

The Hackney Terrier

The Friends of Hackney Archives Newsletter

105



Winter 2019



In this issue:

Layers of London Live – Hackney's history is now accessible to the world online through the Layers of London website.

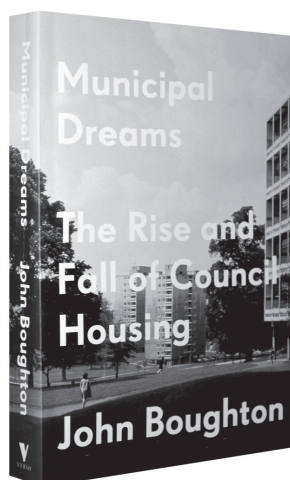
New Books – *We Fight Fascists*, by Daniel Sonabend. *With Hope, Farwell* by Alexander Baron.

Housing

We also highlight John Boughton's book on social housing – *Municipal Dreams*.

Children starve at Christmas

In a Dickensian spirit we bring you a terrible story of neglect of the poor in mid-19th century London, despite a workhouse system that was notionally in place to relieve suffering.



Municipal Dreams

The FoHA AGM, 28th November, was followed by a talk on **Council Housing in Hackney after the Second World War** by John Boughton.

John is a social historian, author of *Municipal Dreams: the Rise and Fall of Council Housing: A narrative history of council housing – from slums to the Grenfell Tower* Verso 2019; and blogger: Municipal Dreams – <https://municipaldreams.wordpress.com/>

His blog <https://municipaldreams.wordpress.com/2016/03/08/hackney/> describes the ways Hackney Metropolitan Borough addressed the needs for housing after the Second World War, looking briefly at pre-war provision of blocks of flats. The ideal of only building to three storeys, and to modern 'Scandinavian' estate designs – as in Gibberd's Somerford Grove Estate (1949), soon gave way to taller blocks as land became harder to find and more expensive. By the 1960s the borough had the confidence to both design and build blocks of flats in-house.

Estates built at this time he describes include Sandringham Road; The Beckers, Rectory Road; Trelawney Estate, Paragon Road; the Morland and Fields Estate.

He has also blogged on the Woodberry Down Estate (Sept. 2013); Hackney Town Hall (Nov. 2013); and Municipal Electricity in Shoreditch (Dec. 2013).

Continued overleaf

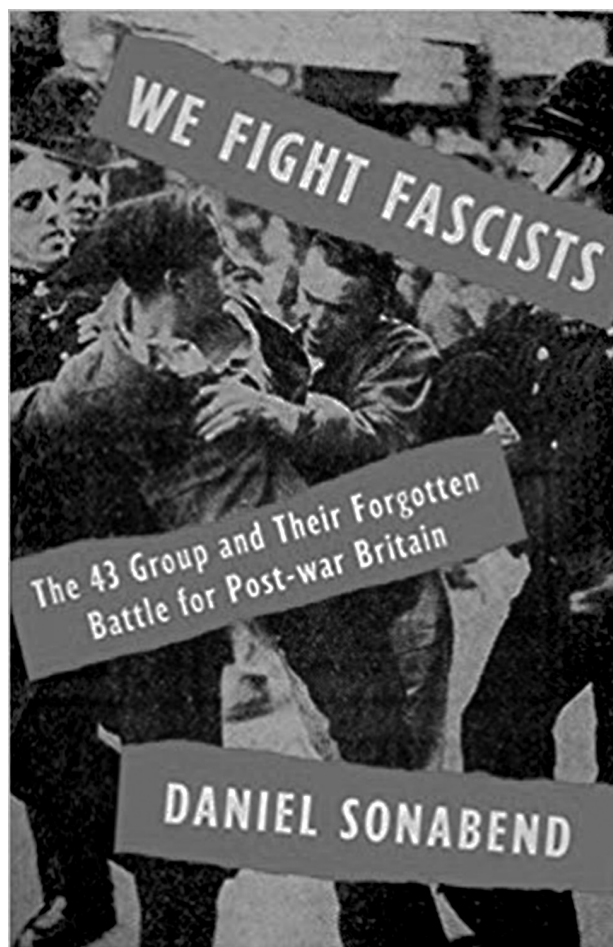
Congratulations – to Dr Etienne Joseph for his promotion to Archives Manager. His replacement as Archives Officer will be in place in January.

We Fight Fascists by Daniel Sonabend

‘In 1946 many Jewish soldiers returned to their homes in England imagining that they had fought and defeated the forces of fascism in Europe. Yet in London they found a revived fascist movement inspired by Sir Oswald Mosley and stirring up agitation against Jews and communists. Many felt that the government, the police and even the Jewish Board of Deputies were ignoring the threat; so they had to take matters into their own hands, by any means necessary. Forty-three Jewish servicemen met together and set up a group that tirelessly organised, infiltrated meetings, and broke up street demonstrations to stop the rebirth of the far right. The group included returned war heroes; women who went undercover; and young Jews, such as hairdresser Vidal Sassoon, seeking adventure. From 1947, the 43 Group grew into a powerful troop that could muster hundreds of fighters turning meetings into mass street brawls at short notice. The history of the 43 Group is not just a gripping story of a forgotten moment in Britain’s postwar history; it is also a timely lesson in how to confront fascism, and how to win.’ (Guardian book review)

Much of the book describes events in the East End, where the fascists undertook provocative actions, and from where much of their opposition was drawn. One of the 43 Group leaders was Hackney-born Gerry Flamberg, and the book reaches a form of crescendo with a chapter on ‘The Battle of Ridley Road’ in the summer of 1947, at a time when anti-semitism was exacerbated by events in Palestine.

We Fight Fascists: The 43 Group and Their Forgotten Battle for Post War Britain, published by Verso Books, 2019.



Continued from page 1 – Municipal Dreams

His book *Municipal Dreams* is described as:

‘Urgent, timely and compelling, *Municipal Dreams*, brilliantly brings the national story of housing to life.

In this landmark reappraisal of council housing, historian John Boughton presents an alternative history of Britain. Traversing the nation, he offers an architectural tour of some of the best and most remarkable of our housing estates, and in doing so offers an engrossing social history of housing in Britain. John Boughton’s account includes extraordinary planners and architects who wished to elevate working men and women through design.

The politicians who shaped their work and the competing ideologies that have promoted state housing and condemned it. The economics that have always constrained our housing ideals. As well as the crisis wrought by Right to Buy, and the evolving controversies around regeneration. Boughton shows how the loss of the dream of good housing for all is a danger for the whole of society – as was seen most catastrophically in the fire at Grenfell Tower.’

And reviewed as:

“Crucial for understanding the state of housing in Britain. Through an impassioned and detailed description of how council housing was created, transformed, and ultimately undermined, Boughton explains the origins of the current crisis. *Municipal Dreams* proves that an alternative housing system is not only possible, but was once the goal of policymakers, architects, and citizens across the UK – and could be again.”



David Madden, author of *In Defense of Housing*

Layers of London

You will have read, in the last issue of the Terrier, that Friends of Hackney Archives are working with Layers of London, a map-based heritage website (layersoflondon.org) to make the wealth of material that has been captured by Hackney's local historians more widely available. Two things are making this possible.

Firstly, Layers of London have funded the digitisation of our 20 year archive of journal publications, and back issues of all our publications can now be viewed online. Secondly, information has been drawn from these publications to create pop-up records linked to locations on the Layers of London maps.

We will launch our record collection at the FoHA AGM this November. A team has been working on this for months and over 200 records are ready to be uploaded. These records are anchored to particular locations, give a taste of the original article and invite the reader to click through and read it in full with the relevant references and citations. The earliest record relates to Holywell Priory in the 1100s, the most recent to fighting fascists in Ridley Road in 1962.

Some records tell the story of familiar historic locations such as Abney Park cemetery. Few of today's visitors, however, will already know the details offered in this extract from the record:

The first interment at Abney Park Cemetery was in 1840. Many more – particularly from Non-Conformist families – followed. When the Abney Park Cemetery Company was floated on the Stock Market in 1882, directors were already worried that soon the cemetery would be full. By August 1899 there were 100,000 bodies buried and in 1913, 121,676. There were accusations of re-using old graves and there was filling-in alongside pre-existing graves.

We hope they might be inspired to read the second issue of Hackney History (1996) to find out even more.

Other records will tell readers about buildings that no longer exist but have helped to shape the character of Hackney. Those interested in the site of Cardinal Pole School, for example, can read about the Berger paint factory that once stood there.

In 1780, following damage by fire to his Shadwell premises, Berger acquired a green field site in Homerton with the Hackney Brook running through it. The move enabled the range of colours to be expanded. Berger's three sons joined him in the business. The family bought the Hackney House estate to the north of the factory. The firm prospered in the first half of the nineteenth century, with improved production methods, rebuilt premises and new colours on offer. By 1860 Lewis Berger and Sons employed 60-70 people.

This record, taken from a 1988 Terrier, also outlines the history of the German immigrant who established the business.

Some records complement the specialist maps available on Layers of London. One such map locates nearly 3,000 furniture makers with a concentration, of course, in Hoxton. A record drawn from a description of this industry



in Hackney History 9 includes some details about a typical production process.

The process for making occasional tables was typical of the way that furniture production was organised. A cabinet maker would receive an order for a dozen tables with pie crust edges and a central column with tripod feet. Much of the work was then sub-contracted out. Veneer was selected, cut and glued to a thin wooden board to make the table top. The edging was marked out on mahogany board using a zinc template. Short lengths of edging were glued to the table tops which were then spindled to a smooth curve. The columns were prepared by a turner and the tripod stands shaped by a carver. Materials were used as efficiently as possible, avoiding any waste. Nobody was likely to own more than one machine and everyone lived on their earnings from week to week.

This will surely bring more readers to Jack Whitehead's first hand account.

We hope that the launch of these records is just the start. We want to involve anyone who is interested in mapping Hackney's history and adding new records to Layers of London. Our first batch of records aims to bring history that has already been researched and documented to a new audience.

In future, we would also like to support the recording of histories that may not yet have been captured in this way. Hackney has so many stories to tell about the ways it became the place it is today. Friends of Hackney Archives, in partnership with Archives staff, will be running workshops on record making for interested individuals and community groups.

The first workshop will be on 1st February – see www.hackneyhistory.org/Events for Eventbrite booking.

Mike Gray's records are coming home:

David Mander provides an update on an exciting new collection heading Hackney's way.

Friends may recall the short notice in *Terrier* 94 announcing the death of Mike Gray (1938-2015) and more recently will have seen Laurie Elks' excellent article in *Hackney History* 20 on the campaign to save Sutton House¹ in which Mike features prominently. Mike came to Hackney in the early 1970s, and with a background in community activities and the creative arts from his roots in East Dulwich, he rapidly became involved in similar activities in his newly adopted home. He took the lead in founding the Hackney Marshes Fun Festival and when Hackney Council closed the library in Chatsworth Road prior to opening Homerton Library, Mike successfully campaigned for the building to become a community arts centre. When Chats Palace opened, Mike was its first Chair. He was active in persuading the Greater London Council to put up a blue plaque to Marie Lloyd in Graham Road. Most notably Mike took on a lead role when the National Trust proposed to redevelop Sutton House as flats, with no public access. Mike launched the Save Sutton House Campaign with like-minded friends and was ultimately successful in getting the Trust to change course. With the house re-opened and restoration complete in 1995, Mike went on to chair the Sutton House Society.

Mike was an extensive local history researcher. He established where Joseph Priestley had lived in Clapton and ploughed back his knowledge into local guided walks, partnering with Sean Gubbins in *Walking East*.

Mike's last partner was Carole Mills, the first Sutton House manager. They divided their time between London, Kent and a house Mike had bought in Mora de Toledo, which he knew through a relationship with his previous partner Eufemia ("Ufi") Agasee. After Carole's death Mike went to live in Mora permanently and died in a residential home.

Mike had already agreed to deposit some of his extensive records with Hackney Archives, covering the early days of Chats Palace, but his house in Mora was stuffed full of his records and extensive photographic work. Mike had been a professional photographer and had an eye for landscapes and for portrait work. Mike's son Nic asked for help in tackling his papers spread between a study, bedroom and outhouse which together documented Mike's wide-ranging artistic and historical activities. As Mike's literary executor, I agreed to be part of a party, which comprised Laurie Elks and his wife June, my wife Janet Keighley, Nic and two of Nic's friends. Nic's mother, Ufi, who owned a house in Mora, agreed we could use it as our base – Mike's home not being in any fit state for us to stay – and we spent five days there in April 2016.

I acted as lead to a massive sort, and must pay tribute to the team who worked in difficult and sometimes dangerous conditions – at one point a bag of lime burst in a very tight



space, covering one of the team in clouds of choking dust. At the close though we had several tables of documents, books and an extensive photographic archive, ready to be transported to the UK. The photo shows one of the bedrooms used as a sorting room.

So what is coming Hackney Archives' way? I have made the selection to reflect Mike in the round, so his personal papers and extensive photographic work join his local history research and walk texts, some Communist periodicals and records, local theatre, concert and sporting programmes dating back to the 1950s, with one lovely book mark from the Stamford Hill cinema from 1910 and extensive cuttings collections. Books that inform Mike's thought and work have also been kept, but not those which cover London history in general or which I knew to be already well represented in the Hackney local history library. In total some 1.6 cubic metres of records have formed the initial selection, which will then be subject to a further appraisal by Hackney Archives staff. When the collection is catalogued it will form a very valuable trove for all those interested in campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s and for all interested in Hackney's past history.

David Mander, November 2019



1. For Mike's obituary see www.guardian.com/theguardian/2015/feb/18/mike-gray-obituary
Hackney History 20, Friends of Hackney Archives 2019 pp32-46

Alexander Baron

<https://www.andrewwhitehead.net/alexander-baron.html>

Historian, writer and blogger Andrew Whitehead draws our attention on his website to writer Alexander Baron, who grew up as Alec Bernstein in Foulden Road, Stoke Newington.

‘In recent years, many of Alexander Baron’s novels – both his gripping accounts of the Second World War and his commanding London fictions – have been republished. More titles will be back in print soon – and one of his unpublished novels, *The War Baby*, will be available for the first time. There’s every prospect that his memoirs, *Chapters of Accidents*, may also see publication. Baron is back in vogue!

His first novel, *From the City, From the Plough*, sold massively on its publication in 1948. It was based on his own war service, fighting across France from the Normandy D-Day beaches, and won acclaim for depicting both the boredom and the brutality of the battlefield, and for its account of the strong sense of camaraderie among those brought together by combat.’

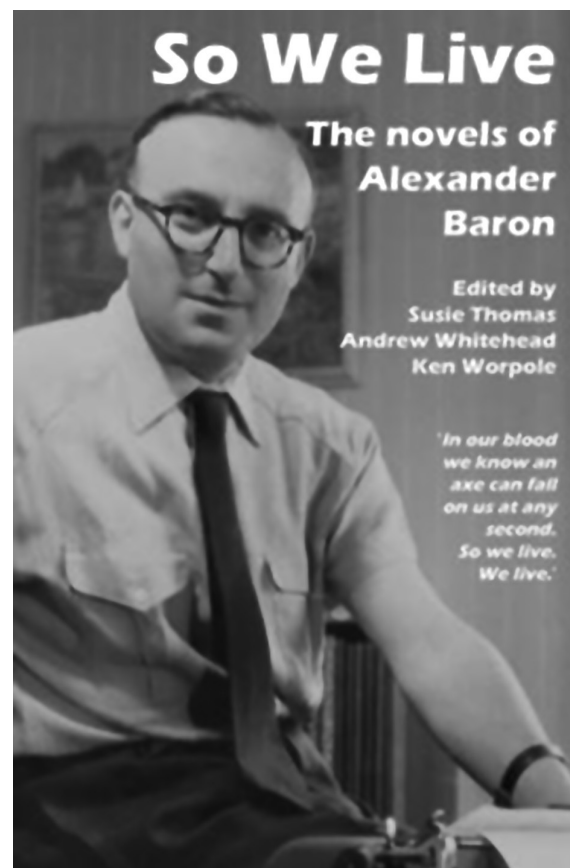
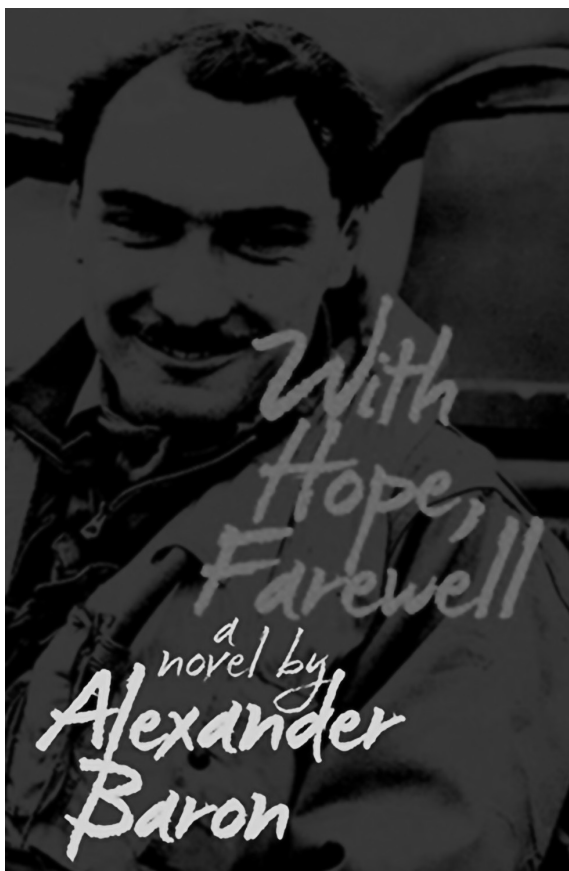
The Lowlife, his classic London novel, harked back to the street where he grew up, Foulden Road, on the cusp of Stoke Newington and Dalston, where he was known as Alec Bernstein until he began to be published. *The Lowlife* – published in 1963 and set in the early 1960s – is the novel for which he is now best known.

With Hope, Farewell (1952) has been republished for the first time by Five Leaves, it also locates the protagonists in the Foulden Road area.

‘Mark Strong endures petty anti-semitism but achieves his wartime ambition to become a fighter pilot. After the war, blighted by injury and a desolation brought on by conflict, Mark and his wife, Ruth, seek to set up home in Hackney. ‘The bombing of the East End during the war had sent thousands of homeless Jews outwards in wave after wave’, Baron asserts in this novel. ‘They had penetrated to every corner of Hackney.’ They face organised anti-semitism, and the climax of the novel comes amid a Mosleyite rally in Dalston during which Ruth suffers a miscarriage.’

Now for the first time there’s a compelling book about Baron – *So We Live: the novels of Alexander Baron*, edited by Susie Thomas, Andrew Whitehead and Ken Worpole, it contains six pieces about Baron as well as photos and brief extracts from his writing. It’s published by Five Leaves <https://fiveleaves.co.uk/product/so-we-live-the-novels-of-alexander-baron/> £12.99.

So We Live also includes a ‘walk round Baron’s manor’ of Stoke Newington with a map and commentary – online at <https://www.londonfictions.com/a-walk-round-barons-manor.html#>



Education

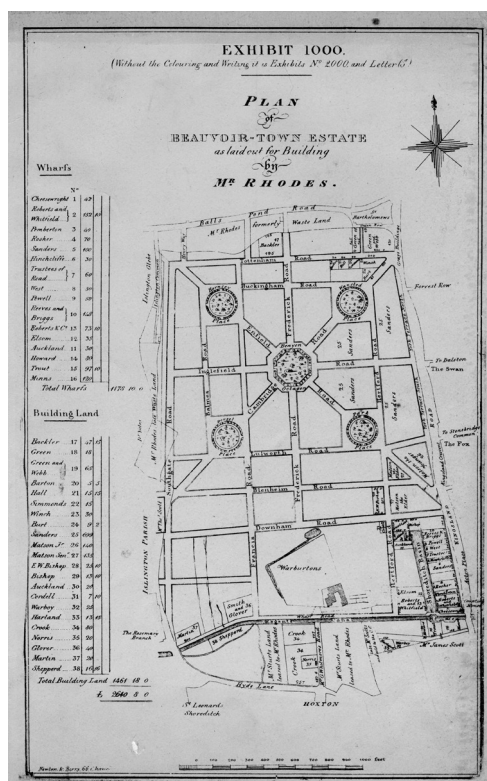
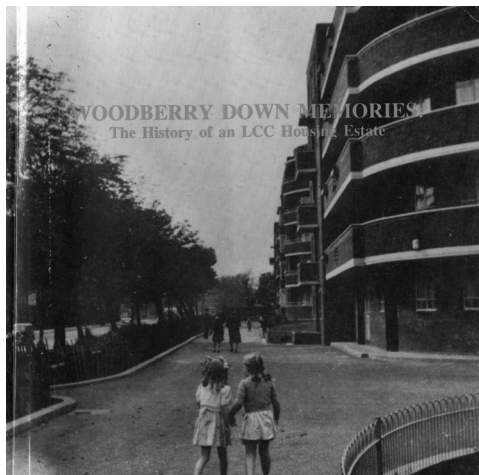
Over the past few months we have had two visits from university students undertaking research projects relating to the local area.

A group of students from Liverpool University School of Urban Design and Urban Planning visited on 1st October. I was impressed that Liverpool University students were attracted to Hackney as a research subject, but did later discover that this campus is in fact based in London. They were looking at the development of the De Beauvoir area, from the early battle between the Rhodes brothers and Benyon De Beauvoir to the modern developments and the effects of gentrification. The students were able to make use of the rich resources we hold relating to this subject, including original case papers from the Rhodes vs Benyon De Beauvoir court case, planning reports relating to the De Beauvoir conservation area and responses from local organisations, such as the De Beauvoir Association. The other group of students (15th October) were LSE City Design and Social Science masters students looking at the development of the Woodberry Down Estate. Again we hold a range of relevant resources such as detailed LCC/GLC plans of the Estate on microfilm, photographs and publications such as *Woodberry Down Memories*, published in 1989, which was written and researched by a group of older tenants on the Estate.

We hope to build on these two visits to further promote our collections to local universities and publicise the unique material we hold which could provide the raw material for a range of different research topics.

The Archives is also currently working with the Museum on a CPD event for local teachers planned for 12 December 2019 from 4.30- 6.00pm. It is called “Super-localised Hackney History” and aims to enable Hackney teachers to make their history topics as local as possible, by equipping them with the skills they need to delve into Hackney Archives’ collection of historical records. We will be showing them our collections, including maps, photographs, newspapers articles and census records and discussing how these resources can be used to engage learners and inspire them to see their place in Hackney’s history. This will be a useful opportunity for us to talk to teachers about what they would like from us and what we are able to offer them.

Elizabeth Green



It is with regret we note that Geoff Taylor died in October this year, a former teacher and Hackney councillor, he was a keen historian, authoring a book *A Parish in Perspective: A history of the church and parish of St John of Jerusalem, South Hackney*. He also contributed to *Hackney History 19: Equality or opportunity: South Hackney School in the 1970s*. Obituaries can be found on the Hackney Gazette and Hackney Labour websites. We hope to publish two of Geoff’s talks in forthcoming editions of *Hackney History*.

Homerton Children Starve on Christmas Eve



In September 1855 Edward Harvey, a jobbing bricklayer, moved his family into a street of small terraced houses, now called Cresset Road, off Well Street. Edward, Harriet Ray and Edward's four children rented a single unfurnished back room on the ground floor of 13 Brunswick Street. One mattress, two old chairs and a table were all the furniture they could provide. Since

July Edward had been employed on and off by a Hackney builder but work – and Edward – were erratic.

Earlier that summer a policeman had taken the children, destitute and emaciated, to the Bethnal Green Workhouse on Waterloo Road. Harriet joined them there but the family were split up and put to work. Conditions during their five weeks at Bethnal Green would have been at least as bad as those recorded in *The Lancet* a decade later. Reporters found the wards severely overcrowded with each inmate having only a quarter of the officially recommended space. Windows were placed six feet above the urine-soaked floor to prevent inmates from looking out. Diet and hygiene were very poor with just two latrines to serve 45 men, flushed twice a day.

Edward was convicted of child neglect and spent this time in prison. After five weeks in the workhouse Harriet and the children were removed to the Ware Union, presumably because they were found to have come from Hertfordshire. By November they were back with Edward in Brunswick Street, Homerton, and he applied to the Hackney Union for help. The relieving officer gave him two loaves of bread and an order to bring the family into the workhouse. They did not arrive.

In the following weeks they survived on dry bread, rice and oatmeal. Just before Christmas Harriet returned to the relieving officer. She was given a loaf of bread and some oatmeal and told that Edward must make the application himself if the family were to be helped. Harriet went back the next day but was sent home empty handed. When Edward finally presented himself he was given an order of admission to the workhouse where he would get paid work in the stone yard. The desperate family never arrived at the Hackney workhouse on Kenworthy Road.

On Christmas Eve Edward sought help from his landlady to find a doctor for his children. She discovered that they “were quite skeletons – there were not any bedclothes, there was a thin covering over their faces”. Edward fetched

the South Hackney Surgeon who found the nine year old daughter nursing a baby and two other children, aged five and seven, lying dead or dying in the corner. His post mortem report stated “I found all the organs of the body quite healthy, except that they were entirely devoid of fat – there was no fat about the body at all – I found no food of any kind in the stomach”.

A crowded inquest held at The Two Black Boys pub on Well Street heard that the children had no clothes and were starved. The jury found Edward and Harriet guilty of ‘wilful murder’. Edward Harvey was convicted of manslaughter at the Old Bailey and sentenced to twelve months in prison. Harriet Ray was found not guilty because she was not the children’s mother and therefore did not have a duty to provide them with food.

Information sourced from Old Bailey Online and contemporary press reports.

Wendy Forrest

For more on the Bethnal Green workhouse see: www.workhouses.org.uk/BethnalGreen/

And for the Hackney workhouse: www.workhouses.org.uk/Hackney/



Working at Hackney Archives

History was my least favourite subject at school, I suppose because kings, presidents, battles and palaces didn't feel relevant to me. Imagine my astonishment when I found myself at home one evening not just watching but enjoying 'Who Do You Think You Are?' (a BBC programme following celebrities tracing their family trees).

I put this newfound interest in history down to my recent few months working at Hackney Archives. Although I've been working for Hackney Libraries for over a decade, and had been into the Archives a couple of times, I had minimal knowledge of what went on behind the scenes, and, more importantly, what treasure lay hidden in the downstairs store rooms, populated with floor-to-ceiling rolling stacks full of beauty and mystery.

Here are a few of my personal highlights:

- volumes of leather-bound council notes and minutes, some with extravagant straps and buckles or elegantly marbled book edges;
- the punishment book for Hutton Poplars Orphanage which listed hundreds of unfortunate boys getting lashes for absconding or stealing apples (I assume the poor lads were miserable and hungry);
- maps of my local area showing how it's changed and what used to be there;
- the wealth of images and information highlighting Hackney's radical past;
- the variety of people who use the Archives: Hackney residents past and present, community groups, students, tutors, architects, journalists, councillors, police!

I feel fortunate to have had this opportunity to work for the Archives, and will continue to be an enthusiastic advocate when my time here is done.

Lisa McDermott, Library Assistant

Forthcoming events – dates for your diary:

Saturday 1st February

Layers of London Training Session at the Archives
2 - 4.00pm, booking via Eventbrite
(see www.hackneyhistory.org/events).

Thursday 7th May

Liz Rushen talk: 'The enigmatic John Marshall of Hackney'

Venue to be confirmed but expected to be at St John at Hackney.

Please keep an eye on our Events webpage.

Thursday 11th June

Carolyn Clark to talk on the 200th anniversary of Regents Canal.

At the Archives, further details and booking will be confirmed nearer the time.

An attractive display of copies of historic photographs of Hackney and Homerton from the LMA are now up on the walls of Homerton University Hospital and attracting a great deal of interest from patients, staff, and visitors. The display will be in place for the next year.

Hackney Archives Sale

Maps, Books, Postcards

December 2019 - January 2020

Used and new stock

Bargain prices

Christmas/ New Year closing times:

Hackney Archives is closed from 7.30pm on Thursday 19 December until 10.00am on Tuesday 07 January 2020.

Coming Soon – the new Archives catalogue system Soutron for both documents and images should be operational by the New Year. 'Beta-testing' has taken place and final adjustments are being made. <https://hackney.soutron.net/Portal/Default/>

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Contributions to future issues should be sent to the above address.

www.hackneyhistory.org