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# Hackney History

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## Textual Matters

### *Abbreviations used in this issue*

HA	Hackney Archives	MDR	Middlesex Deeds Register
LMA	London Metropolitan Archive	NA	National Archives
LPA	London Picture Archive	NPG	National Portrait Gallery

### *Footnotes*

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# Arms and the Men: Hackney Terrace and the Assertion of Gentility

*Iain Bruce*



Hackney Terrace – 20 to 54 Cassland Road – is an elegant, symmetrical, brick composition some two-hundred feet in length and three storeys in height. Its façade is unelaborated save for its projecting sills, its string course and its first-floor cast-iron balconies which confirm the traditional London 18th century

palette. The railings at street level turn to take the visitor up the five steps to the round-headed front doors of each of the eighteen houses. Below, each house has an area giving light to the basement. There is no elaboration. There are no keystones above, or patterned – rusticated, vermiculated –



*Figure 1: Hackney Terrace at evening from the west.*



Figure 2: Hackney Terrace pediment with three escutcheons.

blocks around the doorways. The façade imitates the palace front. The central block and what would be the two pavilions are marked by a projection to the depth of half a brick in a subtle assertion within the unified structure. In terms of Georgian architecture, Hackney Terrace is elegant but unremarkable though to Pevsner it ‘comes as a surprise’,<sup>1</sup> largely because it is the sort of building that one knows better in the West End. John Summerson rather dismissively speaks of ‘small tentative developments’ to the east as being in ‘the backwash of the great westward drive’ of expansion.<sup>2</sup> The Terrace is contemporaneous with the great western estates such as the Portland in Marylebone. Hackney Terrace had been preceded by St Thomas’s Square (1771-1772)<sup>3</sup> and would be followed by Sutton Place, planned in 1796 but built in 1809.<sup>4</sup>

### A Display of Arms

If it is in many ways what Pevsner calls ‘plain’, what distinguishes and lifts the Terrace is its assertive armorial pediment. It gains distinction from the complementary use of the classical form and from the

flourish of three coats of arms displayed in elegant overlapping ovals surmounting the wordless motto band beneath and the swag of two palm leaves below, tied with a bowed and rippling ribbon bearing the date 1792 the year the scheme was first projected. 1795 saw six houses in occupation but it took till 1801 till the last – number 13 – was occupied.<sup>5</sup>

The three coats of arms, reading from east to west, purport to be those of the speculator builders William Fellows, John Shillitoe and Thomas Abree Pickering. The shields are uncoloured but, drawing on examples from the arms of families of the same names, the colours can be given speculatively [in brackets] as follows: for Fellows, [Azure/blue background] a fess dancettée ermine between three lions’ heads [or/gold] erased [raggedly cut] langued gules [with red tongues] ducally crowned [or]’. In 1792, these arms belonged to William Fellowes of Eggesford, MP for Huntingdon until 1796.<sup>6</sup> The central escutcheon, for Shillitoe, can be described as: [Azure] three fleurs-de-lys [or] two and one between three keys palewise [vertically], wards facing dexter [right] one and two

1 Bridget Cherry and Niklaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London, 4, North*, 1998, p. 503.

2 John Summerson, *Georgian London*, ed. Howard Colvin, 2003, p. 224.

3 *The Victoria History of the County of Middlesex, volume X, Hackney Parish*, [VCH], 1995, Oxford, p. 25.

4 *VCH*, p. 55.

5 HA: P/L/LT/5/3 and P/L/LT5/4, Assessment Ledgers.

Houses were numbered west to east: no. 1 is modern no. 20; no. 18 is modern 54.

6 NPG: D11688. A mezzotint shows the arms of William Fellowes of Eggesford, Senior Master in Chancery (d. 1723). They are displayed on his monument in Eggesford Church, Devon, and were passed down to the MP.

XIV. COATS of ARMS.		Feet	In.	by	Feet	In.			
429	His Majesty's on a Pannel	4	6	by	3	10	15	15	0
430	Ditto <i>alt Relief</i>	4	0	--	4	0	12	12	0
431	A Plume of Feathers	2	4	high			2	12	6
432	Ditto	2	0	ditto			2	2	0

Figure 3: *A Descriptive Catalogue of Coadé's Artificial Stone Manufactory*, 1784, p.19.

[or]. (Directions in heraldry are determined from the point of view of the person holding the shield. It follows the logic of 'stage left, stage right'.) There does appear to be a faint vertical line on the central shield. If it is intentional, the colours conventionally would be reversed – *i.e.*, one half would be blue and the other gold with the colours of the keys and the fleurs-de-lys reversed – blue on gold, gold on blue. There is no official record of such arms in the College of Arms<sup>7</sup> though similar unrecognised arms are recorded for Shelletoe or Shilecorne in Yorkshire.<sup>8</sup> The third shield, for Pickering, can be described as 'Ermine, a lion rampant guardant [upright with limbs and claws extended] [azure] armed and langued [clawed and tongued gules] ducally crowned [or]. A version of the arms belong to Pickering's distant cousin Henry from whom Pickering would eventually inherit the estate of Thelwell in Cheshire together with the right to bear the arms though 'differenced'. If all these are the actual colours, the display in total would be predominantly blue, gold and ermine with touches of red.

The arms themselves are in Coadestone<sup>9</sup> which surpasses natural stone in its resistance to weathering. A mixture of ground flint, stoneware and glass combined with clay and water was moulded, allowed to dry and then fired at 1100° to 1200°C.<sup>10</sup> Eleanor Coadé's catalogue<sup>11</sup> lays out all manner of architectural embellishments that Hackney Terrace lacks – the keystones, medallions, pateras and mouldings found

in the West End terraces and squares and in the work of Nash and Soane.<sup>12</sup> The 1784 catalogue listed 778 components which could be combined for structural or decorative effect. It offered two sizes of the royal arms – widely used on government buildings and by royal warrant holders – at 12 and 15 guineas (approximately £1,200 and £1,500 at 2022 prices). The cost of bespoke arms, while more expensive than off-the-peg pieces, was reduced by using separate standardised moulds. A lion rampant, in *alt relief* for example, would be placed on the blank escutcheon and the other elements added using slip as an adhesive to complete the design before the ensemble was sent for firing.<sup>13</sup>

### Arms and Gentility

Beyond the function of filling what would otherwise be the flat void of the pediment, the arms are important not only because they purport to belong to the speculators but because they demonstrate a class aspiration both on the part of the speculators themselves and also, it is to be supposed, of the tenants of the houses. The arms become tokens, *insignia*, of gentility. The rank of 'gentleman' was the lowest in contemporaneous tables of precedence: 'King, Princes of the Blood, Archbishop of Canterbury ... Knights Bachelor, Colonels, Serjeants at Law, Doctors, Esquires, Lastly Gentlemen, bearing Coat-Armour.'<sup>14</sup> It was a rank, however, to which many aspired and was much defended by those who regarded themselves as already genteel. Having a coat of arms, legitimately granted or spuriously asserted, was a marker.

7 A search by Adam Tuck, Rouge Dragon Pursuivant, in the records of the College of Arms failed to produce a record of authorized 'Shillitoe' arms.

8 John Papworth, *Ordinary of British Armorial*, 1874.

9 Cherry and Pevsner, p. 503.

10 For a fuller description of the process, see, Alison Kelly, *Mrs Coadé's Stone*, 1990, Upton-upon-Severn, pp. 55-59.

11 *A Descriptive Catalogue of Coadé's Artificial Stone Manufactory ... with prices attached*, Lambeth, 1784.

12 Alison Kelly, 'Coadé Stone in Georgian Architecture' in *Architectural History*, 1985, vol. 28, pp. 80-88.

13 Kelly, *Mrs Coadé's Stone*, pp. 60-63.

14 John Browne, *General Law List for the Year 1795*, p. 241.

The right to bear arms had long been contested ground. The conservative, exclusionary position in the 18th century was little different from that of Henry VIII's 1530 Commission charging the heralds to maintain the status hierarchy by allowing arms only to 'men of good honest reputacyon ... not issued of vyle blood' but for 'service doon to us' provided they had 'possessions and riches hable to mainteyne' their new honours.<sup>15</sup> The historian Selden in Elizabeth's reign offers a much looser definition: 'What a gentleman is 'tis difficult with us to define, in other countries he is known by his privileges, in Westminster Hall he is one that is reputed one, in the Court of Honour he that hath arms.'<sup>16</sup> By the 18th century one commentator, Sylvanus Morgan, offers an even looser definition which chimes with a more mobile society:

It is Industry that gains us Riches,  
And Riches gains us Honour, Coat and Britches.  
Virtue and Learning, and Honest Parents, can  
With Spade and Spindle, make a gentleman.<sup>17</sup>

The Restoration saw Charles II attempting to assert the older definition by reviving Heralds' Visitations to identify those using arms without a grant from the College of Arms. James II went further. On 13 August 1687, he issued Letters Patent to re-establish the Court of the Earl Marshall as the regulatory body:

... which said Court hath been disused ever since the horrid Rebellion [of 1641]; by reason whereof very many abuses [of arms] not determinable in any other Court hath been unreformed and gon [*sic*] unpunished ...<sup>18</sup>

In a happily apposite local case, dated 9 September 1699, John Cass is summoned 'to reply to certain articles ... concerning his contempt for the jurisdiction and authority of this court and of the office and laws of arms and particularly by bearing, usurping, displaying and causing to be used both arms and emblems proper to gentility which neither he himself nor his father by right nor by the laws of arms could

bear.'<sup>19</sup> Presumably Cass had displayed those arms on his father Thomas's funeral hatchment.<sup>20</sup> Cases were notoriously protracted. Only the initial four stages survive in Cass's case. The third of which records Cass's failure to appear. The fourth was a procedural matter.<sup>21</sup>

The reason for the heralds' Visitations was that observance of the law was being ignored. In fact, the first Visitation of James II's reign was also the last ever. It was impossible to prevent anyone who chose to appropriate arms from doing so.

By 1792 there was no longer a threat of prosecution. Social mobility meant that a gentleman was simply a man who was reputed one. This was particularly the case in London where wealth derived from trade rather than land. The Guilds had long been granted arms – the Fishmongers<sup>22</sup> in 1512 and the Clothmakers' in 1530 both, incidentally, within the reign of Henry VIII; merchants who became aldermen were granted arms. The prosecution of Cass was a rearguard action.

### Who was then a Gentleman?

How, then, are the three speculators seen in terms of their station in society? Invariably in land documents they are named as William Fellows, surveyor, John Shillitoe, plumber, and Thomas Abree Pickering, gentleman – rather than as 'attorney', his profession. Their biographies reveal very distinct courses of life, both before and after their collaboration in this and in their earlier speculative building venture in Pollard's Row off the Old Bethnal Green Road in 1791.<sup>23</sup>

15 *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500-1700*, Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, 1994, Stanford, p. 7.

16 Heal and Holmes, p. 7.

17 Heal and Holmes, p. 38. The allusion is to the Lollard priest John Ball's sermon in 1381: 'When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?'

18 G.D. Squibb, *The High Court of Chivalry, a Study of the Civil Law in England*, 1959, Oxford, Appendix IV.

19 '... ad respondum certis Articulis ... concernandum eius contemptum jurisdictionis et authoritatio huius Curiae et Officii et Legum Armorum et praesertim in gerendo usurpando ostendendo et uti faciendo Arma et Insignia tanquam Arma et Insignia Gentilitia propria ... quae de jure et per Leges Armorum nec ipse nec eius pater gerere potuit ... .' Extract from *College of Arms MS Act Book, 1687-1702*. Transcription provided by Adam Tuck, 18 March 2022.

20 G.D. Squibb, ed., *Oldys v Cass in Reports of Heraldic Cases in the Court of Chivalry, 1623-1732*, 1956, Harleian Society, vol. 107, p. 9. Dr Oldys was the King's Advocate responsible for bringing prosecutions. There is no evidence of who made the complaint.

21 Extract from *College of Arms MS Act Book, 1687-1702*.

22 [https://www.heraldry-wiki.com/heraldrywiki/wiki/Worshipful\\_Company\\_of\\_Fishmongers](https://www.heraldry-wiki.com/heraldrywiki/wiki/Worshipful_Company_of_Fishmongers)

23 Isobel Watson, *Gentlemen in the Building Line, the Development of South Hackney*, 1989, p. 31.



### William Fellows

Of the three men, Fellows had the earliest connection with Hackney and may have been raised there. In his will, his father describes himself as 'John Fellows of Clapton in the Parish of St John Hackney'.<sup>24</sup> He was a successful bricklayer and builder with City premises in Blossom and Elder Streets, Norton Folgate, and in Widegate Alley and Savage Court off Bishopsgate. A lease of 1801 showed that the father held two plots of land on the north side of the road between Clapton Turnpike and Lea Bridge.<sup>25</sup> Though not stated in the indenture, the land may have been the source of clay for the brick kilns in the area. The indenture states that there are 'edifices structures erections and buildings' on the land, though Ashpitel's Plan of 1799 shows no structures at all [Fig. 4].<sup>26</sup>

As residual legatees of Fellows's will, the two sons together with William's brother-in-law Matthew Bull, brewer of Stoke Newington, took equal shares of the £450 raised by the sale of the leases.<sup>27</sup>

John, the father, is recorded in surveyors' affidavits from 1770 as builder of two 'small houses' erected in Three Tun Court, Shoreditch and two more in Thomas Street, Bethnal Green.<sup>28</sup> In 1771, he is recorded at his business premises at number 8 Blossom Street as a 'bricklayer [and] builder' – though also a bankrupt.<sup>29</sup> Two years later he was discharged<sup>30</sup> and subsequently thrived. He served on the first of the two London juries at the Old Bailey on 13 April 1774.<sup>31</sup> His next court appearance, however, was at Middlesex Sessions in May 1777 charged with assault to which pled not guilty. The outcome of the hearing is not recorded.<sup>32</sup> Thereafter he appears to have been a solid citizen, twice serving on coroners' juries in the City, in



Figure 4: William Hurst Ashpitel, *Plan of Hackney Turnpike Road, surveyed 1799*.

1788 and 1794.<sup>33</sup> On his death he had considerable property both in Clapton and in Bishopsgate.<sup>34</sup> These tenements were divided between his son John and granddaughters Ursula Fellows and Arabella Bull. William is not a beneficiary of the City properties.

William's address in his father's will is given as Canterbury Square, Southwark. Every document associated with Hackney Terrace, gives his address as Southwark – occasionally specifying Tooley Street.<sup>35</sup> Land Tax records show him in three Southwark houses with increasing valuations. In 1789 he is living in Church Row at the east end of St John's Church, Horsleydown, at the junction of Tooley Street and Fair Street in a house valued at £12 on which he paid £2-2-0 in tax. In 1793, he has moved to 69 Tooley Street, a house valued at £30 on which he paid £4-10-0. In 1800 he is at 1 Canterbury Square off Dean Street, the second house in on the south-west side of the square, itself open to the south-east.<sup>36</sup> In 1800 the house was valued at £26 but £35 in 1803 on which he paid tax of £4-19-2. (The Square now lies under the tracks from London Bridge Station.) The Rhinebeck Panorama of 1806 shows substantial two-storeyed houses with attic dormers.<sup>37</sup> Dean Street was

24 NA: PROB 11/1361/179

25 LMA: Indenture of Assignment MDR 1801 6 37 recording two Indentures of Lease dated 2 August 1795 and 1 May 1798.

26 J.L. Dailey, *Turnpikes and the Turnpike Roads in Hackney, Shoreditch and Stoke Newington: a Preliminary Study*, 1981. Typescript volume in Hackney Archives: AS 335.1.

27 LMA: MDR 1801 6 37

28 LMA: MR/B/C/1770/60 and 61

29 *The London Gazette*, 16 July 1771, 1162, p. 4.

30 *The London Gazette*, 9 February 1773, 11326, p. 4.

31 *The Whole Proceedings ... held at the Old Bailey ... in the Fourteenth Year of His Majesty's Reign*, Number IV, Part 1.

32 LMA: MJ/SP/1777/05/020

33 LMA: LICC LIC 650010411 and LIC 650010411

34 NA: Prob 11/1361/179

35 E.g. LMA: MDR 1792 5 627

36 Richard Horwood, *A Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster, the Borough of Southwark, 1799*, 1966, London Topographical Society, publication 106, sheet E3.

37 Ralph Hyde, *The 'Rhinebeck Panorama' of London, 1807-1811*, 1981, London Topographical Society, publication 125.

blocked at its southern end, meaning that, unlike the busy thoroughfare of Tooley Street, it had no passing traffic. Only a pedestrian passage opened at the southern end.<sup>38</sup> His neighbours included attorneys,<sup>39</sup> merchants and tradesmen. He was firmly one of the middle classes. It was here that he and his wife Elizabeth raised their son, William, who had been born on 11 April, 1799 and baptised at St Olave's Church, Tooley Street, on 12 May that year.<sup>40</sup>

Apart from his surveyor's fees, Fellows had an income from property. In addition to his share of his father's Clapton land, he leased land to a William Bottomley south of Hackney Terrace<sup>41</sup> as well as taking the proceeds of his share from the sale by the three developers of surplus land along the north side of the road from Well Street to Hackney Wick to Matthew Bull his brother-in-law. Fellows's holding stretched 340 feet.<sup>42</sup>

His secure position in a respectable square indicates his success in his profession. The work of a surveyor is laid out in the very detailed guides and manuals of the period. John Hammond's *The Practical Surveyor* of 1750 characterises it as 'for surveying of lands and waters' with particular focus on 'the various sorts of theodolites' and on the 'measuring wheel, universal dial and pantographer'.<sup>43</sup> The degree of geometrical and arithmetical skills required is of a high and rigorous standard. Surveyors, indeed, sometimes advertised themselves as mathematical tutors. The rapid expansion of 18th-century London provided surveyors with ample rewards. In supervising the building of a first-class house the surveyor would earn £3-10-0 with £1-15-0 for every subsequent alteration; for a seventh-class house, 10s. 6d.<sup>44</sup> Precision and expertise were pre-requisites. Surveyors in London and Middlesex worked principally under the controls – and penalties – of 'An Act for the further and better regulation of buildings and party walls, and

for the more effectually preventing mischiefs by fire' (1774) – the 'Fires Prevention Act' also known as 'The Building Act'.<sup>45</sup> To ensure compliance, building plots would be measured, progress throughout the period of building supervised and costs controlled. In *The Universal British Builder* the surveyor at work controls costs down to the detailing of a door.<sup>46</sup> Skaife states: 'Many surveyors ... propose methods for estimating ... [by] guessing' but the only rule required is for the prices of components of material and labour to be applied 'to every particular' thereby giving 'a near certainty for the whole'.<sup>47</sup>

Party wall disputes were another task. Surveyors would be hired by parties in dispute – and a resolution sought first by agreement of a group of surveyors or if necessary, by a jury of neighbours or by reference to the district surveyor. A certificate would be sworn to record the decision. Happily, we have a case dated 27 October 1773 in which William's father as one of four surveyors signs in an elegant cursive hand<sup>48</sup> the 'humble Certificate' in a case of 'an old message in Three Cup Alley' attesting that 'we have strickly examends the said Party Wall and find the same is so much decay'd ... that it renders it nessicary to take and pull down the same and rebuild the same in such manner provided by the said statute'.<sup>49</sup> John's experience as a builder qualified him to judge a wall: William may not have followed his father as a bricklayer and builder but we see his father foreshadowing his younger son's profession.

The late 18th century saw a jostling to establish a class of professionals. Though William Halfpenny, one of the most influential of writers in the field, was pleased to describe himself on the title page of *A New and Compleat System of Architecture* as 'Architect and Carpenter',<sup>50</sup> by the end of the century the quartet of builder, surveyor, architect and engineer was

38 Horwood, sheet E3.

39 Five are listed as resident in Canterbury Square: *Brown's General Law List for the Year 1795*.

40 LMA: P71/OLA/015

41 LMA: MDR 1797 1 319

42 LMA: Deed of Partition, MDR 1797 1 321

43 John Hammond, *The Practical Surveyor*, third edition enlarged by Samuel Warner, 1750, p. iii.

44 Thomas Skaife, *A Key to Civil Architecture or the Universal British Builder*, London, 1776, p. 384.

45 14 Geo. III c. 78.

46 Skaife, p. 171 – see figure 5.

47 Skaife, p. 262 f.

48 This is likely a scribal hand: in the same year, testifying to having had his silver watch stolen at one in the morning his evidence is verified 'John Fellows, his mark'. LMA OB/SP/1773/05/017

49 LMA: MS MPS 506340232

50 William Halfpenny, *A New and Compleat System of Architecture*, 1759.

Bead and flush doors, on one side, per foot, are charged by mafters, at — — —	o 10
Surveyors allow from 7d. to	o 10
The labour to one of this fort is 1¼ day.	
Ditto, ovlo and flat pannel, of whole-deal, work on one side, fquare back, the mafters charge	o 10
Surveyors allow from 8d. to	o 10

Figure 5: Skaiife, *The Universal British Builder*, p. 171.

splitting into separate professions.<sup>51</sup> The Institute of British Architects was first, in 1834, to establish itself, specifically excluding surveyors from membership. The Chartered Surveyors followed only in 1868. Fellows's family background as son and brother of bricklayers and his own profession as a surveyor are a last echo of the amalgam of two of the quartet to which he likely added a third. It is probable that he would have planned and supervised the building of Hackney Terrace – as architect and surveyor and builder (with Shillitoe) of the joint project.

One piece of his work as a surveyor survives. In 1793, His Majesty's Customs commissioned him to make 'A Plan Shewing the Situation of the Public Foreign Suffrance Wharfs' on the Upper Pool of the Port of London in anticipation of the construction downstream of wet docks at Wapping and Rotherhithe and on the Isle of Dogs. His engraved drawing and measured capacities of warehousing was published along with the Commissioners' report.<sup>52</sup>

In the Royal Academy catalogue for works he exhibited, he is described as 'Architect'.<sup>53</sup> In 1793 he submitted 'An Elevation of a villa now building at Sydenham in Kent'. His address is 69 Tooley Street. In 1799, now from Canterbury Square, he submitted 'A cottage', in 1803 'Rectory at Warnford' and in 1810 'Farley Hill Castle near Reading'. Architectural pieces survive 'Drawn and Engraved' by William Fellows and published by Robert Wilkinson: 'A view

of St Pancras Old Church', 'St James's Tottenham Court Road', 'St Mary Abbots Church, Kensington Church Street' and 'St James's Church Clerkenwell'.<sup>54</sup> He also drew and engraved St Mary Abbots Church, Kensington<sup>55</sup> and St Mary's Church Paddington.<sup>56</sup> Most of these etchings appeared in Lysons's *Historical Account*.<sup>57</sup> Further pieces include a view of Church Row – his first recorded dwelling in Southwark.<sup>58</sup>

Beyond surveying and art, we find him as one of the three executors of William Wing, 'late of Little Britain, London, Bricklayer'. Wing's creditors and debtors should contact the executors so that the estate could be wound up.<sup>59</sup> In August 1801 he is named in two indentures of lease and release for three parcels of land near West Green, Tottenham, at Harpools and in Hangers Lane.<sup>60</sup> This form of indenture was a two-stage legal device used to conceal the financial 'considerations' involved in a transaction.<sup>61</sup> Property – in this case a leasehold of a thousand years – was first leased to an individual – here, Fellows – who shortly thereafter (as here, often on the next day) re-leased it to a third party – the true purchaser – Fellows acting as middleman. Both these cases reveal that Fellows was regarded as trustworthy.

In his social life, he was a Steward at a dinner of the 'Constitutional Livery' dining on 25 October 1803 with the Society to celebrate 'the Anniversary of his Majesty's happy Accession to the Throne'.<sup>62</sup> He was also a member of another – rather unexpected – society 'The Society of Ancient Britons', a charity for those 'inclined to favour the Maintaining, Cloathing, Educating, and putting-out Apprentices Poor Children descended from Welsh Parents.' A notice in 1804 announced a service in St George's Hanover Square with music by Handel and prayers 'to be read

51 J. Mordaunt Crook, 'The pre-Victorian Architect: Professionalism and Patronage', in *Architectural History*, 1969, vol. 12, p. 62.

52 'Accommodation for the Trade and Shipping of the Port of London', 1796.

53 Algernon Graves, *The Royal Academy, a Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their work from its foundation in 1769 to 1904*, 1905, vol. 3, p. 97.

54 LPA, Records 305016, 23677, 17831, 303900 and 8453

55 LMA: SC/PZ/KE/01/013

56 LMA: SC/GL/LYS/003/002/p544150

57 Daniel and Samuel Lysons, *An Historical Account of those Parishes in the County of Middlesex, which are not described in the Environs of London*, 1800.

58 Francis Steer et al. *Dictionary of Land Surveyors and Local Cartographers of Great Britain and Ireland 1550-1850*, 1997, p. 44.

59 *The London Gazette*, 20 July 1799, p. 735.

60 LMA: MDR 1801 4 752; MDR 1801 4 753

61 A.W.B. Simpson, *An Introduction to the History of the Land Law*, 1961, Oxford, pp. 178-9.

62 *Oracle and the Daily Advertiser*, 21 October 1803, p. 1.



Figure 6: *St Pancras Old Church*, William Fellows 18--, Aquatint ©LPA 305016

in the Antient British Language’ followed by dinner in the Freemasons’ Hall, Queens Street, Lincoln’s Inn Fields. Fellows is designated ‘Esquire’.<sup>63</sup>

Prudently, he insured his life through the Amicable Society for a Perpetual Assurance Office. His name is listed in the announcement of payments to be made to the executors of those who had died ‘in the year ending Lady-day [25 March] 1810 (Old Style – *i.e.* 1811).’ £180 would be paid for each share held by the deceased member.<sup>64</sup> How many shares Fellows held is not stated nor is his date of death recorded. Thirty-six names are listed for that year. The highest rank was William Cavendish, Duke of Portland. Below him in descending order came one knight, four esquires, ten gentlemen and twenty without rank, defined, rather, by their trade – watchmaker, cheesemonger, ironmonger, surgeon. Amongst that number was ‘William Fellows, late of Tooley Street, Southwark, Surveyor’. For all his prosperity and respectability

– even his designation as ‘esquire’ by the Society of Ancient Britons – he remains as he began: ‘surveyor’. Social position was in flux. Whether Fellows would have been granted arms is, however, moot.

### **Thomas Abree Pickering**

Of the three speculators, Thomas Abree Pickering ‘gentleman’ was the one most entitled to a coat of arms. By the end of his life, as owner of Thelwall Hall in Cheshire, he will have inherited the right through the death of his distant cousins, Henry then Robert, who died childless as, indeed, did he.

Pickering was born in Canterbury in 1755. His father, Thomas Woolley Pickering, was a lieutenant in the Royal Navy.<sup>65</sup> His mother, Mary, was the daughter and heir of James Abree, printer, the publisher of the *Kentish Weekly Journal or Canterbury Newsletter*. At the age of fifteen on 20 December 1770, Pickering was apprenticed in London to Henry Adams,

63 *The True Briton*, 15 February 1804, p. 1.

64 *Morning Post*, 24 July 1810.

65 NA: PROB 11/1224/124

attorney, of 78 Mark Lane, Fenchurch Street.<sup>66</sup> What is striking, in terms of the class position of attorneys at this date, is that in the list of the twelve boys apprenticed that day, Pickering took his place as sixth after a breechesmaker, a cordwainer, a fellmonger, a cooper and a draper. Like the other boys, he would learn his trade over five years. Pickering's training would involve the copying and serving of documents and observation of proceedings in the common-law Court of King's Bench of which his master was an attorney. He would be expected to read and understand the various forms of action in law. Members of Pickering's family had, in the 17th century, been barristers, members of Gray's Inn.<sup>67</sup> Unlike them, attorneys had no right of audience before any court. His business was 'to prepare matters for the counsel to plead on, and to conduct the suit through its several steps, till it comes to a final issue ... He must be able from his client's information and writings ... to comprehend his case clearly ... from which he must draw a compendious state of the whole affair. ... The professor of this science must have a clear, solid unclouded understanding, a distinguishing head and a puzzling unpuzzled brain.'<sup>68</sup> The nature of the work of the attorney is described in an exceptionally detailed guide – down to the cost of the particular paper or parchment to be used: 'Ingras the Bail Piece on a double 1s[hilling] stamp'd piece of parchment; carry it to a Judge's Chamber ...'.<sup>69</sup> Once the paperwork had been completed the instruction is given: 'To move for Judgement Give it [the documentation] to Counsel to move for Judgement.' Just as for the breechesmaker or the cooper, at the end of his five years' apprenticeship, Pickering would be examined. A judge or judges would ascertain whether he should be sworn attorney 'by such Ways and Means as they shall think proper, touching his

fitness and capacity.'<sup>70</sup> It would not be until 1872 that compulsory examinations were introduced for barristers. They would, consequently, often rely on the attorney for guidance on the complex form of documentation and on procedure in the conduct of cases.

In 1780, Pickering is listed as an attorney in Staple Inn.<sup>71</sup> In 1781 he is the junior partner of Mr Jemmett in Pudding Lane<sup>72</sup> before striking out on his own with considerable success. A surviving Exchequer exhibit for one client over two law terms and vacation in 1785 contains 139 chargeable items earning Pickering £65-5-4.<sup>73</sup> In 1782 his address in the Law List is 28 Pudding Lane where he remained until his last appearance in the List in 1804.<sup>74</sup> So far as his property is concerned, in 1799 his premises in Pudding Lane were assessed at £40 on which he paid £8 land tax. In the same year, his house on Hackney Terrace was valued at £30 on which he paid £1-8-9.<sup>75</sup> The Land Tax Registers for Pudding Lane give no house numbers but there is a sole payment made for insurance in 1781 for his 'now dwelling house and kitchen adjoining with room over, brick a small part timber' at 20 Pudding Lane. The sum insured including 'household goods, wearing apparel and china and glass' was £1,500. For a beginning lawyer, this is a surprisingly large amount. He was charged £1-13-0.<sup>76</sup> Whether his office was at 28 and his home at 20 is unclear though it seems unlikely that he would be running two establishments in the same street as well as a house on Hackney Terrace.

Although the Court of King's Bench dealt with both criminal and civil matters – the King's side and the Plea side – Pickering's recorded cases were entirely civil. In 1781 he dealt with a mortgage for a family in

66 NA: Apprenticeship Books, IR 1/26, p. 200: For Adams see John Browne, *Browne's General Law List for the Year 1777*, p. 9.

67 Joseph Foster, *The Register of Admissions to Gray's Inn, 1521-1889*, London, 1889, for 1639, 1653 and 1693.

68 R. Campbell, *The London Tradesman Being an Historical Account ... calculated for the Instruction of Youth in their Choice of Business*, 1757, p. 70.

69 *An Attorney's Practice Epitomiz'd or the Method, Times and Expences of Proceedings in the Courts of King's Bench and Common Pleas*, 1768, p. 3.

70 2 Geo. II c. 23 (1729), *An Act for the better Regulation of Attorneys and Solicitors*. See also Robert Robson, *The Attorney in Eighteenth-Century England*, Oxford, 1959, pp. 52-67.

71 Browne, 1780, p. 70.

72 *The London Gazette*, 12172 p. 3, and 12176, p. 4, 20 March and 3 April 1781.

73 NA: E/140/64/12, *Murray v. Pickering*. According to the Bank of England inflation calculator the 2022 equivalent is £8,000.

74 J. Clarke, *Clarke's New Law List*, 1804, p. 78.

75 LMA: MR/PLT/5458: Land Tax Assessment Book 1799, St John Hackney, p. 39.

76 LMA: Sun Insurance 297/451288



Essex.<sup>77</sup> In 1786 he vouched for Captain John McIver of the *Betsy* to appear before the King's Bench on his return from New York to answer a dispute over a sum 'between nine hundred and one thousand pounds.'<sup>78</sup> *The London Gazette* over the course of his professional life lists 30 occasions on which the Commission of Bankrupt appointed him to receive submissions from creditors or debtors of declared bankrupts. Most melancholy was his appointment to receive submissions concerning his erstwhile partner in the development of Hackney Terrace, John Shillitoe, declared bankrupt in 1798.<sup>79</sup>

He ventured beyond simple practice. His *Discourse on the Use and Doctrine of Attachment* (1786) was a 'Proposal for an Act of Parliament' seeking to curb a judge's 'arbitrary power' to attach a defendant's goods without right of appeal. He cites *Magna Carta* and the writ of *Habeas Corpus*, prefacing his 'Introductory Discourse' with a quotation from Montesquieu: 'The political liberty of the subject is a tranquillity of mind arising from the opinion each man has of his safety.' Though highly guarded in its criticism, it does give a sense of his understanding of right. In the same spirit, are testimonial records that he 'was principally instrumental in recovering the possession of the Lammas lands' for Hackney inhabitants. Well Street Common which backs onto Hackney Terrace was part of the Lammas Lands. The testimonial continues: 'Not only were [his services] gratuitous, but [his] treatise on "The Origin and Nature of Lammas Lands",<sup>80</sup> a work conveying much parochial information to the residents, [which] will hand down to posterity as much credit to that gentleman's judgment as [to] his liberality and independent spirit.'<sup>81</sup> Pickering was the secretary of the committee and researched the law of the Lammas Lands starting with the Patent Rolls of Edward II held in the Tower. His liberal spirit is manifested in his conclusion to his report: 'In a political survey,' he writes, 'Lammas

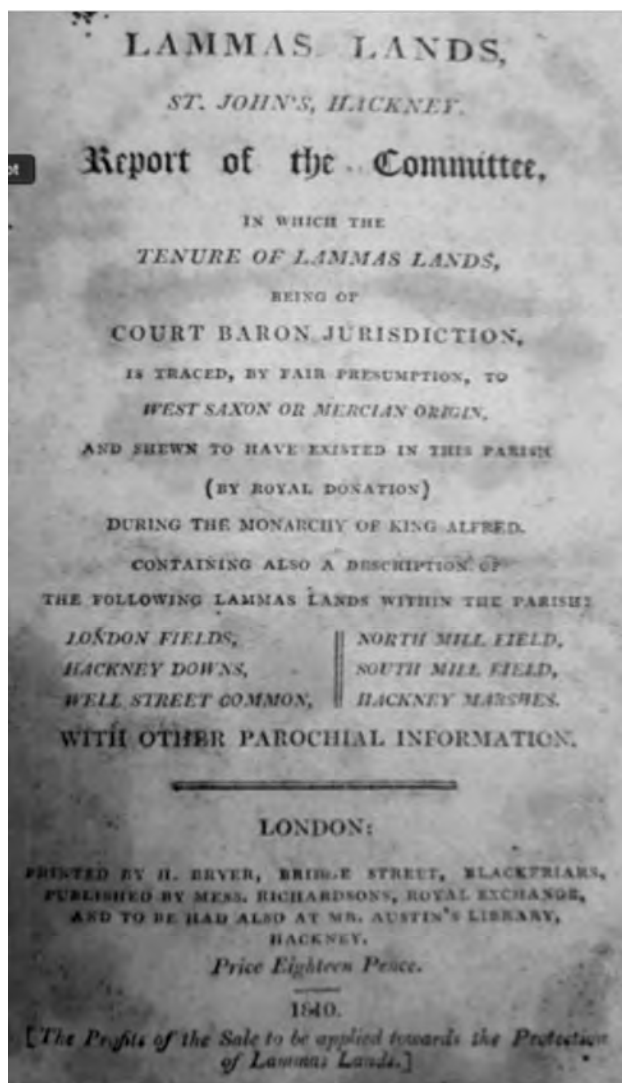


Figure 7: Pickering's Report on the Lammas Lands, HA 382.3

lands, by being pasturage during two thirds of the year for the poor man's cattle, contribute to his industry, and the maintenance perhaps of himself and a large family ... In honesty, render to every man the things which are his.'

In 1828 he turned to a more mundane matter in a patent 'for [a] method of preventing losses, and for the security of remittances ... by coaches, so frequently occurring.'<sup>82</sup> Beyond the law, he subscribed to three publications we know of: in 1784, James Cook's *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean*, 4 volumes and in 1792 to William Boys's *Collections for an History of Sandwich in Kent* and J Burton's *Lectures on Female Education*,

77 East Sussex Record Office PAB/164, 165

78 LMA: Middlesex Sessions – Justices' Working Papers, LMS MPS 5081 30089

79 *The London Gazette*, 15035, 23 June 1798, p. 578.

80 *Lammas Lands, St John's Hackney: Report of the Committee*, 1810 – fig. 7.

81 James Nicholson, *Chronicles of Thelwall*, in *The Topographer and Genealogist*, vol 1, p. 453. Nicholson, a Warrington solicitor, was bequeathed Thelwall on the death of Pickering – possibly in settlement of a debt.

82 *The Philosophical Magazine*, 1814, vol. 44, p. 77.

Rochester, 1793. He showed wider reading in citing, unexpectedly in his Lammas Report, Pope's *Dunciad*.

He first appears in the Hackney Land Tax Assessment Book at number 8 [modern 34] Hackney Terrace in 1798.<sup>83</sup> The adjoining houses had been occupied since 1796 but no charge was levied on number 8 suggesting that it had not then been completed. It is marked 'Empty'. His last land tax payment in Pudding Lane was in 1803 and his last entry in the Law Lists was in 1804. Until 1803/4, then, Pickering was operating from a base in the City and with a home in Hackney. His last land tax payment in Hackney was in 1817.

In his private life, he had shared his houses in Pudding Lane and in Hackney Terrace with both Mary his mother and his unmarried sister Miss EL Pickering. Both died at Hackney Terrace in November 1815, Mary aged 94 and his sister aged 63.<sup>84</sup> Another sister, had remained in Canterbury and had married Mr Burnby, an attorney.<sup>85</sup> In 1816 at the age of 41, Pickering married in St Leonard's Shoreditch, Hannah Lion, a widow of 34 years of age, to whose daughter, Mrs Bartoli, he later left an annuity of £30.<sup>86</sup>

He disappears from the records until 1823 when he inherits Thelwall Hall with its dairy, brewhouse, dovecot, stables, piggery, greenhouse, melon frames and sixteen acres of parkland between the Mersey and the Bridgewater Canal in Cheshire.<sup>87</sup>

The Hall (demolished in the mid 1950s) was a fine brick Georgian house, built *c.* 1753 of three storeys, seven bays across with a central raised entrance, the frontage surmounted by a pediment. He did not enjoy his new estate untroubled. Hannah, his wife, had died in November 1822 aged 40. He had also to prove that Henry's younger brother, Robert, was dead and childless. This required reports from Jamaica where Robert had been living.<sup>88</sup> The inheritance itself was something of a poisoned chalice. The house was dilapidated. One surveyor, found 'injury done to the interior of five bedrooms by the water coming

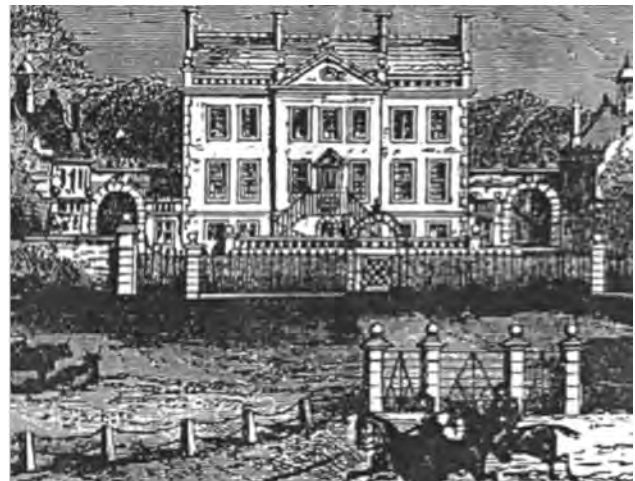


Figure 8: Thelwall Hall, Etching 1845.

through the roof and destroying the paper, colouring, whitewashing, walls and so forth.' A slater reports: 'the ridging stones were decayed and some of them fallen off ... the plaster of the staircase was much damaged, the barn was in a very dangerous state ... the walls having bulged and the fish ponds choked with rubbish.' A second surveyor estimated £335-6-0 to make all good.<sup>89</sup> Worse, his forebear Thomas Pickering who had died in 1776 had left the finances of the estate in a desperate state which measures taken by Thomas's successor, his nephew Henry, did little to resolve. Thomas Abree Pickering began his stewardship attempting, under threat of litigation, to clear the accumulated debts by taking out two loans totalling £12,000<sup>90</sup> from Matthew Charlie of Battersea, dated November 1824, to be secured by a mortgage on the property. Neither the principal nor the interest had been repaid by 1834 when Charlie brought an action in the Court of Chancery.<sup>91</sup> The case had not been resolved at the time of Pickering's death in 1836. His will, proved on 2 May 1837, has five codicils showing competing attempted settlements.

As late as 1846 his creditors – including his step-daughter Mrs Bartoli and the Earl of Harborough – were still pursuing their claims.<sup>92</sup> Pickering died an armigerous gentleman, a lord of a manor: but a bankrupt.

83 LMA: MR/PLT/5456

84 *Kentish Weekly Post or Canterbury Journal*, 12 December 1815, p. 4.

85 *Kentish Gazette*, 10 July 1770, p. 4.

86 NA: PROB 11/1877/8

87 NA: C 13/839/30

88 William was both dead and childless. UCL's slavery database reveals no Pickering.

89 NA: C 13/1482/18 Interrogatories. The equivalent in 2022 is £32,000.

90 The Bank of England calculator gives the 2022 equivalent as £1 million.

91 NA: C 13/556/21, *Charlie v. Pickering*.

92 *The London Gazette*, 30 January 1846, 20565, p. 344.

**John Shillitoe**

Bankruptcy, too, was John Shillitoe's end. He, like Pickering, had been apprenticed at 15, indentured on Thursday 15 May 1777 to John Poynder, 'citizen and plumber of London' of Great Eastcheap.<sup>93</sup> Shillitoe's first address – presumably house and business premises – is 7 Great Tower Street<sup>94</sup> the eastward continuation of Great Eastcheap and then from 1794 at number 74. Despite his bankruptcy in 1798, he continued to be listed at number 74 in the trade directories up to 1811.<sup>95</sup> In 1803 he insured number 74 'being two houses communicating [of] brick and timber' for £150, household goods for £400 and 'stock and utensils therein not exceeding three hundred pounds.'<sup>96</sup> From 1789 to 1791 he is described as 'Plumber, building trade' to which in 1794 was added 'glass cutter'.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps his broad experience in the building trade won the 'Shillitoe arms' the central position on the Hackney Terrace pediment as his being first among equals. He paid his Land Tax in Tower Ward from 1788 to 1811 on a property valuation – unchanged since 1692 – of £27.<sup>98</sup> To conduct the French war, the government sought in 1798 to raise funds by offering land taxpayers the opportunity to 'redeem' their tax by purchasing 3% government stock in 16 instalments over three years. A certificate in Hackney Archives shows one, Catherine Meyer, with property taxed at £6-5-6½, purchasing stock for £230-3-2½ - some 36 times her annual land tax.<sup>99</sup> That Shillitoe (and, indeed Pickering<sup>100</sup>) chose to pay at a similar rate may have contributed to his bankruptcy.

In Hackney, Shillitoe is the first of the three speculators to appear in the land tax assessment books, appearing in 1793, 1794 and 1795 both as simply 'John Shillitoe' (Rent £12) and 'John Shillitoe & Co. Land' (Rent £30). The implication is that his company was acquiring building land but that he was also resident in the area. In 1795 his address is given as 1 Hackney Terrace. In 1796 number 1 was occupied

by a Mr Thessager though Shillitoe continues to be named in the tax lists for an unspecified property. In 1796 and 1797 the entries show Shillitoe acquiring further land in his own name taking a 'house and land late Reeves' and 'house and land late Reynolds'. On 31st May 1797, he took a lease on a 'parcel of ground' abutting ground he had already leased from Reeves.<sup>101</sup> We know he occupied (and by implication, built) a new house while still paying tax on the Reeves and Reynolds properties. In 1799 in the proceedings in bankruptcy his house is described as 'A substantial new built Brick Cottage, finished in a neat style, situate on the Road leading to Hackney-Terrace, consisting of Two Stories; and containing on the One Pair Story [*sic*] Two best Bed-Chambers and a Servants Sleeping-Room; on the Ground Floor, an Eating-rom, 18 feet 8 inches by 14 Feet 4 Inches; a convenient Kitchen, Scullery, with a Pump of excellent Water, and every suitable Convenience, a Garden; a large Front Court, with Two Stall Stable or Chaise House, and other Out Offices.' The leasehold of forty-five years and three quarters at a ground rent of £10 per annum is to be sold: 'Immediate Possession may be had. For Particulars apply to ... Mr Pickering, Solicitor, Pudding Lane.'<sup>102</sup> Peter Denys of fashionable New Burlington Street took the lease.<sup>103</sup> Denys was a speculative builder in Chelsea. In 1810 three surveyors' certificates record 18 houses erected there by him.<sup>104</sup> He had begun life as a drawing master, marrying one of his pupils, Lady Charlotte Fermor, daughter of George, 2nd Earl of Pomfret, with an annual income of £4,000 and lead mines in Cumberland. An extensive business correspondence exists showing Denys involved in the management and transportation of lead south via Stockton.<sup>105</sup>

Lead links the two men. Shillitoe had borrowed £316 from Denys but in 1798 still owed £200 at an interest rate of 5% p.a. In his petition to the Court of Chancery Denys complains: 'the said Defendant set up divers ... pretences to hinder [Denys] from

93 NA: IR 29 f. 99

94 Andrews's *New London Directory*, 1789.

95 His last entry is in the *London and County Directory*, 1811.

96 LMA: Sun Insurance 426/no. 747392

97 *General London Directory*, 1794.

98 Indeed, the Land Tax Register for 1923 still records John Shillitoe of 74 Great Tower Street as paying £2-16-3 a year.

99 HA M831

100 NA: Land Tax Redemption Office IR 23

101 LMA: MDR 1797 2 735

102 *London Gazette*, 16 July 1799, 15160, p. 725.

103 LMA: MDR 1800 3 424

104 LMA: MR/B/C/1810/066; 085; 082

105 North Yorkshire County Record Office: *e.g.* ZLB/3/8/2: 'For carriage of all lead which the AD or Old Gang Mines may produce from the wood yard at Fremington belonging to the AD Mines, to Stockton for 5 years commencing 5 April next at £25 per mark of 400 pieces.'

being paid his said Principal Money and Interest.<sup>106</sup> Though this debt is the direct cause of his bankruptcy it is likely also that Shillitoe had over-extended himself through property speculation.

Whatever the cause, the course of his fall can be traced in the entries in *The London Gazette*. The first entry is 23 June 1798 followed by eight further notices. The entry for 8 August 1812 records his incarceration in the King's Bench Prison [Fig. 10].

The last appearance of Shillitoe is on 4 April 1815 when 'a Final Dividend of the Estate and Effects of the said Bankrupt' is made. It is a sad irony that Canterbury Square, the comfortable lodging of William Fellows, is under a mile from the King's Bench Prison the temporary home of his erstwhile partner John Shillitoe.

### Who, then, was a gentleman?

The course the three lives took had little to do with social status – and none at all with the pretensions to the bearing of arms. The three were speculators operating in a lively market. The arms they adopted were for show. The substance was elsewhere and, in two cases, evanescent. It was the gentleman Pickering who suffered the greatest financial loss in an attempt to maintain his status of lord of the manor of Thelwall; his one mercy was that he did not find himself in debtors' prison along with Shillitoe. It was Fellows the surveyor, a member of an emerging profession, who secured his place in society.



Figure 9: Examination of a Bankrupt before his Creditors: Court of Kings Bench. Augustus Pugin and Thomas Rowlandson ©LPA 3623

### Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Isobel Watson, author of *Gentlemen in the Building Line*, and to David Mander, formerly Hackney Archivist, who kindly read through and commented on the draft of this article. Their knowledge of Hackney's history is profound: any errors or infelicities are entirely my own.

106 NA: C 13/489/73

## Prisoners in the KING'S-BENCH Prison, in the County of Surrey.

John Shillitoe, formerly and late of Great Tower street, in the city of London, plumber, a person against whom a commission of bankrupt has issued and is still in force, and who has not obtained a certificate of his conformity to the statutes concerning bankrupts duly allowed.

Figure 10: *The London Gazette*, 8 August 1812, 16631, p. 1564.

# ‘The Original Ginger Beer’: the History of Batey & Co. Ltd.

*Justin More*



In July 1887, at a meeting of the Linnean Society, Bayley Balfour, Professor of Botany at Oxford University, exhibited some specimens of ‘a curious substance, popularly known in many parts of the country as the Ginger-beer Plant, from its association with the domestic manufacture of the well-known summer beverage so often purchased in villages and towns in various parts of the British Isles, where it is usually put up in brown stone bottles, with tied corks.’<sup>1</sup> These were the words of another Professor of Botany, H Marshall Ward of the Royal Indian Engineering College, who published in 1892 a learned treatise for the Royal Society on the origins of the beverage. He added: ‘the Ginger-beer Plant has long been known ... as a mysterious agent which brings about the fermentation of saccharine solutions, to which ginger has been added, and transforms them into an acid effervescing beverage, usually known as home-made ginger-beer.’ Its origin, variously ascribed to the return of British soldiers from the Crimean War in 1855 and to its introduction from Italy, were dismissed.<sup>2</sup>

Years before that distinguished presentation, two Hackney families had been responsible for the adoption of this strange plant into the commercial manufacture of the beverage. This article covers the history of the company which was formed for that purpose.

## **The Batey Family**

William Batey was born to William and Rebecca on 12 January 1826 and christened on 12 May in St Leonard’s Shoreditch.<sup>3</sup> By 1851 he was head of a family living at 26 Dunston Street in Haggerston with his wife Jane, brother Charles and sister Elizabeth, and was engaged as a greengrocer.<sup>4</sup> Within a few years he had handed over the greengrocer’s business to his brother Charles and started his own as a ‘ginger beer and soda water manufacturer [at] 32 Queen Street & 49 Lee Street, Kingsland Road.’<sup>5</sup> Queen Street at that time ran between Dunston Road and Acton Street.<sup>6</sup> By 1861 the family property had been renamed Britannia [*sic*] Terrace and Jane had given birth to two daughters, Jane aged 12 and Emily 4, and a son also named William aged 7.

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1 ‘The Ginger-Beer Plant etc.’ by H. Marshall Ward read to the Royal Society on 21 January 1892.

2 *Ibid.*

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3 Baptism Record of St Leonard Shoreditch 1826.

4 Census Return of 1851.

5 *Commercial Directory of 1856.*

6 *City & County Directory of 1856.*



William senior died in Islington on 3 April 1868 at the young age of 42<sup>7</sup> and his will disclosed effects worth under £8,000.<sup>8</sup> William junior had to take over the business as a teenager no older than 15 and at 17 he was shown as head of a family living at 216 Kingsland Road with his sister Alice and a housekeeper (but 'employing 36 men and 10 boys').<sup>9</sup> On September 24 1872 he entered into a clandestine marriage with Grace Collington Amos at St John's Hoxton<sup>10</sup> but this ended in 1877 in an acrimonious divorce, with mutual allegations of violence and drunkenness, and he was ordered to pay her alimony at the rate of £580 per annum.<sup>11</sup> In 1881 William, now 27, is living with his new wife Matilda in Romford, though he still claims to be a ginger beer manufacturer,<sup>12</sup> but by 1891 he has moved back to Clerkenwell and is employed as a bus conductor.<sup>13</sup>

### The Alabaster Family

Robert George Alabaster was born in Clerkenwell in 1830.<sup>14</sup> He made his way up the ladder slowly but surely. In 1861, at the age of 31, he was the licensed victualler and landlord of the Market House Tavern, at 19/20 Market Street Shoreditch, married to Jane More (the daughter of the harness-maker who lived up the road at number 6) and with three sons and four servants;<sup>15</sup> 10 years later John, the eldest son, has left home at the age of 16, the second son, Robert James, has attained the age of 14 and there are a barmaid, a servant, a potman and a housemaid living in the property.<sup>16</sup> Later in life, Robert George moves up to a large house called 'The Hawthorns' at 54 Amhurst Park in Stamford Hill and becomes a pillar of the community, as a Vestryman of St Leonard's Shoreditch, a Justice of the Peace and the Chairman of the Shoreditch Board of Guardians which ran the Vestry's orphanage in Hornchurch.<sup>17</sup> Never a director of the Batey company, he nevertheless effectively

financed the Alabaster takeover and subsequent flotation of the business during the 1880s.<sup>18</sup>

The two sons had very different temperaments. John Alabaster, born in 1854, was the director who later managed the company's factory in Fulham. He married Jane Smith in 1893 and had a number of children including a son named Hugh; the family lived in Schubert Road in Wandsworth. In 1898 John was named as co-respondent in a divorce petition brought by a coach driver called Alfred Morse against his wife Isabella alleging his adultery with her.<sup>19</sup> John and Jane separated but never divorced; John set up house with one Jean Emma Rogers, who adopted his surname. By 1927 he has moved to Hamlet Gardens in Ravenscourt Park with Jean. He died at the age of 82 in 1936; in his will he makes bequests of cash and shares to both Jane his wife and Jean Emma his 'dear friend' and of his cigars to his son Hugh!

By contrast Robert James, born in 1856, never married and never left the family home, living with his parents and his sister Martha Clara Alabaster, her husband and her large family for the whole of his life, variously in Stamford Hill, Whetstone and Northwood. His great love appears to have been his 37-ton sea-going yawl *Woodbine*,<sup>20</sup> which was moored at Burnham-on-Crouch and made many voyages over to the Continent. He died at the age of 81 in 1937, leaving £134,222-3-1 in his will.

Two nephews of Robert James (sons of his sister Clara) took over the conduct of the business after the deaths of the Alabaster brothers. Edgar More was born on Christmas Eve in 1904 and was appointed as a director of the company in 1935 at the age of 31. He remained unmarried until 1951 when he met Joan Hardy, who worked as a secretary at the National Association of Soft Drinks Manufacturers; they married in July 1953. Raymond More was born on 24 July 1910 and became a director in 1942, though he could not take up the post until his return from war service in Burma in 1945. He married Ann-Shirley Milner in that year and they lived in Barnet with their two children. Both men remained with the company for two years after its takeover.

7 Register of Deaths April-June 1868.

8 Register of Wills 1868.

9 Census Return of 1871.

10 Marriage Register Christ's Church Hoxton 1872.

11 Court Minutes in *Batey v Batey* of 1876 and Order of 22 January 1877.

12 Census Return of 1871.

13 Census Return of 1881.

14 National Birth Register of 1830.

15 Census Return of 1861.

16 Census Return of 1871.

17 Extract from *Shoreditch Observer* of 1902.

18 Agreement dated 17 December 1885.

19 Report of *Morse v Morse and Alabaster* 1899.

20 Particulars of Sale – Vallejo Gallery.

John's son Hugh was born in 1898 and was awarded the Victory Medal for his service in the Machine-Gun Corps in the First World War. He married Jane Bishop in 1937 and became a director of the company in 1947. At that time he was living in Croydon and he died in Ditchling, Sussex in 1959.

### Early Days and Liquidation

The Batey business was most probably founded as an adjunct to the greengrocery in Haggerston but in 1847 it became established in a new building in Kingsland Road named Batey's Britannia Steam Works.



Figure 1: The Kingsland Road frontage to Britannia Steam Works in about 1920 (HA P3597).

There had been problems in obtaining the consent of the Shoreditch Vestry to the new development on the grounds that it projected 'beyond the line of building in the Kingsland-road'. At a public meeting, the Vestry's Surveyor expressed his 'dissatisfaction with the plans of the [Metropolitan] Board as to the cost and character of the works', but Batey's supporters 'contended that this was a persecuting opposition to Mr Batey ... and why should Mr Batey be prevented'; a vote was taken and 'a division was demanded, where there appeared, for, 31: against 14'.<sup>21</sup> In 1855, further building work took place and the factory was extended around the corner to John Street (now Laburnum Street). There were further improvements to the site in 1857.<sup>22</sup>

21 *Shoreditch Observer*, 6 January 1846.

22 *Shoreditch Observer*, 10 October 1857.

There are no documents which attest to the success of William Batey's enterprise but the extent of the building works indicates that he had been able to found a thriving business, based on his assertion that his was the 'Original Ginger Beer'. He died in Brooksby Street Islington at the age of 42. The property in Kingsland Road was bequeathed to his son. Young William was no older than 15 at the time and expected to run a business which was said to be 'the largest mineral water works in London'.<sup>23</sup> It was clearly too much for him. His marriage at the age of 18, the subsequent separation and the large sum which he was required to pay his former wife Grace in alimony made his problems worse rather than better. By June 1879 the liabilities of the business were estimated at £10,000, with assets of only £6,000. William had no alternative but to institute proceedings in bankruptcy for liquidation<sup>24</sup> and, on 29 July 1879, special resolutions were passed taking the business out of his hands.

Trustees in the person of a horse dealer James Aston, a corn merchant John Wilcox and a cork merchant Thomas Peet (all creditors of the business) were appointed<sup>25</sup> and the business was tendered for sale by the trustees in April 1881.<sup>26</sup>

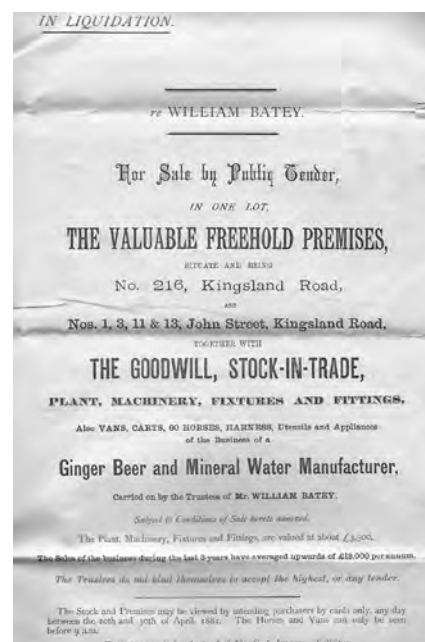


Figure 2: The Tender Notice for William Batey's Liquidation in April 1881.

23 As reported in *Lakeman v Batey and Co. (Limited)*.

24 *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 June 1879.

25 *London Gazette*, 8 August 1879.

26 *London Evening Standard*, 21 April 1881.

The sale included 'the valuable freehold premises situate and being No. 216, Kingsland Road and Nos. 1, 3, 11 & 13, John Street'<sup>27</sup> and 'the Goodwill, Stock-in-trade, Plant, Machinery, Fixtures and Fittings, also Vans, Carts, 60 Horses, Harness, Utensils and Appliances of the Business of a Ginger Beer and Mineral Water Manufacturer.'<sup>28</sup>

In the Tender Document there was an extensive description of the property and plant: the 'Manufactory and Warehouse' extended over three floors and was 'approached by a lofty Gateway from Kingsland Road, leading to a spacious Yard ... paved throughout, and communicating with the Stables in the rear'.<sup>29</sup> There was also, on three floors, 'a series of commodious Dwelling Rooms ... the whole being now occupied by the Manager of the Business',<sup>30</sup> and the premises were fitted with gas and water throughout. The plant included such esoteric items as a 'diurnal, storm barometer by Admiral Fitzroy ... and kamptulicon' [a kind of floor-cloth made of india-rubber and ground cork] in the office and a 'double pump soda-water engine with cylinder complete ... by Barnett, Son & Foster ... and 5 HP steam lift, by Bunnett'.<sup>31</sup> Bidders were invited to inspect the premises between 20 and 30 April but the horses and vans could only be seen before 9am.

In the meantime, the two Alabaster brothers had established their family business a stone's throw from the Batey factory in Kingsland Road. They were in no more than their mid-twenties when they commenced operations, as J & RJ Alabaster, in Canal Road, south of the Regents Canal in what is now Orsman Road,<sup>32</sup> although they had the support of their father Robert George. Their premises included stabling for 83 horses, a wharf, a dwelling-house and two spacious railway arches by Haggerston Station.<sup>33</sup> By 1883 they were able to register, as a new patent, 'an invention of an improved manufacture of aerated beverage'.<sup>34</sup> They

took the opportunity of making a bid for the assets of the Batey business and successfully concluded an agreement with the Trustees of William Batey for the purchase of the assets. The creditors of William Batey eventually ended up with a final dividend of 2s. 9d. in the pound, paid on 5 January 1884.<sup>35</sup>

### The Public Limited Company

Batey & Co Ltd was registered on 17 December 1886, to acquire the businesses of Batey and Co and J and RJ Alabaster.<sup>36</sup> Outside capital was sought from the public in a prospectus published in *The Times*,<sup>37</sup> on the basis that 'the Vendors have considerably enlarged and extended the business with very successful results' and 'it is necessary to erect a new factory ... in the south-west of London ... and the requisite amount for this purpose is estimated at £20,000.' This sum was successfully raised and the first Report of the Directors was published on December 16 1887. The profit was £4,526-18-10 and the directors declared dividends of 6% on the preference shares and 10% on the ordinary shares. They reported that a part of the Company's new factory in Fulham<sup>38</sup> had been completed and opened in the previous July, and that 'the Company's business will be materially benefited by the increased facilities afforded by the new factory'.<sup>39</sup>

So it turned out. During the following two years the company acquired the businesses of R Pyle in Holloway and CE Arscott in Southgate Road, De Beauvoir, and acquired further premises at Priory Road in Bromley-by-Bow.<sup>40</sup> At the Annual General Meeting held in the Alabaster Room at the London Tavern in Fenchurch Street on 30 December 1891, the remuneration of the directors was fixed at £300 per annum and the dividends were maintained at their previous level.<sup>41</sup> By 1895, profits had increased to over £11,000 per annum; by then two of the original directors, CC Paine (a builder in Stamford Hill) and John Walter More (brother of Robert George's

27 The full address was 216 Kingsland Road London NE, later E2.

28 Tender Document of April 1881.

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*

32 The full address was 8 Canal Road Hoxton London N, later N1.

33 *The Times*, 20 December 1886.

34 *Watford Observer*, 9 June 1883.

35 *Morning Post*, 5 January 1884.

36 *Graces Guide and Stock Exchange Year Book*, 1908.

37 *The Times*, 20 December 1886.

38 The full address was 189 Munster Road Fulham London SW6, now the Coda Centre.

39 Annual Report, 16 December 1887.

40 The full address was 19 Priory Road Bromley-by-Bow E later E3.

41 Annual Report 20 December 1890.

wife Jane), had retired, leaving Alderman Pound JP as titular Chairman and the Alabaster brothers John and Robert James as Managing Directors. Pound is better known for his other achievements; he ran the business of John Pound & Co, which became the biggest manufacturer of luggage and suitcases in the country, and was also Chairman of the London General Omnibus Company for over 30 years<sup>42</sup> and Lord Mayor of London in 1904.<sup>43</sup>

The good performance did not last. There were problems in the recovery of deposits for the bottles used in manufacture and it was only at the end of 1894 that the directors were able to report that an agreement had been reached with the company's competitors for charging and that this 'was working successfully, with every prospect of future profit.'<sup>44</sup> This system turned out to be the case and the good results continued in 1896 to the extent that the Directors were able to propose an increase in the company's capital from £100,000 to £130,000, which they were confident 'will be profitably employed in the business.'<sup>45</sup>

### Manufacture and Distribution

Fortunately for the company, there was in the area a number of businesses which were able to provide the equipment needed to manufacture its products.



Figure 3: Advertisement for Barnett & Foster's Complete Soda Machine of 1884.

Principal of these was Barnett & Foster, which advertised its 'Soda Water Machinery for the Manufacture of all kinds of Aerated Drinks in the

highest state of perfection' from Niagara Works in Eagle Wharf Road London N, including 'a Complete Soda Water Machine, including Bottling Apparatus ... for £40 per set for producing 100 doz. Lemonade, Ginger Ale, &c., per day.'<sup>46</sup> The company had a long relationship with Barfos, as they were called, and later with RW Webster & Co Ltd of Abbey Ironworks in Waltham Cross, who were 'Designers and Builders of Automatic Bottling Plant'.

As time went on, the sophistication of the machinery improved and the company found it necessary to travel to the United States to obtain replacements. Both Edgar and Raymond More crossed the Atlantic by liner in the early 1950s to inspect and purchase equipment from the suppliers to Canada Dry Inc in Chicago, which was installed in the Dulwich factory as part of a contract to bottle that company's products in the UK.

Distribution required manpower and depended almost entirely on 'travellers', as they were known, who circulated around set areas selling the company's products to shops, pubs and other outlets on horse-drawn vans (built by a company called Beaumont & Nephew)<sup>47</sup> with or without assistant 'van-boys', earning a commission in addition to their standard wage and paying the van-boy out of their own earnings. Although the first motor vans were introduced in 1929,<sup>48</sup> the transition from horsepower to motorised distribution was slow; even after the Second World War the stables in Orsman Road were still in use.



Figure 4: The Stables at Orsman Road in about 1945. JWL Eddy and Edgar More are on the right-hand side.

42 *From Omnibus to Ecobus 1901-1913*, London Transport Museum, 2000.

43 *The Day*, 29 September 1904.

44 Annual Report, 31 December 1894.

45 Annual Report, 18 December 1896.

46 Barnett & Foster Advertisement, 1884.

47 *The Times*, 20 December 1886.

48 Notebook entry for 29 November 1929.

### Expansion of the Business

'The year of Her Majesty's Jubilee has favoured the Company's business.' So read the first sentence of the following year's Annual Report – 'a new Factory at Dulwich is in the course of erection, and when completed, will greatly facilitate the Company's business. In order to provide the necessary Capital for the new Factory, ... your Directors have placed Debentures for £20,000, bearing interest at 4½ per cent.'<sup>49</sup> The appetite for growth continued in the following year; the Directors reported that 'the new Factory at Dulwich<sup>50</sup> has been completed and the Company is deriving great advantage from same. A Freehold site for the erection of an additional Factory has been acquired in the Willesden district.'<sup>51</sup> Profits had almost doubled in less than five years and now stood at over £50,000 for the first time.

The good times could not last. The Report for the year ending 31 October 1900 was cryptic: 'The past year has not been a favourable one for the Mineral Water Trade in London. Trade itself has not been good, and the cost of materials has increased ... The Directors have taken certain steps which they confidently hope will have the result of increasing profits in the future.'<sup>52</sup> Profits had dropped by nearly 70% but the dividends were nevertheless maintained at their previous levels. Things deteriorated further in the following year and the Board reported: 'The past year has been a very unfavourable one owing mainly to the continued and increasing badness of trade generally. Another cause of decreased profit has been the great increase in the price of nearly all materials used by Mineral Water Manufacturers.'<sup>53</sup> The Fifteenth Ordinary General Meeting was fixed for 3 pm on 31 December, a time and date calculated to deter all but the most enthusiastic shareholders from attending. There was no improvement in 1902 and profits slumped to under £4,000. The Directors again referred to the 'badness of trade and the increased cost of Materials' but particularly mentioned increased taxation '(the Tax on Sugar alone ... during the past 12 months being £4,145-12-6).'<sup>54</sup>

The tide began to turn in 1903. Again, the Directors were full of complaints about the weather, the 'reduced purchasing power of the class who consume the Company's goods', Sugar Tax and the 'continued general depression in trade';<sup>55</sup> but profits doubled to nearly £7,000 and the Balance Sheet exceeded £200,000 for the first time (£10,144 of this being attributed to the value of the company's horses). Notwithstanding, no Ordinary Dividend was paid for the first time in the company's existence as a public company and this was repeated in 1904. In 1905 the Directors went further in their campaign against the Sugar Tax; their Report records that 'they earnestly hope that Shareholders will use their influence to obtain the repeal of this Tax.' They also for the first time referred to the company's local rivals Messrs R White & Sons Limited, with whom 'a satisfactory arrangement is in existence' which 'will certainly ensure a more profitable Trade in the future'<sup>56</sup> (a veiled reference to an agreement which nowadays would be banned under competition rules). The summer of 1906 was 'generally a favourable one' and trading improved. By this time, the Chairman, previously known as Alderman Pound, was now Sir John Pound, Bart.<sup>57</sup>

Things turned for the worse in the following year; there was a loss of over £6,000 and all dividends were suspended, the Sugar Tax again being the main culprit. This prompted a deputation of mineral water manufacturers, including John Alabaster, which 'waited upon Mr Asquith (Chancellor of the Exchequer) in his private room at the House of Commons to urge the removal of the tax on sugar.'<sup>58</sup> Relief came in May 1907; the Sugar Tax was reduced 'from 4/2d per cwt. to 1/10d per cwt.' and 'the ruinous competition, which had existed during the greater part of this year, had come to an end.'<sup>59</sup> That did not prevent a loss of nearly £2,000 in 1909, with Robert James Alabaster himself lending an equivalent sum to the Company to balance the books.<sup>60</sup> The Balance Sheet for 1910 showed the value of the freehold land

49 Annual Report, 26 November 1897.

50 The full address was 47 East Dulwich Road London SE later SE22, now the Goose Green Industrial Estate.

51 Annual Report, 8 December 1898.

52 Annual Report, 10 December 1900.

53 Annual Report, 18 December 1901.

54 Annual Report, 9 December 1902.

55 Annual Report, 8 December 1903.

56 Annual Report, 14 December 1905.

57 *Burke's Peerage*, 107th Edition and Annual Report, 12 December 1906.

58 Report of Deputation to Chancellor of the Exchequer 1906.

59 Annual Report, 30 November 1908.

60 Annual Report, 15 December 1909.



at the company's four sites to be nearly £50,000 and the plant and machinery to be nearly £20,000, but these items were dwarfed by the book value of the glass and stoneware bottles at over £62,000; even the book value of the horses had reduced to less than £7,000.<sup>61</sup>

1911 saw a massive improvement. 'The weather during the past season has been very favourable for our business ... the amount carried to the credit of Profit and Loss is £13,161-4-6.' This enabled the company to pay the outstanding five dividends on the Preference Shares of 6% and to carry forward a small surplus to the following year.<sup>62</sup> In 1912 it was the cost of horse fodder that affected the much-reduced profit, though the main factors affecting the business were, as usual, the weather and the cost of sugar,<sup>63</sup> but 1913 was a good year and the company's borrowings were greatly reduced, including the personal loan from Robert James Alabaster. Another healthy profit of over £12,000 was earned in 1914, though there is strangely no mention of the outbreak of the First World War; dividends were paid on both the Preference and Ordinary Shares for the first time in many years. The Annual General Meeting was held on 23 December, to coincide no doubt with the Directors' Christmas lunch.<sup>64</sup>

### Litigation

The company found itself involved in contact with the long arm of the law on a number of occasions. In 1885, at a time when the company's bottles and stoneware were among the most valuable of its assets, it, together with its great rival White & Sons, commenced an action against a Mr Morgan, a general dealer in the Wandsworth Road, for the unlawful detention of bottles supplied by the two firms to their trade customers. John Alabaster stated that the annual loss to the company through unreturned bottles was about £2,000; Mr Morgan retorted, to laughter in court, that he returned the bottles and that Batey's and White's 'would have to prosecute themselves as receivers also.' Nevertheless, the court determined that the injunction previously issued

against him should be confirmed after the judge, a Baron Huddleston, had advised him 'not to do it again (Laughter).'<sup>65</sup>

The boot was on the other foot the following year. 'At Worship-street Police-court ... Messrs Batey ... appeared by their managing director, John Alabaster, to answer nine summonses, taken out ... for employing nine boys under 18 years of age on Sunday, July 10.'<sup>66</sup> The company pleaded guilty but sought leniency on the grounds that 'on the day in question ... considering the extreme heat and the fact that the demand for mineral waters was so great, small penalties would meet the justice of the case.' The magistrate, Mr Bushby imposed a fine of 10s in each of the nine cases, with £1-18-0 costs.<sup>67</sup>

On 8 February 1897, at a hearing at the Old Bailey, John Alabaster gave evidence against two of his employees at the Fulham depot, Edward Worsfold, a 'traveller' or roundsman who sold and delivered the company's products, and Edward Farmer, a 'checker' who counted those products out and back into the factory. They were accused of defrauding 'their masters' by falsifying the returns of Worsfold's daily round. The intricacies of the system used for taking boxes of full bottles out on the company's 56 vans and checking back in the empties returned were considered by the court and both men were found guilty by the jury. Farmer was sentenced to 12 months' hard labour and Worsfold's sentence was respited – reserved for further consideration.<sup>68</sup>

There were many other instances of lawsuits against the company's employees for assorted fraudulent practices. In 1898 a traveller Walter Picken was convicted of embezzling a total of £23-7-10 of the company's money; he had called in to the 'Sailor Prince' in Earlsfield on his round and drunk 'five glasses of beer and one-third of a quartern of gin', leaving the van-boy to drive the van back to the depot, where Picken fell asleep on his van.<sup>69</sup> He was sentenced to 9 months' hard labour. In 1900 another traveller, Frank Newland, was accused of falsifying

61 Annual Report, 17 December 1910.

62 Annual Report, 11 December 1911.

63 Annual Report, 11 December 1912.

64 Annual Report, 15 December 1914.

65 *Morning Post*, February 10 1886.

66 Report of proceedings in *Lakeman v Batey and Co, (Limited)*.

67 *Ibid.*

68 *Proceedings of the Old Bailey: R v Farmer & Worsfold*.

69 *Proceedings of the Old Bailey: R v Picken*.

receipts for goods delivered to beer-houses in Canal and Ivy Streets, Hoxton; his defence was that 'it is through my mother dying that I have got into these difficulties' and was acquitted.<sup>70</sup>

In 1913, a Mr Bates suffered injury when a bottle of Batey's ginger beer burst open in his hands. The glass was opaque and the jury in the case found that the company was negligent in not taking proper means to discover whether the bottle was defective or not. Mr Justice Horridge nevertheless gave judgement in favour of the company on the grounds that, as manufacturers only of the contents, it was not they who had caused the defect in the bottle.<sup>71</sup> This turned out to be a lucky escape for the company, because in the later and leading Scottish case of *Donoghue v Stevenson* in 1932 (where a Miss Donoghue was injured by drinking a bottle of ginger beer which contained a decomposing snail and which finally established the tort of negligence in English law), the House of Lords decided that a manufacturer in this situation 'owed a duty to [her] to take care that [she] should not be injured externally by explosion.'<sup>72</sup>

### The First World War and After

The year 1914 saw substantial changes. Sir John Pound retired as Chairman and was replaced by WJ Webb, who had for many years acted as Secretary to the company; he in turn was replaced as Secretary by GE Leggett. Again the company made a small profit and all the outstanding dividends were paid.<sup>73</sup> The complaint in 1916 was the imposition of a Table Water Tax which again reduced the profit.<sup>74</sup> In 1918 came the first mention of the war, which by then had just come to an end; the Secretary reported that 'on account of the depletion through the war, of the staffs, both of the Auditors and of the Company, the Auditors have not yet been able to complete their investigation of the Company's Accounts.'<sup>75</sup> This was not remedied until the following April.

1919 also saw the disposal of the land purchased in Willesden, at a small loss of £303-11-1

(a recognition perhaps that the further expansion of the business was unlikely), but profits in that year greatly increased to over £13,000 and the dividend was increased to 3%.<sup>76</sup> The trend continued and the profits for 1920 exceeded £15,000, which gave the company the opportunity of writing off the value of 'Goodwill of Business and Trade Marks' in an effort to reduce the tax payable to the Revenue;<sup>77</sup> in 1921 the profit jumped to £18,523-8-2 and the dividend on the ordinary shares to a healthy 6%.<sup>78</sup> There was a change in personnel in 1922; WJ Webb, the third director, had died and GE Leggett replaced him. The new Secretary was JWL Eddy, who served the company faithfully for over thirty years until its takeover.<sup>79</sup>

### Employment

The way in which the company's staff was engaged was by advertisement in local and national papers. Before the Great War it was generally the employer who called the tune and the *Daily Telegraph* of 22 April 1909 contained the following: 'Harness Repairer. Wanted a thoroughly experienced man of good character, one used to easing collars & general repairs in large stable preferred. Must live in district and start 6am. Apply stating wages required & giving particulars of previous employment.'<sup>80</sup>

Similar advertisements were published seeking farriers, wheelwrights, clerks and stokers; one was for an 'Under Foreman with experience supervising female labour' and another for 'Women and girls not under 16 wanted for washing & labelling bottles. Wages from 15/-.'<sup>81</sup> Sometimes there were additional requirements: for married men, naval pensioners or strong youths, with little regard for what we would now expect in the age of equal opportunity.

The First World War created problems in recruitment; wages increased and a typical advertisement would read: 'Man (respectable) wanted with good references as Shop Roundsman for Mineral Water trade. Must be good pair horse coachman used to canvassing and

70 *Proceedings of the Old Bailey: R v Newland.*

71 *Bates v Batey & Co Ltd* [1913] 3 K.B. 351

72 *Donoghue v Stevenson* [1932] A.C. 562

73 Annual Report, 14 December 1915.

74 Annual Report, 11 December 1916.

75 Letter from Batey & Co. to Shareholders of 23 December 1918.

76 Annual Report, 17 December 1919.

77 Annual Report, 8 December 1920.

78 Annual Report, 16 December 1921.

79 Annual Report, 12 December 1922.

80 *Daily Telegraph*, 22 April 1909.

81 Company Notebook 24 April 1919.

selling goods for Cash. Minimum wages 38/- & War Bonus of 5/- after approval. Apply by letter.<sup>82</sup>

After the war the company used the *Daily Chronicle* for recruitment; in 1929 for a 'Boy wanted for Office, just leaving school preferred. Good at figures.'<sup>83</sup> and a 'Motor Van Salesman ... 35 years of age, previous experience serving retailers necessary. Good Wages and Commission. Minimum earnings £3-12-6 weekly.'<sup>84</sup>

The remuneration of the Directors was a different matter. This was fixed by the shareholders at the Annual General Meeting of the company. In contrast to the annual wage of a female bottle-washer, about £40 per annum, and that of a travelling salesman of about £90, the Directors each drew £500 per annum over the same period, together, in 1925 for example, with a commission shared between them of £1,494-9-10.<sup>85</sup>

### Between the Wars

By 1923 the Roaring Twenties were in full flow and the company blossomed with the country's release from the horrors of the First World War. The profit exceeded £19,000 and the dividend was increased to 10%. The Balance Sheet showed a record sum of 'Investments at present Market Value' of nearly £50,000. The company purchased a series of 'Enamelled Iron Advertisements' and began the slow conversion of its transport requirements from 'Horses and Harness &c.' to 'Vans, Motors, &c.'<sup>86</sup>



*Figure 5: Enamelled iron advertisement of 1923 for various Batey's products.*

82 Company Notebook 9 November 1915.  
83 Company Notebook, 6 November 1929.  
84 Company Notebook, 7 March 1935.  
85 Annual Report, 30 November 1925.  
86 Annual Report, 5 December 1923.

Another high point was reached in 1924; the profit was nearly £25,000, the investments exceeded £57,000 and cash at the bank was nearly £25,000.<sup>87</sup> In 1925 a bonus dividend of 5% was declared, with the result that the ordinary shareholder was earning no less than 15% on their holding.<sup>88</sup> By 1926 the value of the company's investments was in excess of £83,000 and fast becoming the largest element of its assets.<sup>89</sup>

In the following year a nephew of Robert Alabaster, Edgar More, was appointed as a director of the company at the tender age of 24, a clear sign that the family wished to retain control of the business.<sup>90</sup> Nothing seemed to impair the company's expansion; in 1928 the dividend was increased to a staggering 15% with a bonus of 5% and the investments topped £102,000 in value.<sup>91</sup> As a sign of happier times, the timing of the Annual General Meeting was brought forward to the more convenient date of 17 December. So it continued. In 1929 the Directors drew over £2,500 from the company and the investments were valued at £106,875-19-0 and the cash at bank £30,643-11-6. By then mechanisation of the transport arrangements had increased the value of the vans to nearly £5,000 and reduced the value of the horses to about £500.

The happy times of the Twenties gave way to the more anxious period of the Thirties and that affected the company no less than the nation generally. In 1931 profits were greatly reduced to below £12,000 and the company sought and obtained a reduction in capital.<sup>92</sup> In 1932 the value of the investments fell to less than £60,000.<sup>93</sup> In 1933 the dividend was substantially reduced to 5% with a 10% bonus and the Managing Directors halved their salaries from £600 to £300.<sup>94</sup> The profit in the following year was less than £8,000; there was a further reduction in dividend and the death was recorded of GW Leggett; 'in appreciation of his service to the Company', his

87 Annual Report, 3 December 1924.  
88 Annual Report, 30 November 1925.  
89 Annual Report, 29 November 1926.  
90 Annual Report, 25 November 1927.  
91 Annual Report, 30 November 1928.  
92 Annual Report, 4 December 1931.  
93 Annual Report, 5 December 1932.  
94 Annual Report, 7 December 1933.

widow was granted a sum of £1,000 by the Board and RW Place was appointed in his stead.<sup>95</sup>

In 1936, the Annual Report recorded 'with deep regret ... the death of Mr John Alabaster, who had been a Director of the Company since its inception.'<sup>96</sup> The following year, it recorded the death of Robert James Alabaster, 'who had been Chairman for over 20 years.' Leon Eddy, who had acted as Secretary for many years, was appointed to the Board and Edgar More became Chairman.<sup>97</sup> In that and following years, a provision was made in the accounts for 'National Defence Contribution', in a premonition of the war to come.<sup>98</sup>

### Packaging and Advertising

One of the major assets of the company was the stock of containers which held the various products. These took various forms but the most common in the earlier days were the ochre-coloured stoneware bottles of differing sizes.



Figure 6: Two stoneware containers made by Govancroft Pottery of Glasgow in 1934 and a soda syphon made by British Syphon Mfg. Ltd. of Barnsbury about 1930.

By 1886 the company's Price List stated 'that they are now supplying all Mineral Waters in Codd's Patent Globe Stopped Bottles' and the List contained instructions on how to open and pour out the contents.<sup>99</sup> Ginger beer was 8d per dozen and other products such as ginger ale, lemonade and soda

water 1s per dozen; the syrups used to flavour the new products such as pineapple rum and ginger brandy were offered for 1d each.<sup>100</sup> A special series of brown stoneware was commissioned to celebrate the company's anniversary with the endorsement 'for 50 years unrivalled.' There were also olive-green glass bottles and blue glass soda syphons produced for the company jointly by 'British Syphon Mfg. Co. Ltd. of London and King & Barnes Ltd. of Horsham.'<sup>101</sup>

All these are now collectors' items and obtain quite substantial prices in auction. A light blue glass bottle with a stopper and the word 'Batey' cast at the bottom was dug up during the extension of the Museum of the Home (formerly the Geffrye Museum) in Kingsland Road and is now exhibited there.<sup>102</sup>

Advertising and publicity were essential in a trade which was intensely competitive. The company approached this by erecting signboards in suitable locations, such as Adam Street and Neptune Street in Bermondsey,<sup>103</sup> and by placing smaller enamelled signboards on the outside local shops which stocked their products (one referred to Batey's being 'John Bull's favourite ginger beer').<sup>104</sup>



Figure 7: Corner shop in Earl Street South Shoreditch in 1895 displaying various Batey signboards.

The delivery vans, whether horse-drawn or motor, were also emblazoned with the company's credentials.

Newspapers were also used extensively. Advertisements were placed publicising their non-alcoholic pale ale with the words: 'If your Grocer will not procure this Ale for you, remit 2s. 9d. to Secretary Batey & Co. ... and a sample dozen pints will be forwarded to you

95 Annual Report, 3 December 1934.

96 Annual Report, 27 November 1936.

97 Annual Report, 4 December 1937.

98 Annual Report, 2 December 1938.

99 Price List for 1886.

100 Special Announcement for Christmas 1886-1887.

101 See Figure 6.

102 *Behind the Walls*, Museum of the Home, 2019.

103 Application and permission from Bermondsey Vestry, 11 October and 22 November 1898.

104 See Figure 5.

carriage paid ...<sup>105</sup> Others extolled their ginger beer as being 'carefully and skilfully brewed on scientific principles. Every drop has been boiled. Beware of imitations ...'<sup>106</sup>

### Final Years

1940 saw the company report that 'property owned by the Company, and also property held on lease by the Company, have suffered considerable damage' and claims for war damage were presented to the government.<sup>107</sup> In 1941 the Directors announced that they 'would be unable to present their Annual Report ... before the end of the year'; Raymond More was appointed a Director and the Annual General Meeting, when it did take place in May 1942, was transferred to the Liverpool Street Hotel because of war damage to the London Tavern.<sup>108</sup> The onset of war had resulted in what was called by the Board of Trade 'the concentration of production', whereby 'in the soft drinks industry the manufacturers' wartime association adopted the drastic course of eliminating all brand names for the duration and selling standardised products under such designations as "Orange Squash S.W.153" the code letters and number being the sole indication of the manufacturer's identity.'<sup>109</sup>

Nevertheless, the war years constituted what one might describe as a golden age for the company; in 1941 and 1942, income was such that two investments of £8,000 were made in National War Bonds purchased during 'London War Weapons Week' and 'London Warships Week' respectively.<sup>110</sup> It performed particularly strongly towards the end of the war, with profits of £46,856 in 1943, £49,659 in 1944 and £44,300 in 1945, but the retained nett profit was severely reduced by an emergency wartime Excess Profits Tax<sup>111</sup> (which amounted to £34,000 in 1943 alone).<sup>112</sup>

In 1947 the Board reported that 'it is with great regret that the Board have to inform Shareholders of the death of their esteemed colleague Mr RW Place, who had been associated with the Company for over 45 years and had been a Managing Director since 1934.' John Alabaster's son Hugh was appointed as a director in his stead.<sup>113</sup> Performance in 1947 suffered, however, from the after-effects of the Second World War: profits were reduced to £21,350. 'Production was much handicapped by Fuel and Power Cuts' and 'our Dulwich Works, which were requisitioned by the Government from 1 October 1942, were reopened by us [only] on 12 October 1947.' The premises at Priory Street, Bow, had been severely damaged by enemy action and were sold for £6,000.<sup>114</sup>

By the following year 'the control exercised by the Soft Drinks Industry (War Time) Association Ltd ceased on 31 January 1948, and since that date the Company has manufactured and sold its products under its own name and brands.' This resulted in 'a substantial increase in the volume of sales ... and considerable progress in the re-equipment of the Company's plant, additions to its fleet of motor vehicles, and in the over-taking of the arrears of maintenance due to war conditions.'<sup>115</sup> In 1949, the last horses had been disposed of and 'the Company's transport is now entirely mechanised' and 'progress has been made with War Damage repairs to the Company's premises ...'<sup>116</sup>

### The Charrington Takeover

There was one final flourish before the company's demise: Edgar More had been elected as the President of the National Association of Soft Drinks Manufacturers and presided over the Association's Annual Conference at the Royal Hotel in Scarborough in April 1951.

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105 *Westminster Gazette*, 22 July 1893.

106 *South London Press*, 15 April 1899.

107 Annual Report, 20 December 1940.

108 Letter to Shareholders, 15 May 1942.

109 *How Britain Was Fed in War Time*, HMSO 1946, pp. 21-22.

110 Annual Reports, 12 May 1942 and 1 April 1943.

111 Annual Reports, 7 February 1944, 8 January and 5 December 1945.

112 Annual Report, 7 February 1944.

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113 Annual Report, 10 January 1947.

114 Annual Report, 15 December 1947.

115 Annual Report, 3 December 1948.

116 Annual Report, 8 December 1949.



Figure 8: Programme for National Association of Soft Drinks Manufacturers' Scarborough Conference in April 1951.

For the 200 members who attended (out of a total membership of 830) there were speeches such as an 'Official Welcome by The Worshipful the Mayor', discussions on abstruse subjects such as 'The Future of the Soft Drinks Bottle', a 'Coach Tour to Whitby Moors', a 'Civic Reception [with] Dancing in the Neptune Ballroom', an 'Evening Concert [with] Soprano, Baritone and Conjuror', an 'International Golf Match', a 'Mannequin Parade (for the ladies)' and finally the 'Soft Drinks Trade Banquet and Ball', which included a toast to the Association by Robert Boothby MP,<sup>117</sup> who was later to become embroiled in scandal involving the Kray twins.<sup>118</sup>

The Directors' Report for 1950-1951 showed a much-reduced profit as a result of 'very unfavourable weather conditions throughout the summer period', but that 'all the plant contracted for has been delivered ... and the Company's transport fleet has been improved by the purchase of new vehicles'.<sup>119</sup> The plant referred to was a completely new bottling system for the Dulwich factory.

It was at that point that the brewers Charrington, with its headquarters at the Anchor Brewery in Mile End, who were owners of the rival brand R White, expressed an interest in purchasing the company and its assets. Negotiations commenced in February 1952 and at one point there was a request from Charringtons that their representative should be allowed a secret visit, incognito and with a false name, to the Dulwich plant without the staff working there being advised

of it. Eventually, after many exchanges, the final offer made by Charringtons was put to the shareholders for acceptance on 26 September 1952:<sup>120</sup> '£4 5s. in respect of each Preference Share and ... £9-17-6 in respect of each Ordinary Share.' The Directors had 'reached the unanimous conclusion that the offer made by Charringtons is an attractive one ... and they do not hesitate to recommend it for acceptance.'<sup>121</sup>

The schedule of the company's stocks prepared as part of the takeover negotiations was understandably comprehensive. The largest items were bottles worth £22,645 and boxes and crates worth £21,489, but it included some of the ingredients of the products themselves, notably 'Cyder & Whiteway's Wines, VP British Wines, Oxo Cubes and Soups, ... Bovril, Vinegar ... Vichy Water [and] Pineapple & Tomato Cocktail'<sup>122</sup> which illustrates the variety of flavours the company was by then producing. There were also large quantities of acids, essences, sugar, saccharin, colouring and syrups, an indication perhaps that some of the company's wares would not have satisfied present-day health regulations.<sup>123</sup>

The takeover necessarily required the consent of 90% of the shareholders. At that time 75% of the shares were held by various members of the family, and the rest by an assortment of small shareholders, principally resident in the affluent south-east of England (though there were also three quite substantial investments held by financial institutions).<sup>124</sup>

The 66th and last Annual General Meeting was held on 27 April 1953 at Charrington's headquarters in the Anchor Brewery at Mile End. Resolutions were passed confirming the appointment of five new directors, including two members of the Charrington family, and of a Mr ER Chadwyck-Healey as Chairman.<sup>125</sup>

So ended the independent existence of the company, which had maintained its headquarters in Kingsland Road for nearly a century. Those headquarters were demolished and the site is now occupied by the Suleymaniye Turkish Mosque.

117 Banquet Menu and Toast List, 7 April 1951.

118 *The Spectator*, 30 May 2020.

119 Annual Report, 4 December 1951.

120 Letter 26 September 1952 to Shareholders.

121 *Ibid.*

122 Summary of Stocks, 31 October 1951.

123 Monthly Comparison of Expenditure, July 1951 – 1952.

124 List of Shareholders as at 18 April 1952.

125 Agenda for Meeting, 27 April 1953.

# 3

## Haggerston Baths

*Tim Walder*

### Introduction

I first visited Haggerston Baths in late 2015. Despite being nationally listed by Historic England at Grade II (LEN: 1235838), the building was in poor shape: as cold as a tomb and recently squatted (the Council had evicted the squatters, then boarded up the building and provided 24-hour on-site security). A users' group had expressed concerns to the Council about the state of repair of the building as long before as 1999 and it had closed to the public on 29 February 2000 on health and safety grounds. A candlelit vigil was held for the pool's centenary in 2004, which became an annual street party for some years, and various proposals were made for refurbishment. However, the likely costs spiralled over time, particularly as evidence about the structure and condition of the building mounted. In 2005, a Council scheme to refurbish the building as a medical centre with community facilities was costed at £21 million and appears to have been shelved. By the time I visited, the building had been empty for fifteen years, had been on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register since 2014 and had featured on the cover of *The Victorian Society* magazine as a building at risk.

### Background

The Metropolitan Borough of Shoreditch (MBS) had sprung to life as a new local authority under

The Local Government Act 1899<sup>1</sup> which reorganised local government in London, replacing the Parish Vestry of St Leonard's, Shoreditch. The MBS was active and progressive (with the motto 'More Light, More Power') and there was competition between neighbouring new boroughs to show prestige civic builds. The Baths and Wash-Houses Act 1846 permitted local authorities to provide public facilities for laundry, individual baths and 'open' baths (*i.e.* a pool).<sup>2</sup> It is notable that there was no mention of swimming: this was all about cleanliness, not sport. From 1878 the Act was amended to include reference to swimming pools; allow boarding over of the bath or pool during the winter months for public events of a worthy nature (but not music and dancing); and vary and allow some increased rates of charge.<sup>3</sup> From 1896 the Act was amended in London to allow music and dancing during the winter months.<sup>4</sup>

The MBS appointed Alfred William Stephens Cross (1858-1932) as architect, without a competition. Cross had experience in Shoreditch, having designed the Pitfield Street baths in Hoxton in 1899 (damaged

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1 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London\\_Government\\_Act\\_1899](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Government_Act_1899).

2 I. Gordon, and S. Inglis, *Great Lengths*, 2009, p. 34.

3 Gordon and Inglis, p. 54.

4 Gordon and Inglis, p. 60.



beyond repair in World War II, although other parts of the complex survive, listed Grade II). The Baths Committee Vice-Chairman E J Wakeling (see below) was frustrated by the delays and extra costs caused by the architectural competition at Pitfield Street and persuaded the committee to appoint Cross directly. He was a well-qualified and experienced specialist in swimming baths, partnered with Henry Spalding (architect of Hampstead Baths, 1899). His other pools include Dulwich, Camberwell Green, Marshall Street (Soho), Hoxton, Wandsworth, Finchley and Walthamstow baths with further projects after 1922 with his son Kenneth. Cross had been educated at Cambridge, had an office in Mayfair and was Vice-President of the RIBA; he wrote a book on public baths design in 1906,<sup>5</sup> the standard text for a generation.

The MBS were early adopters of electricity, but Cross dissuaded them at Haggerston, preferring coal. He also persuaded the committee to use glazed bricks and tiling throughout the interior (to reduce maintenance costs), but failed to get granite for the exterior, settling for Portland stone. The foundation stone was laid by the Mayor on 18 March 1903 and construction was completed in about a year. The final cost was around £60,000 (which was £5,000 over budget). Using the historical retail prices index this is equivalent to about £7.8 million today. At the opening ceremony Wakeling, who was at least 40 years of age, dived in and swam the length of the 100-foot pool underwater. The opening was noticed in both the national and local press.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 1: Opening ceremony HA, P3659

5 A.W.S Cross, *Public Baths and Washhouses: a Treatise on their Planning, Design, Arrangement and Fitting*, 1906.

6 *Hackney and Kingsland Gazette*, 27 June 1904, p. 3.

### The baths in 1904

The context of the building was rather different in 1904. Haggerston Baths is now seen as a detached building with a pedestrian street called Swimmers Lane running south to north on the west side and detached from the adjacent building on the east side. In 1904, the building was attached to terraced housing at all four corners on what is now Laburnum Street and Whiston Road: the west and east elevations of the building (which are very plain and generally windowless) were not visible and not meant to be. This arrangement may also explain why many of the internal spaces in the baths are top-lit by rooflights to avoid overlooking of neighbours or loss of privacy for baths users.

One of the more farcical aspects of the project was that a mistake was made when setting out the building. It was constructed about eighteen inches (460mm) further south than it should have been. This made the pavement in front of the entrances on Whiston Road rather narrow and is a problem which has plagued the building ever since (and still does). It also made the London County Council very cross and they demanded that the new baths (then almost completed) be demolished and moved back. Understandably the MBS refused and the argument rumbled on until, in the wake of the First World War, officials on both sides decided it was not worth the candle.

The building was a work of art externally. Constructed in a mixture of soft red brick in Flemish bond and Portland stone, with slate roofs, it is in the Edwardian Baroque manner, with Queen Anne Revival elements. The form and architecture of the building have been extensively analysed elsewhere<sup>7</sup> and this is not repeated here. The architectural sculpture is by Frederick Emile Eberhardt Schenk (1848-1908), a well-regarded Art Nouveau craftsman; those in the front pediment showing two seated female figures

7 See the official listing description to be found here: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1235838?section=official-list-entry>. Also highly informative is the *Historic Building Report, August 2021* by Alan Baxter Associates which forms part of a planning application and can be found here: <https://developmentandhousing.hackney.gov.uk/planning/index.html?fa=getApplication&cid=71642>



Figure 2: South elevation 1904.

Figure 3: North elevation 1904.

Original drawings for the building by Alfred William Stephens Cross (1858-1932). LMA: GLC/AR/BR/19/1281 (15 plans)

are particularly strong.<sup>8</sup> The striking golden ship windvane is by Mr George Wragge Ltd of Salford, who appears to have repeated the form at Deptford Town Hall (also listed Grade II).

The building had a number of unusual features and was in many ways transitional between the classic Victorian baths (Kings Hall Leisure Centre/Hackney Baths is a local example) and the different designs used in the 1920s and 1930s (like Poplar Baths). The roof and structure of the main pool hall were formed in steel trusses. Although these were hidden behind decorative plaster panels in the ceiling and glazed brick linings lower down, it was a departure from the timber trusses used in late 19<sup>th</sup> century pools. The attractive coffered ceiling in the

main pool hall, with its recessed square panels, was an early attempt to resolve the severe acoustic issues in a swimming pool. A second variation was the provision of a single swimming pool: late Victorian swimming pools usually had at least two and often three (e.g. Kings Hall, which originally had a First Class Men's, Second Class Men's and a Ladies' Pool). A single pool became the norm in the inter-war years, until the invention of the children's pool. The final variation was the unusual compromise around pool-side seating and changing. The arrangement is apparent in the opening ceremony photo [Fig. 1] and the original Ground Floor Plans [Figs. 5 and 6]. The standard late Victorian arrangement was to have individual changing cubicles (then known as 'Dressing Boxes') adjacent to and level with the pool (extant at King's Hall). Haggerston featured an amphitheatre horseshoe of tiered seating for spectators and participants in swimming competitions. This resulted in the changing cubicles being pushed up and away from the poolside. Pool users had to use a flight of wet steps to get between the pool and the cubicles. This compromise arrangement was not repeated elsewhere, nor was the non-slip pool deck surface which was originally a type of parquet made of rubber blocks. Overall, the building is Janus-like in its combination of the conservative and the progressive: the functional plant and machinery, modern steel windows and pool layout were forward-looking; much of the rest of the layout, elements of the external styling and the interior finishes such as the teak parquet, doors and the glazed brick wall finishes were traditional.

### Public entertainment

Fears of catching a chill and the costs of achieving sufficient warmth meant that pools at this period were boarded over during the winter months and used for entertainment purposes. The original drawings [Fig. 6] show a winter layout with auditorium style seating and a stage. Haggerston appears to have an excessive amount of storage space at basement level, especially in the doubling up of the corridors around the pool [Fig. 4]. It is likely that this was used for the storage of the trestles and timber boarding and temporary seating for the winter use of the pool, which would have been bulky.

As noted above, the 1878 Act was cautious about too much rowdy fun for the working classes and allowed

<sup>8</sup> For more information about Schenk see: <http://www.speel.me.uk/sculpt/schenk2.htm>

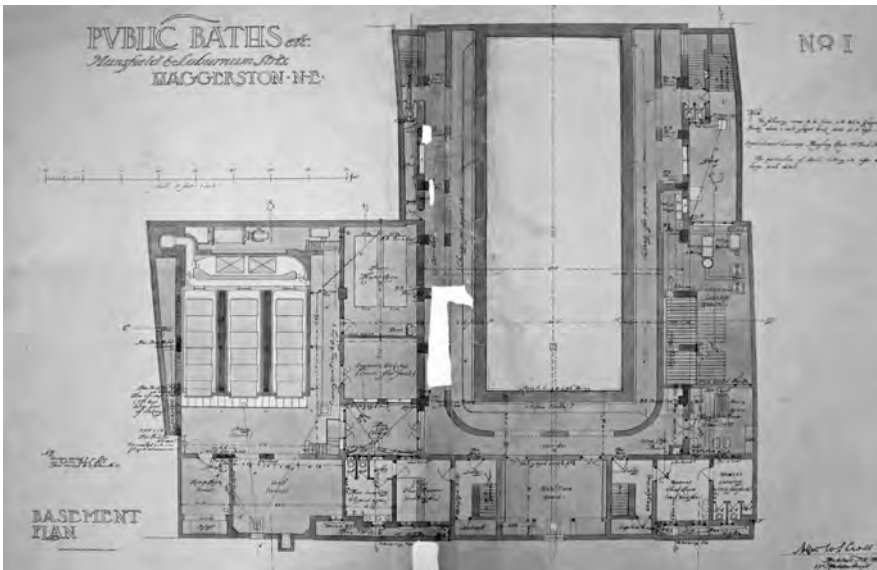


Figure 4: Basement plan.  
HA: S/EP/5/1-9

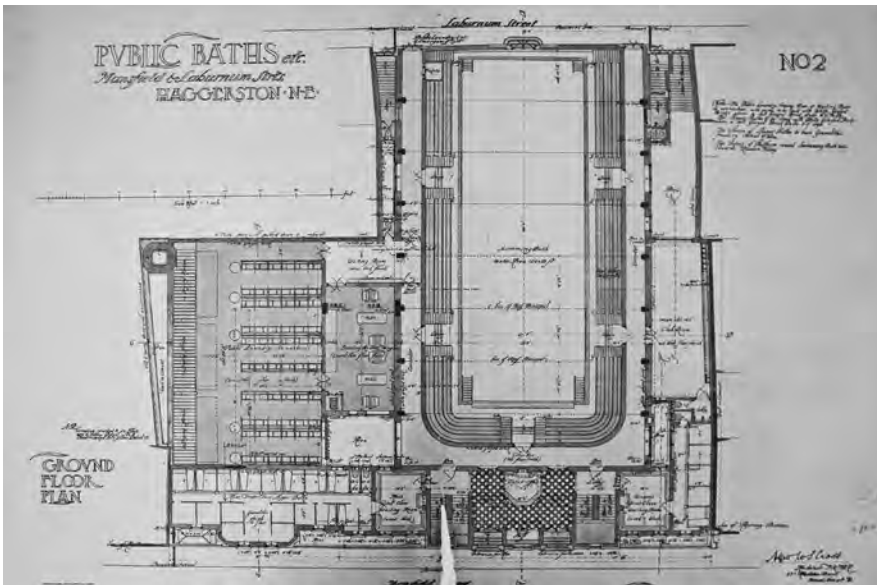


Figure 5: Ground floor plan  
as pool. HA: S/EP/5/1-9

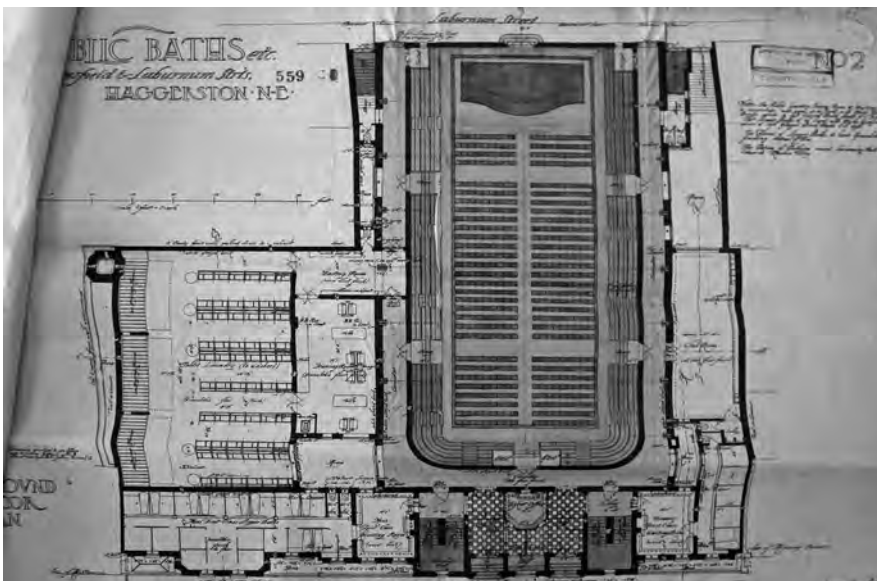


Figure 6: Ground floor plan  
as theatre. HA: S/EP/5/1-9

### Stratification and types of use in 1904

The table below summarises the different uses and provision in 1904: the text is best read in conjunction with of the original 1904 plans [Figs. 4 to 9], in which north is to the top.

Activity	Location	Quantum
<b>Front of house activities</b>		
Swimming (in summer months)	Ground floor	A single pool (100 feet by 35 feet) with shallow and deep ends
Entertainment (in winter months)	Ground floor	A stage to the north and seating for 540 in temporary seating and perhaps as many again in fixed amphitheatre seating (about 1,090 in total)
Men's First Class Slipper Baths	Ground floor, south west	17 baths
Men's Second Class Slipper Baths	First floor, south west	49 baths
Women's First Class Slipper Baths	Ground floor, south east	5 baths
Women's Second Class Slipper Baths	Ground floor, south east	19 baths
Public laundry	Ground floor, west	Waiting Room, 60 washers (shallow sinks), 4 mangles, 5 "hydros" (an electric dolly tub), 3 ironing tables and 60 drying horses
Public meetings	First floor, south	Board room with associated ceremonial balcony
<b>Back of house activities</b>		
Plant	Basement, west	Coal storage, pump room, stokery, 3 boilers, chimney, 2 Green's Economisers, fan room, 2 water heaters, engineer's workshop and hot air ducting
Establishment laundry	Basement, east	Conveyor belt, 3 washing troughs, "hydros" (electric dolly tubs), drying houses and mangling room.
Caretaker's flat	Second floor, south	Four-bedroom flat on the second floor.
Other	Various	WCs, circulation, storage, lightwells, access and emergency exits, roofs

only worthy public events. By 1896 the Act was amended in London to allow music and dancing. Records show that Haggerston Baths had a licence for music and dancing from 1904 until at least 1908. There were discussions around a cinema licence in 1911.<sup>9</sup> There was an attempt to renew both in 1921, opposed by the London United Temperance Council on the grounds that 'the sale of intoxicating drinks is not necessary or desirable in a place of public entertainment', although there was music and dancing in 1923. A Boxing Licence was granted, following alterations (see below) in 1930 and 1931 and appears to have replaced the music and dancing after that. It is lovely to imagine the ornamental balcony at first floor being used by victorious boxers to receive the adulation of the crowd in Laburnum Street. This used must have ceased by 1969, following the Council ban on boxing in its own premises after the tragic death of heavyweight boxer Ulric Regis at Shoreditch Town Hall.<sup>10</sup>

### All swimmers

At this time swimming was a serious sport, a recreation and a means of keeping clean. The building was referred to as Haggerston Baths and this reflected the cleanliness priority. Some users would have been unable to swim and would have used the swimming pool for relaxation and cleanliness. Haggerston was aimed at sports education too and it is likely that from 1904 local schools visited. The provision of a Swimming Club Room, the amphitheatre seating and a 100-foot pool suggests that serious sporting competition was part of the intention. Galas with flags, bunting, ceremony and medals were common at the time.

Water was unchlorinated at first and appears to have been unfiltered at Haggerston. It was normal to change the water once a week (prices were lower in many pools on the day before the change). The pool water was heated, to about 20° Celsius, considerably lower than the modern norm (28 to 30° Celsius).

### Male swimmers

Men would enter through the labelled south elevation west door into the west half of the black and white stone tiled entrance hall, buying their ticket from a

ticket booth to the north (once the staff had emerged from their tiny staff room to the south) [Fig. 5]. They would then go down the western Men's Stairs, passing through a glazed teak fire door into the Men's Cloakroom to shed their coats and perhaps boots. If they needed the toilet they could pass through another teak door to a Lobby and the WCs and Lavatory. Men would then collect their towel from the Towel Store [Fig. 4]. They would then go back up the Men's Stairs to the first floor, passing onto the raised balcony to access the Dressing Boxes (cubicles were located around the perimeter) [Fig. 7]. They would descend to poolside on flights of steps past the amphitheatre seating. This seating was in teak with flip-up seats concealing a box for small items such as goggles. They would then enter the single pool via a choice of four flights of steps, two to the shallow end to the north and two to the deep end to the south [Fig. 5].

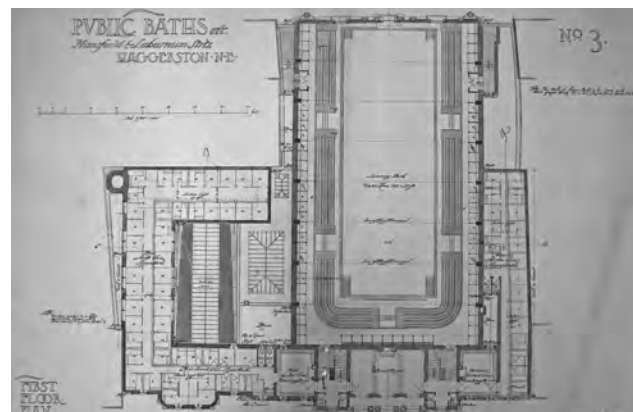


Figure 7: First floor plan. HA: S/EP/5/1-9

### Female swimmers

Women could swim only on one day a week (this appears to have been Friday). The route followed was a mirror image to that for men, entering through the labelled south elevation east door, using the eastern Women's Stairs, the Women's Cloakroom and WCs and lavatory.

### Club swimmers and children

It seems likely that schoolchildren and swimming clubs would have used the Club Room to the east of the pool [Fig. 5], which was fitted with a bench and under-bench storage around the perimeter and had access via a Lobby to its own WC. They would have crossed the Corridor and gone up the short flight of steps to the southeast of the pool.

<sup>9</sup> Theatre licence case file. LMA: GLC/AR/BR/22/BA/022163 (correspondence, certificates and some plans).

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sarflondondunc/248231994>

### **All slipper bathers**

The concept of public baths for private washing is now remote. The local newspaper reported that the baths would particularly serve 'those occupying one or two-room tenements.' At the opening of the baths, Randal Cremer, MP for Haggerston advocated: 'the opportunity ... of coming to [the baths] at least once a week.'<sup>11</sup> In the year 1902-1903 Shoreditch Borough Council's other baths at Pitfield Street, Hoxton, saw 263,002 bathers and 49,860 people washing clothes. A cold bath cost 1d and a hot bath 2d and came with a towel (but soap only in first class). Baths were probably a weekly event for local people. With improvements in local housing, it is easy to imagine that this service might have faded away in the 1950s, but baths could certainly still be taken at Haggerston in 1961 and probably as late as 1985.

### **Male First-Class slipper bathers**

Male bathers entered the building like male swimmers. They would then have used the basement Men's Cloakroom, WCs, Lavatory and Towel Store [Fig. 4] before returning to the ground floor and turning west, through a teak door into the Men's First-Class Waiting Room, which had a coal fireplace. They passed through another teak door into the slipper bath suite, with the chance to use two WCs, giving their ticket to the attendant in the first cubicle to the south of the entrance [Figs. 5 and 6].

### **Female First-Class slipper bathers**

Female bathers entered the building like female swimmers. They would then have used the basement Women's Cloakroom, WCs, Lavatory and Towel Store before returning to the ground floor and turning east through a teak door into the Women's First-Class Waiting Room which had a coal fireplace. They passed through another teak door into the slipper bath suite, with the chance to use a single WC and giving their ticket to the attendant in the first cubicle to the east of the entrance [Figs. 5 and 6].

### **Male Second-Class slipper bathers**

Male bathers entered the building like male swimmers. They would then have used the basement Men's Cloakroom, WCs, Lavatory and Towel Store before returning to the first floor and turning west, through a

teak door into the Men's Second-Class Waiting Room which had a coal fire. They passed through another teak door into the slipper bath suite with the chance to use two WCs, giving their ticket to the attendant in the first cubicle to the south of the entrance [Figs. 7].

### **Female Second-Class slipper bathers**

Female bathers entered the building like female swimmers. They would then have used the basement Women's Cloakroom, WCs, Lavatory and Towel Store before returning to the first floor and turning east, through a teak door into the Women's Second-Class Waiting Room which had a coal fireplace. They passed through another teak door into the slipper bath suite, with the chance to use a two WCs, giving their ticket to the attendant in the first cubicle to the east of the entrance [Fig. 7].

### **Public laundry users**

Users would probably have been women. Entrance was to the rear of the building through the eastern set of paired doors on the west side of the north frontage in Laburnum Street. The women would have passed along the Corridor, buying their ticket from a booth just inside the door and then waiting their turn in the Waiting Room before entering the main laundry. Washing of clothes was done by hand in shallow sinks assisted by early washing machines in the form of electrically driven dollies in tubs. It would then have been mangled in the Ironing Room and then dried on the drying horses which were probably heated, (see Plant below) and ironed on the tables in the Ironing Room [Figs. 5 and 6].

### **Public meetings**

The board room was primarily intended for meetings of the Baths Management Committee, but it seems likely that this space may have been publicly rentable. It benefits from double stair access to the Entrance Hall, adjacent WCs and Lavatories and a ceremonial balcony [Fig. 7].

### **Plant**

On a cold winter Monday in 1904 the demands on the plant would have been industrial in scale. Water heating was required for the pool and for hot water supply to the Public and Establishment laundries, as well as 90 baths (with changes of water up to every 4 minutes). Air heating was required for the Drying Houses in both Laundries and for the building in

<sup>11</sup> See footnote 6.

general. All lighting in the building was electric. Electricity was the power source for the ventilation fan and the laundry machinery, a modern arrangement at the time. There is no trace of a steam engine to provide power or to drive a dynamo.

The resident Caretaker would have descended from his second floor south flat [Fig. 8] via the Men's Stairs to the basement Corridor and then accessed the Stokery through the doors in the lightwell [Fig. 4]. Water was stored in surviving large cast iron tanks on the west elevation at roof level [Fig. 8].

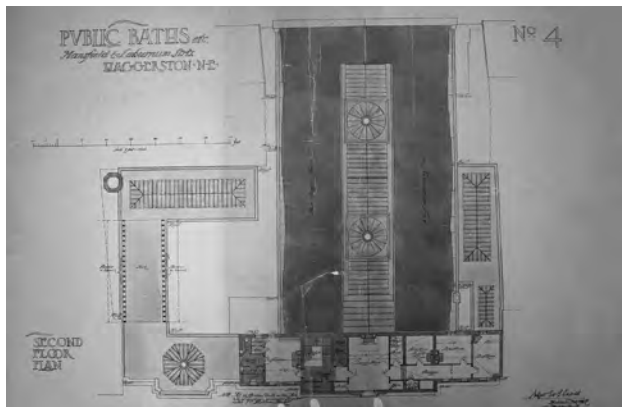


Figure 8: Second Floor plan. HA: S/EP/5/1-9

Coal was delivered to the front of the building and dropped down into a Coal Store. It would then have been shovelled across the Stokery (on its cement apron) and into three Lancashire boilers of huge proportions (7 feet in diameter and 28 foot in length). These featured chain-grate overfeed stokers to deliver the coal into the furnaces. The boilers are described in *The Builder* of 1904<sup>12</sup> as featuring feed and condense pumps, steam injectors and suction and delivery pipes. Air intake was through the six furnace mouths to the south (two to each boiler). In each boiler, each furnace was a large cylindrical tube sitting within an outer steel casing which was partially flooded with water. The water was heated directly by the furnaces and from the outside of the casing. The latter was achieved through the redirection of flue gases from the burning coal through ducts in the brickwork mounts under and to the side of the boilers.

Flue gases were then directed into a brickwork tunnel with a number of centrally-pivoted flaps controlled by the caretaker using a system of weights, cables and pulleys located at the rear of the Stokery. Flue gases

could be allowed to pass directly to the chimney or into two large brick structures to the north. These survive and consist of two *Green's New Patent Improved Economisers*.<sup>13</sup> The Economisers consist of two chambers, each with a large apparatus of coiled pipes. The intention was that new cold water about to enter the boiler to become steam was pre-heated by the hot exhaust gases heading for the chimney. Pre-heating of the feed water in this way improved fuel economy (like filling a kettle with hot water): the Green Company claimed coal savings of up to 25%. The flue gases contained soot and this tended to build up on the pipes in the Economisers, reducing efficiency. To address this, the tubes were fitted with chain-driven scrapers to remove the soot and this elaborate mechanism (presumably electrically driven) survives on top. Ash was removed from the boilers through the lower central door. The boilers could also be drained of 'mud' through large-bore pipes into the trough around the front and could be entered for maintenance through a manhole at the top. Flue gases passed up the chimney after their route through the Economisers.



Figure 9: Green's Economiser. This is identical to the plant at the Baths.<sup>14</sup>

The building also featured an elaborate hot air system. This had a large *electrically driven fan* (in the Fan Room). This appears to have sucked air

<sup>12</sup> *The Builder*, 1904, p. 274.

<sup>13</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economizer> and <https://thegreengroup.co.uk/who-we-are/>

<sup>14</sup> Steam was pumped around a closed circuit between the three boilers and the two Water Heaters, providing indirect heating for the various hot water demands including the pool, radiators and hot water taps.



through a brick duct running around the base of the chimney (which was presumably very hot when in use) and then out through ducts running across the ceiling of the Fan Room and across the ceiling of the Workshop. Historical sections indicate the duct running in a 2-foot diameter pipe in the floor of the Corridor around the pool, the aim being to reach the Drying Houses to dry the towels in the Establishment Laundry. The entry point in this area survives, as does the exit point of the hot air into the northeast 'area' of the building. It is likely that hot air was also directed to the drying horses in the Public Laundry above. The amphitheatre seating in the pool hall also featured a hot-air grille beneath each seat. There is no sign of trunking on this scale, and it is therefore possible that the space heating of the main pool hall used the basement Corridor itself as a giant hot air trunk, with openings below seats. The strange curved southern corners of the basement and ground floor corridors may have been dictated by the avoidance of right-angle bends both in the buried hot air pipe to the Establishment Laundry and the Corridor itself, to enable a smoother airflow.

### Changes between 1923 and 1960

The licensing authority for music and dancing had (possibly well-grounded) fears about the use of the building by over 1,000 people and raised questions about the adequacy of means of escape, the containment of smoke, the potential of boiler explosion and the provision of WCs.<sup>15</sup> The 1923 application for a music and dancing licence, replaced in 1930 by a licence for public boxing matches, resulted in the provision of two additional front emergency exits and the roller shutters to the Men's and Women's Entrances on the south elevation and the provision of turnstiles. The two front exits are quite incongruous once noticed (they are cut down windows with steps bridging the 'area'). This raises the *Carry On Up the Baths* possibility of spectators at a boxing match exiting through the First Class Ladies Baths in the event of a fire.

In 1941, sadly, the local area was bombed. Houses to both sides of the baths in both Laburnum Street and Whiston Road were damaged and later demolished. The baths suffered 'general blast damage' and the original elegant faience lantern light over the main

pool was lost. As late as 1957 the Council were receiving war damage payments for the building.

Three additional water tanks were fitted in rooms to the south of the basement level, probably between the 1930s and 1950s. National government began to issue guidance to improve water filtration and cleanliness from 1929 and it is likely that these tanks were associated with filtration and the addition of chlorine, which became more common from the 1930s.

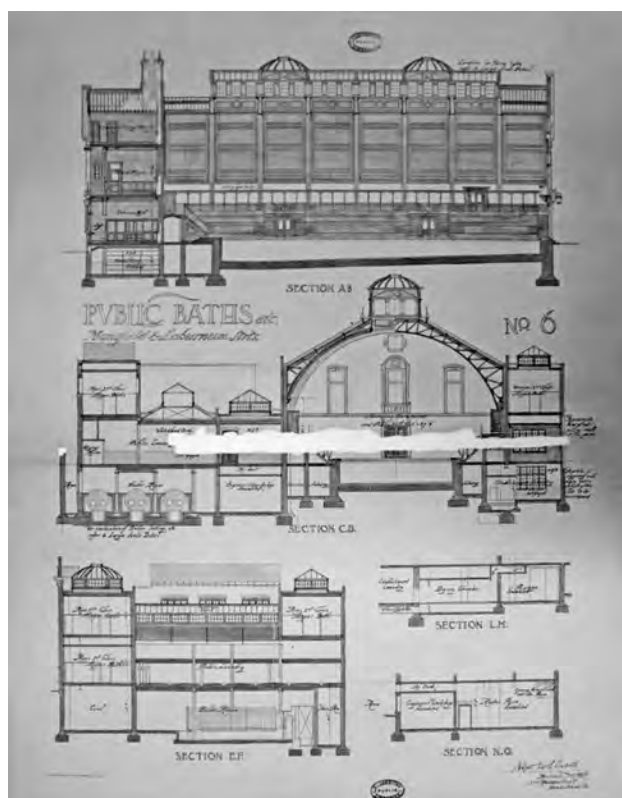


Figure 10: Sections. HA: S/EP/5/1-9

### Changes between 1961 and 1964

In the period 1961 to 1964 the building was heavily altered.<sup>16</sup> A new Laundry Building was added on the northwest corner of the site (to replace the houses destroyed in World War II). This is of a fairly good matching red brick, but basic construction and design, with an industrial saw-tooth roof with north lights. It appears to have been a launderette-style laundry, a storage and delivery area and a plant room.

<sup>15</sup> See footnote 9.

<sup>16</sup> Building Acts case file. LMA: GLC/AR/BR/07/1281 (correspondence)

The original Men's and Women's south entrances became disused. The building was re-oriented towards Swimmer's Lane to the west. A new external entrance canopy and steps and a small exit block to the northwest, near the chimney, were created. The former Men's First-Class Baths was converted into the main entrance hall and circulation area. The former Men's First-Class Waiting Room was converted into the Office.

In the basement, the 1904 plant was abandoned and these rooms appear to have been unused since 1961. The remainder of the basement appears to have been put to various low-grade service and storage uses with a much-reduced establishment laundry function.

On the ground floor, the original Public Laundry was entirely reconfigured internally to provide a poolside maze known as a changing village, with Men's and Women's Changing Areas and associated footbaths, WCs, showers, changing cubicles and saunas. The former Laundry Waiting Room was absorbed into this area as were parts of the pool corridor to become additional WCs.

The poolside itself was remodelled. The height of the floor deck appears to have been raised by about 300mm, the teak Dressing Boxes were swept away, along with the steps down to the pool and the teak amphitheatre seating. The four exits from the poolside were rationalised and provided with privacy screens. The former Women's First Class Baths were converted into staff accommodation including an Office, Kitchen, staff showers and toilets. The Club Room became a Dance Studio and corridor.

On the first floor, the Men's Second Class Baths was converted into a Gymnasium, with new subdivisions for a Solarium and Changing Rooms.

On the second floor, the fire break at the top of the stairs and the surviving kitchen equipment suggests that the Caretaker was still in residence in 1961, but later this area appears to have fallen into low-grade storage use.

### **Changes between 1965 and 2000**

In the period 1985 to 1988 the building was modernised again. New gas boilers, air handling plant and other equipment were installed in the 1961 Laundry Building. The pool was divided by a boom into a 25-metre main pool and a smaller teaching

pool. It also appears that the Women's Second-Class Slipper Baths fell out of use around this time.

### **The future**

By 2015, control of the building had moved to the Council's Corporate Property department. A decision was taken to invite Expressions of Interest for a 250-year lease to provide a new use for the building. Following this, in 2017, discussions were had with interested parties and a decision was taken by the Mayor that it was not possible, practically or viably, to retain a swimming use at the building. The preferred bidder became Haggerston Baths Ltd, a consortium including a workplace provider (Clockwise) with Squire and Partners as architects. After extensive pre-application discussions, applications for Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent were approved at Planning Sub-Committee for a scheme described as: 'Part demolition of the western extension and erection of part three, five and six storey (plus basement and lightwell) extension; demolition of external stair and two-storey side/rear element on eastern elevation and erection of two storey (plus basement) extension and external alterations and refurbishment to provide office floorspace (Use Class E(g)), flexible events space in the former pool hall (Sui Generis), standalone community hall (Use Class F2(b)), gym (Use Class E(d)) and retail (Use Class E(a))'. It is understood that negotiations are at an advanced stage around the Section 106 Agreement and that a decision will be issued shortly.

From my point of view the scheme was very much a compromise which allowed the loss of some historic elements of the building in exchange for the restoration of the remainder. I hope that the scheme is implemented, and soon, so that Haggerston Baths can return to being the useful and beautiful building it once was.

# 4

## From 'At Risk' to Community Asset

*Patrick Hammill and Roland Jeffery*

Hackney History asked two of the people involved in the rescue of Shoreditch Town Hall and its transfer to a non-profit trust for their recollections. What follows is not an exhaustive account and inevitably reflects the perspectives of the authors. It focusses on the period when Shoreditch Town Hall was at risk of disposal for commercial development. It really was a rescue operation.

**Patrick Hammill** was a Trustee of Shoreditch Town Hall for 18 years.

**Roland Jeffery** was the first Director of Shoreditch Town Hall Trust.

**PH:** Opened as the Vestry Hall of Shoreditch Vestry in 1865, the building initially comprised the eastern portion of the Victorian buildings that you see today, with the Council Chamber hidden to the rear. By this date it had little or nothing to do with a vestry in a church, but the origins of the Vestries were the old parish boundaries and the name stuck. When the Shoreditch Vestry became the Metropolitan Borough of Shoreditch in 1899 the first floor Assembly Hall of the Town Hall was enlarged with the addition of a gallery, quadrupling its capacity, and offices suites for the principal officers of the new Borough were built on the Old Street frontage to the west of the original hall. Shoreditch Town Hall's tower dates from this extension but just as works were completing a fire destroyed much of the new work, which had to be rebuilt.



*Figure 1: 'After the Fire at the Shoreditch Town Hall, August 15<sup>th</sup> 1904': HA P1635*

In 1938 the brick Annexe was built to the rear on Rivington Place. Around 1970 a terrace of condemned cottages adjacent to the Annexe was acquired and demolished, with the intention of building a further extension; but this land was only used for staff car parking as by then the building was slowly falling into disuse and extending it was forgotten.

The Shoreditch Vestry and Shoreditch Metropolitan Borough were innovative, symbolised by the Motto '*More Light, More Power*' a reference to their local power undertaking that burnt the borough's refuse

to generate electricity<sup>1</sup> in a purpose-built facility off Hoxton Square. It had a progressive ring beyond that however, and Shoreditch saw itself as the vanguard borough in other fields too, such as public health.



Figure 2: Rivington Place extension and car park, 1978: HA P8516

**RJ:** The recent story of the site begins on 1 April 1964 with a restructuring of local authorities across London. The three Metropolitan Boroughs of Hackney, Shoreditch and Stoke Newington were amalgamated to form the London Borough of Hackney, which based itself at the centrally-placed Hackney Town Hall, Mare Street. The amalgamation spelt the beginning of the steady decline of Shoreditch Town Hall. Whilst the 1930s Annexe at Shoreditch continued to be used as Hackney offices, the older parts of the building were slowly emptied and abandoned. Over thirty years, as the older building was used less and less – even for civil marriages which had long been a staple at the Town Hall – routine maintenance was reduced and the costs to Hackney of keeping the building open increased. A spiral of decline set in.

**PH:** It was by no means only a Hackney problem; the amalgamations in other boroughs led to there being surplus town halls across London, many of them listed buildings. An English Heritage publication drew attention to the problem of these surplus but often handsome buildings and helped stimulate debate on their potential use.

**RJ:** Hackney let the Assembly Hall for events and it was a well-known boxing and wrestling venue until

<sup>1</sup> 'E pulvere lux et vis' – 'From dust light and power' – is proclaimed above the entrance to the offices of the Vestry of St Leonard Shoreditch Electric Light Station on Coronet Street.

the death in the ring in March 1969 of heavyweight champion Ulric Regis, fighting Joe Bugner. The Borough reacted by banning boxing across all council premises, a move rapidly copied by other Authorities.

In material terms, however, it was failure of regular maintenance that hastened the degradation of the building. Just one example was the gutters and rainwater pipes to the Assembly Hall. Blocked with leaves and dead pigeons they eventually had grass and small shrubs growing in them. Every time it rained a huge amount of rain which should have been taken by the gutters cascaded down the walls. This continued for a couple of decades and the iron girders supporting the second floor gents' toilets which served the Assembly Hall (heavily used in the interval of events such as boxing matches) corroded so badly and the stonework supporting them became so crumbly that they were at risk of falling. A huge mass of scaffolding was erected to prevent collapse of the gents' and the fire escape stairs. However, with the water still flowing the scaffolding itself was beginning to rust and become unsafe.



Figure 3: The Assembly Hall, 1978: HA P8536

Some rooms of the Town Hall had not been used since the mid 60s. The caretaker's cottage in the rear yard of the Town Hall was home to hundreds of pigeons. Hackney staff naturally didn't like working so remotely from Mare Street in an unloved building which became more dilapidated by the year. For them, a posting there felt like being sent to Siberia. The building had no champions and became largely 'out of sight out of mind'.

**PH:** English Heritage (as it then was) had instituted the Buildings at Risk Register (Today known as the

Heritage at Risk Register) and Shoreditch Town Hall was on it as a listed building in 'serious disrepair with no agreed future use'. The Whirl-y-Gig weekend daytime dance club was popular with teenagers in particular and flourished briefly in the 90s, until it was discovered that the statutory fire alarm was defunct and any public entertainment uses ruled out on safety grounds.

**RJ:** A front desk was staffed by a loyal Hackney employee, but much of his time was spent re-directing bemused callers to other Hackney buildings.

**PH:** Design Action Teams held community workshops for the use of the buildings but were unable to secure funding to pursue their proposals. But in January 1997 I attended a weekend of meetings of Shoreditch residents thinking about the future of the Town Hall. The follow-up came on February 11 that year with a well-attended public meeting in Shoreditch Town Hall about the future of the building, convened by the Hoxton Trust. This in turn led to a Community Planning Weekend, led by the LB Hackney conservation officer, the RIBA Community Architecture Group, the Hackney Society, Hoxton Trust and several independent residents' and local tenants' associations. A Steering Group arising from this was formed to take forward the idea of a Town Hall Trust.

**RJ:** Politically, the context was that the Shoreditch wards of the Borough were not seen as part of the Labour home ground of Hackney. Many Shoreditch residents felt that they had been neglected as an area ever since Hackney Council had been formed in 1964 and services moved to what was perceived as the far-distant Hackney Town Hall. For their part Labour politicians appeared less inclined to put investment into an area that did not reliably vote for them, even though it contained some of the most deprived wards in Hackney. The Shoreditch wards regularly elected Independents and Liberals.

**PH:** Council officers including Mike New, then Hackney's Head of Planning, were putting forward a proposal to sell all or part of the building, where they saw rising land values in the City Fringe for office use. They considered a bid to the Millennium Commission for funding to turn the Town Hall into a high-tech conference and exhibition hall, but this faltered early. The important step was that the

Council recognised it was no longer sensible to retain the building under its direct control. I was asked to attend because of my roles in the Hackney Society and the Hackney Historic Buildings Trust.

At that public meeting I clearly recall a very strong feeling from residents that this was *their* Town Hall, increasingly underused and a symbol of the neglect of the area by Hackney Council. And now Hackney wanted to sell it off! The speakers from the Council were given a noisy reception in a packed meeting and there was little support for the proposal to sell the Town Hall. Rather, Shoreditch residents overwhelmingly wanted to retain their Town Hall and bring it back into use.

Within Shoreditch one of the strongest social networks were the Tenants' and Residents' Associations (TRA) covering the Council estates that ran continuously from New North Road in the west to Haggerston Park in the east. This was before the Shoreditch gentrification, and the estates ran virtually without a break. They were able to marshal a significant and co-ordinated opposition to the plan to sell the Town Hall, with the support of the Hoxton Trust led by its then Director Karina van der Merve. Shoreditch felt it was neglected and politically the LibDems began to see it as area ripe for them to canvas for votes.

**RJ:** The steering group that had come out of the public meetings developed the idea of a Trust, using the structure of a building preservation trust similar to the Hackney Historic Buildings Trust, working with the Council to explore alternatives to the earlier Council proposals. In January 1998 LB Hackney commissioned the *Shoreditch Town Hall Options Review* from Adrian Ellis Associates (AEA) which also proposed a long lease to a trust, a mixed-use model of offices and assembly uses. This was to be led by Trustees, most of whom would be independent of Hackney Council, and a Town Hall Director. AEA's work was paid for by Hackney. AEA had a track record of advising successful venues, community and arts spaces.

**PH:** The first big landmark came on 26 March 1998 when the Shoreditch Town Hall Trust was formally signed into existence as a company limited by guarantee by Deborah Curtis, Karina van der Merwe, Sarah Prattent, and myself. It was registered as a charity shortly afterwards on 20 May. Several

other Trustees joined us shortly thereafter, to round out our skills.

The 7 May 1998 Council elections produced a hung Council. The council comprised Labour 29, LibDems 17, Conservatives 12. Kevin Dawes and Kay Stone (chair of one of the TRAs) were elected as LibDem Councillors for Wenlock ward which covered much of Shoreditch, and with a Liberal majority on the semi-devolved Shoreditch Neighbourhood Committee the Town Hall Trust proposals were strongly supported by members and by the Hackney CEO, Tony Elliston. The deal was a three-year lease to the Trust with a 'call-option' for a 99-year lease which could be exercised on production of a business plan that demonstrated the Town Hall would not require LB Hackney revenue support and would be self-sustained from earned income and sources external to the council. During the initial three-year lease, a grant, calculated as the Borough's costs of running the building, was made so that the Trust could run the building itself and commission studies to explore the way forward and build the Business Plan.

**RJ:** My post as the first Director of the Town Hall Trust started on the first day of the Trust's three-year lease on 1 May 1998. Many parts of the building had not been used for 35 years. I recall walking around on my first day having decided to see every one of the many rooms in the building for myself. Karina van der Merve, chair of the Trust, joined me. Some rooms were locked and the key long since lost so locksmiths were called on to pick them open. A safe company was needed for the huge strong room in the basement, unopened for decades, it seemed. In other rooms we found more than 35 plastic buckets and even dustbins, positioned to catch rain that poured through holes in the roof. These had to be emptied at least once a week, a task that involved syphoning the water with hoses. Pigeon infestation was a serious issue.

First priority was the year-long BTec in Circus Skills that was to take occupation of the Assembly Hall the following week. They were training a group of 30 acrobat performers for the Millennium celebrations in Greenwich. Several times a day they would perform high above visitors' heads. This seemed a great use for the lofty Assembly Hall as there was the height for both acrobatic equipment and safety nets.

But dancers and acrobats must have a warm space to avoid injury and the heating system barely worked let alone fought off winter temperatures. Repairs and emergency upgrades followed, but we still had to hire portable heaters.

We exploited the disrepair when we could. The derelict-looking basement was terrifically popular for photo-shoots and filming. Several television horror and suspense sequences were filmed there and an album cover for Craig David, who liked the abandoned look. A Vogue fashion shoot in the Assembly Hall [Fig. 3] focussed on the especially-battered paintwork of one area, offsetting the glamorous models of both sexes and super-priced clothes. Creating that kind of decay artificially in a studio doesn't come cheap and we had the real thing. Our location agent charged high fees accordingly.



Figure 4: *The Basement, 1978: HA P8555.*

**PH:** In February 1999 Shoreditch New Deal Trust was established as a major regeneration body for the area, with a multi-million-pound budget, funded under the central government's New Deal for Communities initiative. Perhaps this reflected the influence of the LibDems, as previously Shoreditch does not appear to have been a priority for the Labour Group. Or perhaps it reflected concern in the Labour Party that Shoreditch would be lost forever politically unless it was given much more priority – or both. So, Shoreditch – long the Cinderella part of the Borough – suddenly had two major new regeneration initiatives, a reverse in local fortune.

**RJ:** I met Hackney CEO Tony Elliston monthly. At his request this was 6pm on Friday and we sat on very elderly sofas in his large corner office after most Town Hall staff had gone home. On several occasions



*Figure 5: The Entrance before restoration – with boxed-in original detailing and covered floor – 1978: HA P8534*



*Figures 6 and 7: Transformation revealing classical cornicing, pilasters, skirting, door cases and encaustic tiling. We can be grateful that the original detailing was covered rather than ripped out as commonly happened in 1970s interior design.*

he used his authority to break log-jams we encountered. Though Tony left the Borough when Hackney finances hit the rocks, the Town Hall project would not have made it without his personal and practical support.

*More Light, More Power* became an emblem for the Borough and occurs in many places in the Town Hall, in stained glass and on shields. Commercial companies were seeking to exploit the motto, so Tony Elliston ensured the Borough passed the rights to the motto to the Town Hall Trust and we in turn took

out Intellectual Property trade-mark rights to protect its association with the former Borough and Town Hall site.

I assembled a small team of staff and freelancers and the project rapidly moved towards accommodating a wide range of ‘assembly uses’. This was against the then-prevalent consensus and against some professional advice Hackney had commissioned (though not from Adrian Ellis Associates) for venues. The consensus was heavily influenced by Arts Council policy for cultural venues to have one core emphasis such as theatre or cinema. The wide range of assembly uses proved successful and manageable and would allow the Town Hall to serve a wide range of activities and communities. It was also more prudent to operate across several markets. The space had been disused so long that there was no profile, except as a distant memory, so it was a matter of seeing what worked best in the spaces that were fit to use. We also let quite a lot of space in the Town Hall Annexe; the rents were discounted ‘short-life’ rents but there was a buzz in Shoreditch then, so we had no difficulty filling the space.

### **What Was Happening at Shoreditch Town Hall?**

In spite of the state of the electrics, heating and decoration, during the three-year lease the Trust hosted 160 events and residencies covering a wide range. They included:

- Annual East London Design Show, showcasing local designer-makers.
- Launch of a Sony computer game.
- Weekly Yoga and Pilates classes for local people.
- A month-long art installation and artists 60<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration for the White Cube Gallery.
- Several wedding receptions, two memorial gatherings and several birthday parties.
- Annual Showcase for Shoreditch-based Cranston Tappers Dance School.
- Channel 4’s lavish party for the artists shortlisted for the 2000 Turner prize.
- A series of summer projects for schools and school-age children led by the Trust.
- Professional examinations for the Institute of Chartered Loss Adjusters.



- Artist-led residency organised by the Trust.
- MA degree shows for London College of Printing and the Wimbledon College of Art.
- A series of community tea dances.
- Castings for a range of theatrical, fashion and film projects.
- Principal sound stage for a feature film produced by Duncan Kenworthy.
- Rehearsals for Almeida Theatre's season at the Gainsborough Warehouse, Shoreditch.
- Training 30 acrobats to perform at the Millenium Dome.

We commissioned no fewer than 12 professional reports on every aspect, making our vision for the Town Hall a reality. These stretched from archaeological surveys of what might be below the floors to equal access studies, conservation plan, a competition review and several reports on money – how we would generate it and what the project costs would be. We also commissioned an architect, Niall Phillips. These studies fed into a Business Plan – providing for the disposal of the Annexe and Car Park for £2.73m to cross-fund the Town Hall capital work and to provide an income stream from assembly uses and office lets. I wrote the business plan with a consultant Robert Silberman, usually meeting him at weekends in one of the several sites where he was consulting. The Business Plan was the thing that under our Option would unlock the 99-year lease. If the Town Hall Trust was able to make a plausible case for viability, we would get the long lease. After scrutiny by Hackney officers, who obviously read it carefully and sceptically (but always professionally), there was a huge meeting with councillors which felt a bit like a job interview. The Plan was adopted unanimously by councillors of all parties as fulfilling the condition in the Option for the lease. After three years of our hard work, Hackney resolved to grant the Trust the long lease and permit the back-to-back sale of underleases of Annexe and Car Park, to part-fund refurbishment.

**PH:** By 2000 Labour and Conservatives were working together in coalition and LibDems became the opposition party, a surprising arrangement. And in 2000 after various episodes of financial mismanagement Hackney Council declared itself

bankrupt under a Section 144 notice. The Treasury had to make a significant loan to bail the Council out and effectively become its bank manager. Government civil servants had a huge say over how the finances were managed and the phrase 'cash is king' became a major driver with property sales by the Council. In June 2000 Max Caller became the interim Chief Executive, brought in as a new broom to sort out the finances.

**RJ:** The Heritage Lottery Fund [HLF] had rejected our £1.7m bid for the Town Hall on the grounds that the building had 'insufficient heritage merit' to justify the level of grant. This later transpired to mean that a member of the Committee who was a conservation architect didn't care for the fact that the Old Street frontage of the Town Hall was asymmetrical. It was, of course, reflecting its twice-over rebuilding, though as Old Street is narrow at that point, few people are worried by this fact. We know our project had scored highly on viability and community engagement so this seemed a cruel decision; today, fortunately, the Lottery Heritage Fund is less precious in its decision-making and takes a more rounded view of the merits of heritage projects. HLF officers encouraged a re-submission at a lower level of grant, which meant the scheme had to be split into two phases: Heritage Phase and Completion Phase. We could only proceed with the first phase. A revised business plan and application for the Heritage Phase won an HLF grant of £650,000 which with the Car Park and Annexe sale was enough safely to re-open the building. However, both sales required government ministerial approval by Lord (Charlie) Falconer, Hackney's 'minder' in central government. Under government pressure all new expenditures at Hackney were frozen and there was a year's uncertainty; would our proposals for the Town Hall be granted? The 99-year lease was delayed by 14 months, during which time the Trust had no income and reserves dipped as low as £40k. The building was mothballed again, I worked three, then two days a week as the sole member of staff but our patience was rewarded and the lease was finally granted.

**PH:** 2 May 2002 saw more Council elections and Karina and I went to Shoreditch Town Hall and spent the evening signing the long lease documents prior to the election results being declared, just in case there was a change of Council policy.

**RJ:** I then took a taxi to get the huge pile of legal documents signed, with an hour to spare. The LibDems did indeed lose most of their Council seats and any political power they had had, reduced to only three councillors with Labour on 45 and Conservatives on nine. But the deal was done and as we had all-party support our nervousness was probably misplaced. I moved on to other projects after six years with the Trust and Sheila Benjamin became CEO, implementing most of the Business Plan but putting more emphasis on corporate lettings.

**PH:** It took several years before someone was found to take on the caretaker's cottage at the rear in its then derelict state. In 2005 the Lottery-funded works were completed but commissioning the building for public use was slow and 2006/2007 was described as 'the first full year of Shoreditch Town Hall operating as a venue with all public rooms available for use' – a new business plan being developed around a turnover of around £500,000.

Trustees engaged in considerable debate about a strategic direction for the Town Hall. What could be delivered to support local people and at the same time increase the income to maintain the building? How would proposals stack up? This dilemma had not been resolved when Sheila moved on to take up a new job.

**RJ:** I remember we put on a conference about the future of town halls and other municipal heritage buildings such as libraries and fire stations. Many of them were important local landmarks, often listed. We highlighted options for continued community uses and it attracted press coverage and delegates from across the country. Whether Shoreditch was much of a model, I doubt. A lot of buildings were being declared redundant partly because they were no longer fit for purpose but also because of austerity politics. Moreover, austerity politics were putting pressure on local authorities to maximise aggressively their capital receipt from sales. In London, Bermondsey, Holborn, Tower Hamlets and Bromley Town Halls are among those lost to private uses. But Wembley, Tottenham, Deptford, Hampstead and Finsbury Town Halls, among others, moved to alternative public or community uses. Outside London and in areas where there was market failure or just low values, it worked better, usually supported by the National Lottery

Heritage Fund. Stoke Newington Town Hall has now been revived after a period of decline – this time by Hackney in-house. Directly opposite the Town Hall, the former Shoreditch Magistrates' Court is now a luxury boutique hotel, having previously lain empty for no less than twenty-seven years – a complete waste of a public asset!



*Figure 8: Hackney's first directly-elected Mayor Jules Pipe hands over the Town Hall master keys to Karina van der Merwe, Chair of Shoreditch Town Hall Trust, 2002.*

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### **Further Reading:**

Benita Jones, 'Civic Pride, political prejudice', *Journal of the London Society*, 2002, pp.14-49.

Chris Miele, 'Shoreditch Town Hall', *Hackney History*, 4, 1998, pp. 29-38.

Justin More, 'Shoreditch Local Government, the Infrastructure of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Shoreditch', *Hackney History*, 21, 2021, pp. 25-34.

Joanna Smith, 'Shoreditch Town Hall', in Lisa Rigg, ed., *Hackney: Modern, Restored, Forgotten, Ignored*, The Hackney Society, 2013.

*Also*

*More Light, More Power: 150 Years of Shoreditch Town Hall.* This is a history of the building published by the Trust and told largely through excellently-chosen pictures. It is available at the Town Hall.

# 5

## The Saving of Mapledene

*Laurie Elks*

On 29 August 1972 a public inspector, Donald Kearsley, recommended to Peter Walker, Secretary of State for the Environment, that Compulsory Purchase Orders [CPO] sought by Hackney Council for the Mapledene Area be not granted, the Inspector's decision being adopted by the Minister in the following year. It was a wholly unexpected decision – at any rate to Hackney Council – and which had significant consequences for the future course of development of Hackney, arguably continuing to the present day.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Policy Context: Housing development in London after the Second World War**

By the end of World War Two, London's housing stock was in poor shape. The pre-war programme of slum clearance had been abruptly suspended by the war; large areas had been destroyed or made uninhabitable by enemy action and shortage of materials (persisting after the war) hampered building programmes. Through the fifties and sixties, there was bipartisan agreement that the replacement of unfit houses should be given priority. 'Unfit' was a statutory term with a

precise definition, but alongside unfit housing was a stock of ageing Victorian housing; much of it tenanted, multi-occupied, overcrowded and neglected. 'Housing gain' was the mantra; alongside the unfit housing the old Victorian houses and gardens, wasteful of space, would be replaced with council estates providing all expected modern amenities plus a considerable gain in habitable rooms per acre: this was comprehensive development. Most housing schemes incorporated both unfit and fit housing – the legal routes were significantly different but compulsory purchase orders were made conjointly.

By the 1960s, it was most certainly not 'job done'; London still had large swathes of run-down overcrowded rented housing, a state of affairs vividly described in the Milner Holland Report published in 1965. There was a large shortfall of available housing leading to long and growing waiting lists. Harold Wilson, elected in 1964, made housing one of the main election issues and pledged to raise housing starts to 400,000 per year.

The Metropolitan Boroughs of Shoreditch, Hackney and Stoke Newington, which were to be merged in 1965<sup>2</sup> to form the present borough of Hackney,

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Sheila Greenwood, Ken Worpole, Roger Mears, Julian Harrap and Gayne Wells for their personal recollections. I am also grateful to Gayne Wells who provided me with papers preserved from the two public inquiries referred to in this article which will be deposited with Hackney Archives.

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<sup>2</sup> In the case of Shoreditch – part only.

were all Labour-run and enthusiastic municipalisers.<sup>3</sup> The first elections gave Labour a clean sweep and Councillors lost no time in adopting a housing programme for the new Borough. The target was set at 700 starts for the first year (1965/6) rising in steps to 1,200 units per year for the period 1969-75. It was a perfectly reasonable target given the scale of the problem.

Mapledene, broadly an area between Queensbridge Road and Lansdowne Drive beside London Fields, was on the list of areas to be redeveloped, period. Following the Council's normal practice at the time, officers were instructed to negotiate the purchase of properties available for sale; there was no shortage of willing sellers from landlords of rent-controlled properties for whom a negotiated sale probably offered a better prospect than statutory compensation in due course.

Adjacent to Mapledene – across Queensbridge Road – the Holly Street area was approved for compulsory purchase in 1966. Contracts were placed for building four 21-storey system-built blocks with an adjacent low-rise development of four floors built to a zigzag pattern – 'snake blocks' as they soon became known. The snake blocks, built with the flimsiest of doors and walls almost instantaneously acquired an evil reputation with householders cowering in terror of burglars and teenage gangs.<sup>4</sup> Holly Street was understood by everyone to provide the template that Mapledene, if redeveloped, would follow.

The process of comprehensive development was like an engine which needed constant feeding to keep running. Clearance areas had to be approved by legal process including a public inquiry, the area decanted, and unfurnished tenants had to be provided with Council housing.<sup>5</sup> An army of council officials kept this system well-oiled and the public inquiry procedure was seen by officers (and in practice was) a box-ticking exercise rather than an obstacle.



Figure 1: Holly Street Estate – the 'snake blocks'.

### 1968 The Conservatives Take Power

In May 1968 the unthinkable<sup>6</sup> happened: Conservatives took control of most of the Labour bastions of Inner London, including – most improbably of all – Hackney. It was a verdict not on the local Council but on Harold Wilson's wildly unpopular government following devaluation of the pound.

The inexperienced – and startled – Conservatives needed time to get their tackle in order. Initially the development programme proceeded as before, including placing contracts for Holly Street and Clapton Park estates, whilst in Mapledene the practice of purchasing available properties continued. A new policy was eventually proposed at the Council meeting in June 1969. A new housing target was set of 2,000 houses per year but only 30%, 600, to be provided by the Council; the balance by private developers, housing associations and co-ownership. Priority should be given to removal of slum properties and a resolution proposed that the Council would pay particular regard *to the need to preserve and improve all existing housing which can be brought to a reasonable standard of modern living and maintained to this standard.*

Labour put up a counter resolution reaffirming the Council's priority *to make provision for the building of housing in the Borough so as to expedite the rehousing of all families on the waiting list and to accelerate the former Labour Council's Housing development programme undertaking a long-term programme of property acquisition for that purpose.*

3 See John Finn, '1967 The Birth of the Hackney Society' in *Hackney: Portrait of a Community, Hackney Society, 2017.*

4 See Patrick Hammill: '2005 The Comprehensive Estates Initiative' in *Hackney, Portrait of a Community.*

5 Furnished tenants were excluded and owner occupiers given compensation but invariably insufficient to buy equivalent replacement housing locally.

6 This was the word chosen by the Conservative councillor, Christopher Sills: '1968 The Conservatives take Power' in *Hackney: Portrait of a Community.*

The Conservatives' motion was carried. Mapledene was taken off the clearance programme which henceforth did not show up in local searches, a fact which was to confuse Ernie and Sheila Greenwood, whom we shall meet shortly, as well as others buying in the area.

### Wider Developments

To some extent Hackney's Conservatives were in tune with emerging thinking of the Labour Government in Whitehall, represented in the White Paper, *Old Houses into New Homes*, published in April 1968. This estimated that there were 700,000 remaining unfit houses (after earlier clearance schemes) and priority should be given to clearing those remaining. To enable old houses which were not unfit to be brought up to standard, local authorities should have the power (but not the duty) to declare *General Improvement Areas* (GIAs) and there should be substantial grants available for improvement of properties. The White Paper was substantially translated into law by the Housing Act 1969 which came into force in August of the year.



Figure 2: A policy of gradual renewal.  
Photo, Ernie Greenwood

The Conservatives in the time remaining to them just before losing power in May 1971 declared three GIAs including, most contentiously, De Beauvoir South. Labour was to rescind the De Beauvoir South GIA leading to a ferociously-contested public inquiry: but that is a knotted tale which has been described elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> Mapledene, whilst off the clearance list, was not proposed for a GIA, but a firm of consultants, William Ryder and Associates, was briefed to prepare a report on the area.

<sup>7</sup> Stuart Weir, '1972 Stopping the Bulldozers, De Beauvoir is saved' in *Hackney: Portrait of a Community*.

### As You Were: Labour takes back Control

Life returned to normal at the election on 13 May 1971 when Labour regained every single seat from the Conservatives, in another clean sweep.<sup>8</sup> The new administration hastened to get its housing programme back on track. On the day following the election Martin Ottalangi, the Labour leader, announced: *This very day we have given instructions that all sales and leases of Council houses must cease and work on extension of GIAs be suspended,*<sup>9</sup> a position confirmed at the Council meeting on 3 June.

### Mapledene is back on 'The List'

Mapledene was singled out for priority and the Council rushed out the Ryder report before the month of May was out.<sup>10</sup> Ryder's primary methodology for assessing the condition of houses was external inspection from street view. A team of trainee public inspectors was tasked to knock on doors with a questionnaire to supplement this information as best they could.

Ernie and Sheila Greenwood had purchased a house in Lenthall Road in March and knew nothing of what was planned. In an interview Sheila described how she first became aware of what was afoot:

*Not long after we moved in, two young people called with clipboards, saying they were doing a survey for the Council about housing ownership. I asked 'what's this about' and they didn't (possibly couldn't – they were only kids) really explain. They mentioned something about CPOs and rehousing but said it was nothing to worry about.*

Sheila was not reassured by this reply:

*I was sufficiently disturbed by what I had heard that I wrote my concerns on my children's blackboard, put it up outside in the road and invited neighbours to come and discuss. Two or three people came and we talked in the kitchen, then more people in the street became involved. That was the genesis of what became the Mapledene Residents' Association [MRA].*

<sup>8</sup> The system of unelected alderman existing at the time, however, gave the Conservatives five (very vocal) members on the Council.

<sup>9</sup> Two GIAs – Albion Square, and De Beauvoir Central (incorporating De Beauvoir Square) – were left in place.

<sup>10</sup> The report has been preserved in the minute book of the Housing Development Committee. HA: LBH/HD/1

Sheila's husband Ernie was to become the MRA's chairman and remained so during the two public enquiries which followed. As his character and leadership were to prove so important, it will be helpful to add more about him before going further.<sup>11</sup>



Figure 3: Ernie Greenwood

Ernie was a Londoner, born in Wood Green, obviously and proudly working class.

After serving, at the end of the war he trained as a plumber and claimed that he always kept his tools clean in case he ever needed to return to the trade. He became a Communist early and was uninterested in the politics of the ruling Labour party who were – as Sheila put it – *always at each other's throats*. Teaching himself photography, he served first as a volunteer photographic journalist for the CP's daily newspaper, *The Daily Worker* (subsequently *Morning Star*) later becoming head of art and father of the branch of the NUJ chapel. He was politically active with a small 'p' and his job left him with time in hand to become involved in community politics. He and Sheila were instantly drawn to the new community centre, Centerprise, which had recently opened nearby in Dalston Lane. Sheila served as company secretary for many years whilst Ernie organised photographic exhibitions and a regular leader of Centerprise children's camping trips. Ken Worpole recalls:

*He was a very amiable, and more than competent camper and practical helper an extremely reliable person to have around in a crisis – bad weather, difficult terrain, knocking up a meal in the rain.*

A large – borderline huge – genial man, he could not have been more different from the well-heeled types opposing demolition in Barnsbury and difficult for the politicians of Hackney, with their somewhat one-dimensional view of the working class – to understand.

## The Ryder Report

Ryder was tasked to report on the area between Queensbridge Road and London Fields then known as Mapledene<sup>12</sup> which had been envisaged back in 1965 for redevelopment. The same firm had been commissioned to survey De Beauvoir South. The question was effectively the same – were CPOs justified or could the area be economically improved? The Housing Act, the availability of Improvement Grants and the growing appreciation of Victorian housing clearly meant that the case for comprehensive development – and housing gain – was becoming more finely-balanced.

Ryder's methodology was to divide the development area into 11 zones, assessing whether houses in each zone were in 'good', 'fairly good', 'poor' or 'very poor' condition, and whether they possessed or lacked internal amenities. (Houses with basements – including semi-basements – were frowned upon and marked down for survey purposes.) Their report concluded:

*The area is in a state of obsolescence and a high percentage of the houses have reached or are approaching the end of their useful life ... that some parts of the area are in a better state than others ... [and that] where a high percentage of houses are in a poor structural condition and are lacking modern amenities, it may be better to demolish all the houses in the area rather than prejudice a satisfactory redevelopment by attempting to preserve houses which are in a better condition.*

Taking this approach, Ryder proposed Areas 1 to 5 and 11, as shown in *Figure 4*, for redevelopment whilst areas 6 to 10 were recommended to be scheduled as a GIA.

## A put-up job?

Was this division into redeemable and irredeemable zones a genuine distinction or a put-up job? Sheila Greenwood believes it was a question of phasing and convenience. The Council could digest the development area and pick off the remainder in due course. Roger Mears, who moved to Middleton Road in the midst of this battle, thought it was simply an attempt to divide the community.

11 What follows is based on Sheila's description, his obituary in the *Morning Star*; <https://grahamstevenson.me.uk/2009/10/15/greenwood-ernie/> and personal recollection.

12 Now – obviously 'London Fields'.

There were important reasons for being sceptical:

First, the redevelopment zones were all contiguous both with one another and with the Holly Street development across Queensbridge Road which was nearing completion. This was clearly extremely helpful if the Council were planning to send in the bulldozers and redevelop.

Second, the redevelopment area included the largest gardens including the so-called 'backlands'. These were the hatched areas in the plan in Areas 2 and 5 which, due to a quirk of the early Victorian estate development, had no determined ownership and were used and enjoyed as shared open space. And larger gardens naturally implied significantly greater housing gain.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, the Council was to concede at the subsequent Public Inquiry that (as was apparent to people living locally) there was no real difference between the conditions of the housing stock in the different zones.

The Council's subsequent actions also colour a sceptical interpretation of what was afoot. Consistent with the Ryder report and, *taking account of the need to alleviate the uncertainty which has arisen*, the Chief

Executive proposed to the Housing Development Committee (September 1971) that Zones 6-10 [Fig. 4] should be declared as a GIA, *implementation to take place when staffing is available*. The matter was deferred to the meeting in January 1972 when Councillors took a different course. Declining the suggestion of a GIA they resolved that this 'Mapledene Part II area' be regarded as a reserved area and to declare that their policy will be to intervene actively to ensure the improvement of properties in the area by purchase or otherwise after a period of twelve months, should this action be found to be necessary.

These rather ominous words were predicated on a deep scepticism that landlords and owner occupiers would actually take up the challenge of renewing this obsolescent housing. The report to the Committee suggested:

*Your committee would not be content for the area to continue for an indefinite period in its present rather run-down condition [and] ... recommends to the Council that they will ... exercise the powers conferred upon them ... if the opportunity now given is not taken by owners and occupiers.*

Far from 'alleviating uncertainty' this encouraged owners in the 'Reserved Area' that the axe was still

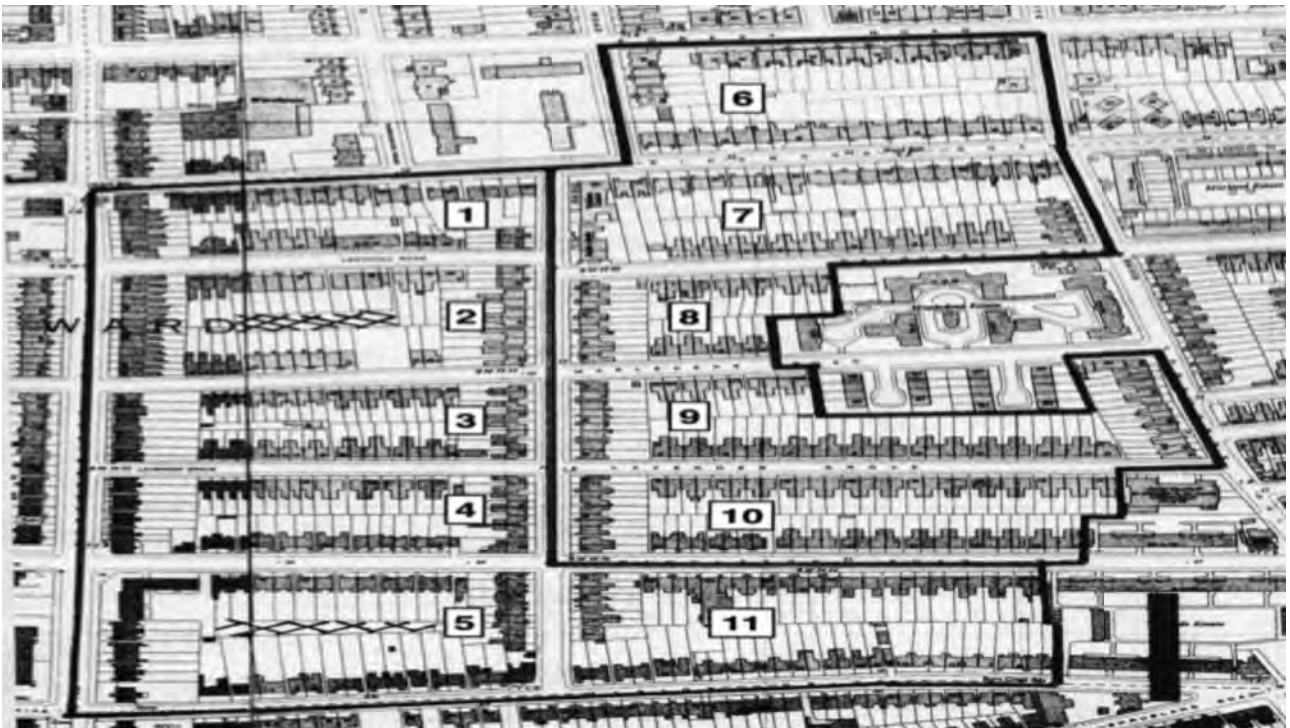


Figure 4: The Ryder proposals.



suspended over their heads and that the Council remained poised to take over in due course. What would actually have taken place remains moot in view of the outcome of the Public Inquiry which followed.

What is beyond doubt is that the Councillors and were in a rush to get the housing development programme back on track. A report to the Housing Development Committee on 28 July 1971 stated that the Council wanted to get the Mapledene properties in the housing development starts for 1973. To this end, Council officers would seek the assistance of officials at the Department of Environment to fast-track the timetabling of the Public Inquiry required to approve necessary compulsory purchase orders. It was later announced the Public Inquiry would take place at Hackney Town Hall in May 1972. Mr Hance who gave evidence for the Council was later to tell the Public Inquiry that he could not vouch for the thoroughness of the Ryder survey and did not seek to do so.

### **The Mapledene Residents Prepare**

The MRA was launched in July 1971 as local residents digested the implications of the Ryder report. It had three tasks in hand:

*Firstly, to gather support.* By the Inquiry there were 203 individual members. This was plainly a minority of the total population (Ryder estimated a total of 857 households) but is perhaps more impressive that it sounds given the fatalistic mood music prevailing at the time to the effect that the Council's will was irresistible. It is a subjective view but the fact that Ernie was a Londoner who looked and sounded and thought like the neighbours around him must have been a factor in attracting support.

*Secondly, to raise funds.* Ernie was to tell the Inquiry that £3,000 (£60,000 or more at current prices) had been spent and Sheila has confirmed that all of this was raised within the community, an impressive achievement.

*Thirdly, to get best advice.* The MRA defined its objective to defeat the Orders and have the entire area declared a GIA. They went to Area Improvement and Development (AID) a Cardiff-based practice with a speciality of making the case for GIAs and Roger Mears, an architect, considered that they did an excellent job. Later, Counsel to represent the MRA

had to be instructed and paid for. It is clear from the Inspector's subsequent report that Mr Forbes did an excellent job and consistently got the better of the Council in argument.

There was also the question of trying to change minds within the Council. Sheila and Ernie contacted Gerry Ross, a firmly old-school Councillor who represented Queensbridge Ward. Sheila described his response:

*He thought we were completely wrong in wanting the houses to be conserved – he said 'round here, if you stand in the middle of the road and blow, the houses will fall down.' His view was that we want decent housing for the working class and that conservation was completely contrary to socialist policy. I think he admonished Ernie for supporting the CP.*

Gerry was willing, however, to introduce a deputation to the Council to press their lost cause. MRA members crowded into the Council Chamber. The Conservative Chris Sills who was present said: *It was the largest number of people I have ever seen at a Council meeting.*<sup>13</sup> The newcomer Ernie wisely stayed in the background and proposed Stan Martin to lead the deputation. Stan's parents had moved to their present house in Mapledene in 1904. He had lived there all his life, purchased the house when the opportunity arose in 1953 and made many improvements. He considered that *the quality of our area makes it an asset to Hackney.* If the Council wanted to depict the objectors as unrepresentative of the Community, the MRA was going to make it difficult.

No minds were changed at the meeting. According to the *Hackney Gazette* Steve Scott, a prominent member of the Council, called out asking what proportion of the residents MRA represented, to which the Council leader, Martin Ottalangui replied: 20%. Councillor Bertie Cohen said that if there were a GIA, *in five or ten years the houses in a GIA would deteriorate into slums.* The MRA got the message: it was the Inspector appointed to chair the Public Inquiry whom they would need to convince.

### **The AID Report**

The AID report was completed in April 1972, just in time for the Inquiry. Although compiled in some haste it was a manifestly superior piece of work to

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<sup>13</sup> *Hackney Gazette*, October 5 1971.

the Ryder report. It contained a far more penetrating questionnaire than the Council's study and, unlike Ryder, asked people what they actually wanted. And it was supported by a detailed survey of a sample of properties. The strength of the Report's recommendations was increased by the clear and unpolemical style in which it was written. The report was illustrated by penetrating photographs taken by Ernie Greenwood together with captions contrasting the obvious merits of Mapledene as a place to live and grow with the emerging horrors of the nearby Holly Street Estate. Reading the report reminds us of the very different state of older housing fifty years ago. Only 66% of households enjoyed running hot water; 69% exclusive use of a WC, 60% use of a bathroom – all of which figures would have risen to 100% if there were redevelopment. The issue was not whether the housing was all satisfactory in its present state but whether it could be economically remedied by improvement.

AID's assessment of the fabric of houses was that 86% were overall 'good' or 'reasonable'. Although not spelt out in the report, it was known that the houses were built in the early Victorian period by the Rhodes Estate for middle-class occupiers. It was not cheaply-built slum housing – although some Hackney Councillors of the time perhaps had difficulty grasping the distinction.

The AID report came to other important findings:

- Mapledene was a stable and settled community: 37% of respondents had lived in Mapledene for more than 21 years and 67% had wider family ties within Hackney.
- 95% had access to gardens which were greatly valued, a point reinforced by the well-maintained state of the gardens and dividing garden walls.
- The improvements most desired were installation of bathrooms, improved kitchens and WCs and (at a time when few houses enjoyed central heating) better damp proofing.
- Only 22% of respondents desired being rehoused to a Council.

The last point requires amplification. The nearby Holly Street Estate was close to completion and the AID report made reference (in measured terms) to the emerging horrors of the 'snake blocks'. Sentiment

of aspiring people was beginning to move against Council housing and with reason. In a *vox pop* conducted by the *Hackney Gazette* at the start of the Inquiry one man said: *I'd rather be six feet under than live in one of them*, 'them' being the flats in the new Holly Street estate.



Figure 5: Corner of Mapledene Road and Malvern Road. Photo, Ernie Greenwood.



Figure 6: Unoccupied house owned by the Council, Queensbridge Road and Albion Road. Photo, Ernie Greenwood.

### The Inquiry

Hackney Council was not moved by the AID report to rescind the compulsory purchase orders and nobody expected that they would be. So the future of Mapledene rested on the view taken by the Government-appointed inspector. The inquiry opened on 4 May. Before the Inspector there were four letters of support and 103 in objection. Many of the objectors were to give evidence in person.

Looking at the evidence now it is easy to say that the objectors had the better arguments but that is to overlook the period context. The Council had a rolling programme of development and public enquiries such as this were a routine step. Many

enquiries went through with minimal opposition: for instance, an order to demolish 337 properties around Broadway Market which went through a Public Inquiry at this time without demur. And in the inquiry for the Barbould Road area, where there were very similar arguments, the Inspector found against the objectors on nearly every point. No one doubted that the objectors faced an uphill task persuading the Inspector of their case.

Mr Hance, Assistant Borough planning officer, giving evidence for the Council had to make a number of concessions: the housing gain numbers were simply wrong; local people had been confused by changes of local politics; the housing stock was in better condition than in De Beauvoir South where a GIA had been declared. Most damagingly, he conceded that there had been insufficient staff committed to even consider the issue of a GIA: *If I had the staff I wanted I would be able to get round the area and find the likely response to it being made a GIA.* It was not a good look.

The Council's case rested on two principal arguments:

*Firstly*, housing gain was at the core of its case. There were 8,225 eligible applicants on the waiting list of whom two-thirds were assessed as in urgent need of rehousing and the list was increasing at an average of 50 per month. There were 1200 people living in the development area and redevelopment would provide 3177 habitable rooms with an assumed population of 0.9 persons per habitable room. Making land available for this purpose depended upon the Orders being confirmed.

*Secondly*, the Ryder report was sound and could be relied upon. The consultant had spent time making himself familiar with the area, visual inspection being supplemented by survey results. Ryder had concluded that the area covered by his study was overall in a *state of obsolescence* whilst carefully carrying a zone-by-zone analysis as described above. It was better to demolish where most houses were in poor structural condition and/or lacking amenities. There were other arguments, for instance the elimination of rat-running through traffic, but that was the core of the case.

As to housing gain, the Council got into unnecessary difficulty through carelessness – or perhaps arrogance. The assumed density of 136 persons per acre in a redeveloped scheme was undermined by the fact that the Council had recently adopted a resolution taking

100 persons per acre as the norm. This change reflected the fact that, since Labour had previously held power in Hackney, sentiment had moved against high rise following the Ronan Point disaster in 1968. There were other difficulties too, with the Council's calculations. The Council brazenly applied, unsuccessfully, to amend their figures at the close of the Inquiry after all the evidence had been heard. Suffice it to say that their figures for housing gain were considerably overstated and that affected the balance of the arguments. As to the Ryder report, the Inspector drily noted that no one associated with the survey had been tendered by the Council to give evidence.

### **The MRA's case was:**

- AID were acting on GIAs for many local authorities. Their Report was suitable as the basis for a decision to create a GIA. No decision should be made until the case for a GIA had been properly considered.
- By Ministry circular 65/69 issued in the wake of the Housing Act, local authorities considering GIAs were encouraged to consult local communities. Although the MRA wished to co-operate, Hackney had responded to it with some hostility.
- Mapledene had been developed as an entity and the zonal approach was inappropriate.
- Central government was actively promoting improvement with national advertising campaigns which were carried the *Hackney Gazette* [Fig.7]. It was extraordinary that council should have made the order without properly evaluating the possibility of improvement.
- Modern thinking about redevelopment was to avoid breaking up settled communities.
- The Council's figures for housing gain were overstated and in any event the resolution of the waiting list problem had to be considered in the light of the continuing decline of Hackney's population.
- Submissions were made about space, privacy and garden space and about all the emerging social problems on the Holly Street Estate.
- Ryder had been rushed and the Council's analysis was shallow.
- The Council's calculation of the maximum economic spend on renovation was based upon

unsupported assumptions about the useful life of an improved dwelling.

On the last point, the Inspector summarised the argument, somewhat bizarrely to the modern reader, as to whether restored houses on Mapledene should have an assumed 20-year or 40-year useful life! The proposition that Victorian houses in Hackney could become fabulously valuable real estate, conserved and curated to last forever, was far from the minds of either side.

There were some elements of what is now called nimbyism in the MRA's arguments and it was indisputable that the waiting-list issue could not be argued away. But it was on the whole an impressive and principled case.

Reading the Inspector's summary of the arguments of individual objectors feels like a window into community life at the time. No doubt it was the well-set and contented who were most keen to see things stay as they were and who gave evidence. The voices of those living in overcrowded conditions without modern amenities have not come down to us. However, the voices heard by the Inspector were clearly authentic views of the community and not those of self-interested carpetbaggers. A few examples follow:

- Mr Baker had lived in the Dalston all his life and in his present house since 1937. He had become a JP in 1945 and had taken pride in serving the Borough voluntarily.
- Mr Hitchins was a professional sculptor and dancer. Having improved the premises he was now able to concentrate on his creative work as an artist.
- Mr Haines had sunk life savings into buying his house in 1956 having been on the Council waiting list. He ran a cycle speedway club and all the members were 'local lads'.
- Miss Remington had lived with her two sisters in the house, bought by her father, all their lives.



Figure 7: The national advertising campaign

- Mr Gray lived with his 90-year-old mother-in-law in the house which he had bought in 1939. His great interest was his garden where he grew exhibition-class chrysanthemums.
- Mrs Shorey had been an active member of church for 45 years. Rehousing would deprive her of the fellowship of the church.
- Mrs Swainsbury had lived in Middleton Road since 1940 and was an active member of local church: thoughts of being forced to live in such an atrocity as Holly Street were frightening.

There were many more of the same and there were also objections from two housing associations, New Islington and Hackney (NIH) and Second Octel: each had converted a Mapledene house to modern flats with the help of available housing finance. Both argued that Mapledene's houses were capable of economic modernisation. NIH had their own waiting list and said they were ready to work constructively with the Council but that the Council had ridden roughshod over them.

Whilst the area was overwhelmingly residential, Roger Mears particularly recalls the impact made by a business objector, Mr Sindall, owner of A Sindall, a long-established business in Middleton Road.

Sindalls were internationally-renowned suppliers of ropes and tassels, supplying theatres and embassies throughout the world. Mr Sindall said that the Council had been unable to identify premises locally where the business (requiring spacious premises for a ropewalk) could operate. He told the Inspector that if relocated out of London, he would lose his skilled staff and the business would fail. He showed samples to the inspector. Collateral damage indeed.



Figure 8: A Sindall tassel in the V&A Collection T.170-1981

Whitbread and Charringtons, owners of the two local pubs, said that they had been ignored and that their premises should be excluded from the CPO. Counsel for Hackney responded vaguely, and not wholly reassuringly, that the redevelopment scheme would include pubs.

And finally there was the infant Hackney Society contesting their first Public Inquiry (and many more were to follow). It said that Mapledene exemplified *the best town planning of the early Victorian period* and that the CPO would destroy a charming area which should be declared a Conservation Area. *Lack of staff was a poor excuse for not investigating the possibility of a GIA.*

### Unfit Housing

The Inspector's remit included the houses within the CPO area deemed unfit having been duly condemned by Hackney's Medical Officer of Health [MOH]. These included some impressive villas in Queensbridge Road and Mapledene Road shown with dark shading in the Ryder plan above [Fig. 4]. By way of example the MOH stated that 53-9 Mapledene Road *must be regarded as unfit for human habitation and incapable of proper maintenance and repair.* All of the houses classified as unfit were to be repaired by the Inspector and remain standing today. By a nice stroke of irony, 53-59 Mapledene Road were to be placed on the Statutory List by English Heritage in 1975, number 59 being purchased by an ambitious young couple called Tony and Cherie Blair, the first rung on the ladder that was to lead to Downing Street.



*Figure 9: 53-9 Mapledene Road, as illustrated in the statutory listing particulars.*

### The Verdict

The Inspector came down lock stock and barrel against the Council and recommended to the Minister that all the orders sought by Hackney Council be not confirmed – a recommendation accepted by the Minister a few months later.

He considered that there was a spurious precision about the Council's assessment of the condition of the houses and considered that many of the deficiencies he saw were simply a matter of neglect of routine maintenance. More generally he held: *I do not accept that a high percentage of the houses in the development area have reached or are approaching the end of their useful life.* And he differed from the Council's generalised horror of basements.

He concurred with the MRA that Mapledene should be regarded as a whole, agreeing with the assessment of the Hackney Society, and he strongly suspected that Ryder's zone by zone analysis had been tainted by the brief given to them. More generally he said: *I am far from convinced that the difference in condition of the houses in the redevelopment area and of those in the reserved area is so emphatic as to justify such a drastic difference in treatment.*

He considered that the individual representations evidenced a settled community which fostered the desire to contribute to community life which would be disrupted by upheaval and dispersal. As to restoration and conversion he noted with approval the evidence of the Housing Association objectors; believed that renewal had been given insufficient consideration by Hackney Council; and considered that the costs of conversion would be economic adopting his own assumption of a 40-year life span – an assessment which of course has proved to be a gross underestimate. Further, he agreed with the case for a GIA. He noted that Government guidance enjoined Councils to consult local residents in considering such matters, noting that the Council's witness had pleaded lack of staff and time as reason for not doing so. He reserved his strongest words for the Ryder Report:

*What I find particularly astonishing is ... where the planning consultant defines one of the objectives of his study as being to 'assess the needs of the residents' ... he freely admitted that despite this defined objective he did not consider it necessary to have any contact with the residents.*

And he found the Council's assessment of housing gain erroneous.

The Inspector's verdict 'Mapledene 1' was described by Mr Pryde, the Inspector in his report at the conclusion of the 'Mapledene 2' Inquiry, as *a total shock to both councillors and council officials in Hackney.*

### What Changed?

In any historical discussion, the section headed 'consequences' is often the most problematical. There is always the question of untangling the course of history as it has occurred from the counterfactual, and definite conclusions are often hard to come by.

Certainly, the Council lost two high-profile public enquiries in short order in 1972: the Mapledene Inquiry and the Inquiry into the rescinding of the De Beauvoir South GIA. There were important parallels. Both resulted from the Council's desire to follow on completed estates, De Beauvoir and Holly Street, by demolishing and redeveloping contiguous areas. Both affected early housing estates which preceded the main development of Hackney in the mid-Victorian period. Both involved Residents' Associations led by canny incomers with an understanding of organising local communities. Both highlighted the value of the Victorian streets and their communities which the Council wanted to sweep away.

Whether minds were changed amongst Hackney Councillors is doubtful. Interviewed in 1975 about these two setbacks, Alderman Dunning (after whom an estate in Clapton is named) probably represented the majority view in saying: *As far as I'm concerned these organisations are set up for the protection of the area for the valuation of their properties.*<sup>14</sup>

It was a remark justified in the case of Barnsbury rather than Mapledene but it is doubtful whether Councillors grasped the distinction. There was undoubtedly a visceral distrust of middle-class infiltration, a spread of the Islington infection, into either the Borough or the Labour Party<sup>15</sup> and Residents' Associations (unlike the mostly docile Tenants' Associations on Council Estates) were readily associated by Councillors with the dreaded middle class.

In a PhD thesis discussing Labour's housing policy in five inner London Boroughs – including Hackney – Michael Passmore has written:

*As a Labour-supporting author put it when reviewing the party's performance in the 1960s, 'Labour politicians were subject to great waves of prejudice when certain words were mentioned: "landlord" was one of these words, "council-house" another. Landlords were bad, council*

*houses were good.'*<sup>16</sup> *Old-school Labour councillors often appeared entrenched in the view that redevelopment of run-down Victorian terraces with new council housing was the only solution to providing decent rented accommodation.*<sup>17</sup>

The Mapledene Inquiry showed that things would necessarily be slightly different in future. The Council's insouciant attitude to local residents in Mapledene was typical of the period. Whilst exhortations in Government circulars to consult had no obvious effect, the brute fact of losing these two enquiries compelled officers to acknowledge that local feelings had to be considered.

Certainly, Hackney's housing starts were set back in the short term by Mapledene being knocked out of its programme: programmed starts declined from 1032 in 1972 to 432 in 1975. This was because the Council, expecting success at the Mapledene Inquiry, had no immediate Plan B to get its programme back on track. But it has been suggested that the fall-off in housing starts was also influenced by Hackney's 'decreasing confidence' that it could manage the CPO process.<sup>18</sup> It would be unrealistic to trace any statistical effect beyond about 1975 because there were so many wider national factors affecting housing starts.

Quite apart from the somewhat dry question of housing starts, there is the wider and inchoate question of *zeitgeist*. Ernie and Sheila Greenwood's Communist friend Joyce Alexander (whom some readers will remember as the owner of Arkady Books in Wilton Way) considered that the Mapledene Inquiry set Hackney inexorably on the path to gentrification. Certainly in Mapledene itself the lifting of the CPO accelerated the arrival of middle-class incomers, including the Blairs. By the time there was a second public inquiry in Mapledene in 1977 there were more middle-class newcomers in the vanguard of resistance who also knew how to organise press coverage in *Private Eye* and the *Sunday Times* to promote their point of view.

14 Quoted in Robert Park: *Housing development in Inner London: a case study of Hackney*, a thesis presented for M.Phil degree, University of London, June 1975.

15 Writing this article has brought back to mind that in 1974 or 75, as a resident of Queensbridge Ward, I made enquiries about joining the local Labour Party and was effectively repulsed by one of the sitting local councillors.

16 Brian Lapping, *The Labour Government 1964–70*, Harmondsworth, 1970, p. 171.

17 Michael Passmore, 'The responses of Labour-controlled London local authorities to major changes in housing policy, 1971-1983' (unpublished PhD thesis, King's College London, 2015).

18 Robert Park, *op. cit.*

But there is considerable historical compression in Joyce Alexander's tale. De Beauvoir apart, there was little gentrification in Hackney in the 1970s and some of today's most fashionable areas – in Stoke Newington in particular – continued to decline through the 1970s. It's complicated!

### 'We saved the Houses'

Stuart Weir, who performed a somewhat similar organising role to Ernie in De Beauvoir, has written:

*De Beauvoir has now become a predominantly middle-class jewel of gentrification ... The point of our campaign had been to save the community as well as the houses and environment of De Beauvoir. We saved the fabric of De Beauvoir, but have ultimately lost the community we had.*<sup>19</sup>

Does that go for Mapledene? The answer must be 'well, yes'. The most recent house sale in Lenthall Road recorded in Rightmove went for £2.1 million and it would be inconceivable that a couple like Ernie and Sheila could move in today. The voices heard at the Public Inquiry have gone – as has the Sindall's tassel-making business. Ropewalk Mews now stands in its place. And Gayhurst School which serves Mapledene is one of the most sought-after in Hackney, its teachers sometimes persecuted by parents wishing to have their talented children pushed harder.

But to leave the judgement at that, *simpliciter*, would be churlish. The Mapledene Inquiry, by lifting the blight which had sat on the area, alerted newcomers who were drawn by the attractions of living in Hackney, bought their houses for modest sums and tackled the backlog of repairs. Many have contributed to the life of the community and many remain. But they were not – and could not be – the community that existed before. What unquestionably has been preserved is a beautiful, peaceful and well-tended estate of early Victorian housing with owners who understand and care for their properties. It is hard to see how the physical fabric of Mapledene will not now last.

### The Mapledene 2 Backlands Inquiry

The Inquiry described in this article was subsequently to be described as 'Mapledene 1' since a second Public Inquiry affecting Mapledene was to follow in 1977.

Balked of the desired comprehensive development, councillors continued to eye covetously the un-owned Backlands and the lengthy back gardens abutting them.<sup>20</sup> The housing gain was comparatively trivial but it represented (from the Council's perspective) the possibility of salvaging some housing gain as well as – in the view of many locals – a form of revenge (a dish always best served cold) on the recalcitrant residents.

The Backlands were hugely valued by local people as free and shared open space. As already noted, there were now more middle-class people to give voice to community concerns. Two leading opponents were the conservation architect Julian Harrap, and Gayne Wells who was for many years secretary of the London Society. It was a community somewhat in transition but still pulling together, with Ernie, as chair of the MRA leading the community, in opposing the orders, fighting along with the newly-formed Backlands Action Group. The Mapledene 2 Public Inquiry was to continue for five days over November and December 1977.

Alongside these newer residents Julian and Gayne, in an interview for this article, particularly recalled the impact of the evidence of Mr Benjamin, who had lived in Albion Drive since 1929. An opinionated trade union branch secretary and member of the Circle Friendly Society, he spoke passionately about the orchard he had nurtured over half a century and the indignity of being put to a second public Inquiry. Such clearly 'authentic' local characters, they considered, had helped to swing the Inspector's verdict.

The Inspector, Donald Pryde, summed up thus:

*The main issue ... is whether the need for more land to meet the housing demand is so great that it is essential to use two areas of back land ... to help meet the need, when development of the land produces only a comparatively small gain, but its effect upon the surroundings is damaging and almost everyone in the immediate locality opposes such a use of the land.*

The Inspector was not persuaded of the case and the Backlands have not been built upon to this day. And aside from the somewhat vexed issue of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, Hackney Council has more or less left Mapledene to its own devices since then.

<sup>19</sup> '1972 Stopping the Bulldozers. De Beauvoir is saved' in *Hackney: Portrait of a Community*.

<sup>20</sup> See *fig. 4* with cross-hatching in areas 2 and 5.