

MORE LIGHT  
MORE POWER



150

YEARS OF  
SHOREDITCH  
TOWN HALL



SHOREDITCH

TOWN HALL

OLD STREET, LONDON, EC1

## SHOREDITCH TOWN HALL

# 150

YEARS



**1851**

POPULATION OF  
SHOREDITCH 109,257

**1849**

CHOLERA EPIDEMIC IN  
LONDON. 899 DIED IN  
SHOREDITCH

**1855**

METROPOLITAN  
MANAGEMENT ACT GAVE  
NEW POWERS AND  
DUTIES TO LONDON  
VESTRIES - OPENS A  
NEW ERA IN SHOREDITCH  
OF PROGRESSIVE  
REFORMING LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT



**1863**

SUB-COMMITTEE OF  
SHOREDITCH VESTRY  
FORMED TO OVERSEE  
CONSTRUCTION OF  
NEW TOWN HALL

**1861**

SHOREDITCH POPULATION  
PEAKS AT 129,364



# THE MUNICIPAL PRINCIPLE



[... Shoreditch Town Hall will be for]

*... discussions of subjects of Local and National importance, for the free expression of opinion upon the political, and social, questions of the day: and likewise to afford means for instructions and amusements by Lectures, Concerts and Entertainments... (we) hope and not unreasonably anticipate that the use of the edifice may tend to further develop, strengthen and perpetuate the municipal principle, and to secure to the Metropolis, the advantages of Local Self-Government for Centuries to Come.*

THE SHOREDITCH VESTRY, CIRCA 1860

**1888**

12 NOVEMBER:  
THE INQUEST INTO THE  
MURDER OF MARY KELLY,  
LAST VICTIM OF THE RIPPER,  
HELD AT SHOREDITCH  
VESTRY HALL



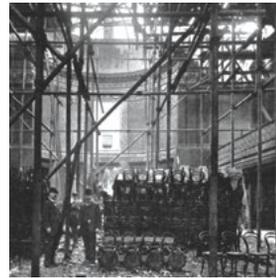
**1898**

WORK BEGINS  
ON EXTENSION TO TOWN  
HALL DESIGNED BY  
WILLIAM G HUNT  
(SEE PAGES 12-13)



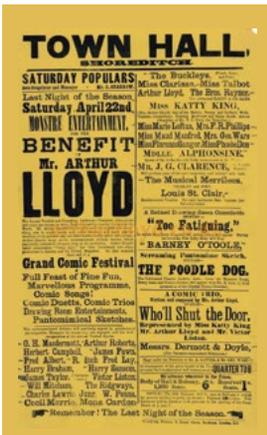
**1904**

15 AUGUST:  
FIRE DESTROYS ASSEMBLY  
HALL. THE NEW  
EXTENSION IS BUILT  
(SEE PAGE 24)



**1866**

OUTBREAK OF  
CHOLERA IN SHOREDITCH  
CONTAINED BY INNOVATIVE  
WORK OF DR BARNES



**1880s**

SHOREDITCH TOWN  
HALL IS A MAJOR VENUE  
FOR MUSIC HALL



**1897**

SHOREDITCH REFUSE  
DESTRUCTOR OPENED.  
NEWS OF THIS  
INNOVATIVE WORK  
SPREADS ACROSS THE  
WORLD. SHOREDITCH  
PRAISED AS A  
'MODEL VESTRY'  
BY LORD ROSEBURY  
(SEE PAGES 18 & 19)



**1900**

SHOREDITCH BOROUGH  
COUNCIL CREATED.  
ADOPTS THE MOTTO  
'MORE LIGHT  
MORE POWER'.



**1910**

THE TOWN HALL  
WORKS IN PARTNERSHIP  
WITH OTHER  
SHOREDITCH BODIES  
TO SUPPORT  
THE COMMUNITY

**1913**

SYLVIA PANKHURST  
ARRESTED AT THE  
TOWN HALL  
(SEE PAGES 50-51)



**1943**

SHOREDITCH BOROUGH  
ADOPTS SUBMARINE  
'THRASHER' AS PART  
OF WW2 FUNDRAISING  
(SEE PAGES 56-57)



**1965**

SHOREDITCH COUNCIL  
MERGES WITH HACKNEY  
(SEE PAGES 68-71)



**1997**

SHOREDITCH TOWN HALL  
TRUST CREATED TO SAVE  
THE BUILDING



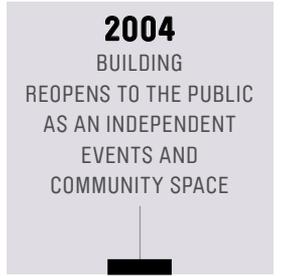
**1990**

WHIRL-Y-GIG  
NIGHTCLUB RUNS AT  
SHOREDITCH TOWN HALL  
UNTIL LATE 1990'S



**2004**

BUILDING  
REOPENS TO THE PUBLIC  
AS AN INDEPENDENT  
EVENTS AND  
COMMUNITY SPACE



**TOWN HALL**

IS AT THE CENTRE  
OF COMMUNITY  
LIFE, HOSTING  
WEDDINGS, DANCES  
& PUBLIC EVENTS



**1955**

22 SEPTEMBER:  
SHOREDITCH TAKES PART  
IN LAUNCH BROADCAST OF  
ITV WITH THE FIRST EVER  
TELEVISED BOXING MATCH.  
THIS IS THE FIRST MATCH  
AT SHOREDITCH AND LEADS  
TO 20 YEARS OF HOSTING  
FIGHTS IN THE TOWN HALL  
(SEE PAGES 58-59)



**1996**

TOWN HALL IS PLACED  
ON LIST OF 'BUILDINGS  
AT RISK' BY ENGLISH  
HERITAGE



**2012**

A NEW PHASE –  
SHOREDITCH TOWN HALL  
ESTABLISHES ITSELF  
AS A DESTINATION  
ARTS AND LIVE  
EVENTS VENUE





## INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK HAS BEEN CREATED TO CELEBRATE  
150 YEARS OF SHOREDITCH TOWN HALL.

**W**hile we have always known something of the building's history, especially key moments, I have always been very conscious that there were significant gaps in our knowledge. There were stories still to unearth and there had never before been a single source or history produced dedicated solely to the Town Hall. For example, we had never seen a photograph of boxing actually taking place in the Assembly Hall, despite what a major part of our history this was. We didn't know how the Council Chamber would have looked when it operated as the centre of local democracy, nor what happened at that point when the London Borough of Shoreditch ceased to exist as an independent authority and was merged with Hackney; did the Councillors all just walk away? The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary has, therefore, provided a fantastic opportunity to address this deficit, spend some time delving into our past, and ultimately tell a more complete and colourful story of the building. A particular highlight has been talking to people today who have very personal or family connections with the Town Hall, from its beginnings as one of the grandest Vestry Halls of its time, through music hall and boxing, to its contemporary life today as a successful arts and events venue.

The building is a great survivor. A huge fire in **1904** nearly destroyed it and neglect in the **1980s** and **1990s** in particular led to its inclusion on the English Heritage 'Buildings At Risk' Register. It has withstood two World Wars, some of the most rapid urban development and population change in London and times of enormous social and political upheavals of every kind. It has endured the relentless traffic of a busy main artery road to its front and trains pounding up and down its eastern flank. The world has quite literally swirled and reformed around its walls with a dizzying speed that has intensified in the last quarter-century, as Shoreditch has become a modern, fashionable destination. Yet despite all of this, the Town Hall stands solid. There is not a

single structural crack nor hint of subsidence – evidence of the fact it was very much built to last. This, combined with the passion of the community who were determined to save it, and a healthy dose of luck, mean today it is able to thrive as an independent venue; an example of how a truly wonderful example of Victorian architecture can be preserved and honoured at the same time as being vibrant and alive with new activity rather than purely a monument to the past.

It has been the greatest privilege of my career to be a custodian of such a wonderful building and to have the opportunity to continue its restoration, as well as establish a new life for it as an arts venue. I feel that something of the passion and commitment of those Victorian Vestry men and women who built the Town Hall inevitably found its way into the fabric of the building, into its bricks and mortar - a friendly presence coming with us on our journey. If the ghosts of the burghers of Shoreditch do inhabit the building I hope they're happy to see it cared for, loved and as full of life today as it ever was in the past - being discovered and enjoyed by new generations. Key to what I hope we've achieved in the last five years is that a building that had 'entertainments and amusements' at its heart from the outset, but was for so long quiet and empty, is today once again welcoming thousands of people through its doors every year to experience theatre, music, events and live performance. Its rooms and spaces are regularly all in use simultaneously. Whether it is with the motto 'More Light, More Power' throughout or the statue of Progress dominating the façade, we're conscious of the gauntlet the building throws down to us every day - to keep moving, keep exploring, keep striving to find new and exciting ways the building can come alive or be enjoyed. Above all, to ensure that it is still here to be enjoyed and reinvented by future generations, as a continuing, vital part of the life of Shoreditch & Hackney and a unique example of a golden age of civic pride and progressive local government in the UK.

**NICK GILES**

Director, Shoreditch Town Hall Trust

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THE FIRST VESTRY HALL  
**1865**



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A lithograph by the architect Caesar Augustus Long.  
Courtesy of the London Borough of Hackney Archives - see page 93 for full list of credits.

## Shoreditch Observer Almanack, 1866.

### SHOREDITCH TOWN HALL.

The Engraving we have chosen to illustrate our Almanack this year represents the Shoreditch Town Hall, which is now in the course of erection near the North London Railway, in Old Street Road.

This edifice will be one of an imposing character, and the most handsome, extensive and costly of all the Town or Vestry Halls in the Metropolis. The ground upon which it stands was purchased by the Vestry for £7,425. The sale of the surplus land will leave the net cost about £6,000. The contract for the building is £20,290, but this does not include the heating or lighting apparatus, nor the fittings, which may be set down at £4,000 more. These three items will make the sum of £30,290. Other charges, such as the Architect and the Clerk of the Works, will bring the total cost to £32,000!

The building will have a frontage of 70 feet by a depth of 130; and, including extra walls, will cover an area of 84 feet by 140, or nearly 12,000 square feet. The basement storey will be devoted to extra offices, housekeeper's apartments, laboratory, store and strong rooms, furnace, etc. The ground floor will contain the offices of the various departments, "Council Chamber," Committee, Sessions, waiting rooms, etc., and the storey above is to be the Great Hall, which will be capable of seating 1,500 persons. This will certainly be the finest public Hall east of Temple Bar. The façade of the building will be of classic design, comprising the Roman Doric, and Corinthian orders. The entire front will be of Portland stone, the side of brick with stone dressings, and the whole is to be completed by April, 1867. The architect is Mr. Cesar A Long, of 98 Bishopsgate Street, and the Builder Mr J. Perry of Stratford.

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“THE COMMITTEE HAVE CONCLUDED IT NECESSARY THAT THE DESIGN SHOULD BE SUCH AS WOULD INDICATE THE PUBLIC CHARACTER OF THE EDIFICE, NOT EXTRAVAGANTLY ORNAMENTED BUT OF A SUBSTANTIAL AND DURABLE CHARACTER.”

**SHOREDITCH VESTRY BRIEF FOR THEIR NEW TOWN HALL, 1865.**

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Vestry Halls built in the **1860s** and **70s** with lesser budgets were criticised for their almost unison adoption of red brick with Portland stone dressings... At Shoreditch, however, the determination of the Vestry Board to invest in quality from the outset has produced a building of distinction. The Town Hall is a prominent landmark - which sets the tone for a superior landscape.”

**EDDIE BOOTH**

*Chairman, The Institute of Historic Building Conservation*

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What ultimately distinguishes Shoreditch Town Hall from its worthy competitors is its tough, urban quality. Though the trams, carts and omnibuses are long gone, Old Street still bristles with traffic and the trains still boom by on the elevated line, from the town and into the suburbs near and far. The architecture stands up to this remarkably well.”

**DR CHRIS MIELE**

*Architectural Historian, essay on Shoreditch Town Hall,  
Hackney Histories Volume 4*

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Very sadly, C. A. Long's plans for the original **1865** Vestry Hall cannot be located and are presumed lost or destroyed. All that remains are his original lithograph (on page 8) and watercolour of the Council Chamber (opposite).



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A watercolour from **1865** illustrating the design of the original Vestry Hall (Council Chamber). A window at the end of the room is now the doorway into the Mayor's Parlour.



## THE BUILDING THAT HAS COME TO BE KNOWN AS SHOREDITCH TOWN HALL IS ACTUALLY MADE UP OF THREE DISTINCT PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT

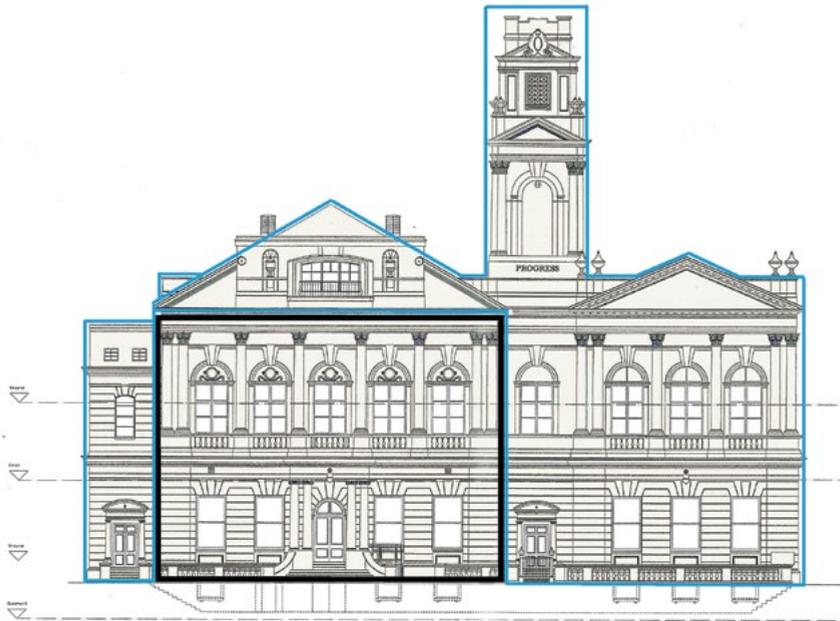
Expansions were designed to accommodate the needs of the Council over the years and be reflective of the increasing responsibilities and demands of a Metropolitan Council in London.

The original Vestry Hall, as shown in C. A. Long's lithograph on page 8, represented the first stage in **1865**. The second substantial stage, virtually doubling the square footage of the original Hall, was opened in **1904** and included the Tower and everything to its right as well as other new offices and spaces. Finally, the Annex office building on Rivington Street at the rear of the Town Hall opened in **1937**.

The Metropolitan Management Act of **1855** paved the way for the thirty eight London Vestries to build new Town Halls. Shoreditch was noteworthy for its sheer size as well as the fact that the entire width of the first floor was taken up with a grand audience space originally capable of seating 1500 people. This was, at the time, the largest public hall incorporated within a vestry hall complex in London. It was envisaged as a truly multi-functional auditorium, not just a monument; an ambition to deliver something which was responsive to the community's needs and for the building to be somewhere people could use and enjoy.

From the beginning, the Shoreditch Vestry's innovative approach to its civic responsibilities was demonstrated by its decision to raise over £100,000 by borrowing from an assurance society. Raising finance on such a scale was very unusual among metropolitan vestries, but it enabled Shoreditch to conduct substantial capital works in the following decades, including housing and sanitation works.

The Vestry started to consider the second phase of alterations in 1898, in anticipation of the Local Government Act of **1899**, which was to create a new metropolitan borough of Shoreditch, served by Mayors, Aldermen and Councillors. A competition was held to design the extension and alternations to the Town Hall and W.G.Hunt was declared the winner. Hunt's brief was



Front elevation with Hunt's extension highlighted in blue.

to incorporate the earlier Vestry Hall and Great Hall into one coherent monumental design, using the site of the old Metropolitan Fire Brigade building next door to the Town Hall.

The new 3 bay extension, comprising committee rooms and offices, was built at the western side, its facade of Portland stone embellished with statues celebrating past municipal achievements and the new Coat of Arms - 'More Light, More Power' - for the newly established Borough of Shoreditch. A monumental tower, with a statue of 'Progress' - a reference to Shoreditch's innovative street lighting and refuse destructor scheme - unified the two halves.



## SHOREDITCH VESTRYMEN AND EARLY PROGRESSIVENESS

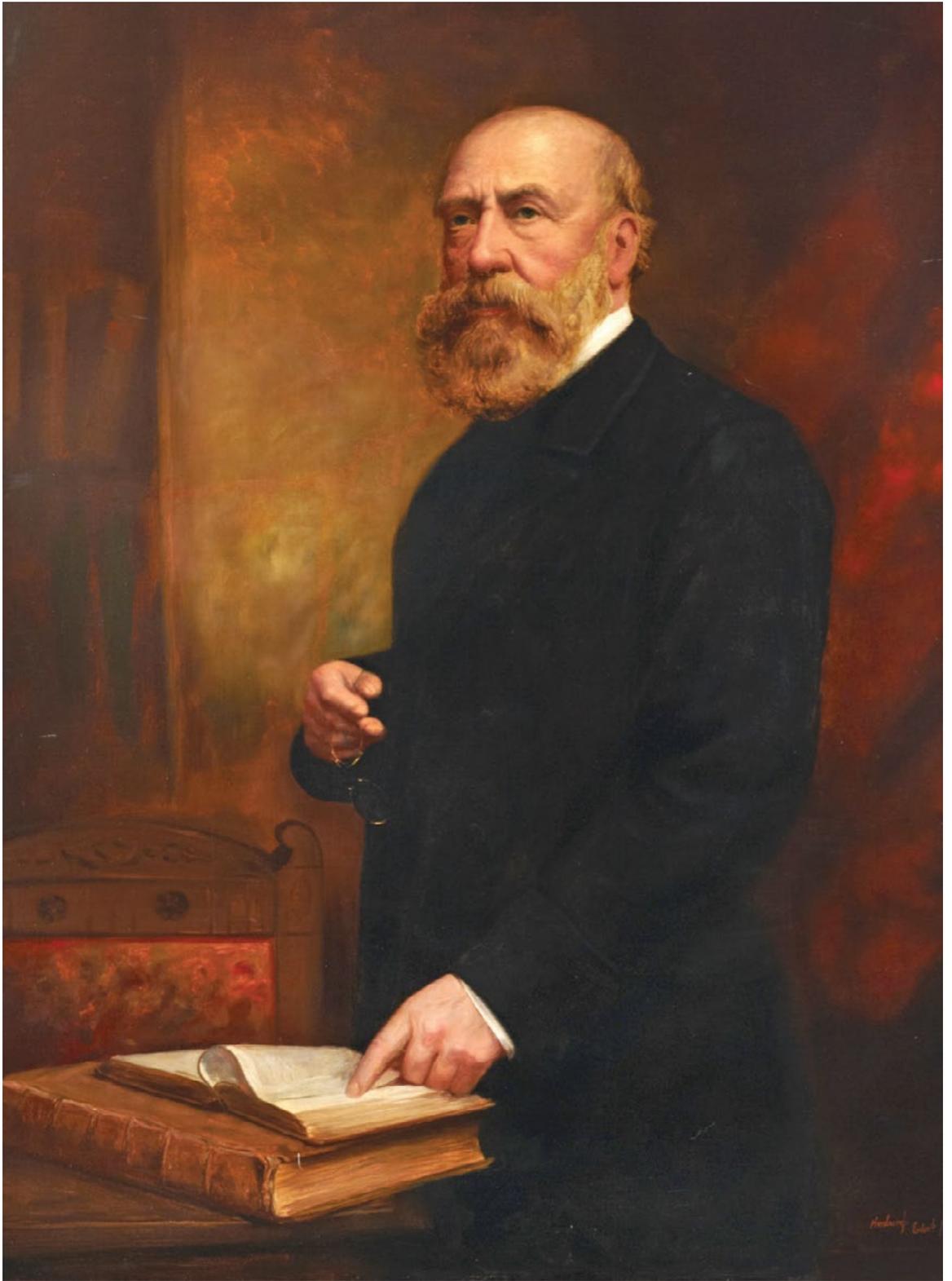
THE TOWN HALL WAS CONCEIVED AS A PHYSICAL  
DEMONSTRATION OF THE AMBITION AND PROGRESSIVENESS  
OF THE SHOREDITCH VESTRYMEN & WOMEN.

In the early years after the **1855** Act, the new Vestry was an active body, made up mostly of prosperous local tradesmen, a majority from the local furniture trade, which undertook bold new measures to improve conditions for the population.

The **1855** Act not only created the Vestries, but also created the new role of Medical Officer of Health (MOH) for each metropolitan district. Dr Robert Barnes (shown in the imposing portrait opposite) was the first MOH for Shoreditch, and was an eminent obstetrician and gynaecologist. A distinguished member of the London medical elite, he founded the British Gynaecological Society after a long struggle to promote midwifery and the diseases of women as a medical science rather than a surgical specialism.

His work in Shoreditch was similarly innovative and forward-thinking. He is a perfect example of the non-conformist, progressive Shoreditch Vestrymen, driven and motivated by a desire to improve the lives of local people. He created systems for the notification of diseases and abolished cesspools, repaired drains and increased ventilation in tenement properties. In **1866**, these new methods of sanitation limited the outbreaks of cholera in Shoreditch - a disease which had devastated other parts of London - saving hundreds of lives.

Barnes' work in Shoreditch also connects him to a British revolution in social medicine: he was at the forefront of the rise of public health and the development of preventative medicine. By advocating an explicit connection between public health and social conditions, Dr Barnes was an early example of how the medical profession expanded its work from private individually focused activity into the sphere of public health and advising the government on social and medical policy.





## MORE LIGHT, MORE POWER

In **1897**, Shoreditch became the first district in the country to combine refuse disposal and electricity generation in a single innovative, municipal undertaking.

By the closing decades of the 19th century, electricity was recognised as the fuel of the future, but the growth and development of this infrastructure had been largely left to private enterprise. The Electricity Lighting Act of **1882** empowered the Board of Trade to grant licences to supply electricity to both private and public organisations, but it also gave local authorities the right to purchase private undertakings after 21 years.

Shoreditch by **1888** was 'one of the largest light-consuming districts in London', thanks to its large number of warehouses and manufacturers, as well as a vibrant night-time economy of some 300 public houses and shops. But the appetite of private enterprise for investing in this growing need had waned, with the length of time it took to recoup investment seen as a disincentive. By **1891**, three companies applied for licenses to supply the area, but Shoreditch Vestry resented the idea of private profit made at the expense of local need. It also had the problem of 20,000 tons of municipal refuse to deal with each year. An innovative solution beckoned.

In **1892**, Shoreditch Vestry was granted a Provisional Licence to supply electricity and in November that year the Vestry commissioned engineer Edward Manville to conduct a feasibility study of a combined 'dust destructor' and electricity generating station. His report was encouraging and the Vestry moved forward, bolstered by the endorsement of local voters in the **1894** elections.

Pre-1900 vestries were not known for their enterprise, but Shoreditch was an exception. The 'dust destructor' and generator were to form part of a complex of ambitious civic buildings. The generating station itself comprised a destructor house 80ft square with a 150ft chimney, an engine house and offices. Next door, there were to be public baths and a washhouse - with hot water supplied by the station's waste heat - and a public library and museum.



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An exhibition of new electrical appliances & technology  
in the Council Chamber, circa **1900**.

This was bold, innovative planning and the Vestry took justifiable pride in it. The Shoreditch Refuse Destructor and Generator Station in Coronet Street was opened in June **1897** with much ceremony by the physicist, Lord Kelvin. Shoreditch was praised as a 'Model Vestry' and its commitment to providing such infrastructure in a district without great wealth was seen as even more praiseworthy.

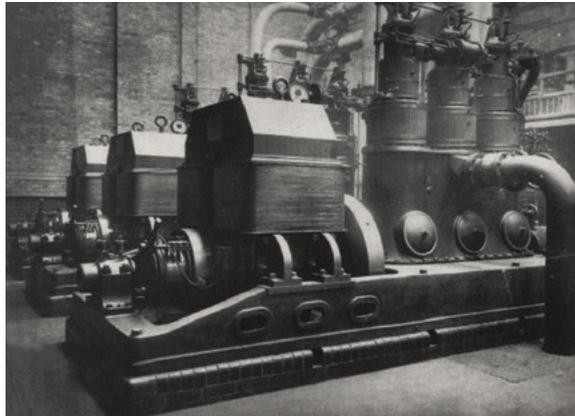
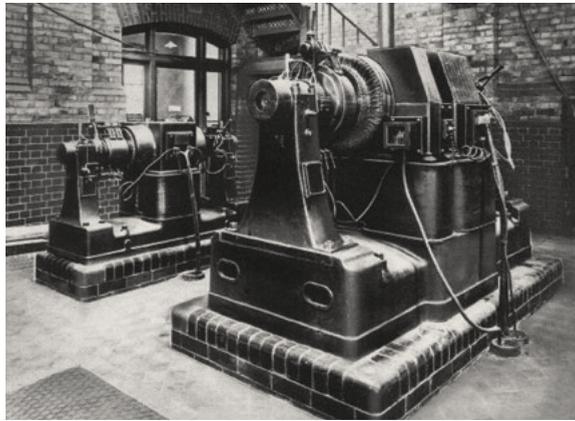
And it was, in fact, an example for others to emulate. The opening of the dust destructor received significant press attention both nationally and internationally, with tales of Shoreditch's progressiveness reported as far afield as New York and Western Australia. By **1905**, 40 similar stations had opened across the country. Shoreditch had shown the way.

So perfectly did this work embody the spirit of progress and collective enterprise of Shoreditch that the words 'More Light, More Power' were adopted as the motto of the new Metropolitan Borough of Shoreditch on its foundation in **1900**.

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This is an edited extract from the blog 'Municipal Dreams' written by John Boughton. Edited and reproduced with kind permission from the author.

THE REFUSE DESTRUCTOR



THURSDAY, OCTOBER 28, 1897.

## Elizabethtown Post.

### Electricity from House to House

The Shoreditch, Eng, crematory for house refuse was opened on June 28, and is reported to be a great economical success. By this process, the house refuse, which before had cost about 55 cents per ton to get rid of by being transported and cast into the sea, is now utilized to produce energy for the electric light and power purposes. These combined electricity and dust destruction works were erected at a cost of about \$750,000. The destructors cells or furnaces are capable of burning 20,000 tons of ash-bin refuse yearly, and the heat given out is sufficient for the electric light and power of the whole of Shoreditch, with a population of 124,000 people, besides supplying heat to the adjoining baths and washhouses. The utilization of waste products for power purposes is not confined to England alone. In Paris, it is said, lamps will be lighted by electric furnished by a destructor. The unique municipal exercise in Shoreditch appears to be exciting the liveliest interest in scientific and municipal circles in Great Britain and abroad. If successful, it promises to revolutionize the public supply of electricity. As the vestry of Shoreditch promises to supply electricity at six pence (12 cents) per unit for the first two hours, and four pence per unit afterward. During a preliminary test 150 pounds pressure of steam was raised in the boilers from dust alone, absolutely no coal being used.

### TO BURN REFUSE FOR POWER.

#### Experiment in England Which May Revolutionize the Lighting and Heating of Cities.

**London, June 26.** An economic and scientific experiment will be inaugurated on Monday when Lord Lelvin opens at Shoreditch the combined electricity and dust destruction works erected at a cost of about \$750,000. The destructor cells are capable of burning 20,000 tons of ashbin refuse yearly, and the heat given out is sufficient for the electric light and power of the whole of Shoreditch, with a population of 124,000, besides supplying heat to adjoining baths and washhouses.

In Paris, lamps will be lighted for the first time on Monday by electricity furnished by a destructor.

This unique municipal exercise in Shoreditch appears to be exciting the liveliest interest in scientific and municipal circles in Great Britain and abroad. If successful, it promises to revolutionize the public supply of electricity, as the Vestry of Shoreditch promises to supply electricity as 2d (4 cents) per unit in day time and at 4d (8 cents) per unit at the night time.

During a preliminary test 150 pounds pressure of steam was raised in the boilers from dust alone, absolutely no coal being used.

NEW YORK TIMES 1897



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THE REFUSE DESTROYER WHICH  
POWERED THE STREET LIGHTING  
BECAME A PARTICULARLY  
POWERFUL SYMBOL OF THE  
PROGRESSIVE SHOREDITCH POLICIES  
AND LED TO THE ADOPTION  
OF THE BOROUGH MOTTO:  
**MORE LIGHT, MORE POWER.**

THE BOROUGH WANTED TO HARNESS  
THE POWER AND BENEFITS OF  
ELECTRICITY. THE MOTTO WAS  
DISPLAYED ALONGSIDE THE BOROUGH  
COAT OF ARMS— A TWIN BODIED,  
SINGLE HEADED LION TAKEN FROM  
THE ARMS OF THE MEDIEVAL LORD OF  
THE MANOR JOHN DE NORTHAMPTON,  
SECOND LORD OF THE MANOR  
OF SHOREDITCH AND LORD MAYOR  
OF LONDON 1381 - 1382.

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## TOWN HALL EXTENSION 1904

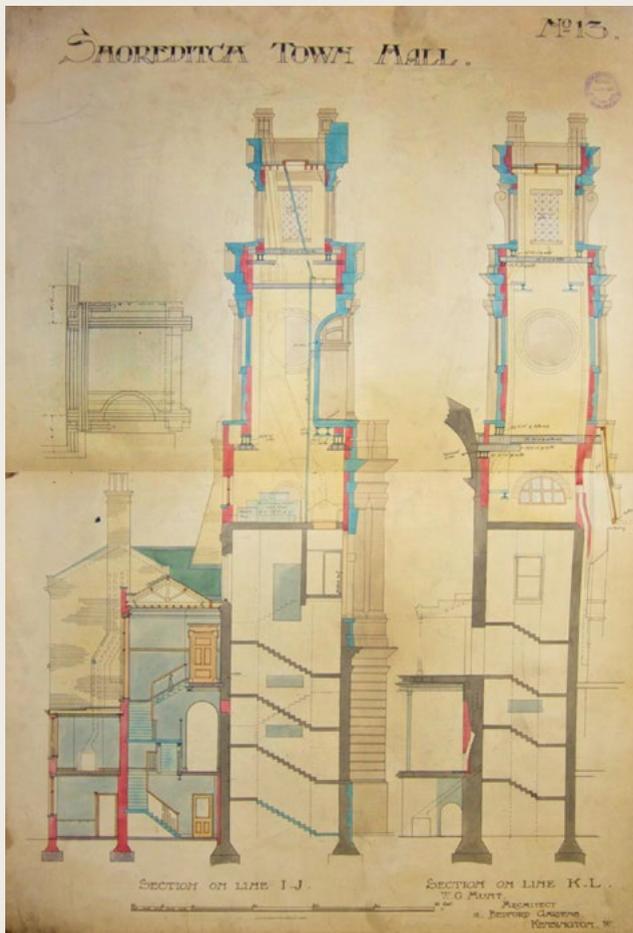


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W. G. Hunt's plans for the significant extension works of **1904**, are preserved in good condition at the London Borough of Hackney Archives. They clearly show the capacious fire escapes that allow the Town Hall today to meet modern standards of ingress and egress.

The colour work is also striking.

The 1904 extension was just on the point of completion when a disastrous fire broke out in the Assembly Hall.



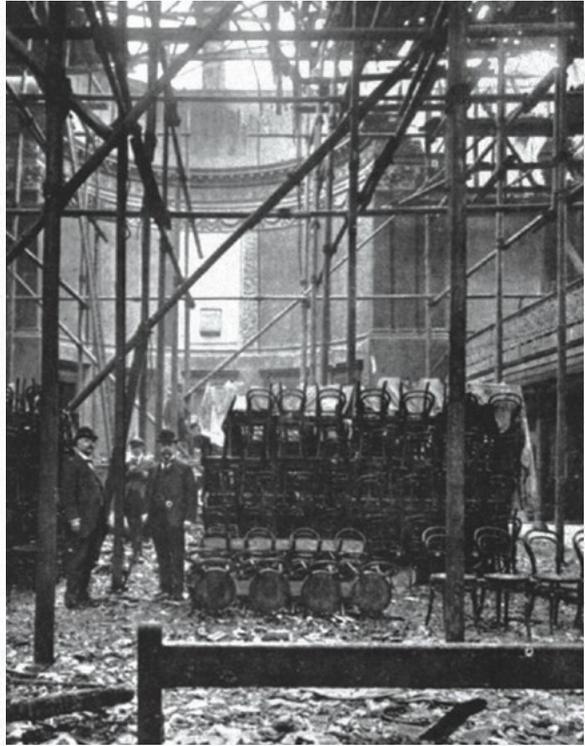
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## SHOREDITCH MAYOR AT WORK

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By a destructive fire which broke out in Shoreditch Town Hall yesterday afternoon (August 13th), and brought about the collapse of the roof, it is estimated that damage to the extent of about £50,000 has been done. The building is a handsome structure, in Old Street, St. Luke's, and for the past two or three weeks an army of workmen has been engaged in redecorating the large hall, which was filled with scaffolding. It is thought that a workman in lighting a candle to aid him in his work ignited a gas leakage and caused the roof to catch fire.

Fanned by the boisterous wind, the flames spread with amazing rapidity, and shortly after the arrival of the brigade the roof fell in with a crash, carrying with it the whole gallery which ran round the hall. The fall of the roof took the fire into the body of the hall, the interior of which blazed furiously. Every available engine and appliance in the metropolis was summoned, but owing to the crowded state of the district and the congestion caused by a block of about half a mile of tramway-cars on either side of the town hall, it was difficult to get to work from the front of the building. The Shoreditch Station of the North London Railway afforded a vantage point for a section of the brigade, and when all the men got to work a tremendous volume of water was thrown into the building, and came pouring down the wide staircase and out into the street in a torrential rush. Part of the high coping and a flagstaff threatened to fall, and the police had considerable difficulty in keeping back the



crowds which poured from the factories and workshops of the neighbourhood.

The staff of the council began to move the books and securities as soon as the outbreak was discovered, but it is feared that many of the records have been rendered useless. One of the first to lend assistance with the hose was the Mayor, Cr. Jt. B. Bird, who happened to be on the premises. By five o'clock the brigade had mastery of the flames, but by that time the interior of the building presented a wrecked appearance, and water did almost as much damage as fire. It was not until seven that the stranded tramway cars were allowed to pass, and then ensued a scene of wild excitement as they were boarded by the thousands of workers anxious to get home.

**DAILY MAIL, OCTOBER 1904**



## SHOREDITCH: THE MUNICIPAL MECCA

Shoreditch is already becoming the Municipal Mecca of the world. It has been visited by deputations from America, Australia, Ireland and Scotland, consisting of people anxious to discover the secret of success in municipal matters. This, in brief, is the record of Shoreditch: A Town Hall with a music and dancing licence, a mechanics technical institute which has not ruffled the feelings of any trade unions, a splendid free library, baths and washhouses, electricity works supplying light at three-halfpence below the average figure, and a dust destructor; the last three yielding a profit.

A Sunday Times representative a few months ago interviewed Mayor Harris to ascertain if there was any probability of the City Council carrying out similar work. The reply was: "I have not given the matter any consideration," he said; "and, furthermore, think that it would be altogether impossible."

Sydney Sunday Times, Jan 28, 1900.



## PROGRESS

The statue of Progress was added as part of the **1904** extension works, and positioned prominently on the tower she was intended to be an unequivocal symbol of the forward looking, pioneering Shoreditch Borough Council. She is typical of the Edwardian Baroque tradition of the time, reminiscent of warrior women archetypes and clothed in Roman garments. She is also likely to have been based on the figure of 'Hope', very popular in the Victorian era - perhaps the most famous example being the Statue of Liberty. It's impossible not to see the similarities. She wears a winged helmet, a symbol of speed, and carries a torch, to shine the light of progress and illuminate her way. She also bears an axe, to cut her way through obstacles, including bureaucracy. Physically she has the look of a Valkyrie, especially in the solidity of her raised arm, symbolising strength and purpose. Mounted prominently on the tower, overlooking the front of the building, it's also not a stretch to feel she's something of a nautical figurehead on the prow of a ship, with all the related allusions of cutting through the waves and forward motion.

The Refuse Destructor Station (which in **1994** became Circus Space - going on to become the National Centre for Circus Arts, a thriving arts and cultural space) shares a female figurehead with the Town Hall, as well as a motto closely related to More Light, More Power: 'E Pulvere, Lux, Et Vis'. This broadly translates as 'Out of the ashes, Light and Power' and appears on the building. In the illustration the figure stands on a fire fuelled by mixed refuse, depicted as a spirit of power or electricity and chained to presumably prevent her from escaping and taking this power with her. She also wears a crown with an eight-pointed star, a symbol often related to Venus, new beginnings or creation. In the depiction this appears to be the medium or catalyst for the transformation of the refuse from something of no value, mystically or alchemically, into electricity.



## KEY STONE SYMBOLISM



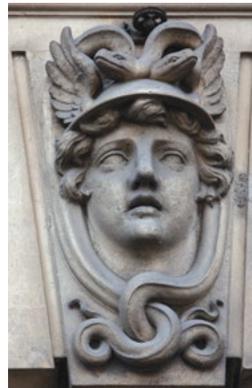
**1.**

LADY JUSTICE  
AND THE RULE  
OF LAW



**2.**

THE CROSSED  
HAMMERS OF LABOUR  
AND WORK



**3.**

HERMES OR MERCURY,  
REPRESENTING  
PUBLIC HEALTH



**4.**

A CASTLE  
TURRET, SYMBOLIC  
OF MUNICIPALITY  
AND CIVIC  
ADMINISTRATION



**5.**

A PORTCULLIS,  
SYMBOLISING SAFETY  
AND PROTECTION



**6.**

A WOMAN WITH  
FRUIT AND CORN,  
INDICATIVE OF  
THE ROLE OF THE  
COUNCIL IN PROVIDING  
SUSTENANCE  
AND SUPPORT TO THE  
LOCAL POPULATION



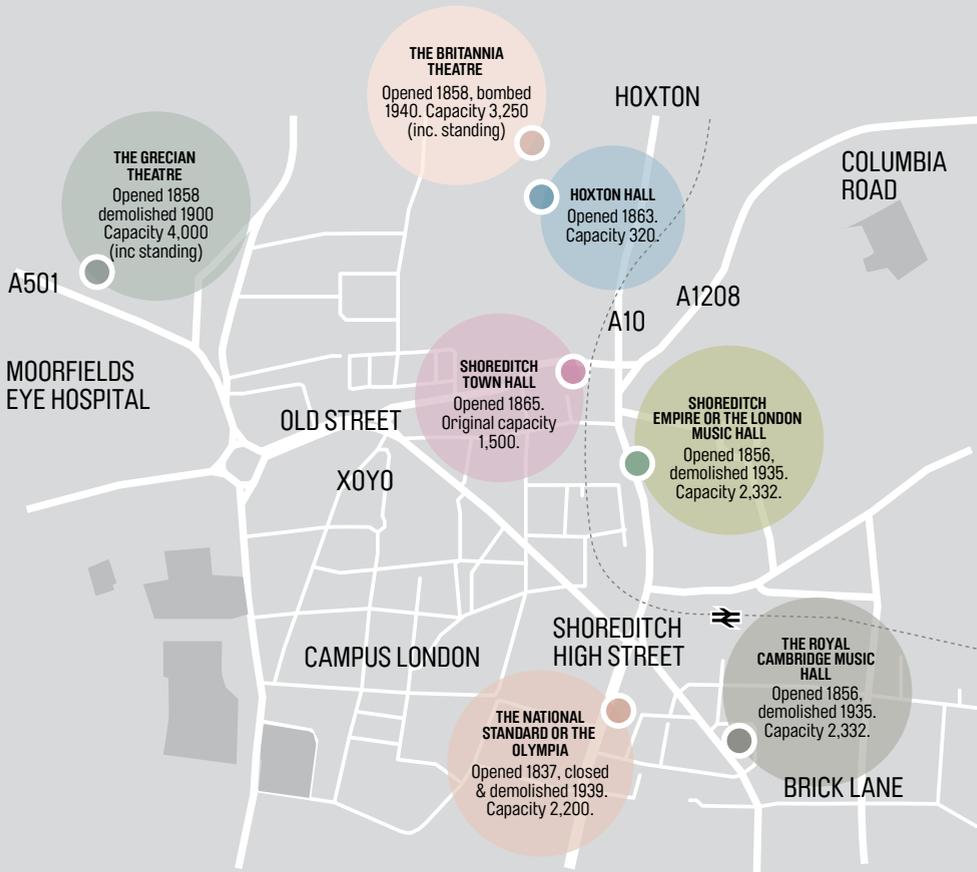
**7.**

A MAN WEARING  
A LION SKIN,  
WITH THE HEAD  
OPEN-MOUTHED,  
A SYMBOL OF  
AUTHORITY AND  
STRENGTH FROM  
ROMAN TIMES





## VICTORIAN EAST END THEATRES



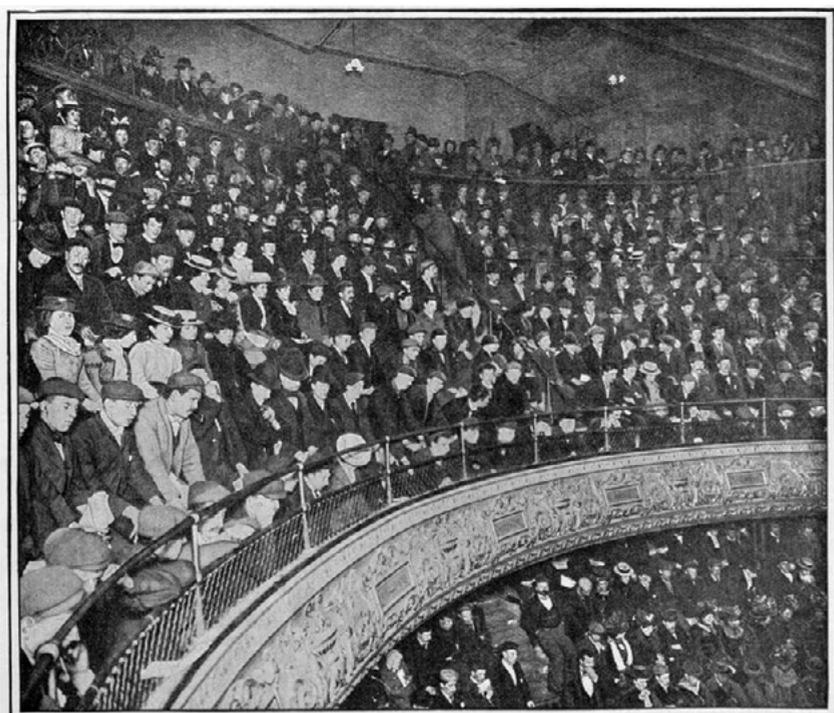


## MUSIC HALL

Originating in saloon bars within public houses in the early **1800s** 'Music Hall' became something of a phenomenon and was hugely popular until the mid-**1900s**. It comprised mixed bills of entertainment with programmes including songs, male and female impersonators, mime artists, impressionists, trampoline acts, comedy, theatrical sketches and speciality acts, including burlesque and vaudeville. So rapid was the increase in demand for Music Hall that over fifty theatres were built in London alone to accommodate audiences. The East End became a key destination for Music Hall lovers. In the square mile around Shoreditch Town Hall there was a total audience capacity of 12-13,000 by the late **1800s**, with some theatres, for example the Britannia on Hoxton Street, large enough to accommodate up to 3,250 people.

The Assembly Hall in Shoreditch Town Hall came about in large part because of the huge popularity of Music Hall. The Vestrymen and women were keen to ensure their new Town Hall would be of real value to local people, and not just be seen as a monument, a place you came only to pay your bills or conduct civic business. With the explosion in popularity of Music Hall all around them, including many new venues, the answer was simple: include a theatre in the new space and give people what they wanted. The Assembly Hall was therefore designed in the grander style of Victorian theatre auditoria, specifically with the aim of being able to host the top professional artists of the day such as Arthur and Marie Lloyd, Dan Leno and George Leybourne.

While it may not seem particularly remarkable today to include a public space like the Assembly Hall in a Town Hall design, in the **1860s** it was highly unusual and considered quite radical. As contemporary media coverage suggested: Town Hall's were not places you came to dance and enjoy yourself! Today, as discussions of wellbeing and civic pride are an accepted core part of political agendas, its worth reflecting how Vestries such as Shoreditch were ahead of the curve 150 years ago with their own brand of community and civic engagement.



*Reproduced by permission of Cassell & Co. from "Living London."*

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A full house at The London Music Hall, Shoreditch.

## CONCERTS AND ENTERTAINMENTS



### Mr J Sparrow

After leaving in May Mr. Sparrow returned to work in the city as an auctioneer and organised a penny reading-room in Shoreditch Town Hall. His concerts there became quite a local institution, and he ran them every Saturday night during the winter months for seventeen years, and indeed,

only relinquished them when he was obliged to give way to the strenuous opposition of the music hall proprietors, who declared that with the aid of their cleverest people he cut in on the best night of the work. They thereupon made their contracts in such a form as to deprive Mr Sparrow of the services of the artistes who might appear at their halls, and, of course, there could be no question, from Mr Sparrow's point of view as to the result of this system of engaging a music hall 'turn'. Two of the most popular artistes of the present day got almost their earliest engagements with Mr Sparrow – Mr George Green / Crossmith and Mr Arthur Roberts. Who were them well content with a pound or thirty shillings a night. Mr Frank Thornston (now in Australia with Sweet Lavender) Mr George Laybourne and Mr Arthur Lloyd used to sing with Mr Sparrow at penny readings. Shortly after Mr Bill Holland showed Marion the 'Amazon Queen' and giantess at the Alhambra, Mr Sparrow engaged her to appear at his concert hall where she created little less than a furore.

"Talking about Bill Holland" says the interviewee "I recollect a benefit performance which he organised at the now deceased Wilton's Music Hall, The chair was taken from half hour to half hour by well-known men, among them Mr Henry Pettitt, with whom I became rather closely associated in the days of the old Grecian..."

The Era, July 1903

Concerts, lectures and other forms of education and entertainment were also a part of the Town Hall's public events programme – sometimes with the acts or the promoters overlapping with the popular Music Hall nights. Many of the promoters and general managers were extremely hard working, creative entrepreneurs, working not just to see their own events bring in the crowds, but often competing with other more established programmes.

Mr Jesse Sparrow, was one such figure. By turns an auctioneer, proprietor, promoter and general manager he was part of a consortium who backed the building of the Granville Theatre of Varieties at Walham Green (now Fulham Broadway) in **1898**. He was also the General Manager of The Grand Theatre, Clapham, designed by Frank Matcham, which opened in November **1900**. He also ran a successful 'penny reading-room' at Shoreditch Town Hall for over seventeen years. Reading-rooms originated as part of working men's clubs and societies, to provide space simply to read newspapers or books, but by the mid **1800s** these had gradually grown into a variety of Music Hall, with entertainment and acts laid on alongside the reading.

Jesse Sparrow brought many noteworthy names to Shoreditch Town Hall, including perhaps the most famous Music Hall star of the day, Arthur Lloyd.



**TOWN HALL,**  
SHOREDITCH

**SATURDAY POPULARS**

John Proprietor and Manager. — MR. J. SPARROW.  
Last Night of the Season,  
Saturday April 22nd.

**MONSTRE ENTERTAINMENT,**  
WITH THE  
**BENEFIT**  
OF  
**Mr. ARTHUR LLOYD**

The famous Vocalist and Comedian, Arthur Lloyd, whose name is known to all, will appear in the evening and will sing and recite in the most brilliant manner. He will be assisted by the following artists: Miss Maud Manfred, Mrs. Geo. Ware, Miss Florence Sanger, Miss Phoebe Don, and Miss Marie Lottus, Mrs. F. R. Phillips.

**Grand Comic Festival**  
Full Feast of Fine Fun,  
Marvellous Programme,  
Comic Songs!  
Comic Duets, Comic Trios  
Drawing Room Entertainments,  
Pantomimical Sketches.

G. H. Macdormott, Arthur Roberts,  
Herbert Campbell, James Fawn,  
Fred Albert, R. Inch Fred Lay,  
Harry Braham, Harry Sansom,  
James Taylor, Victor Liston,  
Will Mitcham, The Ridgways,  
Charles Lewis, Junr. W. Penna,  
Cecil Morris, Mons Cardon.

Remember! The Last Night of the Season.

The Buckleys,  
Miss Clarisse—Miss Talbot  
Arthur Lloyd, The Bros. Raynor—

**MISS KATY KING,**  
Miss Marie Lottus, Mrs. F. R. Phillips—  
Miss Maud Manfred, Mrs. Geo. Ware  
Miss Florence Sanger, Miss Phoebe Don—  
**MIDLE ALPHONSINE,**  
Mr. J. G. CLARENCE,

The Musical Merrilees,  
Louis St. Clair—

A Refined Drawing-Room Comedietta,  
"Too Fatiguing,"

"BARNEY O'TOOLE,"  
Screaming Pantomime Sketch.

**THE POODLE DOG.**

**Who'll Shut the Door.**  
Represented by Miss Katy King  
Mr. Arthur Lloyd and Mr. Victor Liston.

Messrs. Dermott & Doyle,  
The Managers.

At 8 o'clock in the evening, at a quarter of 8  
Body of Hall & Gallery, 6 pence.  
Lobby, 1 penny.

Remember! The Last Night of the Season.



## MY TOWN HALL MATTHEW LLOYD

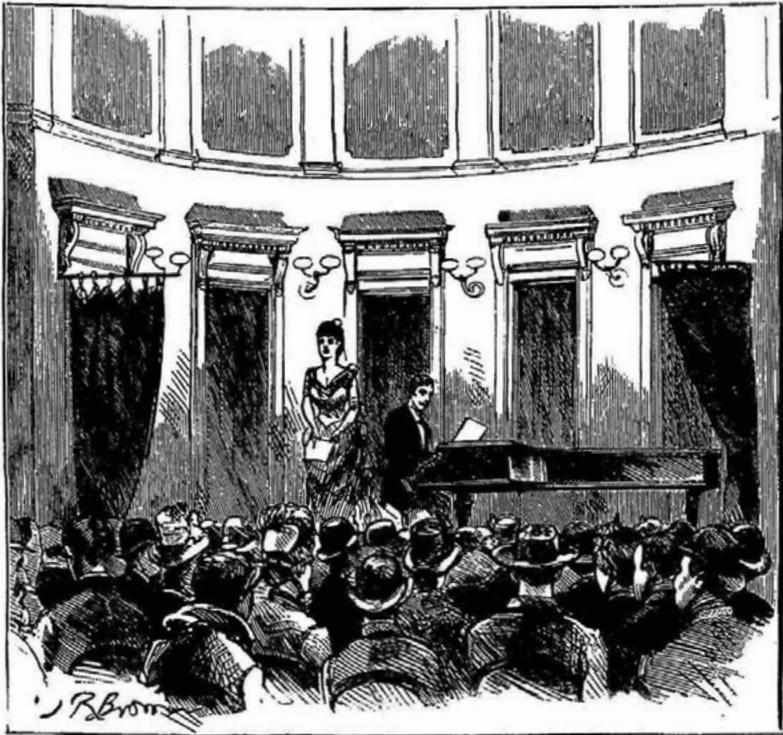
*“Arthur Lloyd was a big star on the Music Hall stage. He was one of the top four of the time, known as a Lion Comique. He would perform in four Music Halls a night in London, travelling to each – he’d do his act, then get into a horse and carriage and shoot across London to another venue, do the same thing, four halls a night. So, he kept that up until the late **1800s**.*

*I’m sure he probably performed here [Shoreditch Town Hall] tens, if not hundreds of times to be honest, because he was all over London all of the time. It’s lovely when you go back into a venue and stand on the stage, it’s a wonderful connection – I’m standing on the same stage that he stood and performed on. He was so popular and loved, and I hope he’d be proud that I’ve gone to visit these places, especially as most of the Music Halls that he performed in just don’t exist anymore.*

*And there’s a story around the posters. I got contacted by somebody from an antique shop, and they said we’ve got a lot of Arthur Lloyd posters dating way back to the mid-to late-eighteen hundreds, and would I be interested in them? I said yes, but I was interested also how this antique shop had got them. Apparently, Arthur Lloyd’s son, Harry Lloyd, who was also involved in the business but he was a bit of a vagabond I think, he had got into some sort of debt and given this poster collection which had been collected by members of the family for almost one hundred years, as some kind of security on a debt that he owed. They were all in good condition and as well as covering Arthur also include T.C. King, who was Arthur Lloyd’s father-in-law, and was also a famous actor who worked at Drury Lane a lot. His daughter Katty King was also a performer on the stage, and went on to marry Arthur. So I have posters for her and Arthur, performing together on the same bill, some also for T.C King, Horatio Lloyd and Fred Lloyd, covering all members of the acting family.”*

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Edited from an interview with Matthew Lloyd,  
Arthur Lloyd’s great grandson.



A CONCERT IN SHOREDITCH TOWN HALL

A rare illustration of the original stage of the Assembly Hall, pre the **1904** fire, published in *The Graphic Illustrated* weekly news in February **1888**. The original design was markedly different from the one that replaced it in the new, grander Assembly Hall. Opting for a more intimate characteristically Music Hall design, C. A. Long's **1865** stage includes multiple doorways for entering and exiting. Noticeably absent is the Juliet Balcony, a prominent feature later introduced by G.A. Hunt.

NATIONAL SUNDAY LEAGUE.

**SUNDAY EVENINGS FOR THE PEOPLE.**

THE SEASON WILL COMMENCE ON  
**Sunday, 18th Oct., 1891.**

**SHOREDITCH TOWN HALL,**  
 OLD STREET, E.  
 HANDEL'S ORATORIO  
 "SAMSON,"

TO BE PERFORMED WITH  
**CHOIR AND FULL ORCHESTRA.**

SOLOISTS.—  
 Miss ADA PATTERSON, MADAME VAUDREY,  
 M<sup>rs</sup>. DYVED LEWYS and M<sup>r</sup>. ROBERT HILTON.

Musical Conductor, ... M<sup>r</sup>. OZOR BASKAY, M.A.  
 Leader of Orchestra, ... M<sup>r</sup>. W. R. CAYE.  
 Solo Trumpet, ... M<sup>r</sup>. JOHN SACCOM.

**THE 'HORNS' ASSEMBLY ROOMS,**  
 HENNINGTON PARK, S.E.

LECTURE BY  
**T. C. HEPWORTH, ESQ.,**  
 ON "FOOTPRINTS OF CHARLES DICKENS."  
 With Oxy-hydrogen Lantern Illustrations of many Places of Interest  
 mentioned in Dickens's Famous Works.

FOLLOWED BY VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC.

VOCALISTS.—  
 MADAME ISABEL GEORGE & M<sup>r</sup>. ARTHUR STRUONELL.

The Band of the 4th Vol. Inft. East Surrey Regiment will perform  
 during the Evening. M<sup>r</sup>. A. R. SPRING, Conductor.

Conductor ... M<sup>r</sup>. NANCY MAISON.

Doors open at 8.30 Commence at 7 pm.  
 ADMISSION FREE. RESERVED SEATS 3d, 6d, and 1s.  
 (10a—Barnhill's Chancery, 5, Dombell's Bond. Haver Music, Barnhill.)

TOWN HALL, SHOREDITCH.



**SATURDAY**  
 POPULAR  
**ENTERTAINMENTS.**

SEASON 1891-2.

Sole Proprietor and Manager - M<sup>r</sup>. J. SPARROW.

These Entertainments organized by Messrs. HUNT and SPARROW in 1891) are supported by the  
**MOST PROMINENT ARTISTES OF THE DAY,**  
 AND ARE UNIVERSALLY RENOWNED TO BE THE  
**BEST CONDUCTED & MOST SUCCESSFUL**  
 OF THEIR KIND IN THE  
**UNITED KINGDOM.**

Pianist ... Madame CLARENCE HUNT.

Doors open at Half-past Seven. Commence at Eight o'clock.

N.B.—All communications to be addressed to M<sup>r</sup>. J. SPARROW,  
 Town Hall, Shoreditch.

Printed by "Beckley Express" Steam Printing Works, 26, Old Street, E.C.

**W. B. Pennington's Testimonial Fund**

**BALACLAVA ANNIVERSARY**



UNDER THE DISTINGUISHED PATRONAGE OF  
 Her Royal Highness The Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll;  
 His Grace The Duke of Argyll;  
 SIR HENRY IRVING; The Rt. Hon. HERBERT GLADSTONE, M.P.; LADY JEUNE;  
 &c. &c.

**GRAND ENTERTAINMENT**  
 AT THE ...  
**Town Hall, Shoreditch,**  
 On THURSDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 25th, 1900.

Under the direction of **ODOARDO BARRI**, Composer of the National Song "The Old Brigade."

The following popular Artists will appear:

Miss RITA PRESANO	Miss ALICE PENNINGTON
M <sup>me</sup> . LUISA SOBRINO	(By kind permission of E. DOLLY CARTE, Esq.)
Miss JOSEPHINE WHITE.	Miss EMILY DAVIES
	M <sup>me</sup> . BESSIE WEBBER
	AND
Miss MAUD SANTLEY.	
M <sup>r</sup> . REGINALD GROOME	M <sup>r</sup> . WALTER CLIFFORD
M <sup>r</sup> . BANTOCK PIERPOINT	M <sup>r</sup> . FRANKLIN CLIVE
	AND
M <sup>r</sup> . CHARLES COPLAND.	

Solo Violin - - - Miss JESSIE GRIMSON.

Recitations by Miss ELLEN BOWICK and M<sup>r</sup>. W. H. PENNINGTON.

At the Piano - M<sup>rs</sup>. FRASER HENRY & M<sup>r</sup>. LOVETT-KING.

During the Evening ...

**M<sup>r</sup>. HERBERT CAMPBELL**  
 has kindly consented to sing two of his humorous songs,  
 ... AND ...

**M<sup>r</sup>. MAURICE VICTOR**  
 will give his charming Sleight of Hand Display, as performed before their Royal Highnesses  
**THE PRINCE and PRINCESS OF WALES.**

Concert Grand Pianoforte kindly lent by Messrs. John Broadwood & Sons.

Doors open at 7. Commence at 7.30.

**Tickets 21/-, 10s, 5/-, 3/-, 2/- and 1/-**

Of Messrs. PALMERS & Co., 41, Finsbury Pavement, E.C.; M<sup>r</sup>. LOVETT-KING, Music Warehouse,  
 Highbury Corner, N.; M<sup>r</sup>. J. T. CHATTAWAY, 377a, Mare Street, Hackney, N.E.; M<sup>r</sup>. W.  
 WAGGOTT, Music Seller, 7a, Highbury Park, N.; M<sup>r</sup>. GEORGE ULWORTH, Stationer, 6a, High Street,  
 Stoke Newington, N.; M<sup>r</sup>. S. C. HAYWOOD, Bookseller, 106, Kingsland High Street; and of all  
 Members of the Committee.



## 1900: A NEW METROPOLITAN BOROUGH

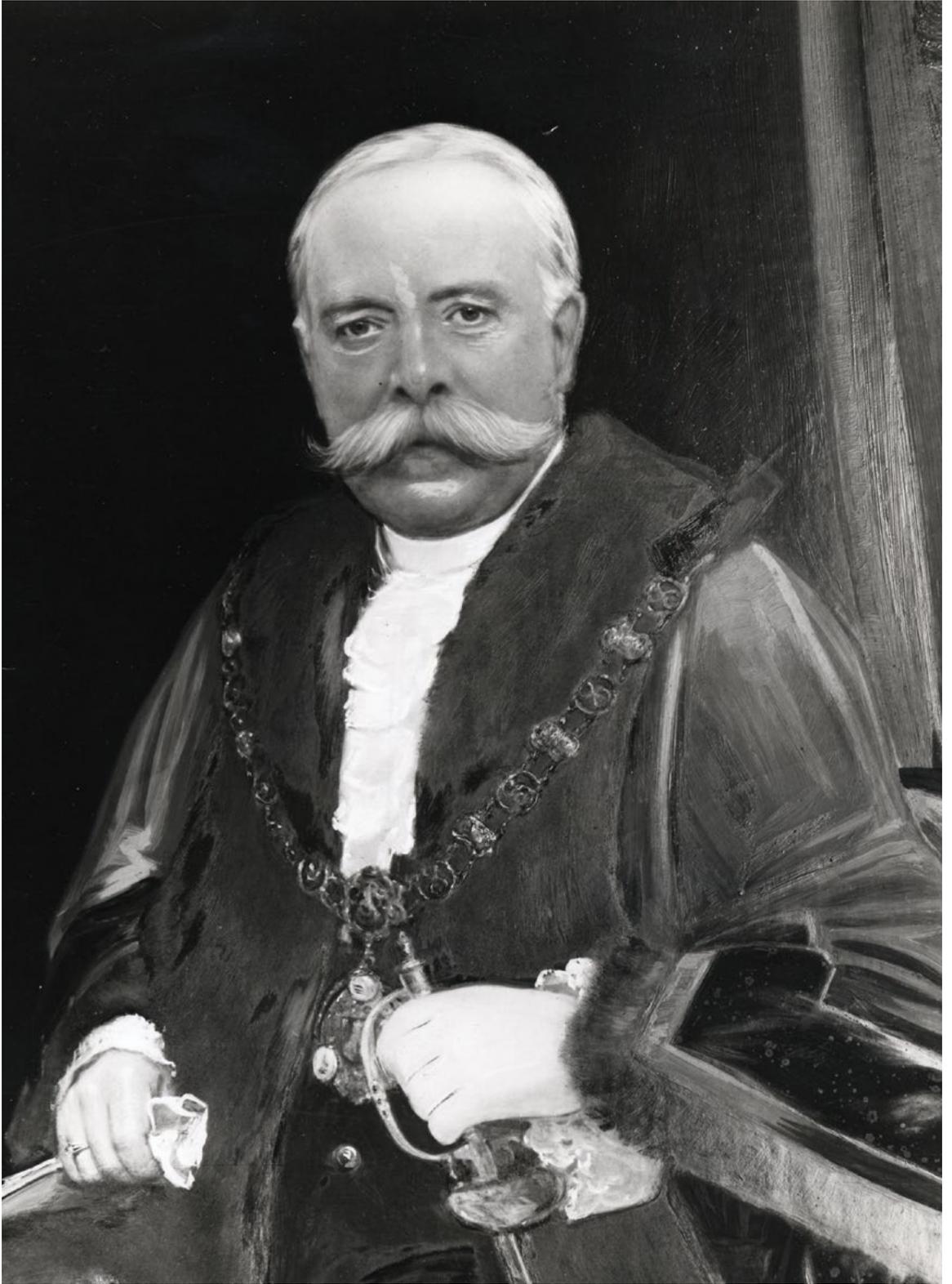
FROM 1900 THE NEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT USHERED IN CHANGES IN SHOREDITCH: IT BECAME A NEW METROPOLITAN BOROUGH, WITH A MAYOR.

These new mayors were drawn from the local community and from the start had solid connections with local trades and industries. They had an energetic zeal in addressing the perennial problems in Shoreditch of poverty, overcrowding and unemployment, marking them out as worthy successors to the reforming Vestrymen of the **1860s**. Many of the mayors and councillors in Shoreditch were at the heart of the developing Labour Party.

Sir Henry Busby Bird was elected as Mayor twelve times between **1903** and **1919** - more than any other Councillor. He ran a business as a cheesemonger and grocer at the heart of the community alongside his work as Mayor, and was knighted in **1919** for his services to the Borough.

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Sir Henry Busby Bird.



THE SHOREDITCH OBSERVER  
AUGUST 21, 1914

SHOREDITCH

**Always a strenuous worker, the Mayor of the Borough is just now taking a full share of both public and private responsibility.**

Having spent the whole of his life amongst the workers and the poor, Councillor Bird (who is this year Chairman of the Guardians Board) knows a good deal at first hand of the conditions arising from poverty and unemployment, and, as Mayor he lost no time in setting on foot the necessary organisation to deal with exceptional distress.

As a magistrate always on the spot, the Mayor has been sharing with his fellow justices the duty of enrolling special constables. In business life Mr. Bird has also had an anxious time, as the head of a large provisions business, in the midst of a very crowded and poor population. From the first he set himself against panic prices and the firm has so far gone very creditably through an anxious time. Not since the sudden fire, which seriously damaged the Town Hall some years ago, has there been such a busy time at the municipal centre during the summer recess. Part of the building is in use as a recruiting station, with a brisk business doing, and the Highways Committee have several bits of work which can be put in hand for the benefit of those not quite equal to naval or military service.

The Town Clerk has indefinitely postponed his summer holiday and several members of the staff are awaiting a more convenient season.



March, **1945**. Rivington Street, the Tramshed in the background. The Mayor of Shoreditch at the time, Thomas Sillitoe, helps local resident Mrs. Hardy with a pram piled with furniture and household goods. These had been donated from across the UK thanks to a scheme set up by the Women's Voluntary Service and were to help Londoners whose homes and possessions had been destroyed in bombing raids.



## RADICALISM AND POLITICS

Shoreditch Town Hall has always been a political melting pot. Those who have met under its roof provide a snapshot of how the East End was where many of our great political battles have been fought. Activists, campaigners and politicians of all stripes, from local community members to Prime Ministers, representing all the major ideological convictions which underpin the great political stories and struggles of the past century, have used the Town Hall as a hub for their meetings and rallies.

Among them were the various branches, local and national, of the Labour Party, the Communist Party, Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, Universal Suffrage groups, Zionists and workers' Unions. Following the Battle of Cable Street\*, resistance meetings were held at the Town Hall to coordinate opposition to Oswald Mosely's BUF. During the unprecedented newspaper strike of **1955** which led to almost a month with no London newspapers published, meetings of the engineering and electrical unions who were fighting for a wage increase, also took place at the Town Hall.

In November **1947** Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, and Herbert Morrison, Deputy Prime Minister, hosted a Trade Council Dinner at Shoreditch Town Hall (see photographs, opposite page). During the dinner both the Prime Minister & Morrison gave speeches honouring the public service of William Girling, in his fourth term as Mayor of Shoreditch at the time, and his wife, Henrietta Girling OBE, who had been the first woman Mayor of the Borough in **1930**. Along with Henry Busby Bird and Thomas Sillitoe, the Girling's were

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\*The Battle of Cable Street took place on Sunday 4 October 1936 when Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists (BUF) attempted to march through East London.

There were clashes between the BUF (and the police protecting them) and anti-fascist demonstrators, including the local and particularly Jewish communities and political groups, including The Communist Party of Great Britain.



one of the three political families that dominated local politics for half a century. In his speech, as well as praising the work of the Girling's, Morrison reminisced about his youth working in Shoreditch, stuffing envelopes for local elections in what was to be the beginning of a life in politics.

Herbert Morrison was a major figure in local and national politics, as well as a key figure within the Labour Party. He was Mayor of Hackney in **1920**, and MP for Hackney South in the early **1920s** and then from **1935 - 1945**. He was also Home Secretary in Churchill's government during the War, and as Deputy Prime Minister played a key role in the progressive post-war Labour government that introduced the National Health Service. He was also the prime mover behind the hugely successful Festival of Britain in **1951**, becoming Companion of Honour the same year. His grandson is Peter Mandelson, a former cabinet minister in Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's government.



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**Henrietta Girling OBE** was Mayor of Shoreditch in **1930/31** and was its first female Mayor. She also represented Shoreditch at the London County Council from **1931-49**. She was a life long Labour member and is pictured here (circa **1960**) in later life being visited by Rt Hon Herbert Morrison (Lord) and Lady Morrison.



MY TOWN HALL  
**MARGARET DAVIS\***

*"I remember that Uncle Bill [William Girling] as we used to call him, had a reservoir named after him\* and that Auntie Hettie [Henrietta Girling] was the first Mayoress of Hackney and a Justice of the Peace. When my Dad went down the pub with Uncle Bill, I don't think she ever went. She was quite grand! She made sure she wrote JP [Justice of the Peace] on the back of this photo (being held in the picture above). I remember she was in charge of a committee that gave hardship money. After my Grandfather died (he was only 50), my Grandmother, who didn't work as she had children to bring up, applied for help and was turned down! After that I don't think Auntie Hettie was very popular! I think I'm the last member of my family locally. My cousin lives abroad."*

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\*William Girling OBE was Chairman of the Metropolitan Water Board as well as being a Shoreditch Councillor, and Mayor for three terms, from 1919 - 1922.

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## DOROTHY THURTLE



Dorothy Thurtle, Mayor of Shoreditch **1936-37**, was also Shoreditch's representative at London County Council in **1946**. From a political family (her father was George Lansbury, Labour politician, Leader of the Labour Party from **1932-35**), she was a dedicated social reformer and leading campaigner for women's reproductive rights, and access to contraception and abortion rights. She was also the actress, Dame Angela Lansbury's, Aunt.

BRUSHES WITH HISTORY:  
**JACK THE RIPPER'S LAST VICTIM**



On 29 December **1888**, the inquest into the murder of Mary Kelly (the last victim of Jack the Ripper) was held in the Council Chamber (Vestry Hall) at Shoreditch Town Hall.

Having opened proceedings, the Coroner proposed that the jury see the body and scene of crime. Reports from the time indicate that the jurors then - having put on their hats and coats - walked somberly from Shoreditch Town Hall to Shoreditch Church, where the body was viewed in a small mortuary, and then on to Whitechapel, accompanied by a curious crowd of onlookers.



## BRUSHES WITH HISTORY: **SYLVIA PANKHURST**

KNOWN AND LOVED THROUGHOUT THE EAST END AS 'OUR SYLVIA', SYLVIA PANKHURST WAS A TIRELESS AND EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGNER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE OF ALL KINDS.

Sylvia Pankhurst's commitment to improving conditions for ordinary people in the East End has never been forgotten. She organised free mother and baby clinics to address the devastating effects of poverty on child health in the East End. She also set up a 'Cost Price' restaurant during the First World War to address dire food shortages, which in **1915** served 400 meals a day and saved many lives. Another key achievement was establishing a Women's Factory to save the employment of dozens of women whose jobs in tiny failing workshops had vanished in the war.

However, Ms Pankhurst was most famous during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for her campaigning for Universal Suffrage and Votes for Women, along with her mother Emmeline and sister Christabel in the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). She was particularly active in mobilising women in the East End and in **1913** worked alongside Labour MP George Lansbury to organise a series of rallies and marches throughout the area. She and George had both been repeatedly arrested and imprisoned for their campaigning, and the East End rallies became a game of cat and mouse with the police. Eastenders, loyal to 'Our Sylvia', flocked to these rallies and organised themselves to protect her and outfox the police, flooding into an area and causing confusion, allowing Sylvia to escape. Her luck ran out at the eighth rally at **Shoreditch Town Hall** in November **1913**, where she was finally arrested and imprisoned. She later left the WSPU and established the East London Federation of Suffragettes which included an explicit commitment to socialist ideals.



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Sylvia Pankhurst, circa **1930**.

BRUSHES WITH HISTORY:  
**A DANCE WITH A PRINCE**



**ALL ENVY HER** – Miss Violet Varnals, chosen by Prince George as his partner at a dance at Shoreditch Town Hall. They did the Charleston so well that three solo encores were demanded.

As the councillors who commissioned it envisaged from the outset, the Town Hall has been at the centre of its community and was a busy, vibrant place throughout the first half of the **1900s**. In addition to the many public concerts, entertainment and events that took place regularly, the Town Hall was also – thanks in part to its grand and beautiful Assembly Hall, complete with fully sprung floor – a popular venue for parties and dances. These included: visits by leading actors, politicians and even royalty of the day (see article above); schools and people from the local community celebrating christenings and weddings; and amateur concerts and fundraisers.

BRUSHES WITH HISTORY:  
**A SOCIAL & COMMUNITY HUB**



Fancy Dress Party 1916 (top left) | Community Young People's Group circa **1940** (middle left) | Wedding **1950's** (bottom left) | Actor Bill Owen, in his early thirties, dancing with his first wife, Edith Steveson, at an event for the stars of the film *When the Bough Breaks* **1947** (right).



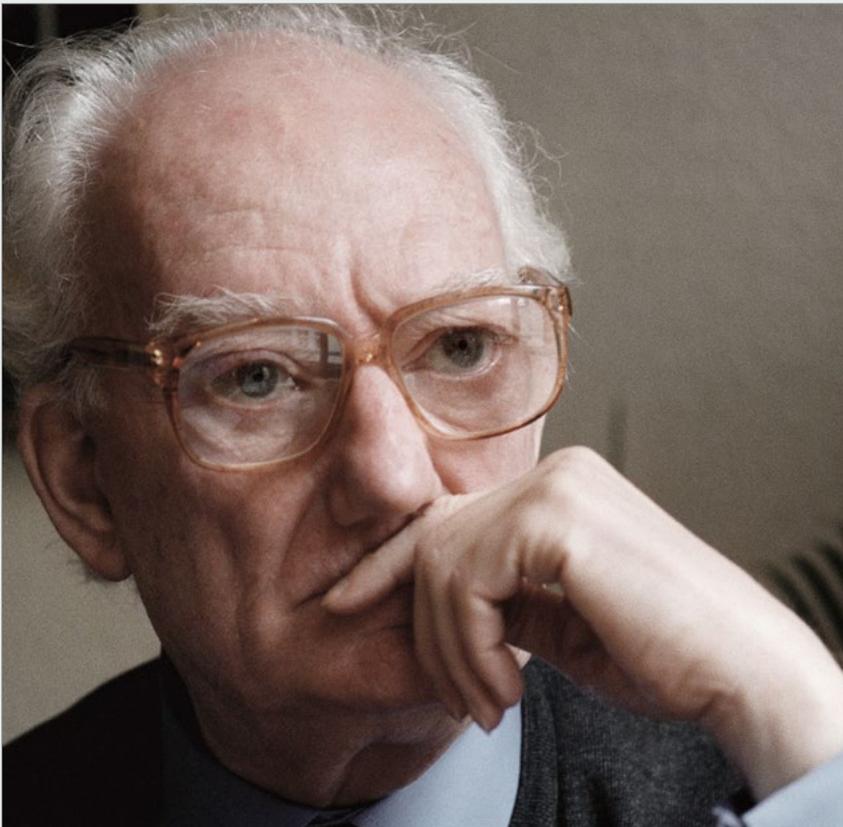
## MY TOWN HALL **BRYAN MAGEE**

BRYAN MAGEE HAS HAD A DISTINGUISHED AND VARIED  
CAREER AS A WRITER, ACADEMIC,  
PHILOSOPHER, BROADCASTER AND MP.

He was born into a shopkeeping family in Hoxton Street and lived there until he was evacuated as a nine year old at the outbreak of the Second World War. His memoir *Clouds of Glory: A Hoxton Childhood* is a vivid evocation of life within the borough of Shoreditch in the pre-war years, overflowing with fascinating detail of the young Magee's observations of a Hoxton that has vanished: of street markets, illegal bookies, gangs, concerts, theatres, the rise of Oswald Mosley, and of the solid work of Labour Mayors in the Town Hall providing public baths, welfare centres and electricity for the teeming population.

Here he describes a particularly memorable experience at the Town Hall: *"[The Western Brothers] were taking part in a variety show at Shoreditch Town Hall, and as always they sat at a piano in white tie and tails singing satirical songs about current affairs. [...]"*

*I was in the cheapest seats right at the back; and because this was not a theatre and the floor was not raked, I could not see over the heads of the people in front; so I left my seat and stood propping myself on a radiator against the back wall in the middle of the central aisle, giving me a full and clear view. One of the performers was a woman ballad singer, and the very peak of her act was a long-sustained top note sung by her with arms flung wide. At just the moment when she was about to come off the note and bring her act to an end, the tension with which I was bracing myself against the radiator caused my feet to slip forward from under me on the polished parquet, and I went down with an ear-splitting and almighty crash! The entire audience turned round to see what had happened and watched me picking myself up off the floor, while the singer's climax and exit were ruined."*



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Bryan Magee; *Clouds of Glory: A Hoxton Childhood*, page 256.  
Reproduced with kind permission from the author.

## HMS THRASHER AND THE WAR EFFORT

Shoreditch Town Hall played its part in the war effort. During Warship Week in March **1942**, Shoreditch Town Hall honoured Captain MacKenzie and the crew of the submarine *HMS Thrasher*. A mock-up of the submarine was even built in the Town Hall so that Capt. Mackenzie could be pictured with it. MacKenzie was made a freeman of the Borough - his name appears on the list of Freemen and women on the plaque in the Committee Room corridor - and the Council were proactive with fundraising to support the war effort. In the photograph below Mayor Thomas Sillitoe awards Capt. Hugh MacKenzie Freedom of the Borough in a ceremony in the Assembly Hall in **1943**. The engraved wooden box being exchanged contained the elaborate and beautiful scroll shown opposite.

The items were kindly donated to the Town Hall by Capt. MacKenzie's family as part of the 150th Anniversary history project.



**Metropolitan  
Borough of Shoreditch**

At a Meeting of the  
Council of the  
Metropolitan Borough of Shoreditch  
held in the Council Chamber on Tuesday,  
the Ninth day of February, 1943

It was Unanimously Resolved:-

**Lieutenant Hugh Stirling  
Mackenzie,  
D.S.O., R.D.**

**Commanding Officer of  
H.M. SUBMARINE  
"THRASHER"**

be admitted to the  
**HONORARY FREEDOM**  
OF THE  
Metropolitan Borough of Shoreditch

in recognition of his gallant and  
distinguished services as Commanding  
Officer of the Submarine "THRASHER",  
which Submarine was adopted by  
the Borough during "WARSHIPS  
WEEK", March 1942.

In witness whereof the  
Common Seal of the  
Council was hereunto  
affixed in the presence of:-

*W. J. J. J.*  
Mayor

*R. J. J. J.*  
Deputy Mayor

**This is to Certify that  
Lieutenant H. S. Mackenzie, D.S.O., R.D.,  
has this day been admitted to the Honorary Freedom  
of the Metropolitan Borough of Shoreditch  
pursuant to the above resolution, and that his name  
has been inscribed in the Freeman's Roll.**

*R. J. J. J.*  
Deputy Mayor

Dated this Twenty-sixth day of February, 1943.

  
TEL. 4189 (PRIVATE EXCH.)

THE MAYOR'S PARLOUR,  
SHOREDITCH TOWN HALL,  
OLD STREET,  
E.C.1.

22nd January, 1943.

Dear Lieut. Mackenzie,

This Council are desirous of asking you to accept the Freedom of the Borough of Shoreditch, but before any publicity as given to the matter I shall be glad if you will let me know as soon as possible whether the proposal is acceptable to you.

Yours sincerely,  
*W. J. J. J.*  
Mayor.

Lieut. H. S. Mackenzie, D.S.O.,  
H.M.S. "Thrasher",  
c/o G.P.O. London.

P.S. I hope you received my letter of the 9th inst. with reference to the presentation of the Plaque.

If undelivered return to:-  
MAYOR'S PARLOUR,  
SHOREDITCH TOWN HALL,  
OLD STREET, E.C.1.



*Lieut. H. S. Mackenzie, D.S.O.  
H.M.S. "Thrasher"  
c/o G.P.O.  
London*



## LIVE FROM SHOREDITCH TOWN HALL: A BOXING & BROADCAST FIRST

FROM **1955** UNTIL **1975** SHOREDITCH TOWN HALL WAS ONE  
OF EAST LONDON'S PREMIERE BOXING VENUES.

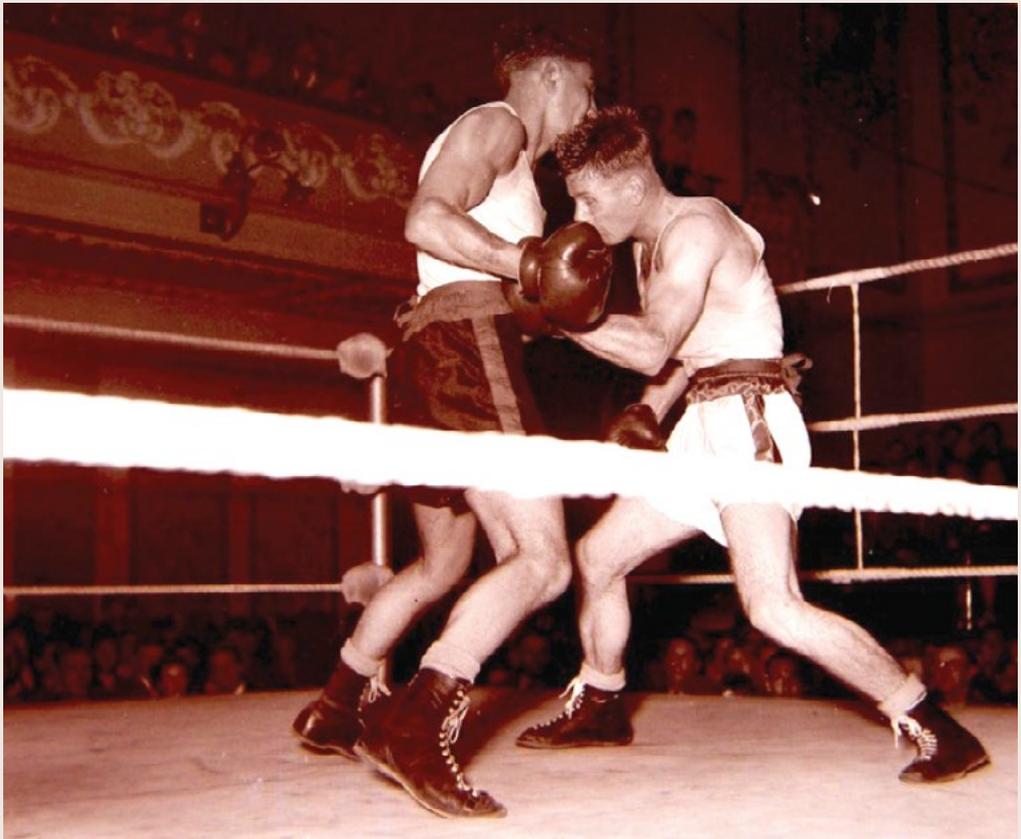
However, the building's association with the sport is even more significant as it was also the location of the first ever live broadcast of boxing on British television.

On the evening of 22 September **1955** Associated-Rediffusion, which had won the first London weekday commercial television franchise, kicked off their programming, and the launch of the first commercial TV station in the UK, with an evening of 'variety, drama, features, sport & pageantry'. Following an hour of drama excerpts live from Guildhall starring, amongst others, Sir John Gielgud, Sir Alec Guinness & Dame Edith Evans, the action switched to Shoreditch Town Hall's Assembly Hall and the first ever live broadcast of boxing on British TV: Lew Lazar vs. Terence Murphy.

Over the next twenty years the Assembly Hall was to host 169 shows, featuring 1040 matches and 862 boxers. It was a much loved, hugely popular venue among audiences and boxers alike, famous for its intimacy and atmosphere.

The Town Hall's association with boxing was, however, to end on a tragic note. In **1969**, following a fight with UK heavyweight champion Joe Bugner, Ulric Regis, heavyweight champion of Trinidad & Tobago, was injured in the ring and died later in hospital after being found unconscious. The tragedy provoked a wave of concern about the safety of boxing, and many local authorities banned the sport as a result. This included Hackney, where the ban is still in place today. The last fight at Shoreditch Town Hall eventually took place in **1975**.

Today, there is little to give away the Town Hall's association with the sport, unless you know where to look. For example, the brackets that would have held the lights over the ring and the power cables for them can still be seen suspended in the roof of the Assembly Hall. The four original anchor points in the wooden floor that were installed especially for the boxing ring to screw into, are also still present.



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An early boxing match, circa **1955** (boxers unknown).



## FIGHT NIGHT



*"You'd look at the bill - no way was there going to be good nice boxing. You'd go along, there was always nobbins (money, coins) thrown in the ring. You would always see a great fight. The word got around. This was the place to go if you wanna see a real scrap. It was like a cockpit. Boxers used to say that there was no way that you could box in that ring. The crowds in the overhanging balconies used to force you to have a war.*

*You'd get people come out of the business world of the West End. Show business people, they've always been closely involved with boxing. Oliver Reed - he was a frequent visitor to Shoreditch. There was always personalities from the showbiz world. And famous sportsmen too. As soon as the place got a reputation for a great fight night, people used to turn up.*

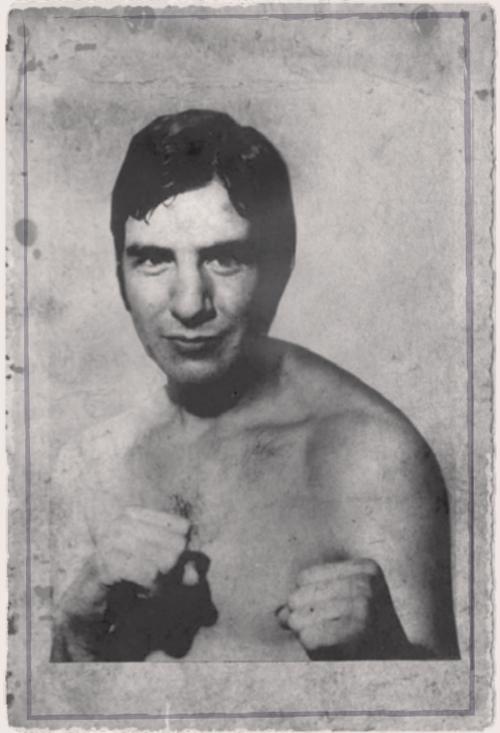
*Sometimes it was like a fashion parade. Very brassy. Peroxide blondes. The local businessmen turning out with a bit of stuff. It was a way of showing off his girlfriend. A little bit flash. The villains? They were definitely there, at the ringside, no doubt about that, and everyone seemed to know it. It was all the nudge-nudge treatment in the seats around 'em.*

*In the **1960s**, the Krays come down with their entourage. It was about twenty or thirty of 'em. The heavy mob. So it was said they didn't pay. They just walked in an' sat down 'cos they hated the promoter. Nothing was said. Just walked in, defied 'im. Nothing was said. What could he do? Call the police? You just didn't do that sort of thing at **Shoreditch Town Hall**."*



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A former patron's anonymous account conveying the atmosphere of fight night. From Chapter 6: *Sport and Youth Culture* by David Robins, p143 in *Sport Culture and Ideology* ed. J Hargreaves; Routledge Library Editions Sports Studies, **1984**.



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Lew Lazar (left) and Pat Thompson.

## REQUIEM FOR A HEAVYWEIGHT

**Hackney**  
**Gazette**



### Tragic sequel to Shoreditch fight

By GEOFFREY SMITH  
(Gazette Boxing Correspondent)

**ULRIC REGIS has fought his last fight. The brave West Indian fighter died at 1 a.m. on Saturday night at the National Hospital for Nervous Diseases.**

Regis never recovered after he was found collapsed in his hotel room the morning after his losing effort against Joe Bugner at Shoreditch Town Hall on Tuesday. On Wednesday he had an emergency operation to remove a blood clot from his brain, unfortunately to no avail. Regis, 27, was heavyweight champion of Trinidad and Tobago, leaves a wife and baby girl. The doctor who examined him after the fight said that he showed none of the signs that go with brain injury. No headaches, no double vision, no amnesia, and perfect coordination: in his own words "If there was anyone who shouldn't have had a brain injury it was Regis". Nevertheless, the fact remains that

Regis did suffer brain injury which led to his death. During the fight Bugner did not land very many heavy punches on target: indeed, in the later stages of the fight Regis landed some good punches of his own. In fact Regis put up such a good fight that in the eyes of the crowd, he was the winner.

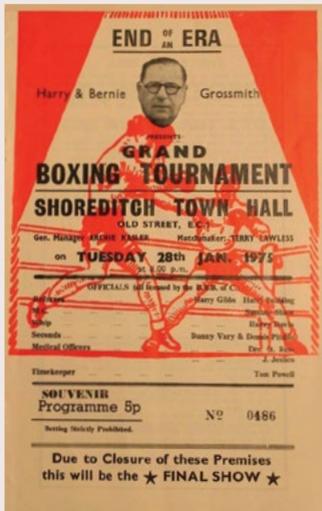
After the fight, Regis was in good spirits and chatted happily to all before leaving the Town Hall to go for a drink with a taxi driver. The taxi driver returned him to his hotel, unconscious, only a few hours later. Regis had vomited in the taxi: this vomiting may have been the result of drink or the delayed effects of concussion. By coincidence the last fighter who died in Great Britain also had his last fight at Shoreditch Town Hall

He was Lyn James and he collapsed



in the sixth round against Islington's Colin Lake. He died the next day of brain damage. Lake fought on: I hope that Bugner does too, but he is very young and until his next fight we shall not know what effect this tragic accident has had on him.

Ulric Regis, Heavyweight champion of Trinidad and Tobago.



End of an era: the last fight, **1975**

Terry Downes; Bobby Neill, Mickey Duff, Danny Vary; Ralph Charles;  
 Dave Needham; Jimmy Anderson; Pat McCormack; Bernie Grossmith; Terry Lawless;  
 Maurice Hope (behind M.C.) Sammy Shaw; Kneeling Johnny Pritchett;  
 Vic Andreotti and Ernie Fossey.

## OUR TOWN HALL: BOXING MEMORIES



Left to Right:  
Sammy McCarthy, Ron Cooper, Patrick 'Pat' Thompson, Colin Hayday.

**SAMMY McCARTHY**

*"Whenever I was going into the ring I was absolutely positively petrified. But I realised afterwards I was always frightened of being frightened – I thought it wasn't masculine. But, after you got into the fight you forgot all about it.*

*I remember when I was young there was a boxing club on every corner of every street. Because at home there was no TV, no entertainment other than maybe your Mum and Dad having a few words. And you knew every amateur – you all knew each other. Even the schoolboy championships were a big thing."*

**RON COOPER**

*"You went down the road with your little bag and you felt proud; you wanted to be a champion. That's what was in your mind, in my mind, you wanted to be a champion. You was well respected – ten out of ten fighters are respected. That was the main thing. When Sammy McCarthy boxed coach loads of people would go to see him – he was one of the most respected boxers in the East End – still is today."*

**PAT THOMPSON**

*"I was in the last show here. The atmosphere was always great – fantastic – loved it. The Hall seemed small, but it would be packed – always fantastic fights, always packed. Sometimes you'd get more money from the nobbins [money, coins thrown into the ring] than from the fee! I had a good fight with Willie Nelson. Every time I boxed him he was quite good, but not good enough for me. You can see on the poster; Pat Thompson – everybody's favourite fighter. I used to tell jokes and everything!"*

**COLIN HAYDAY**

*"The secret with this place was because it was smaller, it was intimate and you felt part of it. If you came to watch boxing here you were almost in the ring with them, and if you were in the ring, you could see everyone there. The crowds used to scream and shout, but you always heard your mother! My mum used to shout – "go on, hit 'im"! Every word she spoke – I heard. It was a special place. I'm talking about 1955, when I was eleven years old. I started young!"*



## BRUSHES WITH HISTORY: THE KRAYS



*The Twins were great boxing fans and were once very well thought of as boxers themselves. They also liked to contribute to 'good causes' - donating plenty of cash, often in a very public way.*

*One evening at a boxing match in **Shoreditch Town Hall** there was a 'charity auction' of a few things from the ring. Tommy Trinder, a well-known comedian ('You Lucky People' being his catchphrase) was the auctioneer.*

*The Krays bid for everything, often bumping the bids up between them! The final item was a huge bouquet of flowers.*

*The Krays were again the highest bidders. After the applause died down, they passed the bouquet back to Trinder and said:*

*"Give this to the nurse's home, with our compliments".*

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Courtesy of Philip Harfleet, from his blog 'Chronicles of a Croydon Boy'.

*Every area had its own gang, and where there were leaders like John Nash, Ronnie Diamond and Tony Parchita, there would be followers aligning themselves with ferocious loyalty under the banner of the leader's name. We had no quarrel with the Nash gang, in fact we were quite friendly with them. Even today I class John as a good friend. With some of the others we had an uneasy truce. In the main, confrontation with most meant an explosion of violence. A dice game in the toilet area of **Shoreditch Town Hall** ended in a battle when we found out some cheating was going on. Our gang pulled out concealed weapons and done the lot of them.*



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From Reggie Kray's *East End Stories*.  
Reggie Kray and Peter Gerrard.



Shoreditch Town Hall from the corner of Kingsland Road  
and Hackney Road. Circa **1970**.



## END OF AN ERA

**The London Government Act 1963** introduced a new structure for councils in the Capital, significantly reducing the total number of districts and creating new local authorities responsible for larger areas and populations. This led, in April **1965**, to the Metropolitan Boroughs of Shoreditch, Stoke Newington and Hackney merging to become the London Borough of Hackney.

In common with Shoreditch, many of the Metropolitan councils were fiercely independent, with proud histories. In Shoreditch's case, this could be traced as far back as **1090**, when it had been one of the very first Vestries, the model on which much local government was based in subsequent years.

This meant that while there was of course a professional and constructive engagement with the highly complex task of reorganisation, there were concerns about loss of identity and the challenges of serving and maintaining a close relationship with local communities.

Post-merger these concerns were shown to be not entirely without foundation, as local rates for the newly created Borough of Hackney actually increased - the opposite of the efficiency savings that had been a key part of the proposal to reduce the number of standalone local Councils.

It's hard not to read the final page of minutes opposite, and the brief, business-like reference to past achievements and not feel a sense of poignancy: 100 years of progress and achievement, a genuinely pioneering administration, acknowledged in just a few, extremely measured sentences.

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**Opposite page top:** Albert Simmonds, the last Mayor of Shoreditch, addresses the final meeting of the Council. This is a rare photograph of the Council Chamber showing it as a working political chamber, including the wooden benches and speaker's chair in situ.

**Bottom:** The final page of minutes from the last meeting of the London Borough of Shoreditch.

Photos courtesy of Gary Knight, Albert Simmonds' grandson, from a private collection.



ADJOURNMENT.

Mr. Councillor J. A. Welch stated that he would like to speak on behalf of those Councillors who would cease to be members of the Council after this meeting. He stated that he had found it an interesting experience, particularly during the period when he was Mayor of the Borough. He would be watching events and hoped that the new Council would see that things were run as well as they had been in Shoreditch.

Mr. Councillor D. Wray stated that this was the end of the business on the Agenda Paper and the final business of the Metropolitan Borough of Shoreditch.

Alderman W. Hebden, J.P., expressed the view that the meeting should not close without paying a tribute to the many stalwart members of the Council of former days and those who would no longer serve in this capacity.

It was then

MOVED by Mr. Councillor D. WRAY, duly seconded and

**Resolved—That the Council do congratulate His Worship the Mayor upon the excellent manner in which he has conducted this meeting of the Council.**

THE MEETING TERMINATED AT 8.08 P.M.

*A. J. Simmonds*  
MAYOR



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Albert & Lou Simmonds, centre, flanked by Mayors from the surrounding Boroughs, at a party at Shoreditch Town Hall to mark the merging of the council with Stoke Newington & Hackney to form the new London Borough of Hackney. The photo shows the main entrance hall and doors of the Town Hall in the background.

## THE NEW LONDON BOROUGH OF HACKNEY

As part of transitional arrangements Councillors from each of the three Boroughs merging came together as part of the new London Borough of Hackney. Robert Tallentire, at the time the longest serving Shoreditch Councillor, became the first Mayor of the new local authority.

### NO. 1 CITIZEN OF THE "NEW THREE"



Councillor Robert Tallentire . . . Mayor of the new Hackney London Borough which merges Hackney, Shoreditch and Stoke Newington on April 1.  
Photo by Chambers of Clapton.





## MY TOWN HALL: GARRY KNIGHT

*"In the photo I'm holding, the small boy right at the front is my brother Clifford. My Dad is there on the left, then there's Alan Knight, my Mum, Doris, sitting down on the left, my Nan, who was the Mayoress – she was commonly known as Lou. Then there's little me hiding behind my Grandad, and right at the back was the macebearer and chauffeur, Frank. I do remember as a young boy I occasionally got a ride in the big, official, chauffeur-driven car which I think was a Hummer. That was quite exciting to go out in the big car. Frank would come and drive the car around, but of course we lived in council flats so it was quite something to have this great big chauffeur-driven car to come up for us.*

*I do remember coming to the Town Hall for a big reception, which I think must have been at the end of his term in office. For me as a child, a young child – it was a big occasion, dressed up in a suit and a bowtie. Hundreds of people there, lots of noise, lots of pomp and ceremony. The real memory of that is as a little kid going up to the bar, and getting a drink, and the barman saying to me 'be careful you'll get drunk' so that in particular. But also, I seem to remember very vividly watching the wrestling here and I was actually introduced to a couple of wrestlers by my Grandad - there is a photo of him with Mick McManus and I think Johnny Logan.*

*He was a very kind and caring family man, my Grandad. He always had a smile, thoughtful... everything he said seemed to be considered. He always dressed well too, always walked with a kind of air – of a leader. He was very calm and deliberate – he never rushed anywhere – and he never drove, he always took public transport. He was also very humble, he came from a fairly poor background and lived in council housing and flats all his life. He wasn't at all how you may have imagined someone of his background.*

*He didn't carry on in any kind of active way in the Council after he left. He moved to Farnborough in Hampshire and became ill and died in **1976**. So he left Hoxton and Shoreditch behind really after he stepped down."*

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Edited from an interview with Garry Knight, grandson  
of the last Mayor of Shoreditch, Albert Simmonds.



## A BUILDING AT RISK

From April **1965** onwards, with the new administrative headquarters of the Council moving to Hackney Town Hall, Shoreditch Town Hall entered what was to be a period of thirty years of slow decline. Public events became less frequent - most notably boxing which came to its tragic end in **1969**. While the building was still initially used as office space for the Council, and housed the medical officer and the payments office for rents, it gradually fell into disuse and disrepair. This eventually led, in **1996**, to English Heritage placing the Town Hall on its *Buildings at Risk* register.

In the latter years of occupancy by the council the Town Hall's beautiful Victorian interiors had fallen foul of fashion, and great effort was made to cover up or obscure the original classical features. The building was granted Grade II listing in May **1975**, but this was unfortunately too late to prevent some of the brutal treatment of the interiors in the late **1950s** and **1960s**.

It's hard not to be shocked by the photograph opposite. The grand entrance hall is almost unrecognisable, with the familiar and striking period features completely obscured. The mosaic floor and the beautiful ornamental plaster work of the high ceiling are covered or hidden, and the walls clad in brown Formica panels. The original door frames and mouldings were chipped away to allow the panels to sit flush.

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The Entrance Hall of Shoreditch Town Hall in the **1960s**.





## BRUSHES WITH HISTORY: **WHIRL-Y-GIG**

In the early **1990s** Shoreditch Town Hall became home to an event that would define the venue in the minds of many for years to come.

Whirl-y-gig was an infamous, heady, global disco / trance night that became a hugely popular part of the alternative dance scene. It was famous for its friendly inclusivity and zany dressing of the interiors - which included a pink parachute silk, sixty feet in diameter, that would drop from the roof of the Assembly Hall at the end of the night. At its height the event was attracting a capacity crowd of at least a thousand people weekly.

Unfortunately, the success of Whirl-y-gig coincided with the building being in a poor state of repair. Having been placed on the *Buildings at Risk* Register half way through the club night's tenure (in **1996**), licensing and health and safety concerns eventually led to the end of the event at Shoreditch in the late **1990s** (though it still continues successfully at other venues today).

Given the cost of repairs and challenges facing the Council at the time, Shoreditch Town Hall was simply not a priority, and the building closed to the public until further notice.



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DJ MONKEY PILOT WITH SPECIAL GUESTS</li> <li>3:00 CHILDREN OF DUB</li> <li>4:45 DR DIDD</li> <li>6:30 BAKA BEYOND</li> <li>8:30 EARTH TRIBE</li> <li>10:45 TELEPATHY</li> <li>12:30 JOI</li> <li>2:15 AZUKK</li> <li>4:00 ASTRALASIA</li> <li>5:30 ANOTHER GREEN WORLD</li> </ul>		<p>£25-00 in advance</p> <p>Sunday 31st Dec from 2pm until 6am</p> <p>£30-00 on the door</p> <p>Nº 16284</p>
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Whirl - Y - Gig revellers in the Assembly Hall.  
The middle picture shows the parachute silk descending.  
Bottom: a ticket from the club night.



## SAVING SHOREDITCH TOWN HALL

The local community in Shoreditch felt a huge sense of ownership and affection for the Town Hall – as a unique landmark building but also as a place that had been part of people’s lives for generations. As well as its boxing associations, personal events such as weddings, registrations of births and many public and social events had reinforced the building’s central place at the heart of the community. Having won a campaign to turn the unsafe and community dissecting road system around Old Street and Shoreditch High Street from a four lane motorway back into two way streets, campaigners turned their attention to the closed and increasingly at risk Town Hall.

By the mid **1990s**, with costs for maintenance spiralling, the London Borough of Hackney began to explore selling the building for commercial development. As a direct response, Shoreditch Town Hall Trust was formed in **1997** to argue the case for the building to remain in community hands. Comprising key local activists (Karina Van de Merwe, Sarah-Jane Prattent, Jean Locker and Patrick Hammill) and representing a range of local interests including historic building preservation, environmental protection and social enterprise, the Trust developed a vision for the building as a centre for local business, community and cultural use. Robert Biggs, the first Council nominee as a Trustee - then Director of Environmental Services for London Borough of Hackney - also supported the development of the Trust, and in **1998** Roland Jeffery became the Director of the now independent Town Hall. Working initially with a building still in a very challenging condition, the Trust began opening up rooms and spaces as they could for a range of community projects and commercial events, at the same time as kicking off a multi-million pound financing campaign aimed at addressing the most pressing restoration work.



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The far end of the Entrance Hall (left) and the inside of the Council Chamber (right) prior to restoration. The left hand photograph also shows an unknown theatre company in an early project to bring activity back to the building.



# Calls for community to secure the future of empty town hall

by FIONA MITCHELL

**SHOREDITCH Town Hall could become a gateway to the borough and a window on the world if ambitious plans get the go-ahead.**

That was the conclusion of a weekend of meetings at which Shoreditch residents gathered to discuss the future of the disused building in Old Street.

More than 60 people went along to the weekend – organised by the Hoxton Trust – which was aimed at bringing community groups and experts together to say what they wanted to see happen with the building.

## Crucial

"If you get residents involved, then you end up with better ideas," said Karina van der Merwe, of the Hoxton Trust. "Getting local people on board is a crucial part of regeneration."

"There was a real feeling that local people wanted to reclaim something that they used to have and there was a great atmosphere with lots of ideas being shared."

"People recognised that the project would have to be commercial, but it is possible to balance this with community needs."

Shoreditch resident Judy Adam,



● Patrick Hammill (left), from the Hackney Society, discusses the town hall environment with residents, including Maureen Walker (centre), a director of the Hoxton Trust.

of Curtain Road Arts, agreed the atmosphere was "very good" during the weekend.

"There was a strong feeling that people wanted the town hall to be a focal point in the community," she said.

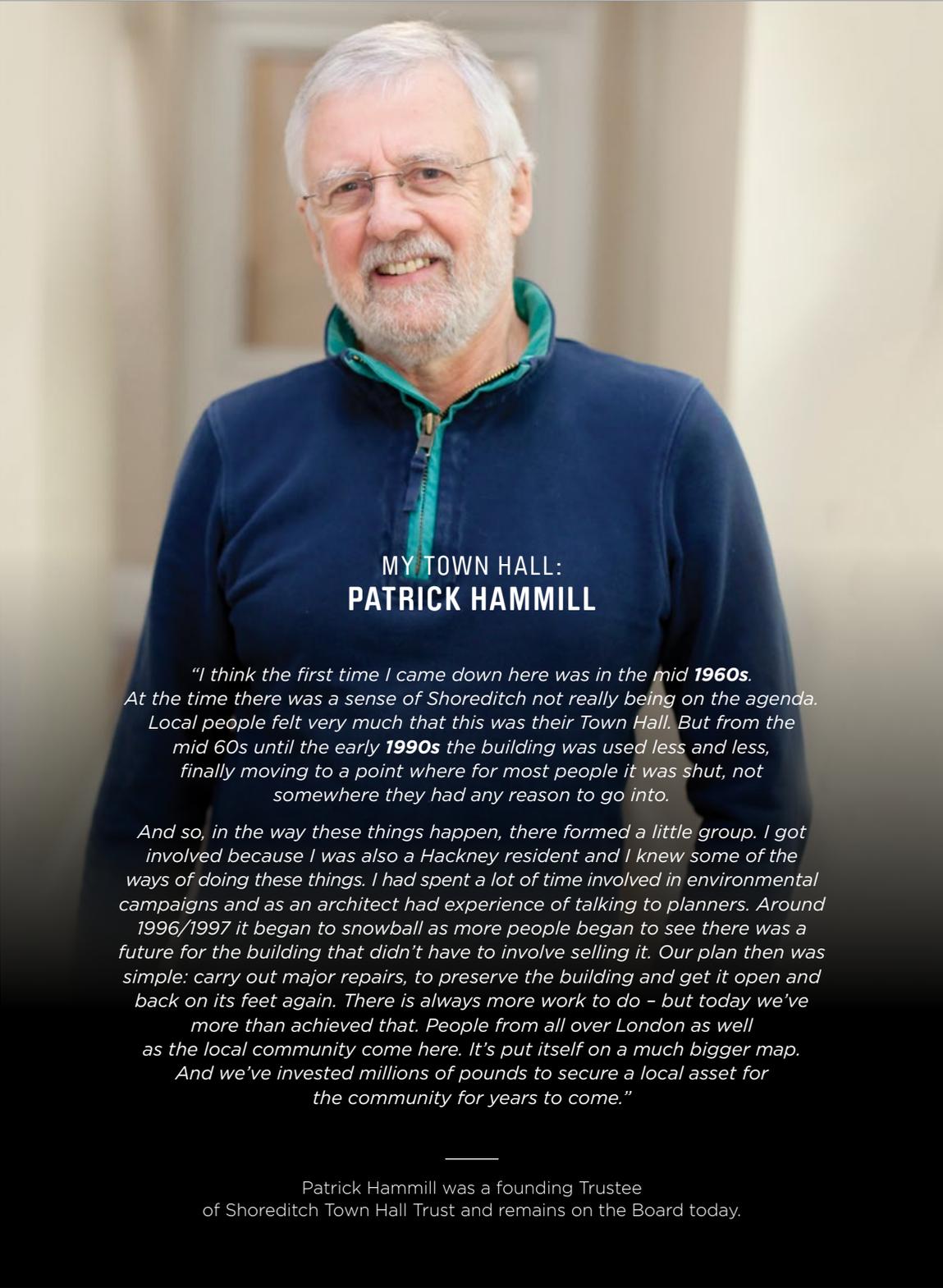
"A lot of positive energy came

from different residents representing a wide range of community groups."

Hackney Council has already put in a bid for cash from the Millennium Commission – a special Lottery fund – to transform the Victorian building into a hi-

tech conference and exhibit centre. The whole project would cost around £5 million.

Anyone wanting to find out more can go along to a public meeting on Tuesday, February 11, at Shoreditch Town Hall from 7.30pm to 9pm.

A portrait of Patrick Hammill, an older man with white hair and a beard, wearing glasses and a dark blue zip-up jacket with a teal lining. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

## MY TOWN HALL: PATRICK HAMMILL

*"I think the first time I came down here was in the mid **1960s**. At the time there was a sense of Shoreditch not really being on the agenda. Local people felt very much that this was their Town Hall. But from the mid 60s until the early **1990s** the building was used less and less, finally moving to a point where for most people it was shut, not somewhere they had any reason to go into.*

*And so, in the way these things happen, there formed a little group. I got involved because I was also a Hackney resident and I knew some of the ways of doing these things. I had spent a lot of time involved in environmental campaigns and as an architect had experience of talking to planners. Around 1996/1997 it began to snowball as more people began to see there was a future for the building that didn't have to involve selling it. Our plan then was simple: carry out major repairs, to preserve the building and get it open and back on its feet again. There is always more work to do - but today we've more than achieved that. People from all over London as well as the local community come here. It's put itself on a much bigger map. And we've invested millions of pounds to secure a local asset for the community for years to come."*

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Patrick Hammill was a founding Trustee  
of Shoreditch Town Hall Trust and remains on the Board today.

## ESTABLISHING SHOREDITCH TOWN HALL TRUST



WORKING CONSTRUCTIVELY WITH LONDON BOROUGH OF HACKNEY, THE TRUST WAS GRANTED A 99 YEAR LEASE ON THE WHOLE SITE ON 30 AUGUST 2002.

As part of the deal it was agreed that the Trust could sell long term leases on both the Annex building and adjacent car park at the rear of the building (now developed as Sense of Place)

to raise the bulk of the funds (£2.85m) necessary to carry out the most pressing repairs and restoration, with the remaining £650,000 coming in the form of a grant from the Heritage Lottery Foundation. The building closed in **2001** for works to be carried out and reopened again in **2004**.

From **2004** the Trust built a stable events business and gained a reputation as something of a unique venue in East London, with its location and quirky, character interiors a real selling point. The programme up until **2011** included a mix of commercial and community hires, including major fundraisers for The Royal Court and Jamie Oliver's FIFTEEN, as well as the venue for Sam Taylor-Johnson (née Taylor-Wood) and Elton John's star studded joint birthday party in **2007**. With the influx of digital business into the area the venue also hosted major events with Blackberry and Google, as well as becoming a space for local community activity. As one of the only large venues of its kind that could host higher capacity events, The Assembly Hall became particularly popular at the time as a location for Bangladeshi weddings.

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Rear of the building in a **1960s** photograph showing the car park site and Annex building, both sold to help fund the renovations in **2002**.



The Assembly Hall in party mode, **2009**.



## A NEW PHASE

In **2012** Shoreditch Town Hall entered yet another significant phase of change and growth. Having run successfully as a hire venue for a number of years, but with the building still in need of major investment, the Trust adopted a new, more dynamic vision.

Following the appointment of a new team, including Nick Giles as Director, the aim was to more fully realise the building's potential and establish it as a destination arts and events space for Shoreditch and Hackney. The core of the plan was to produce and promote in-house arts and community programmes for the first time, animating the unique spaces with theatre and activity, giving local people and audiences across London compelling reasons to come through the doors. Alongside would be established re-invigorated commercial activity, which was vital to support running costs for the non-revenue funded operation. Underpinning the plan was an ambitious £3m capital programme. Its aim was to complete works outstanding from previous phases of refurbishment as well as develop new in-house production and event facilities. This would enable the building to operate freely and flexibly as a theatre, music and live events venue – something that had not been possible since reopening in **2004**.

Since **2012** £2.3m of phased capital investment has transformed the capability of the building, enabling the development of a distinctive theatre, music and contemporary arts programme. This has allowed Shoreditch Town Hall to establish itself firmly on the London cultural map as a vital, non-traditional venue. The building also houses office space occupied by a range of creative industry companies, bars, rehearsal space and a world-class restaurant, The Clove Club. The collective result of this significant programme of development is that today the venue welcomes audiences of 30,000 people annually for the arts programme and another 50,000 for commercial events. Turnover has increased from an average of £350,000 in **2012** to £1.7m in **2015/16**. Having once run at just 15% of its available capacity, the building now regularly averages 85% use across a typical year.



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A moment during Nigel Barrett & Louise Mari's *Party Skills For The End Of The World*, an interactive, immersive theatre piece commissioned and developed by Shoreditch Town Hall in **2014**.



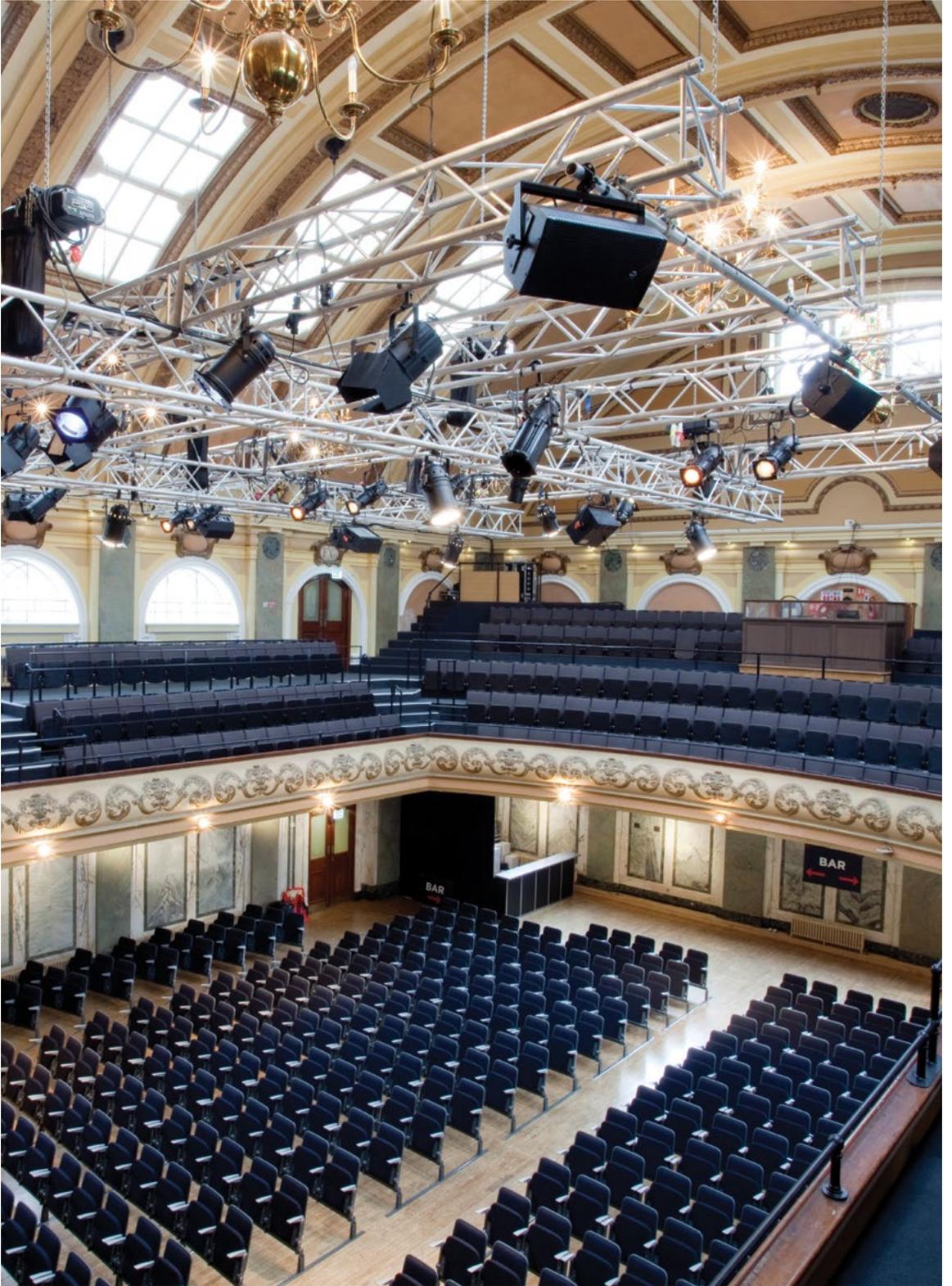
## A GRAND MUSIC HALL FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The Assembly Hall is the largest purpose built public auditorium in Shoreditch, and the last remaining of the larger Victorian theatres that were once so numerous locally. It is therefore not just an important part of East London's arts infrastructure, but also a unique architectural gem: a grand auditorium from the days when Music Hall was a vital part of people's lives.

When the Trust took over the building in **1998**, the Assembly Hall had a range of pressing issues, including a leaking roof in poor overall condition. This was replaced prior to reopening in **2004**. However, the space also had a number of other problems. The balcony had no seating as the original wooden benches had been removed in the **1970s** and the area also did not meet modern safety standards. There was also inadequate seating in the stalls, no power distribution, no production infrastructure, acoustic issues, and internal plasterwork and lighting in need of repair, all preventing the space from being used for the purpose it was originally designed: as a public theatre auditorium.

As a result, a key project of restoration works since **2012** has been returning to full use this magnificent space with £1m of investment. 274 bespoke seats have been installed into the balcony, along with redesigned rakes to improve sightlines. A system of 550 dismountable seats have been purchased for the stalls. A new rig with modern lighting and sound has also been installed, enabling the space to meet modern production standards, but this can be entirely removed - ensuring no permanent impact on the fabric or character of the building. Power distribution has been extended, repairs carried out and acoustic panelling installed.

All of this investment means that for the first time since the **1960s**, the Assembly Hall can once again operate as an 800 capacity venue, and be celebrated and enjoyed as a unique part of London's cultural landscape.





## LEGACY & FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

As we celebrate this significant anniversary of the Town Hall, we are also reminded daily how – in the 21st century – we have a building that has successfully found a new life as a contemporary arts and events space, thanks to the vision of the Victorian Vestrymen and women of Shoreditch 150 years ago. There is evidence everywhere that reminds us how their investment in quality made a building that has stood the test of time. Past decisions, some purposeful, others accidental, benefit us now, often in unexpected practical ways and show how the Town Hall has always been a building which has been adapted according to circumstance and the needs of its community.

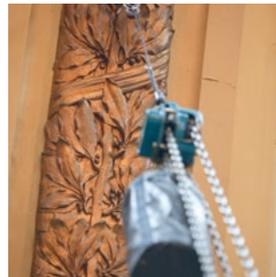
A look up at the eastern external wall of the Assembly Hall reveals the sheer quality of Victorian workmanship. Despite being one of the parts of the building most exposed to the elements, the brickwork and pointing could have been completed just a few years ago, such is the excellent condition.

The basement, safe but left in a distressed state, showing the patinas and wear and tear of the years, today feels completely contemporary. But, here too, quality of construction is evident. The floor and foundations are solid, and there is not the damp you might normally expect from a 150 year-old basement in London. It is in fact, bone dry. Additionally, the space has natural air flow and a comfortable ambient temperature on all but the very coldest days, thanks to the location of the boiler.

Perhaps most significantly, and counter intuitively, the fire of **1904** and resulting rebuild had probably the biggest, most beneficial impact on the ability of the Town Hall to function today, as it helped to meet modern requirements for public spaces. The original **pre-1865** balcony in the Assembly Hall would have been a wooden construction, with support poles connecting to the main floor, typical of music halls. The likelihood is that by today it would have needed to be refurbished and reinforced structurally – it might have been entirely in need of replacement. Instead the Hall benefits from a massively engineered, free standing, concrete and iron cantilever balcony typical of enthusiastic Edwardian engineering. This leaves the main floor free

of supports and a safe, sturdy construction, sufficient in theory to support more than three times the number of people the space is licensed for or physically capable of holding. Capacious independent fire escapes were also added as part of the **1904** extension, allowing sufficient ingress and egress to meet modern standards. Retrofitting such significant elements today would have been financially prohibitive, not to mention impossible due to listed building restrictions.

One of the biggest challenges of the recent capital works was installing production facilities for the Assembly Hall that would satisfy the needs of both artistic and event users at the same time as respecting the Grade II space. The problem was how we would anchor the new grid to the ceiling without significant works that would impact negatively on the Hall or not be permissible under conservation law. The eureka moment was noticing that one of the gold rings that run along the ribbed joists of the ceiling (shown in the photograph below) had a small plastic tag attached to it. According to the information we had these rings were largely ornamental, but the tag indicated that at some stage it had been 'load tested' for weight bearing. Following structural investigation it was discovered that the rings were in fact designed for rigging, installed as part of the new vaulted roof in **1904**. The solution was therefore simple: the new rig is suspended from six existing points in the roof and we have been able to introduce this element entirely without needing to carry out any new works. When required for filming or specific events, this means that the Assembly Hall can be returned to its 'original' state – a fundamental principle of how the Trust have approached all renovations and modern interventions.







## THE VICTORIAN STEPS

The Victorian Steps are the one of the many original and eccentric architectural features that give the Town Hall, and the basement in particular, its unique character. They are also another example of how necessary and practical decisions by the Council many years ago have had unexpectedly positive outcomes in subsequent years. In this case it provides an especially intriguing and atmospheric space as part of the many contrasting ones in the Town Hall's underbelly.

Up until the **mid-1930s** the Council Chamber had its own external entrance and stairs similar to those of the main entrance portico, accessed via the path down the eastern side of the building. However, when the Annex at the rear of the Town Hall was built in the third **1937** phase of works, an internal entrance to the new space from the main building was required. To create this, a two storey extension was built outside the Council Chamber on the eastern side of the building, levelling over the original steps to create a new internal vestibule accessed via the main entrance hall. In a typically utilitarian approach, rather than removing the original Council Chamber steps they were instead recycled and used as the foundation for the new building above - today, leaving the space with vaguely ghostly stairs to nowhere. The Victorian pavement was also preserved, like a time capsule, under the new structure at the same time, adding to the sense of a slice of Town Hall history preserved.



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