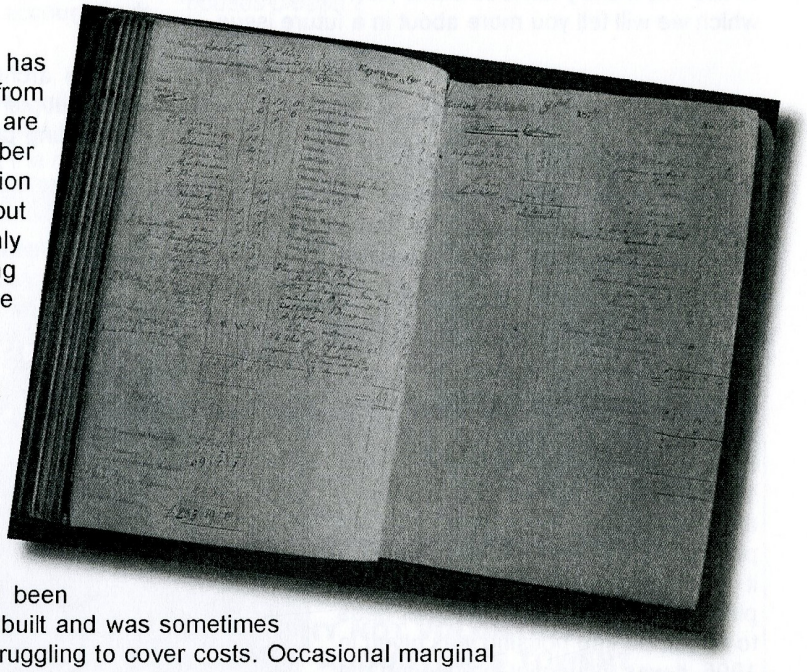
The Hackney Terrier 72

The Friends of Hackney Archives Newsletter

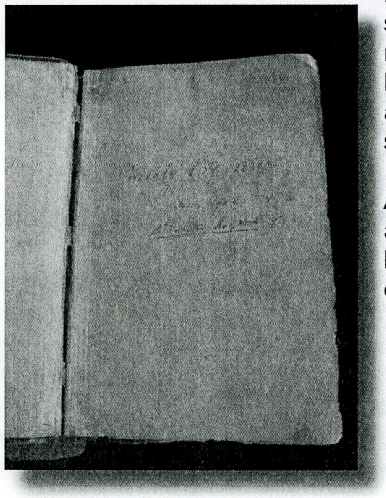
Summer 2006

A dramatic discovery



An exciting and quite unexpected find has been the fascinating account book from Shoreditch's Standard Theatre. We are grateful to Robert H. Thompson, a member of the Friends, for drawing our attention to this item in a dealer's catalogue, but for which the item would almost certainly have been sold elsewhere. Instead, using the Friends' donations fund, we were able to step in immediately and buy it.

The Standard accounts book offers a brief but illuminating glimpse into the life of the theatre on a weekly basis. Covering the period from May 1876 to September 1879, the volume details payments made to staff and visiting performers, throwing light onto the period soon after the theatre had been rebuilt and was sometimes struggling to cover costs. Occasional marginal notes bring the theatre to life – such as when the actress playing Lady Macbeth was such a disaster that her wages were docked – and also add flesh to the bones of incidents and anecdotes known of from other sources within HAD's collections.



An article is planned for 'Hackney History' vol. 12, taking an in-depth look at how the accounts book ties in with HAD's existing Standard Theatre holdings and how the sources combine to raise the curtain a little higher onto the world of Shoreditch's theatrical past.

Generous donation from Save the Reservoirs Campaign

Joan Potter and Betty Gough represented the Friends, and Edward Rogers represented the Archives Department, at a ceremony in May marking the winding up of Stoke Newington's successful Save the Reservoirs campaign. The campaign's records have been deposited at Hackney Archives, and distribution of remaining funds has resulted in generous gifts to the Friends of £804 from the campaign itself and £800 from Stoke Newington's own charity Stoke Newington First. We are very grateful to all concerned, and plan to use this money towards Stoke Newington projects, which we will tell you more about in a future issue.

The records

The SRC was set up in 1985 after Thames Water announced that its filter bed and two reservoirs at Stoke Newington were no longer required for operational use and would be disposed of for development. A large number of local residents protested against the loss of these green spaces, and the Campaign was formed. Over the next few years the SRC corresponded vigorously with Thames Water, alerted local residents and contacted local and national political figures for support. Although it was not completely successful, as planning permission for the filter beds to be turned into housing was given in 1995, it was influential in ensuring the survival of the two reservoirs. The East Reservoir has been kept by Thames Water both as an operational reservoir and as a conservation area where wildlife can live undisturbed. The West Reservoir was sold to Hackney Council for a nominal fee and is now used mainly for water sports.

After the reservoirs' survival was guaranteed, the SRC played a role in the setting up of the Sailing Centre and in applying for money from the Heritage Lottery Fund. It was particularly eager to ensure that the Council consulted local people about the uses to which the West Reservoir was put. After more than twenty years of campaigning it was formally closed down on 13th May 2006.

The archive, which is currently being catalogued, includes minutes of the SRC management committee, issues of the SRC's newsletter, publicity leaflets and postcards produced by the SRC. It also includes exchanges of correspondence with Thames Water, Hackney Council and local residents. The records give details about the SRC's campaign and the various suggestions they put forward for the future of the reservoirs. They also show the attitudes and proposals of Thames Water and Hackney Council at various points during the discussions on the site's future.

As the archive of a large local campaign run by local people in the Stoke Newington area, this is a fascinating group of records to have in the Hackney

collection, and the Friends are delighted that the campaigners offered it to the Archives.

Margaret MacDonald photographs

Another recent acquisition is a collection of photographs (negatives and prints) by Margaret MacDonald, covering the period 1974 – 1981. MacDonald was a professional photographer, who worked closely with the Hackney Society on a number of their publications, including "From Tower to Tower Block". The material, consisting of seven

boxes and files, is part of a bequest made to the Museum of London. However, as these photographs are mainly Hackney based, the Museum of London has donated this part of the collection to Hackney Archives Department, with the agreement of Helen MacDonald, executor of Margaret MacDonald's will. At present these photographs have not been catalogued and so are not available for viewing.

A plea for help

As you will see elsewhere in this issue, HAD has been fortunate enough to acquire a fascinating piece of theatre history in the form of a weekly account book from the Standard Theatre.

Our fortune was not luck, but due to the vigilance of a Friend, Robert Thompson, who identified the item in a bookseller's catalogue and brought the matter to Isobel Watson's attention.

A very welcome increase in public awareness of archives has produced a rather less welcome market for the sale of archives and many items which should be in record offices are finding their way into private collections. It is therefore important that today's archivist should be vigilant in monitoring, not only the traditional booksellers but also online auction sites particularly Ebay. In this monumental task, we would appreciate the Friends' help. Please contact the Department if you see any suitable Hackney material for sale. I hardly need to ask you to check before bidding for any Hackney material either for yourself or on behalf of the Department, to ensure that we are not bidding against each other. With the help of individual friends in this way and the generosity of the Friends in assisting with purchasing documents, we can turn the challenge of online sales into an opportunity.

Edward Rogers
Archives and Information Services Manager

Members' interests

We are happy to publish requests for information made by members of the Friends. Please reply directly to the address below, rather than to Hackney Archives Department. If you would like us to publish your requests, please send in a letter with details of how you would like people to contact you, to Hackney Archives Department, 43 De Beauvoir Road, London N1 5SQ.

My Father, Charles Sidney Challener, was born in Homerton Terrace, Morning Lane in 1913. The terrace was opposite St. Luke's Church, where his parents had married, and is now just a grassed area.

I have checked bombing records and there is no mention there and although there are flats nearby this terrace space has not been rebuilt on.

Can anyone solve the mystery of the disappearing houses please ?

Christopher S. Challener

Brynglas, Zion Street, Llanwrtyd Wells, Powys, LD5 4RD; tel.: 01591 610770; email: Christopher.challener@virgin.net

HACKNEY'S OLDEST BUILDING NEEDS YOUR HELP

DO YOU HAVE A FEW HOURS TO SPARE EVERY MONTH?
ARE YOU INTERESTED IN HISTORY?
DO YOU WANT TO HELP OTHERS ENJOY THEIR PAST?
DO YOU WANT EXPERIENCE IN HERITAGE OR TOURISM?

WHY NOT VOLUNTEER AT ST AUGUSTINE'S TOWER?

ST AUGUSTINE'S TOWER HAS JUST HAD A MAJOR FACELIFT FINANCED BY THE HLF. IT WILL OPEN TO THE PUBLIC FROM SEPTEMBER 2006 FOR GENERAL VISITS, ART EXHIBITIONS AND SCHOOL SESSIONS. HACKNEY HISTORIC BUILDINGS TRUST WHO LOOK AFTER THIS TREASURE NEED SOME HELP TO DO THIS.

TO FIND OUT MORE RING ANN ROBEY ON 0208 525 0706 TO DISCUSS OPPORTUNITIES.
FULL TRAINING GIVEN

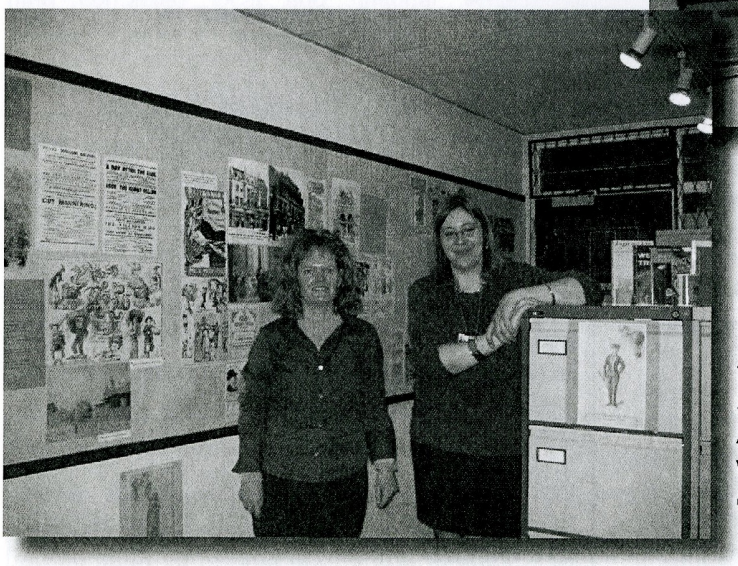
News/events

Open Day

The Hackney Archives Open Day on Saturday 8 April was a great success. Wide publicity, including a mention in the *Hackney Gazette*, ensured that we had our best turn-out in recent years. Sally England and Elizabeth Green worked immensely hard in the weeks leading up to the Open Day to produce an exhibition on the history of theatre in Hackney, which was very well-received and which is available to view until September. Visitors were also able to search for photographs on the HA2000 database, to find out about the Hackney Archives catalogues which can now be found on the Access to Archives (A2A) website*, and to meet our conservator, Jacqueline Bradshaw-Price, who had her own display in the conservation studio of the largest and smallest items in the collections. All in all, the staff ended the day in the pub, tired but pleased at how the day had gone and full of ideas for the next one. (This is not to say, of course, that the ideas survived the beer, but it doesn't stop the fact that we had them...)

*www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a

Jacqueline prepares for her conservation demonstration at the Open Day.



Elizabeth and Sally in front of the exhibition on the history of theatre in Hackney, which can still be viewed at the Department.

St John at Hackney Church Fete

This annual event will be held this year on Saturday 22nd July from 11.30am - 4.30pm. As usual the Friends of Hackney Archives will have a stall there, staffed by Friends committee members and volunteers.

Staff and volunteers

New Finance & Admin Officer

As part of the restructure of the Department, Nora Dunn was appointed as part-time Finance and Administration Officer. She atarted work on 06 March.

Nora: I had previously worked for many years with the London Borough of Waltham Forest as a finance & admin manager but took early retirement when my post was deleted during a restructure.

I was attracted to this job in the Archives Section as I have a degree in history and thought I would be able to combine my experience in local government finance and admin with my interest in history.

I have been fascinated by the amount of books and information available in the Archives Section and have been inspired to research into my own family history which was something I had never got round to doing before. I have found the volunteers from 'Friends' to be welcoming and to have a great fund of local knowledge.

Archivist appointed

Siân Mogridge has been appointed as archivist and started working on 18 April. After a few months at Hackney she has this to say:

I've now been working at Hackney Archives Department for almost two months and have found my colleagues here very welcoming and the readers I have met so far, including several Friends, very pleasant.

I have always been fascinated by history and after leaving University I got a place as an Archives Assistant at Lambeth Palace Library. I did my Masters in Archives and Information Management at Liverpool and for the past two and a half years I have been working at the Corporation of London Records Office and the London Metropolitan Archives.

I was delighted to be offered a place here. Hackney Archives has a good reputation and Hackney itself, changing in character over time as London expanded, has a fascinating history. I am very much looking forward to learning more about the area and the archive.

Volunteers

We have had a number of work experience volunteers over the past few months. Keirron Celestine was with us from 30 May - 09 June, Zoë Forkin from Our Lady's Convent High School volunteered from 19-30 June and Nathaniel Williams is with us from the 10 - 21 July. All of the these volunteers have been doing excellent work scanning images and then uploading them to the HA2000 database, as well as being introduced to a variety of archives and local studies library tasks. Faiza Ghanima , a history graduate , is another new volunteer, coming in once a week, and Anne-Marie Sullivan spends a few hours typing up searchroom lists on one day a week. It goes without saying that Joan Potter, our longest standing volunteer, still comes in regularly. Joan Murton continues to assist her in identifying missing images on the HA 2000 photograph database

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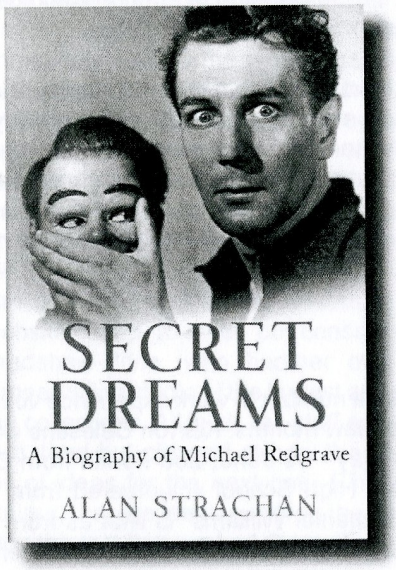
Friends of Tower and Gardens

The St Augustine's Tower has now been restored with a Heritage Lottery grant (see page 3) and the official opening will be in early September. The Friends of Hackney Churchyard Gardens have joined with The Hackney Historic Building Trust to form one Friends Group.The AGM for the Friends Group will be in October 2006 and further information will follow in due course.

Local Studies Library: new acquisitions

Two titles recently added to the Local Studies Library are in keeping with the theme of theatre history running through this edition of the *Hackney Terrier*. Please note that these books are additions to the collection – Hackney Archives Department does not offer them for sale.



Secret dreams : a biography of Michael Redgrave : Alan Strachan

Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £25.00
ISBN : 0297607642

Although Michael Redgrave's personal connection with the Hackney area was limited to his film work at Hoxton's Gainsborough Studios, this biography provides useful information on the Britannia Theatre during the 1890s, for it was there that Michael's father Roy appeared as a melodrama actor. Nicknamed 'The Dramatic Cock of the North', Roy Redgrave was a popular leading man at 'The Brit', where he met his first wife, fellow actor Ellen Maud Pratt, whom he persuaded to change her name to Judith Kyrle.

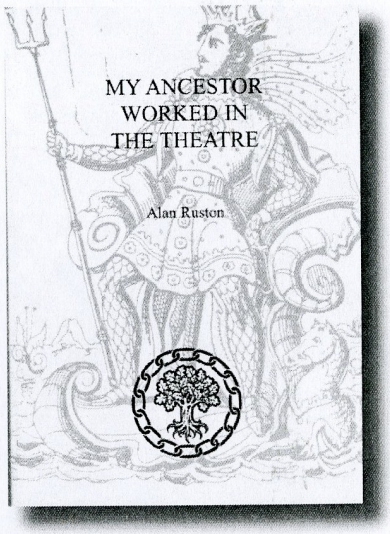
Strachan relates a story of how, whilst filming 'The Lady Vanishes' at the Gainsborough Studios, Michael decided to visit the pub next door to the Britannia, only to discover that the landlord and his wife had been stagehand and dresser at the theatre and had worked with Roy Redgrave. The old couple regaled him with memories of the father Michael had never known, an encounter he always treasured.

Such a serendipitous incident would be much envied by anyone investigating their own theatre ancestry. In a field where real and stage names were often wildly different, where ages, backgrounds and pedigrees were frequently as fictitious as the plays in which the actors performed, researching ones theatrical forebears can be a frustrating occupation. However, help is now available in the form of....

My ancestor worked in the theatre : Alan Ruston

Society of Genealogists Enterprises Ltd, £5.95
ISBN: 1903462894

This was an extremely timely donation by Friends member Alan Ruston. A new addition to the 'My ancestor...' series, the booklet offers an introductory guide to a sometimes difficult area of genealogical research – actors have often been happy to extend the use of smoke and mirrors to their own histories.



A brief but valuable history of British theatre is presented before the author guides the new researcher through the different sources they will need to consult and the specialist areas such as fairs and circuses, music hall and pantomime to be considered.

After listing important British collections and repositories for theatre family history, the author gives a useful and entertaining illustration of research in practice, recounting how he successfully traced his ancestor Richard Nelson Lee, the great pantomimist, and also his work to uncover information about the very private music hall star, Harry Champion.

As the author admits, theatre ancestry is an extensive subject area and one of which this booklet can only scratch the surface. It does, however, offer an excellent introduction for those starting out their genealogical explorations in a challenging but very exciting field.

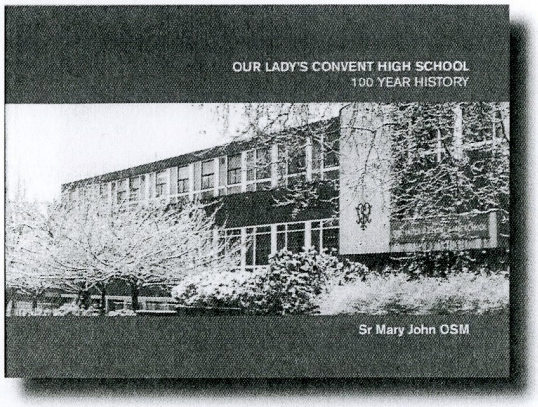
Books for sale

Our Lady's Convent High School : 100 year history

Sister Mary John OSM
£5.00

Our Lady's Convent High School celebrated its centenary in 2004, upon which occasion the school published a history written by former headmistress Sister Mary John. The book charts the school's progress and achievements using a wide variety of memories, documents and images, from the school's foundation by Servite Sisters with just 38 pupils at 14 Amhurst Road to its present occupation of numbers 6-16 as a specialist language college with nearly 800 students.

Hackney Archives Department has been pleased to build a relationship with the school over the past few years, with student volunteers working with us each summer, so we are delighted that Sister John has very kindly donated a copy of her book to the Local Studies Library. We also have a limited number of copies for sale at £5.00 + £1.50 p+p each. Cheques should be made out to London Borough of Hackney. First come first served!



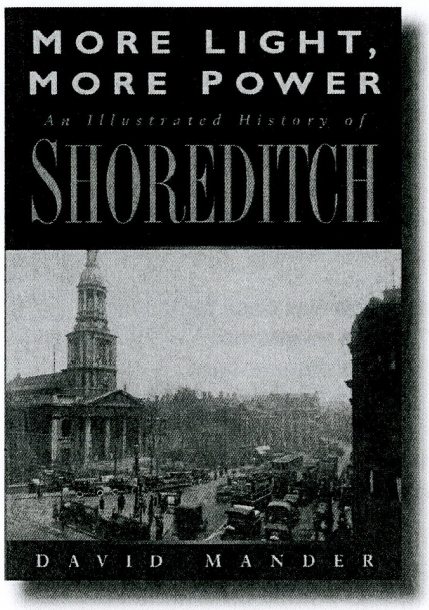
If you would like to purchase any of the publications on this page, please send a cheque made payable to London Borough of Hackney to Hackney Archives Department, 43 De Beauvoir Road, London N1 5SQ. Alternatively ring 020 72412886 to provide your credit card details. Please include the cost of the publication as well as the postage costs. If you are purchasing more than one publicaton, please add the postage costs together.

Old stock re-discovered

There are some advantages to the Archives being part of the Library Service. Library managers doing a clearout have brought to light a number of copies of books that have long been out of print, including the much sought after Shoreditch volume by David Mander. There are only a limited number of copies of each title and we are offering them to the Friends on a first come first served basis - see below for details of the titles on offer.

More Light, More Power

An Illustrated History of Shoreditch
David Mander
£9.99 + £1.90 postage
(16 copies)



Britain in old photographs: Hackney, Homerton & Dalston.

David Mander
£9.99 + £1.90 postage
(11 copies)

Hoxton: Architecture and history over five centuries.

Christopher Miele.
(2 copies.)
£4.00 + £1.35 postage

Answers to quiz questions

Here are the answers to the quiz questions published in Terrier 71. Congratulations to all those who got them right !

1. The London Borough of Hackney was created in
   - **a. 1965**
   - b. 1900
   - c. 1765

2. The London Borough of Hackney was formed by amalgamating three boroughs. Were they:
   - a. Hackney, Hoxton and Stoke Newington
   - **b. Hackney, Shoreditch and Stoke Newington**
   - c. Hackney, Shoreditch and Stamford Hill

3. The tower in Mare Street is called St Augustine's Tower because:
   - a. It was owned by the knights of St Augustine
   - **b. It was part of St Augustine's church**
   - c. Because St Augustine once stayed in Hackney

4. Shoreditch was once famous for
   - a. Its museums
   - b. Its menageries
   - **c. Its lunatic asylums**

5. What was the Castle Climbing Centre on Green Lanes originally built as:
   - a. A debtors' prison
   - b. A stately home
   - **c. A pumping station**

6. Which famous scientist, who discovered oxygen, taught in Hackney?
   - a. Albert Einstein
   - **b. Joseph Priestley**
   - c. Isaac Newton

7. Which famous playwright attended the Grocers' Company School on Hackney Downs?
   - **a. Harold Pinter**
   - b. Samuel Beckett
   - c. Geoffrey Chaucer

8. How old is the New River?
   - a. About 50 years
   - b. About 100 years
   - **c. About 400 years**

9. Which river forms part of the eastern boundary of the Borough?
   - **a. The River Lea**
   - b. The Hackney Brook
   - c. The River Fleet

10. Who was arrested for brawling in Shoreditch in 1592?
    - a. Henry VIII
    - **b. Christopher Marlowe**
    - c. Guy Fawkes

11. What opening did Hackney celebrate in 1850:
    - a. The opening of its first canal
    - **b. The opening of its first railway**
    - c. The opening of its first motorway

12. During the 1830s, which was Hackney home to:
    - **a. The largest hothouse in the world**
    - b. The largest cigar factory in the world
    - c. The largest elephant in the world

Apology
Friend, Melvyn Brooks has correctly pointed out that the Grocers' Company School was in fact called Hackney Downs School by the time that Harold Pinter attended it.

Credits & Contacts
The Hackney Terrier, which appears at least three times a year, is published by the Friends of Hackney Archives and produced by Elizabeth Green. The Friends constitute an independent charity (no. 1074493) and membership is open to all: the subscription is £10 in the UK (plus £2 for each additional member at the same address) and £20 sterling overseas. The subscription runs for a calendar year and includes a copy of the journal Hackney History.
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