



HACKNEY DOWNS 1876-1995

The Life and Death of a School

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The extension of educational provision in Great Britain during the second half of the 19th century led to the establishment of a number of schools by leading charitable organisations.

One such was the Grocers' Company's School which was built on a triangular site at the corner of Hackney Downs, bounded by the Great Eastern railway on two sides and by Downs Park Road on the third.

During its history the School changed status several times. Founded in 1876 as a selective-entry grammar school, in 1906 it was given on trust as a free gift by the Grocers' Company to the London County Council. In 1954 it became a County School, and in 1969 a Comprehensive; in its final years (1990-95) it was very publicly mismanaged by the London Borough of Hackney. It survived the upheaval of evacuation to Norfolk during the Second World War, and a second upheaval following a fire (1963) that destroyed much of the original Victorian Gothic building. But it could not survive exploitation by an array of political and ethnic groupings that cared less about the school and its pupils than about the pursuit of their own sectarian agendas.

Once regarded as one of England's finest boys' secondary schools, Hackney Downs became one of the worst, and was closed on government orders in 1995, amidst frenetic media coverage.

Deemed a "failing" school, Hackney Downs was in fact failed by others, the victim of multiple betrayals.

In telling this story Geoffrey Alderman has revisited the history of the school which he first published in 1972. Using hitherto closed archival material, and the oral testimony of those who witnessed the School's demise, he has written without fear or favour a history that encompasses the entire life of the school from its opening, so full of promise, in 1876 to its ignoble closure, so full of venom, in 1995.

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