

Housing the Workers

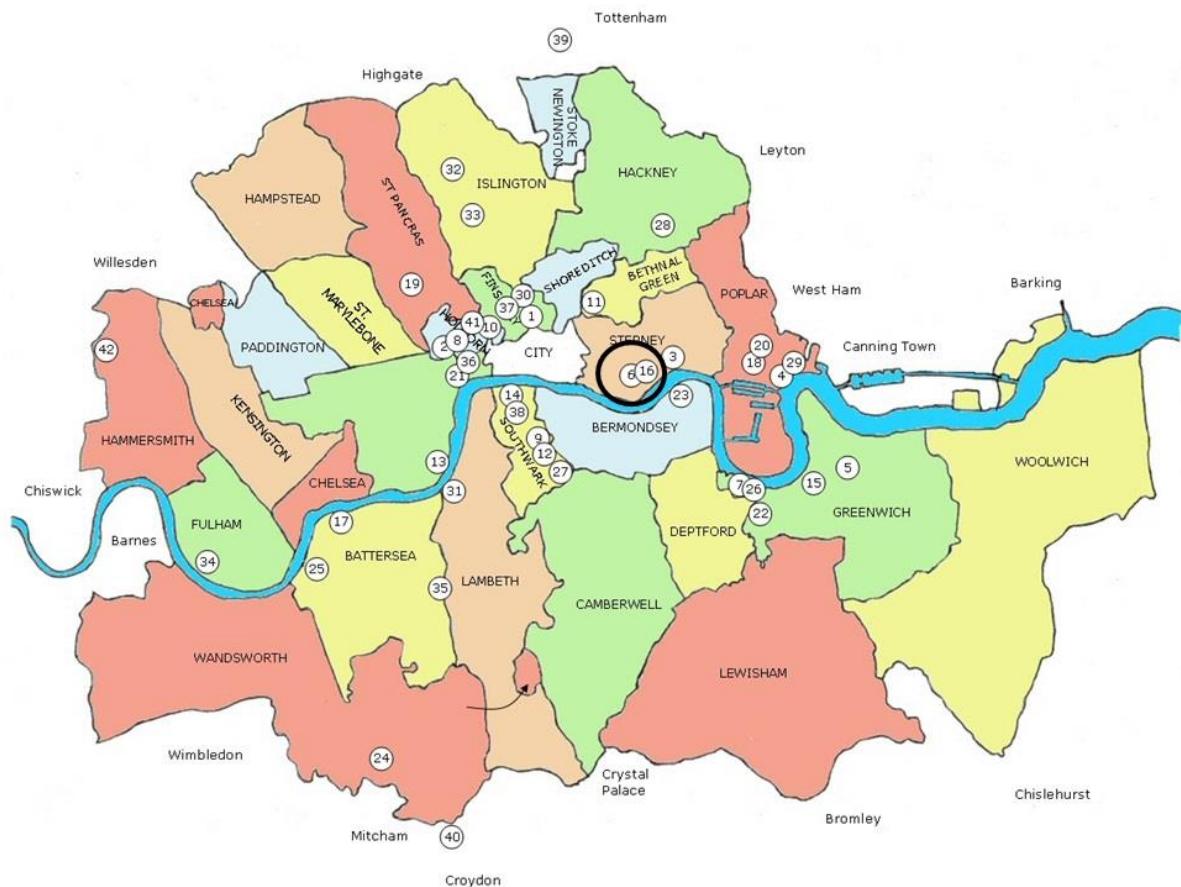
Early London County Council Housing

1889-1914

Martin Stilwell
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Part 3 – the schemes in detail

6 – Cable Street, Shadwell
Western section – Bewley and Dellow Buildings



Cable Street, Shadwell, Limehouse scheme (western section)

Bewley and Dellow Buildings, 1894-1896 Built under the 1882 Artizans' Dwellings Act

This development scheme in Shadwell was inherited from the MBW. The original representation was made by the medical officer of health for Limehouse in 1883 and was based on the condition of the housing and the high mortality rate. The original proposal failed but a modified proposal succeeded in 1886. The plans for the clearance and the re-development of the area, including a new street, are detailed in the MBW plan in Fig. 1 below.

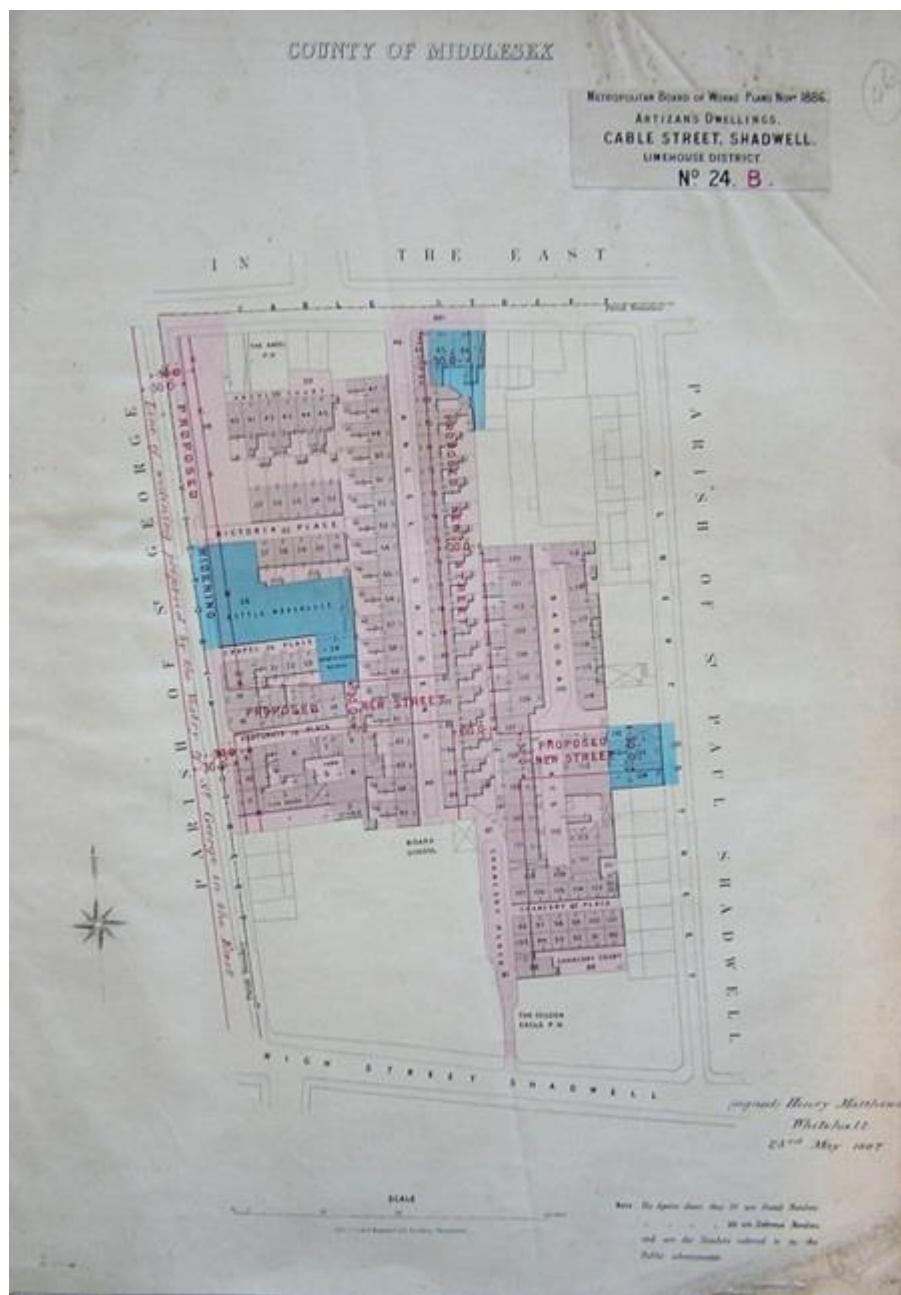


Fig. 1: Cable Street development area (LMA ref: MBW/2646)

The new east-west street became Lowood Street and the north-south street became Bewley Street. The scheme was modified in 1889 to make the alignment of Lowood Street a straight line and both new streets 40ft wide in place of the original 30ft.

The number expected to be re-housed was 970, which included 60 in a common lodging house, although this was subsequently reduced to 485 (see text below).

The property was acquired through negotiation and arbitration for a total of £40,840. The demolition materials realised just £251 and the site was finally cleared in 1891. The street improvements cost £4,831 and were completed in 1891. Surplus land was sold for £330.

The development of the scheme was carried out in two phases; the land to the west of Bewley St and north of Lowood St (largest plot) was completed in 1896 (Plot A) and is the subject of this chapter. The development of the land to the east of Bewley St (Plots B and C) was completed in 1901 and resulted in Lowood and Chancery Buildings.

The Guinness Trust approached the Council with a view to purchase Plot A to the west of Bewley St and favourable terms were agreed, but the Trust would not comply with the Council's building regulations passed in Dec 1899. The three sites were put up for sale (for the erection of working-class housing) but there were no buyers although the Guinness Trust was still interested. The Council sought to reduce the height of the planned buildings to four storeys to make it attractive to the Trust and this required the Secretary of State to reduce the number re-housed to 720, which they agreed to. Despite this, terms still could not be agreed with the Trust and so the Council applied to further reduce the total number to be re-housed to 485 to make the plots more attractive. This also failed to find a purchaser and the Council applied to erect buildings itself. Once the plans for the houses were drawn up it was soon apparent that the buildings had to be 5 storeys and that the height of the ceilings and widths of the staircases had to be reduced to make the building cost-effective. The two buildings constructed between 1894 and 1896 were called Bewley and Dellow Buildings and cost £23,612, of which £1,800 was due to alterations during construction. They are of the internal-landing design, whereas the later Lowood and Chancery Buildings are of the external-walkway design.

The two blocks contain 40 tenements of two rooms and 60 of three rooms giving a total theoretical capacity of 520 persons. Together with the later development on the remaining plots, the whole scheme provided accommodation for 796 persons (although the scheme needed to provide for only 485 persons). The average room sizes were right down to the minimum at 145 sq. ft. for the living rooms and 97 sq. ft. for bedrooms.

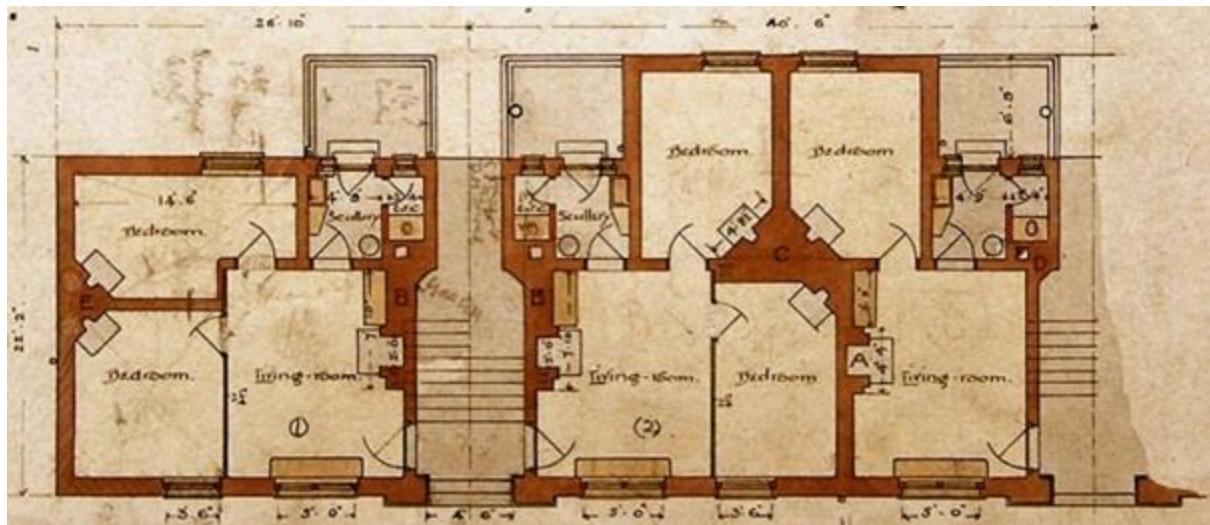


Fig. 2: Dellow/Bewley ground floor plan (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/3/46)



Fig. 3: Dellow Buildings taken in 1960 during modernisation (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0778)



Fig. 4: Rear of Dellow Buildings during modernisation (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0778)



Fig. 5: Scullery of Dellow Buildings taken before renovation in 1960 (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0778)



Fig. 6: Dellow living room before modernisation (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0778)

The 1901 census returns show a typical spread of tradesmen and labourers for the head of household, with one sergeant and 9 constables in the 100 tenements. Many of the trades were connected with the docks and river and included two Dock Constables. The 60 three-roomed tenements had an average occupancy of 4.83 persons and the two-roomed tenements an average of 2.9, which compares with the theoretical maximum of 6 and 4 persons respectively (based on 2 persons per room). This indicates a good control of the tenancies, but the fact that the buildings had only been occupied for 5 years needs to be taken into consideration when making this judgement.

The 1911 census returns show a similar spread of occupations but with only 5 constables, all with young families. The trades have widened a little from those recorded in 1901 but with no prominent occupation or trade. The birthplaces of the heads of household were varied with some from Ireland and Scotland and two Germans, one Italian and one Austrian. Overcrowding was not a major problem although some tenements were over the official maximum, indicating some local problems with the management. Five of the 60 3-roomed tenements had 9, 8, 8, 7 and 7 occupants respectively. One of those occupied by 7 people had a Venetian-born ship's rigger as the head and 4 of the occupants are all recorded as visitors and do not appear to be related to the Venetian or his English wife. Only one of the 100 tenements is unoccupied. Bewley had 193 occupants and Dellow 198, giving 391 in total and a 75% occupancy against the theoretical maximum of 520.

The costs of this Cable Street development (Plot A) cannot be separated from those of Plots B and C and so the whole costs are dealt with in the later section that covers the development of Lowood and Chancery Buildings (see Cable Street Shadwell – Phase 2).

The buildings were modernised in 1960 starting with Bewley Buildings. The conversion resulted in the 20 two-roomed and 30 three-roomed tenements being converted into 20 one-roomed and 30 3-roomed tenementsⁱ.

The buildings still stand and are surrounded by other block dwellings which date from between the wars. Neighbouring Lowood and Chancery Buildings are also still standing. Note in the photograph of Dellow House in Fig. 8 that the rear balconies have been taken down (compare

to Fig. 4). This seems to be simply because the doors were replaced by windows at the rear during modernisation and so leaving no access to the balconies.

All buildings are showing signs of stress and the immediate surrounding area is not pleasant. This part of the Borough of Tower Hamlets is almost entirely populated by immigrant ethnic families and the buildings are showing no signs at all of any pride by the tenants in living there. In all the four blocks there is not one pot plant to be seen on a balcony or at a window. The modern photographs below give a somewhat flattering view of the buildings.



Fig. 7: Dellow House, front, 2009



Fig. 8: Dellow House, rear, 2009

A house called “The Lodge”, squeezed in between Dellow and Bewley Buildings at their southern end, still exists and in good condition. This was the home of the LCC caretaker. The very far end of Dellow House, as seen in Fig. 7 above, was damaged by bombing in WW2 but the repairs were carried out to match the original building as there is almost no sign of the repairs.

Footnotes

ⁱ "New Homes for Old", LCC press release, February 1960; LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0788