

31/01/2003

LOWER CLAPTON ROAD E5  
(North Side)

735/0/10127

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TQ 3511 8539

Nos 37-41  
Public Baths,  
Kings Hall Leisure Centre

GV

II

Public swimming pool and baths. 1894-97. By Edward Harnor and Frederick Pinches. Portland stone front with slate roof.

PLAN: deep rectangular site, widening out to rear. Three-storey entrance and admin block to front. Central spine of changing rooms with three main areas on either side: two to left formerly pools, now sports halls, large one to right with main pool

EXTERIOR: Free renaissance style front of three storeys with attic. Irregular four bay front, 3<sup>rd</sup> pedimented bay breaking forward and wider. Front balustrade with ornamental railings above. Rusticated ground floor. Pedimented Ionic doorcases, reached via steps, with arched entrances in 2<sup>nd</sup> (2<sup>nd</sup> from left) and 4<sup>th</sup> (right-hand) bays. Arched windows in 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> bay with mullions and transoms. Private entrance to upper floor accommodation to right of 1<sup>st</sup> bay. Frieze at 1<sup>st</sup> floor level. First storey with four lower light windows, moulded hoods over, to each bay except the 3<sup>rd</sup>; this has an oriel window with pedimented centrepiece. Rusticated pilasters divide the bays. String course at second floor level. Four-light windows to second floor, two to 3<sup>rd</sup> bay. Frieze above inscribed HACKNEY PUBLIC BATHS. Parapet pierced with balustrading. Pedimented dormer to 3<sup>rd</sup> bay; four-light window beneath bulls-eye window within pediment. Steeply pitched roof. Other, lesser, elevations not inspected.

INTERIOR: In spite of alteration numerous features of interest remain including the following. Entrance areas retain cornice. Café and changing areas (incorporating the former slipper baths area between the men's pools) retain top lighting, some with open trusses. Main pool, originally the men's first class pool or King's Pool (now sub-divided, with separate shallow pool at north end) with gallery, fronted with ornamental rails, walls faced in glazed white brick, open iron trussed roof. Former men's second class pool undergoing conversion to a dance studio and fitness suite at time of inspection (2001). Former ladies' pool converted to sports hall use: it retains impressive open hammerbeam roof but has lost the gallery and changing cubicles that ringed the now floored over pool. The front block retains many features. The decorative cast iron staircase is in situ, as is the decorative tiled lining to the stairs. The first floor committee room retains its panelling.

HISTORY: Hackney adopted the 1846 Public Baths and Wash-houses Act in 1891. Harnor and Pinches, architects of the Bow Public Baths in Roman Road, won the limited competition held in 1892. Work began in 1894: a legal dispute delayed opening, which took place in February 1897; Lord Russell of Killowen, Lord Chief Justice, performed the honours. Nearly 150,000 persons used the baths in the first 5 months of opening. The King's Bath was adapted for use as a public hall, with a capacity of 1500. Considerable alterations were carried out in 1937, when 'Russian' (steam) baths were installed. Plans to demolish the baths in the late 1930s and late 1960s were not pursued. A major programme of modernisation was carried out in the early 1990s. The baths retain numerous features of interest as well as a handsome frontage, and are listed as a building of special interest, embodying late Victorian civic concern for the promotion of cleanliness and fitness.

SOURCES: Hackney Society Newsletter (Summer 1990); London Borough of Hackney, historic buildings listing report (c. 1988)