

The Emerging Copeland Cultural Quarter

By Eileen Conn, local Peckham resident

In the 1870s, Geo.G.Bussey & Co, a well-known small arms manufacturer, moved to Peckham. They built a factory, and a firing range, alongside the newly built railway line opposite Peckham Rye Station. They branched out and became well known for sports goods, so successfully that around twenty years later the factory was replaced with an imposing large brick-clad, reinforced concrete industrial structure. The factory made cricket bats from its own willow farm in Suffolk. The side facing the railway tracks has its decorative features, and was used for advertising. The Geo.G.Bussey name, on the side, can still be seen from the trains to Nunhead.

There are spectacular views of central London from the roof. From One Tree Hill, to the south, looking down over Peckham nestling in the hollow below, the Bussey building is very visible like a majestic liner sailing across the ocean. In the early twentieth century, Holdron's built their large department store next door. This was a feature of Peckham's *Golden Mile*, as Rye Lane was known far and wide many decades ago. Parts of these imposing buildings remain in use, and one of Holdron's magnificent shopping arcades may be capable of restoration.

The Bussey building is still buzzing with lively commercial activity, as part of Copeland Industrial Park. This is tucked away behind Bournemouth Road and Rye Lane, and hosts many small businesses, including some 100 artists, several faith groups, and arts, music and exhibition spaces. These contribute to the emerging Copeland Cultural Quarter. It is part of the large seven acre site, stretching from Rye Lane to Brayards Road, designated for demolition for the Cross River Tram depot.

However, it is a strategic site in the heart of the town centre, and could have a different and better future. The historic buildings could be integrated in new developments, for modern businesses and social uses. This, together with opening up the site, by creating small squares, courtyards and passage ways, would include the Quarter in the town centre. A range of ideas about how this might be done has been developed by several UK architects, and also architectural students, with their lecturers, from the Brandenburg University of Technology in Cottbus, Germany.

Some of these ideas are displayed in the Peckham Vision exhibition, in the CLF Arts Café in the Bussey Building, 133 Rye Lane, SE15. Peckham Vision is a consortium of businesses, artists, residents and the Peckham Society, working together to develop ideas for a reinvigorated and integrated Peckham town centre. These ideas illustrate some of the options for this strategic part of the town centre, as an alternative to the tram depot proposed by Transport for London. The Council is asking local people to give their views on these options, as part of their wider consultation on the Peckham Area Action Plan (PAAP). Comments to the Council by 15th December 2008.

Further information:

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Bussey building in Copeland Cultural Quarter



Copeland Courtyard - potential for new public realm, mixed rehabilitation and new buildings. Benedict O'Looney architect