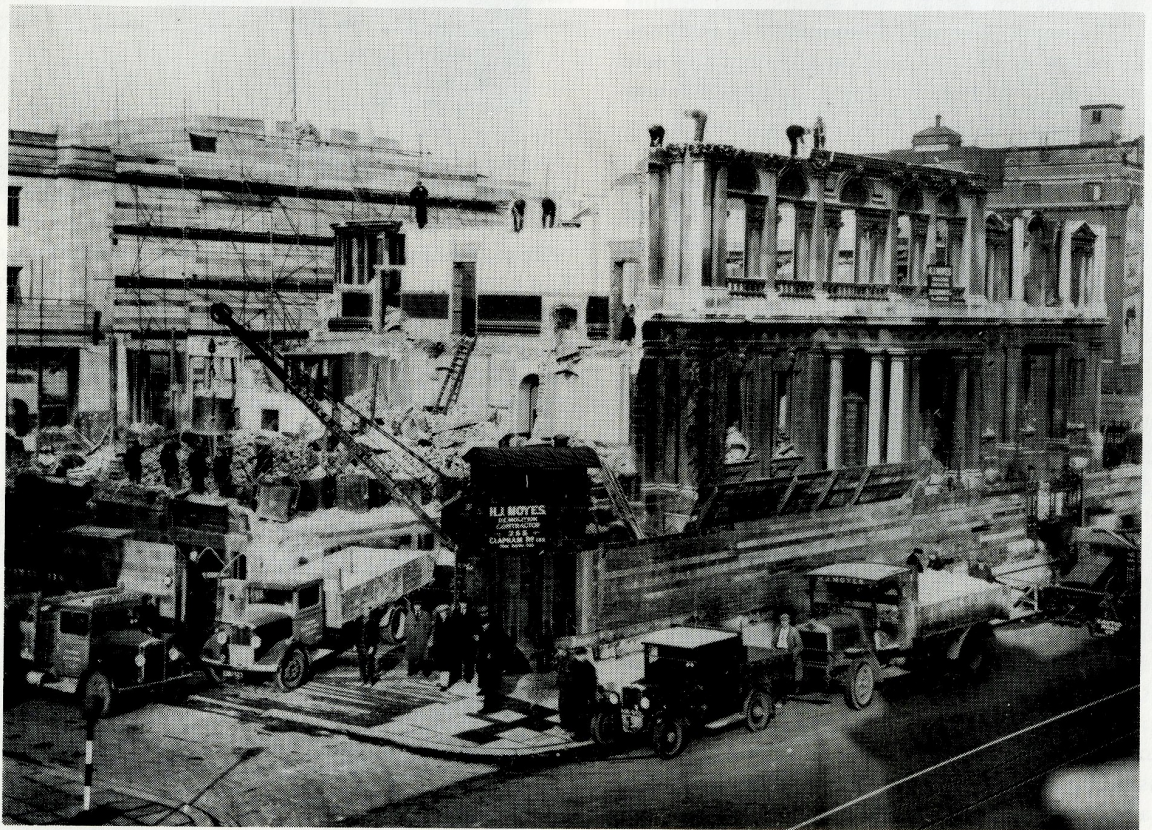
The proposed new Town Hall incorporating St. Augustine's Tower. c. 1857. P10351



The 1866 Town Hall. P9553



The Town Hall of 1866, with the 1898 side extensions. P1211



The 1866 Town Hall being demolished, with the new building behind, 1937. P3156

The new Town Hall was opened in 1866. It may have seemed adequate at first, but as the population increased so did the number of local government officers needed to serve them. In 1894 the Board of Works was dissolved and Stoke Newington managed its own affairs, but even for Hackney alone the building was too small. In 1898 side sections were added. Two years later Hackney became a Metropolitan Borough. One of the last acts of the old Vestry was to refuse to allow in the Town Hall any 'exhibitions of the cinematograph ... a most dangerous display'.

Thirty years passed, and once again the Town Hall was found to be too small. By this time the population had passed its peak, but the Council was providing more services. Maternity and Child Welfare clinics had been provided since 1918; the Borough was generating its own electricity and building its first housing estates. More office space was needed.

Upon enquiry the Council found that a new building would cost only 10% more than enlarging the existing one, and would be much more convenient. One of the new features they wished to incorporate was an Assembly Room with its own kitchen for public functions. They decided to site the new building behind the existing one, and turn the former site into an open space. The buildings behind the old Town Hall were compulsorily purchased - these were mostly factories, but the 10th London Territorials lost their Drill Hall. A new one was built for them, on the far side of the new Hillman Street (named after Hackney's first Freeman, the Rev. John Hillman, who had recently died).

A competition was held for the design of the new building, and *The Architect and Building News* reported on the results. The winning designs were by Messrs Lanchester & Lodge, whose four-storey building made the best use of the available space and provided good internal communications. The journal commented that the open space in front would 'relieve the otherwise painful surroundings, the standard for which might perhaps be considered as set by the Hackney Empire'.

The ground floor was to house the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths (finally moved from the Old Town Hall), the Rates Office, the Medical Officer of Health and the Borough Engineer. The public rooms were on the first floor - the Assembly Room, the Council Chamber and the Committee Rooms; also the Members' suite, the Mayor's Parlour and the offices of the Town Clerk's department. On the top floor were more offices, staff rooms and the hallkeeper's flat, whilst the basement gave storage space.

The square on the north side of the building was intended to be a car park, but the London County Council would not licence the Assembly Rooms for public entertainments until this plan was dropped - cars parked so near the building were considered a fire hazard.

The foundation stone of the new building was laid on 23 October 1934 by Sir E. Hilton Young, Minister of Health and Local Government. Work on the building was nearing completion by the end of September 1936, when the *Hackney Gazette* reported that staff were expected to start moving in at the end of the following month. The first Council meeting in the new Council Chamber was held on 27 January 1937.

When all the staff had moved into the new building, the old one was pulled down. The demolition brought to light the bottle which had been buried under the 1864 foundation stone, containing among other things 17 photographs of members and officers of the Board of Works. These were ordered to be placed in the Central Library. They are now held at the Archives Department (P5272-5288) but until I began my research on the Town Halls we did not know where they had come from.

The new building was so close to the old that the front steps could not be built until the rear of the old building was demolished. This cannot have mattered to the staff or public, since the front entrance was to be reserved for Council members and distinguished guests. Everyone else used the back entrance in Hillman Street, except those attending the Assembly Room and the Rates Office which had (and have) their own entrances in Reading Lane.

When the front steps were complete, the distinguished guests were invited - the official opening ceremony was performed by Lord Snell, Chairman of the L.C.C., on 3 July 1937.



The new Town Hall in 1938 (from The Story of Hackney)

It was not long before alterations had to be made in preparation for the approaching war. The basement was strengthened to serve as the Control Centre for Air Raid Precautions (later Civil Defence), and sandbags were placed around the building. Fortunately the Town Hall suffered no major damage from bombing.

After the war some functions of local government were lost (Maternity and Child Welfare to the new National Health Service, electricity to the L.E.B.) but more were taken on - town planning, old people's welfare, civic entertainments and so on. Other services, particularly housing, were greatly expanded. The Council's staff overflowed from the Town Hall into buildings in Mare Street and Reading Lane.

This accommodation served the Metropolitan Borough of Hackney until its demise in 1965. The new London Borough took Hackney Town Hall as its principal building - temporarily, until the new central offices for all Council departments should be built at Dalston. But this plan, like many another, never got off the drawing-board and so after fifty years Hackney Town Hall still "relieves the surroundings" of Mare Street.

Jean Wait

SOURCES

M.B.Hackney files on Old Town Hall and 1937 Town Hall (uncatalogued).
Hackney Board of Works and Vestry minutes: BW/5,6 and J/V/13,18
Hackney Gazette and M.B. Hackney news cutting books, 1934-1937
Illustrations collection, passim

A GUIDE TO THE RECORDS OF THE DEPARTMENT?

Work is to begin shortly on a comprehensive guide to the collections of the Department, covering the archives and the newspapers with a look at the local history, oral history and visual collections. It is hoped that the mammoth task will be completed in about a year from now and that the guide will be issued in 1988. The project is taking place under the auspices of the Greater London Archives Network and to a format used by all other London local authorities. It is GLAN's intention to combine all the guides into one publication on London's records to be available in microfiche and hard copy.

GLAN was formed in 1982 as a forum to bring together all archivists and librarians working in or having direct responsibility for archive collections held by London local government bodies. Meetings and talks are organised on themes of common professional interest and there are a number of projects in hand beside the London guide, including a survey of standards of storage and provision of facilities in members' record offices/local history libraries. GLAN has published a guide to the London local archives (on sale at HAD price £1.80 or £2.05 by post) and produces updates at roughly annual intervals. A poster on the need for care in handling documents is being prepared and will, it is hoped, appear in many record offices and libraries in coming months. GLAN has also acted as a pressure group on professional matters, and was active in the campaign to keep the Greater London Record Office intact. Regular contact between members has proved beneficial in that ideas and experiences are shared and where appropriate copied.

The London-wide guide is not a new project and predates GLAN. It was originally conceived in the early 1970s, initially co-ordinated from the Guildhall Library. Later responsibility passed to Haringey (Bruce Castle Museum). Many authorities responded to the two-sheet questionnaire, but the project was never completed. There were relatively few guidelines given to individual compilers and the size and usefulness of the guides was very variable. Hackney's contribution was very brief and when initial stocks ran out it was not reprinted.

GLAN took on the archives portion of the guide and substantially revised its structure to bring it into line with guides produced by some county record offices. As well as a list of the records held, details will be given about the organisations which created them - especially the local authorities with their many changes of area and function. There will be extensive cross-references from one section to another, to help searchers to find the records they are interested in.

It is hoped to store the edited versions on computer: this will greatly ease the task of publishing, allow for indexes to be generated covering all lists (for example bringing together all references to workhouse records), and allow new information to be added. Now that the format is right our successors will not have to revise the whole guide again, only add updated information and new accessions.

All three professional staff will work on the Hackney guide. In the continuing absence of a local history librarian I will deal with the printed sections. Most of these will be general description: regrettably we will not include a union list of periodicals, though there will be an updated list of local newspaper holdings. Production of the new Hackney guide will take up considerable staff time, so if there are less exhibitions and other activities for a while then bear with us. We hope the end product of our labours will be invaluable to present and future searchers.

David Mander

David is also Chairman of the Greater London Archives Network

FRIENDS OF HACKNEY ARCHIVES DEPARTMENT Programme for spring and summer 1987

Thursday 14 May Stanley Tongue Memorial Lecture. Isobel Watson will speak on 'Building South Hackney 1750 - 1900'. Rose Lipman Community Centre, 7.30 pm.

Saturday 4 July Boat Trip along Hackney's waterways.
This event is now fully booked.

Tuesday 14 July Visit to Old and New St. Mary's Churches Stoke Newington. Meet outside the Old Church at 7.30 pm.

Sunday 13th September Historical walk round Upper Clapton. Details later in the year.

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