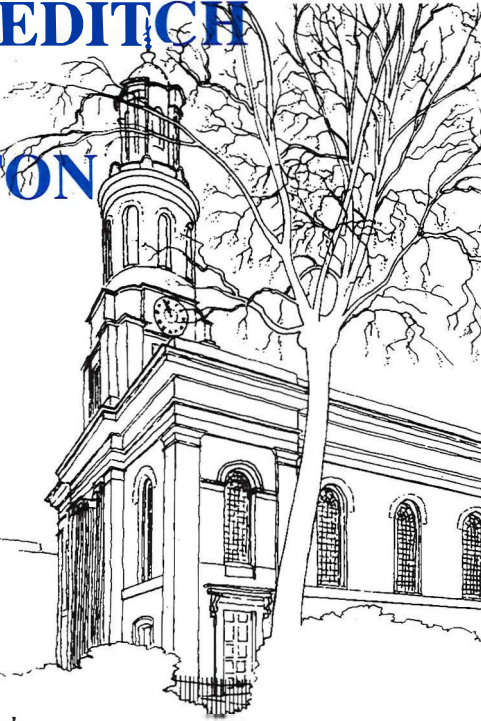


SHOREDITCH & HOXTON

HACKNEY
WALKS
Nº 4

60p



St John's Church

Shoreditch is an ancient London parish and Hoxton was a hamlet just outside the City walls. From the new London Bridge the Romans drove a road due North to their legionary fortress at Lincoln—Shoreditch High Street and Kingsland Road follow the line of Ermine Street—and another marched across the fields outside the city wall towards Colchester. They crossed at Shoreditch, just North of what became the Bishop's Gate. There has been a village here ever since.

We are suggesting a circular walk from the cross-roads at Shoreditch Church, through the old village of Hoxton and back by Kingsland Road. As you will see from the map, you can choose when you reach Hoxton Street (20) to return straight to the Town Hall in Old Street. The whole walk, taken gently, should take about two hours.

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24 Hoxton Garden

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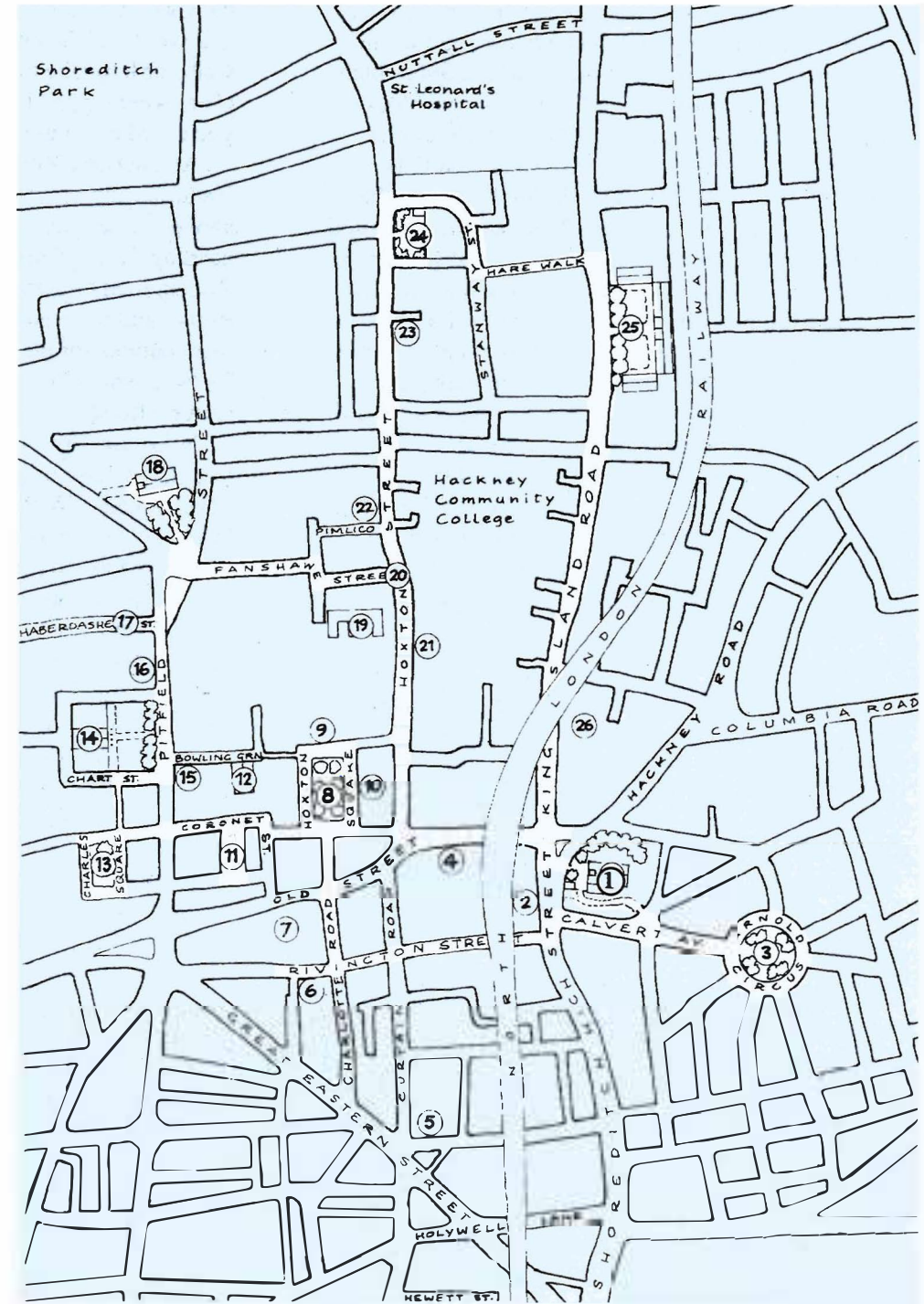
1 St Leonard's Church

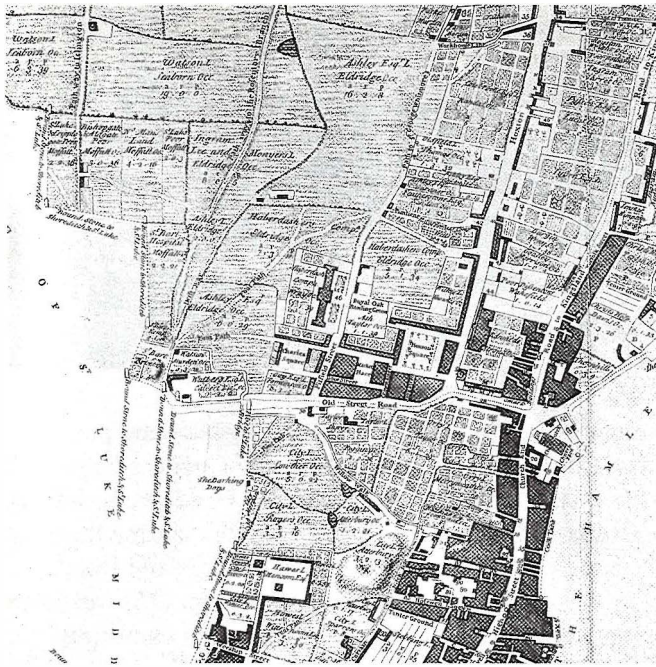
7 Congregational Chapel

3 Boundary Estate

6 The Tramshed

5 Site of The Theatre and
Holywell Priory





Chassereau's Survey 1745

As you walk round you will not just be looking at selected buildings, but beginning to feel the atmosphere of this area. So, before you set out, a word about Hoxton's relationship to the City, which has largely determined the forms of its settlement and use. Areas like Spitalfields, Clerkenwell and Shoreditch are too near to the walls ever to have been truly independent; but being outside them they were not merely to be absorbed.

As late as 1745, Chassereau's survey shows that little of the land you will be walking was developed: the Roman roads on each side of the crossing were built up; houses were strung along Hoxton Street and Old Street, fronting the newish developments of Hoxton and Charles Squares (8,13) and the Aske Almshouses (14) gleamed in open land. But right into the 1800s most of the parish north of Old Street was open.

Shoreditch had always been well colonised by the City of London. If walls were a barrier to the City's spread, places just outside could provide the contrast of semi-countryside. So Hoxton was famous in the Middle Ages for a wide system of managed archery ranges. Later, inns responded to the demand for pleasure

gardens on the lines of Vauxhall—the first Pimlico was here; or, from providing occasional entertainment, expanded into full-blown theatres like the famous *Britannia* (22).

The theatre tradition was much older. Queen Elizabeth had ordained a "green belt", thus encouraging theatres immediately outside the walls, when such activities were banned within them. In 1576 James Burbage set up *The Theatre* (5) near the ruins of the Priory of Holywell—see the plaque at 86 Curtain Road. Here Shakespeare acted in the Lord Chamberlain's Company, and for just twenty years Shoreditch was the venue for the first English theatres—Burbage's was joined by *The Curtain* in 1577. Ben Johnson played there; he also killed a man in a duel up in the fields of Hoxton, escaping, as a cleric could, with a branding.

The mediæval religious foundations had been closed down and sold off by Henry VIII, but the tradition of deathbed charity by well-lined city merchants lived on in the endowment of almshouses—a remarkable number of them tucked away in Hoxton a hundred years later; two of the buildings survive (14, 25).

The trade in lunacy was generally less philanthropic: Hoxton had by 1800 a large number of paying, or paid for, mental patients. On the new Community College site was the largest of these, *Hoxton House* (21).

The most frequent need of the citizens of London in 1745, as now, would have been for small service enterprises: market gardens, stables and workshops of

all kinds. But for furniture-making Shoreditch was a world centre by the nineteenth century and a major employer in Hoxton.

You will be walking through an area which has always been used by Londoners for activities they had no room for, or did not wish to see too much of, or did not allow, within their walls; you may find it interesting to wonder to what extent this is still so, and whether the walls are still there...

The walk starts at the front of the church. There was a mediæval church in Shoreditch, but it was in a dire state in 1711 when the parishioners petitioned to be allowed to have one of the fifty Commissioners' churches which were being built under the 1718 Act. In the end they succeeded: in 1736 the new *St Leonard's* (1) rose to the design of George Dance the Elder, architect of the *Mansion House*. The Clerk's House looks like a relic from much earlier, but was put up only a year before the church.

Look out across the High Street to a row of Victorian commercial buildings, each performing over the traffic. Nos 125-130 (2) are still recognisably a grand ensemble, built as showrooms for Wells & Co's iron works, railings, gutters, cooking ranges and the like. Behind these buildings is the viaduct carrying the North London Railway; it survived as the Richmond-Broad Street Line until Broadgate swamped its terminus. The East London Line extension to Dalston may one day use the tracks again, as well as Shoreditch Station above Old Street.

You will soon be heading over this road, but turn left for a moment. Walk through the churchyard, where the Portland Stone gives way to brick on the south elevation, to Calvert Avenue. Here is the boundary with Bethnal Green, with Arnold Circus and the striped brickwork of the *Boundary Estate* (3); in the 1890s the LCC pulled down "the Old Nichol", Arthur Morrison's "Jago", and one of the worst "rookeries" of the East End, to make way for this new development of five storey flats. Its references to earlier philanthropic models, like *Enfield Buildings* (19), are clear, but this was one of the earliest and best of purely municipal housing schemes.

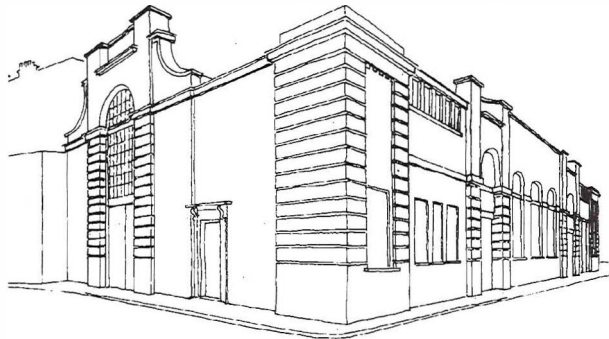


1 St Leonard's Church, Shoreditch in 1820

Return now across the High Street and move under the railway into Rivington Street. On the right a wide yard shows the back of the stage set which Shoreditch Town Hall (4) presents to Old Street. For two blocks Rivington Street maintains the scale of its Victorian mix—small workshops and showrooms with flats over—and two good pubs, The Barley Mow and the Bricklayers Arms. Several have been decently repaired during the 1980s boom; one, N^o 54, refaced with great verve, now sinks back as the white rendering weathers.

Look left down Curtain Road. Here the lofty showrooms of the furniture trade went up, particularly after Great Eastern Street was driven through in the 1870s. Burbage's Theatre (5) was just north of New Inn Yard, with The Curtain probably in Hewett Street.

At the bend in Rivington Street you will have seen a tall arch in the brickwork—the Tramshed (6); which it never was, but an electrical substation to power the trams, designed by Vincent Harris for the LCC in 1907; there is a similar one in Upper Street, Islington.



6 *The Tramshed, Rivington Street*

Across the street from the Tramshed, cliffs of stock brickwork and sash windows signal the 1980s. In the middle the New Tabernacle Congregational Chapel (7) has also become offices—it is best seen from Chapel Place off Old Street. Below it is one of the natural springs which grew into a spa. This was fenland until the fifteenth century (hence Moor-fields), when the marsh was drained. In 1598 John Stow described “somewhat north from Holywell is one other well curbed square with stone and is called Dame Annis the clear” and he described how the wells to the north of

the City “are most famous, and frequented by scholars and youths of the city in summer evenings, when they walk forth to take the air”. The waters of St Agnes the Clear were tapped for ale-brewing, but by the 1730s you could take the waters for all manner of complaints.

At Charlotte Road look south down a canyon of Victorian showrooms with their stockrooms and cranes above. But as you turn towards Hoxton you will be heading for a quieter world across Old Street. This Roman road now roars with traffic on a one-way Red Route, and it is visibly crumbling. The north side has been famous for the rival ironmongers Parry and Tyzack, who still exist, huddled into a shop opposite Curtain Road.

Now cross into Hoxton proper and its Square (8), laid out in 1684 in conscious imitation of West End developments. With Charles Square (13) and the Market (11), it was an attempt, just twenty years after the Great Fire, to kick-start the colonisation of Hoxton fields with elegant squares and terraces. It never quite took off, but in Hoxton Square you can still feel the ordered peace of terraces of houses round a garden.

Walk round it clockwise. On the site of N^o 1 lived the doctor who gave his name to Parkinson's Disease; in 1800 he was medical officer for a private lunatic asylum in Hoxton. Much of this side has gone, including St Peter's Church (Anglican), whose Vicarage remains at N^o 10. N^{os} 8 and 9 are turn-of-the-century furniture workshops with whole frontages opened up to the square.

St Monica's (Catholic) dominates the north side (9), rising between its convent and the National Schools.

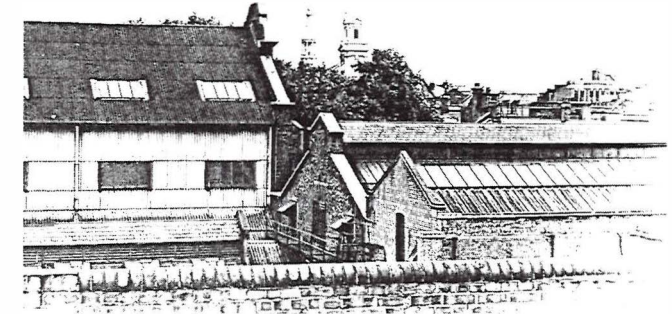


13, 11 and 8 *The Three Squares in 1872*

But these late Victorian Gothic buildings do not tell the earlier story of Hoxton as a centre for dissenting preachers and wider radicalism. William Godwin, philosopher of radicalism, studied at the Hoxton Academy in the 1770s. As so often in the history of Hoxton, it became a haven for those not quite welcome in the City itself.

On the East side the original 1680s frontage of N^o 32 has been carefully restored (10); most of the houses first erected would have had this pattern of frontage, height and vocabulary.

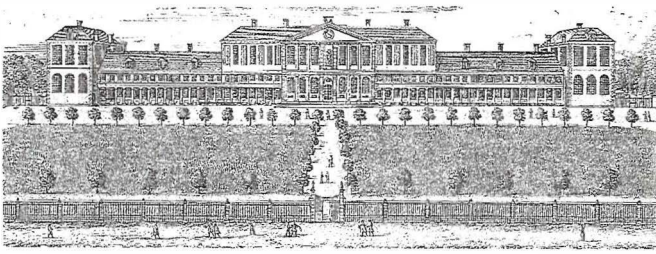
Coronet Street leaves the South end of the Square, passing tall workshops and the Bass Clef Jazz Club, to Hoxton Market (11). This small Square is to be the first of two courts of Westminster University's new student housing. On its East side stands the Hoxton Market Christian Mission, founded by Lewis Burt in 1881 to help a notoriously run-down area. On the North side of the Square is a wide red brick arch—“From dust, light and power” in Latin in the panel above. This was the



12 *The Generating Station—roofscape*

“Shoreditch Vestry Refuse Destructor and Steam Generating Station” 1897, a model for our times, generating power (250 kW) from local waste and feeding it widely to Vestry property, including the new Baths, which used to stand next to Pitfield Street Library (15). Behind rises the Generating Hall (12), three stories high and the next home of Circus Space.

Cross Pitfield Street into Charles Square (13)—the third element in the 1680s layout. The green-centred square itself has survived post-war redevelopment along with a fine town house at N^o 16, the old Magistrates Court and Registry Office. From the corner



14 Haberdasher's School and Almshouse 1890

nearest the tower block look back over roofs to the stonework of the Town Hall (4) with St Leonard's (1) behind it. There is a path from the top of the square to Chart Street and the side of the most grand of Hoxton's institutions—the Haberdasher's Company School and Almshouses (14). This is the second building, of 1827; the first was designed in the 1690s by Dr Robert Hooke, a learned friend of Sir Christopher Wren, using Robert Aske's £24,000 legacy. Further on you will see the extraordinary unity of Haberdasher Street (17), terraces of flats with roof railings.

The main Aske Building lost its Almshouse wings in 1873, but the School remained, now City and East London College. Across its gardens the Doric portico faces the most exuberant of Hoxton's buildings, Pitfield Street Library (15), designed with its baths by the 1895 competition winner Henry Hare. The Vestry were keen to get the Baths right: so Hare did the elevations while Spalding and Cross, public baths experts, sorted out the plans. The baths were demolished in 1962, but from Bowling Green Lane you can see the extent of the Vestry's development—library, baths and power station. Before turning left up Pitfield Street, just pause to look right at N^o 47-49 on the corner of Chart Street, the motifs of a 1930s Odeon deployed in a two-bay corner infill block just before the war.

Now Pitfield Street widens out, with a pre-war estate of fine red brick flats on your right and opposite them the dilapidated facade of George Harwood's 1870 Music Hall, The Varieties (16). Past the George and Vulture stands another of the Commissioners' churches, St John the Baptist (18), designed by Francis Edwards in 1823. Its Apocalyptic internal ceiling paintings have been restored with assistance from the

Borough and English Heritage.

Turn down Fanshawe Street now, towards Hoxton Street. On the right, behind Academy Buildings, rises Enfield Buildings (19), tenements from the charity housing movement of the 1870s.

You have now reached Hoxton Street (20). Hoxton features in Domesday Book, probably as a group of houses along this path out of the City (although concentrated until the 18th century further north, where the road widens at St Leonard's Hospital). At this point you face a range of tall red brick buildings behind a wall. This site has never been part of the northward spread of housing, because it was a Jewish burial ground when Hoxton Square was laid out. Just North of the Square Sir Jonathan Miles owned a lunatic Asylum, which he moved next to the cemetery in 1784. Thirty years later there were nearly 500 patients at Hoxton House, in horribly crowded conditions; N^o 34 may even have been part of it (21). After 1889 the new LCC took it over and erected the Board School, with later additions in the 1960s. The whole of this site is now being replanned as Hackney College, one of the largest educational developments in the country.

You may want to cut short or postpone your walk here, turning right to Old Street Police Station and the Town Hall (4); otherwise turn left into the real market, along Hoxton Street. Its pubs are still lively and musical, but a hundred years ago it was the Britannia Theatre which packed them in and Sara Lane, the "Queen of Hoxton", presided. The "Old Brit" started as a pub under Sara's husband Sam, but was rebuilt in 1857 as a grand and gilded theatre, blitzed in 1940 (22). Hoxton Hall (23) is still there, a well-loved community centre with a unique galleried theatre. It was built in 1863 as a Music Hall (see the keystone in Wilks Place), but from 1879 it was strictly Temperance, run first by the Blue Ribbon Army and then by the Quakers.

Hoxton Street still has several 18th century houses, often under layers of facing and standing well back from later shop fronts. N^{os} 124-6 are now derelict, but N^{os} 173-175 have been restored as houses, with tiled front gardens. Next to N^o 156 the Hoxton Trust has made a beautiful garden (24), with a Cupola brought



24 Hoxton Community Garden

down from Homerton's Eastern Hospital and public lavatories designed for an oil rig. F Cooke's Eel and Pie Shop is at N^o 150 and the Queen's Head overlooks the garden—maybe time for a rest, before cutting through Stanway Street and Hare Walk to Kingsland Road.

As you emerge the Geffrye Museum (25) welcomes you, sitting well back below trees and a enormous pediment—almshouses again, built for the Ironmongers Company in 1715 and once flanked by others. Since 1910 it has been a famous museum of furniture and of the way the English furnish their homes.

Turn right now, past Goddard and Gibbs' glass shop under the railway bridge. On the left is the entrance to Perseverance Works (26). Only at the very end of Kingsland Road do you get to see how to return to the delicate, tiered spire of St Leonard's, over the Roman crossroads, with very great care, by the traffic lights.

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The Society is a local association affiliated to the Civic Trust; for further information contact The Hackney Society,

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