**THE ROUND CHAPEL**

The origins of the Clapton Park United Reform Church or Round Chapel began at the nearby Old Gravel Pit chapel in Morning Lane. This was established in 1804 by a breakaway group from The Ram’s Chapel in Homerton. The Old Gravel Pit community was congregationalist and as Hackney’s population grew so did the size of the Old Gravel Pit community. By the mid 1860’s with the congregation still expanding, the chapel in poor condition and the lease running out it was decided to a new larger building was needed. It was decided to raise the funds by subscription and build it on a new development in a leafy suburb, the Clapton Park Estate.

In 1869 Henry Fuller was appointed as architect. He was well known for designing non-conformist church architect and had already designed three other local chapels. The building contract was awarded to Perry & Co for £10290 – though the final cost was £21294 – a large sum at the time. The first service was held at the new chapel on 26th April 1871.

Most non-conformist chapels were like Anglican churches with aisles facing the preaching box. The Round Chapel was highly unusual at the time. It was more like a theatre which could hold a large congregation and where all of them could see and hear the preacher, important as there is an emphasis on the sermon in non-conformism. It was neither Gothic or classical in design and used Iron in its construction, unusual at the time.

The Chapel was built with ancillary rooms to the rear and vergers house in Glenarm Road. By 1873 there was insufficient space and a school and lecture rooms were built in the same style on the Powerscroft Road side of the site. This block was set at right angles to the Chapel. In 1881 another wing was added.

From the 1890’s onwards the size of the congregation decreased as the Hackney’s population changed with local people moving to the suburbs. This continued throughout the twentieth century and by the 1980’s the congregation could not afford the upkeep of the building. The main chapel closed and the United Reform Church continued worshiping in the school buildings where they remain to this day.

The Round Chapel was transferred to Hackney Historical Building Trust and, with support and funds from English Heritage and Heart of Hackney, restoration work was carried out to reopen the building and give it a viable future. The church cottage was also bought by the trust and they operate both buildings today. The schoolrooms remain the property of the United Reform Church.

The architectural importance of the building has been recognised by its Grade II\* listing with special mention of the chapel’s interior. The grading puts it in the top 4% of listed buildings in the country. It was also included on the Government list of outstanding non-conformist churches along with two others in Hackney, the Agapenomite Church and the Unitarian Chapel in Newington Green.