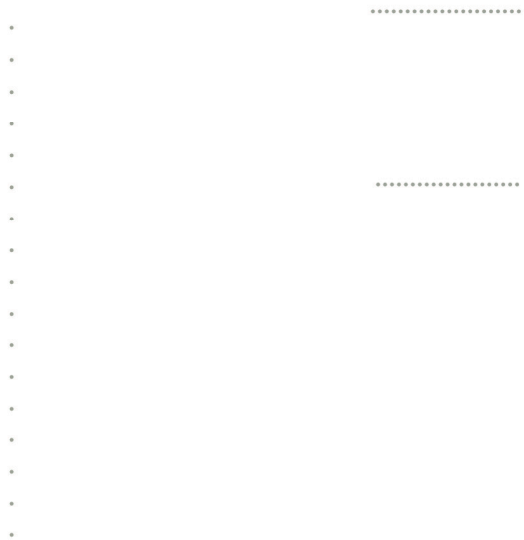




Grand Union Flag (A Hackney 4th of July): Hunter & Lawrence



**HOXTONHALL**

**The Building Exploratory**

Saturday the 4th of July, 2009: Hoxton Street to Orsman Road  
(via The Regent's Canal), Hackney. 2-4pm

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## **A Hackney 4<sup>th</sup> of July**

A Walk Between Hoxton Hall, Hoxton Street to the  
Building Exploratory at Orsman Road (via The  
Regent's Canal), Hackney. 2-4pm

*Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 2009*

**Mark Hunter and Conan Lawrence**

2009

## 1. Hoxton Hall. 130, Hoxton Street, London N1 6SH.

[Conan]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to our walk *A Hackney 4<sup>th</sup> of July*. I'm Conan Lawrence, this is Mark Hunter and we're your guides for the next ninety minutes.

When Mark and me were offered the chance to lead a walk on one of Discover Historic Hackney's weekends we chose today –the 4<sup>th</sup> of July– for its obvious resonances. Independence Day, a reminder of an early loss; of Empire, land, subjects. And tea. What would happen if we told a story in Hackney about something that happened 233 years ago and 3549 miles away? Could Hackney throw new light on an old story; what could Hackney learn from that story?

We were given a geographical beginning and an end and had to invent the middle, with you in mind. One of these inventions was the name we chose for this walk: *A Hackney 4<sup>th</sup> of July*. Another was a letter we wrote to the American Ambassador inviting him to join us on the walk, of which more later. What we decided *not* to do was walk past a lot of buildings and point at them, although there's one we haven't quite made up our minds about yet.

The beginning was, and is, Hoxton Hall, built in 1863, as MacDonald's Music Hall, although it only survived eight years in this capacity before mid-Victorian piety closed it down. But this hall, this auditorium, feels even older. Like a church, a secret room; a shelter.

Inside the bag that accompanies this walk you'll find a few objects. Three postcards designed for this walk –one of which is stamped, a

pen, a voucher and a sealed envelope we'd like you to open only when you get home. If you take one of the postcards out of the bag now...

The flag that appears on the postcard reminds me of another history, another set of desires. Two flags, really, similar. Two flags in love, each not quite sure who's going where –off the page or further into it. A flag is colours divided; lines and stripes, paths designed to replace language. If flags were declarations this one might read “*UK and USA Best Cousins Forever*”, scratched into a Ponderosa Pine or Sweetbay trunk, or scrawled on a Hackney lock-up. They might not remain this close, but they'd remember when they were.

The Americans and the British. Already how normal it seems to have a black President. Without a British Tea Act, and the enraged citizenry of Boston, the Americans wouldn't be choosing any leaders, least of all their own. The Americans love our accents, we love their moon rockets, hamburgers and glitz. Their insularity sometimes makes us wince, but they're the only cavalry we know.

The American Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1776 –85, 102 days ago in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The thirteen original states voting because they hadn't been allowed to vote by the British. And because they were bloody angry. Angry at unrepresentative government, angry at the state reaching out over those 3549 miles to tax, of all things, *tea*.

Hoxton Hall opened 87 years, 3 months and 28 days after the Declaration of Independence was signed. Its own Independence lasted just eight years, before the Police closed it down, citing public disorder. Unlike across The Pond there was no declaration or war to protest this decision.

Hoxton Hall's life as a Music Hall lasted as long as the American Revolutionary War (also known as the War of Independence). 8 years, 4 months, 17 days.

Then the Quakers came, and Hoxton Hall was saved. William Palmer bought the place in 1879 and after his death The Bedford Institute took ownership, and they're still here, in the wings, quiet as a Society of Friends meeting, letting other voices speak: young voices, Hackney voices, resonating in the present.

That same impulse for Independence links the Quakers *and* our best cousins (the Americans). Persecution of Quakers in England peaked throughout the seventeenth century, leading to emigration to the Americas, where their belief in human equality fuelled the coming Revolution.

William Penn, the prominent –and privileged– Quaker, founded the font of Liberty –Pennsylvania, in flight from imprisonment and torture in England.

Hoxton Hall, this refuge from the stresses and perils of the street's calumnations, this performing salve, creative balm –let's get ready to leave it, and turn our attention to departure. If Hoxton Hall is the safety of home, the street might be the journey across an unknown space, urban seas. Turn right at the front door and Hoxton Street is our Atlantic, where we'll carry ourselves to the water. But before we do, Mark has a few words to say on the matter of leaving.

**1b. Hoxton Hall. 130, Hoxton Street, London N1  
6SH.**

[Mark]

[Mark reads William Penn's letter to his family on leaving  
England.]

"My dear Wife and Children: -My love, which neither sea, nor land, nor death itself, can extinguish or lessen toward you, most endearedly visits you with eternal embraces, and will abide with you for ever; and may the God of my life watch over you and bless you, and do you good in this world and for ever! -Some things are upon my spirit to leave with you in your respective capacities, as I am to one a husband, and to the rest a father, if I should never see you more in this world.

My dear wife! Remember thou wast the love of my youth, and much the joy of my life; the most beloved, as well as the most worthy of all my earthly comforts: and the reason of that love was more thy inward than thy outward excellencies, which yet were many. God knows, and thou knowest it, I can say it was a match of Providence's making; and

God's image in us both was the first thing, and the most amiable and engaging ornament in our eyes. Now I am to leave thee, and that without knowing whether I shall ever see thee more in this world, take my counsel into thy bosom, and let it dwell with thee in my stead while thou livest."





## 2. Ossie's Café, Hoxton Street.

[Conan, outside]

We're going to make a stop at Ossie's Café where we'd like you to have a cup of tea, or alternative, at our expense. If you have your *Boston Tea Party* voucher ready to exchange at the counter and respect the wishes of other diners who may not be so revolutionary-minded, we'll begin.

[*Enter Café. Once walkers are seated...*]

Despite being picked in the East Indies, all tea entering America in the eighteenth century had to be imported via Britain, and was heavily taxed. Smuggling hit the British East India Company's monopoly and the Townshend Revenue Act of 1767 taxed our best cousins hard, in part to fund the British colonial administration. Colonial merchants, many of whom smuggled tea, played a major part in stirring unrest, which led to 1773's consignments of tea being boycotted. On December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1773, at Boston, three tea ships were picketed by seven thousand local citizens. At night 130 of them, some disguised as Mohawk Indians, stormed the ships and threw the 342 tea chests into the harbour rather than submit to paying tax on them. The Tea Act was repealed with the passing of the *Taxation of Colonies Act* of 1778, but by then, of course, it was too late.

The rejection of *our* drink –*tea!*– as a spark for revolution, is too poetic to labour over. How *dare* they!

The declaration we're tracing here in Hackney was originally signed on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1776 in Pennsylvania. On this July 4<sup>th</sup> Mark and I invite you,

while you drink your tea, to take out your pre-stamped postcard and pen and write a Hackney 4<sup>th</sup> of July Declaration to someone you know. A declaration of love, a simple hello to someone you've been meaning to write to for a while, even a declaration to yourself, something that matters to you or to them. We'll post these Declarations later in the walk; and I should add that what you write is between you and who you write to: don't worry, we won't ask you to 'share' what you write, as our cousins over the water might!

*[Walkers write their cards]*

And now if you're suitably refreshed, and your Hackney Declarations are finished let's move on, and leave Joseph and George and the staff at Ossie's -thank you- to their business.

**Admit One**

**The Boston Tea Party**

**Ossie's Cafe, Hoxton Street**

**Saturday 4th of July, 2009**

.....

**Exchange this voucher for a cup of tea  
(or equivalent) at the counter (No....)**



Grand Union Flag (A Hackney 4th of July): Hunter & Lawrence

Happy Independence Day!  
I'm taking part in a walk  
through Hackney and we  
are currently drinking tea  
in a cafe and talking about  
Boston's Tea Party and a  
Happy Birthday too. Hope you  
have a lovely week, and that  
we have fun tonight (4th July).

Kixie

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### 3. Dave and Peter, Market Stall, Hoxton Street.

[Conan gestures Dave and Peter, they play guitar and read]

[Peter]

“Hoxton Street Market first traded in 1687

- 89 years before the Declaration of Independence was signed
- 90 years before Morocco became the first country to recognise the United States of America
- 133 years before the Regent’s Canal flowed
- 176 years before Hoxton Hall opened for business, and
- 322 years before today.

We’ve been trading here for 15 years, and if you’d like some candy we can help, as you can see.

Our Hackney Declaration is *Thanks for listening*.

Nice to meet you today. I’m Peter, and this is Dave. We’re playing *Born to Run* by Bruce Springsteen. Have a nice day.”

[Wave/say thanks to Peter and Dave, and move on]

4. Corner of Pitfield Street/Hyde Road (where pavement is widest, by park railings facing the roundabout)

[Mark]

Though we've had a few Declarations already, I'm going to ask Conan to read you another...

[Conan]

[Take letter from Chargé d'Affaires, remove letter from envelope, read verbatim in its entirety, replace letter in envelope]

[Mark]

Mr LeBaron is the seventieth individual to have held the post of American Ambassador –or Chargé d'Affaires ad interim– to London. Only one has been a woman. The Ambassador to the Court of St. James is the President's personal representative. The previous Ambassador, Robert Tuttle, left his post on February 9<sup>th</sup>, this year. The next, a Chicago associate of President Obama's –Louis B. Susman, assuming his Senate approval is successful, will take up his post later this year.

Let's move on- we've an appointment with a postbox.

[Walk down Hyde Road, stop at Postbox]



## 5. Hyde Road. Postbox.

[Mark]

Mr LeBaron's letter –the one Conan's just read out– talked about the important bond between “people on both sides of the Atlantic”. As a mark of that bond we'd like you to add your signatures on *our* Declaration, to a friend of ours on the other side of the Atlantic, who would've liked to have been here today. It'll mean a lot to her to receive it.

[Walkers sign pre-addressed postcard to Hilary; Mark posts it.]



6. 'Poppy Hill', on corner of Penn Street.



[Mark reads the penultimate and last paragraphs from the Declaration of Independence from the brow of the hill, perhaps pointing to the Post Office Tower, which can be seen in the distance beyond the park.]

“In every stage of the Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.”

6a. Bridport Place Postbox.

[Conan directs individual walkers’ Declaration postcards to be posted here.]

6b. By the steps down to the Regent’s Canal.

[Mark advises walkers to take care on the towpath: although pedestrians have priority, it is heavily used by cyclists.]

7. *Grand Union Canal* sign on Regent's Canal bank, just past the first bridge.

[Conan]

And now we're here on the Regent's Canal, which might serve as a reminder of the larger stretch of water that separates us from our best cousins. As you can see from this diagram, which *Karak* has rather ostentatiously marked (though quite fitting on a day of signing, naming and declaring), the Regent's Canal merges with the former Grand Junction to form the Grand Union Canal further north, and eventually winds its way up to Birmingham.

The Regent's Canal was named after the Prince Regent, later King George IV. Fully open by 1820 it was a victim of bad timing –the railway age two decades later decimated canal trade, and despite a brief upturn during the Second World War its future as a commercial waterway was doomed. The last horse-drawn traffic on the Canal was carried in 1956, and commercial traffic had virtually disappeared a decade later.

Now the Canal is a 'leisure facility', as you can see. If you'd like a longer walk, start where the Canal meets the Thames at Limehouse and follow it all the way to Little Venice, beyond which it joins the Grand Union.

And the flag that adorns your postcards is the Grand Union Flag –also known as the Continental Colours– first flown on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December, 1775 on the warship *Alfred*, in Philadelphia. The original flag is credited to Margaret Manny and is recognised as the First Flag of the USA. If you look carefully you'll see it flying in the background of President Obama's inauguration. Despite the Declaration of Independence the

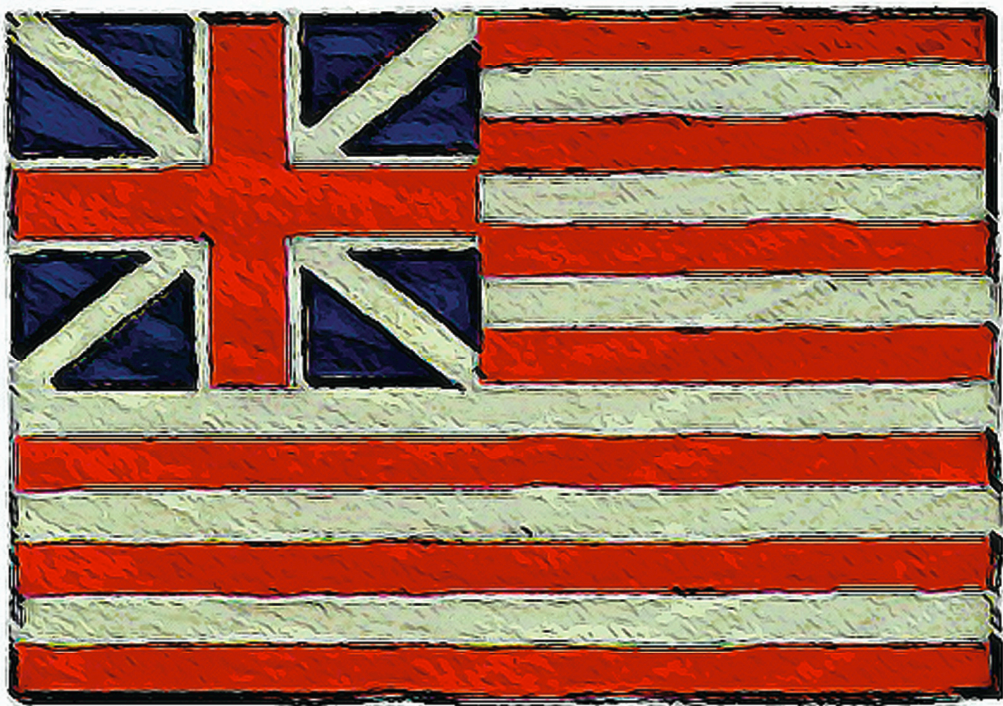
Grand Union Flag continued to be flown until the *Flag Act* of the 14<sup>th</sup> of June, 1777 replaced the Union Jack with thirteen stars to represent the original thirteen States.

Intriguingly The *Flag Act* was passed in response to a petition by Native Americans for “an American Flag.” The text preserved by the Second Independent Continental Congress reads, in its entirety, “*Resolved. That the flag of the United States be made of thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new Constellation.*”

Independence is a strange state. You declare it, but the image of what you depended on stays with you for a while, as though you can't bear to let it go. And then you replace it with *a new constellation*.

The *Flag Act* of 1818, and still in force today, stipulates that changes to the *stars* in that constellation may only take place on a 4th of July. It's a *date* that's hard to be independent of.

Let's move on.



8. Regent's Canal towpath, just past where the long clumps of bankside reed cease to grow.

[Naming of the boat *A Hackney 4<sup>th</sup> of July*]

[Conan]

On a day of Declarations and names it's high time we launched this yacht you've probably been wondering about.

As is traditional with the naming of a boat there is a small text to be read, followed by the christening of the bow with champagne. So can I ask you [*choose a walker to read the naming text*] to read this short text [hand walker the naming text on the back of a postcard].

"Let it be recorded that on this day, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 2009, and forever more, this fine vessel is named *A Hackney 4<sup>th</sup> of July*. I name this boat *A Hackney 4<sup>th</sup> of July*. May God bless her and all who sail her."

Thank you. And if you [*choose a walker to pour some of the champagne over the bow of the yacht*] would like to pour *just a little* champagne on the bow of the yacht we can proceed to the launching. [*Remove cork, hand bottle to walker, they pour some over the bow, take bottle back from walker*]. And now, if you'll excuse me, I'm just going to wet my whistle, as is traditional for the skipper of a new vessel.

And as this is probably the first boat to have been officially launched on the Regent's Canal it falls to us to set a precedent. Therefore let it forever be known this Urban Vessel *A Hackney 4<sup>th</sup> of July* can only be said to have been truly named when all of us have taken a turn pulling

her on her way, so please ensure *everyone* is Captain for a stretch as we wind our way further along the Canal.





9. Regent's Canal towpath, where it is widest, towards the Kingsland Basin exit.

[Mark]

Before we leave this river of quiet and re-join London at Kingsland Road, before we walk you to our destination at the Building Exploratory, I'd like to read you a response to the idea of this walk, written for us by a friend, Hilary Williams, now back in Chicago after four months in London. We signed our names on a postcard to her, back on Hyde Road. It reads:

\*

A plane flight.

Staring at my English mobile, waiting for the battery to die.

Wondering how different it will feel with bigger cars and bigger streets and taller buildings to block the horizon.

Clicking my newly filed fingernails on my coffee cup filled to its brim.

Me filled to my own brim.

Crying.

Because of the text messages and send offs; and letters I didn't write.

Because I've come to know a place so well only to leave it having loved it from the start.

Because I'm terrified of not having a home, or having too many.

Because of the freedom of choices I haven't even begun to make.

Alone.

And filled to the brim.

\*

A picture, now.

It hangs on my wall with its newly painted navy blue trees and navy blue sparrows. It hangs underneath a shelf with books placed in color order. Yellow, orange, red, purple, blue, green.

It hangs unframed. I'm waiting to find the perfect one in an antique store.

It reads: *Shoreditch 1916*.

It is a map, and a list of names and locations of people I've never met and will never meet. They are long lost to dust particles and archaeological sites. Long lost to lists and archives.

Someone I know believes you can save someone's life with their name. Ask me the names of those who lived in Shoreditch and what they did for a living in 1916. I've got a list of over 100. Ask me for a list of performers from the 1800s at McDonald's Music Hall (now Hoxton Hall), I've got over 100. Ask me for a list of names, I'll tell you as many as I can. I'm now in the business of saving lives."

\*

Thank you for signing up to *this* transatlantic bond. Let's move on.



10. The Building Exploratory, Orsman Road. Second Floor, North.

[A table by the window opposite where we stopped to read Hilary's text. On it is placed the yacht, and twenty brown luggage labels with white cotton ties.]

[Conan reads the letter he wrote to the American Chargé d'Affaires.

Mark thanks the walkers for coming, and invites them to write their responses to the walk on the luggage labels and attach them to the mast of the yacht *UV A Hackney 4<sup>th</sup> of July.*]

[Conan offers a Ferrero Rocher chocolate to the walkers.]

ENDS

Conan Lawrence  
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CHANGE AND GROWTH THROUGH THE ARTS  
**HOXTONHALL**

1st June 2009

Dear Chargé d'Affaires ad interim,

My colleague Mark Hunter and I are leading a guided walk in the Hoxton area of Hackney, London this 4<sup>th</sup> of July, under the title of **A Hackney 4<sup>th</sup> of July**. We would like to formally invite you to join us on this walk.

The walk begins at 2pm at Hoxton Hall, one of London's theatrical gems (built in 1863 it is one of London's two surviving Music Halls and works closely with local communities) and continues via the Regent's Canal to Orsman Road where the walk ends. We will launch a small model boat on the canal, symbolising the day's celebrations and our nations' maritime links. The boat will be named **A Hackney 4<sup>th</sup> of July**. The remainder of the walk will highlight traces and reminders of American presences in London.

I realise your time is very precious, and that you will have other –no doubt more pressing (and lavish)- engagements this 4<sup>th</sup> of July. If you cannot join us on our walk we would be most grateful if you could send a small message or dedication we could read on our journey.

Believe me, My dear Chargé d'Affaires ad interim,

Yours sincerely,

---

*So long partner...*