

Housing the Workers

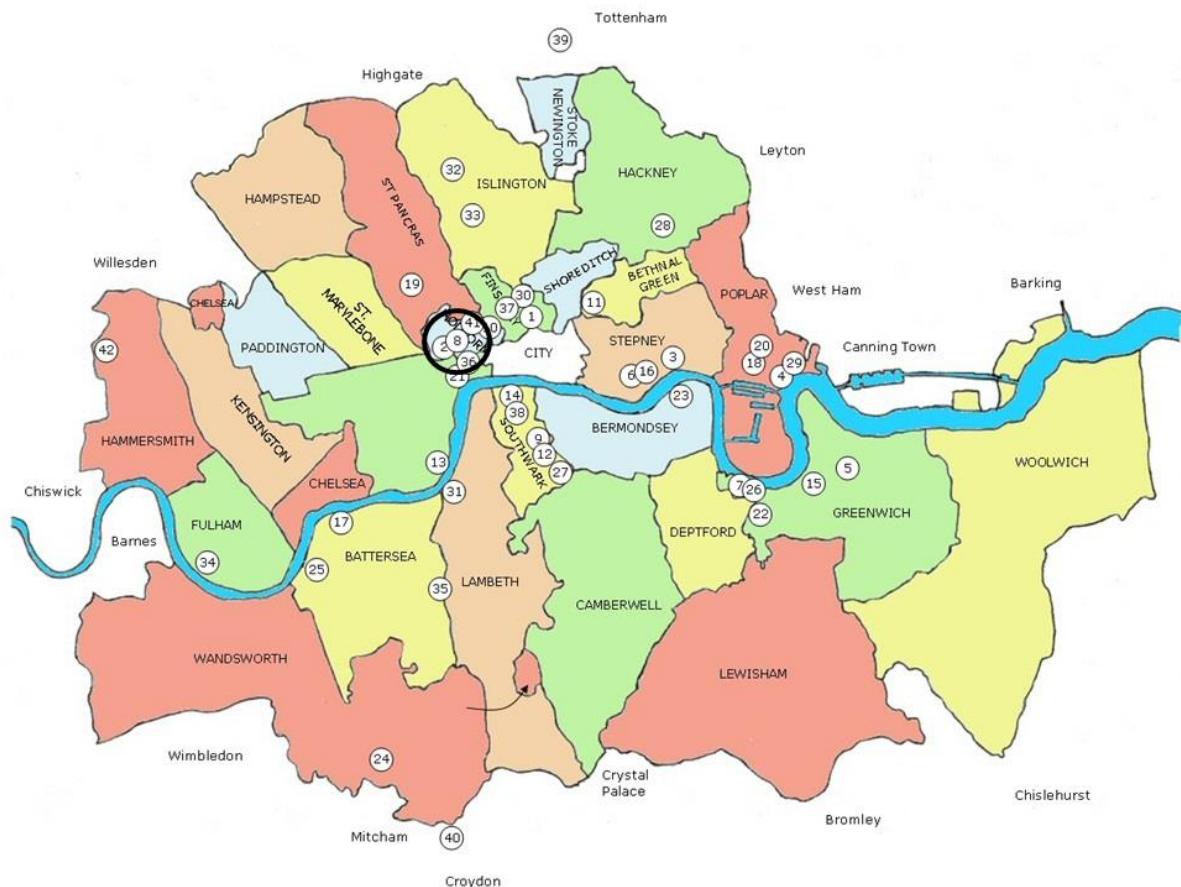
Early London County Council Housing

1889-1914

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Part 3 – the schemes in detail

8 – Shelton Street Scheme - Phase 2



Shelton Street scheme, Holborn

Aldwych, Wimbledon, Cottrell, Lindsey and Powis Buildings, Oct 1896
Built under the 1882 Artizans' Dwellings Act

This was the first LCC re-housing scheme in the West End, being adjacent to Drury Lane. Despite the favourable impression one has today of this area of Holborn, in the late Victorian period the parish of St Giles contained many slum areas and Shelton Street area was the first to be tackled by the Council.

The area in question was first brought to the attention of the MBW in October 1883 under the Artizans' Dwellings Act when it was stated that the area was occupied by 1,722 persons in poor quality housing. The report by the St Giles Medical Office, Dr Lovett, also stated that many houses were dilapidated and unrepairable with many having upper storeys with ceilings below 7 feet and that many back yards were shadowed by tall buildings and had an inadequate water supply. The MBW approved of the scheme on 12th November 1886 and the Secretary of State issued the Act of Parliament which received its royal assent on 12th July 1887. The scheme, as authorised, provided for re-housing for 660 persons although 1,208 were displaced. This is the first occurrence of an allowed discrepancy between numbers displaced and those re-housed and was because the area was so densely populated that new housing on the site could not possibly be built with such a density and remain within the Council's self-imposed regulations.

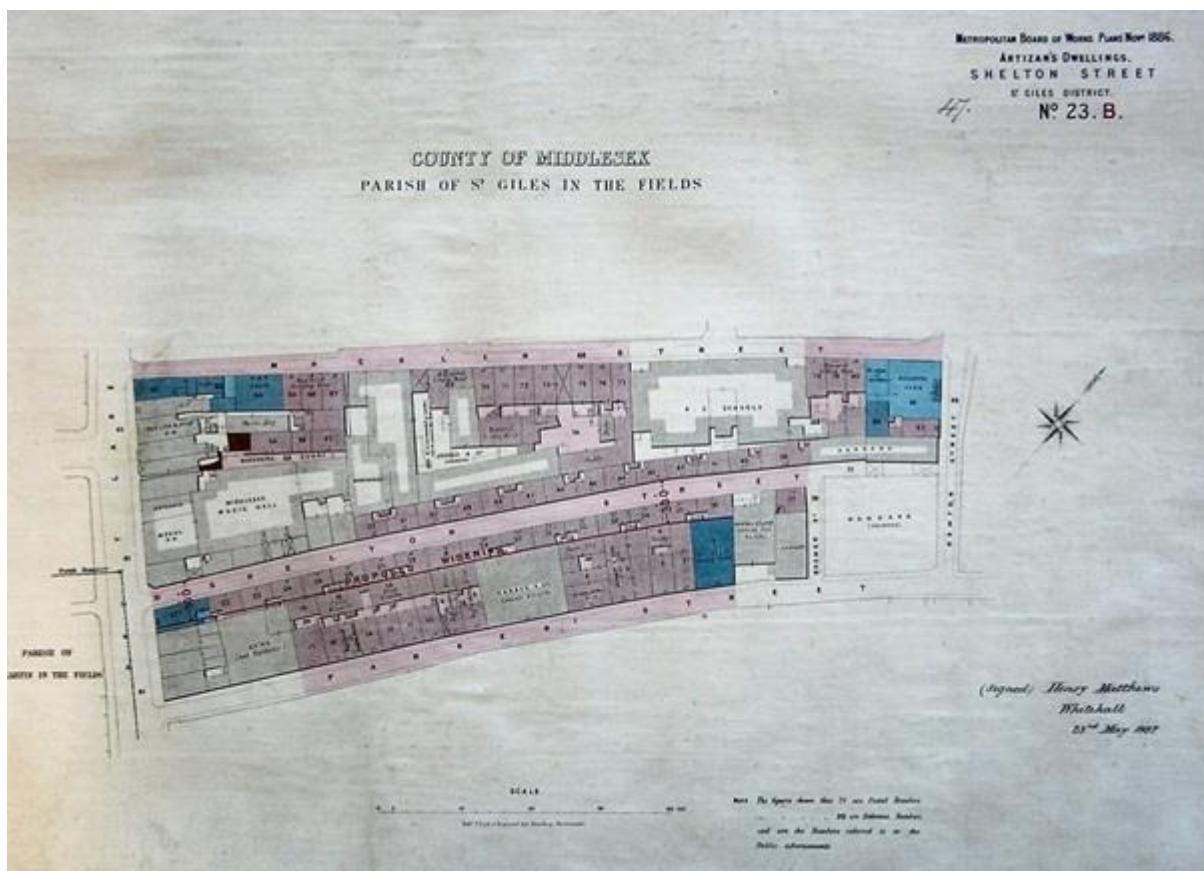


Fig. 1: Original MBW scheme (LMA ref: MBW/2646)

After clearing the land, the Council (who had inherited the scheme from the MBW) found that the site would be too small for the accommodation required and so proposed a modified scheme which came up against considerable opposition from some businesses. This was eventually resolved in June 1891 by the drastic action of compulsorily purchasing the two main business premises (Hunter & Hyland, and Corben & Co.). The new scheme included a new link road and the widening of Parker Street.

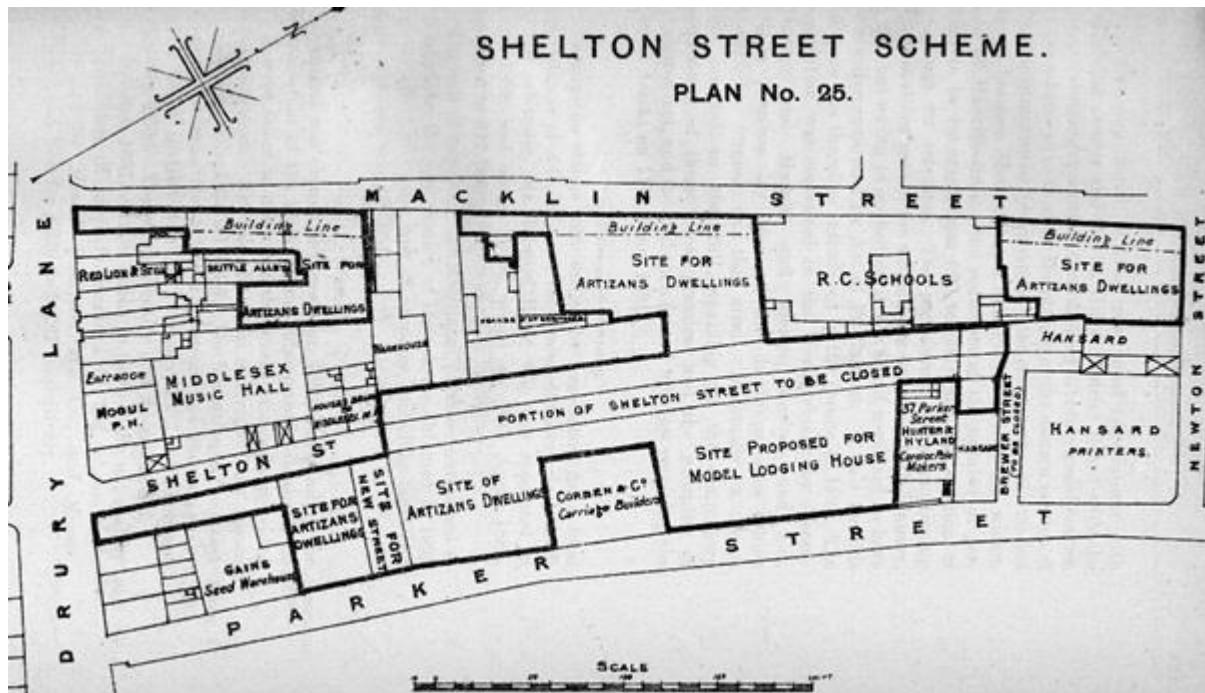


Fig. 2: Updated scheme from 1891 naming the two Parker Street properties compulsorily purchased

The purchase of the property by negotiation and arbitration amounted to £61,573 with the compulsory purchase of the two business premises amounting to £7,125. Including legal expenses, the total purchase price came to £77,051. The old building materials were sold for £471. Widening of Parker St and the new extension to Shelton St to join it with Parker St cost £156, and repairs to party walls following demolition of adjoining property cost £1,101. A surplus plot of land in Brewer St was sold for £1,075.

Five of the sites were allocated for block dwellings for housing the working classes, and the sixth site for the construction of a lodging house which was completed in 1893 (see separate Shelton Street scheme: Parker Street Lodging House). The five sites were put up for auction for erection of working-class housing but no bids were secured and the Council decided to build themselves. This decision was made at the same time as the Parker Street Lodging House opened.

The design of the blocks was entrusted to an external architect, Rowland Plumbe. The resulting buildings were to accommodate 292 persons and the scheme included 17 workshops. The foundations were laid by the Works Department with some interruptions due to changes to the London Buildings Acts which meant alterations to the ongoing work.

The buildings were completed by October 1896. The actual cost was £19,836 as against an estimate of £17,346. The buildings provided accommodation for the 292 persons in 1 tenement

of one room, 45 tenements of two rooms, 13 tenements of three rooms and, unusual for the time, 4 tenements of four rooms. The original plan for the workshops was extended and resulted in 23 being built. The naming of the buildings appears to have been given some thought by the housing officers. Lindsey and Powis Buildings were named after Lindsey and Powis Houses overlooking nearby Lincoln's Inn Fields. There was a Wimbledon House near the development, although that burnt down in the 1600s so may not be the source of the name. The provenance of Cottrell Buildings is not known. The most interesting name is Aldwych Buildings. The large street to the south called *Aldwych* did not exist at the time and was constructed 9 years later in 1906 as part of a slum clearance. The name Aldwych is the modern spelling of the Anglo-Saxon *ealdwic*, meaning 'old settlement', and was a general area to the south of the buildings, although it did not really have an identity until the new road was built.

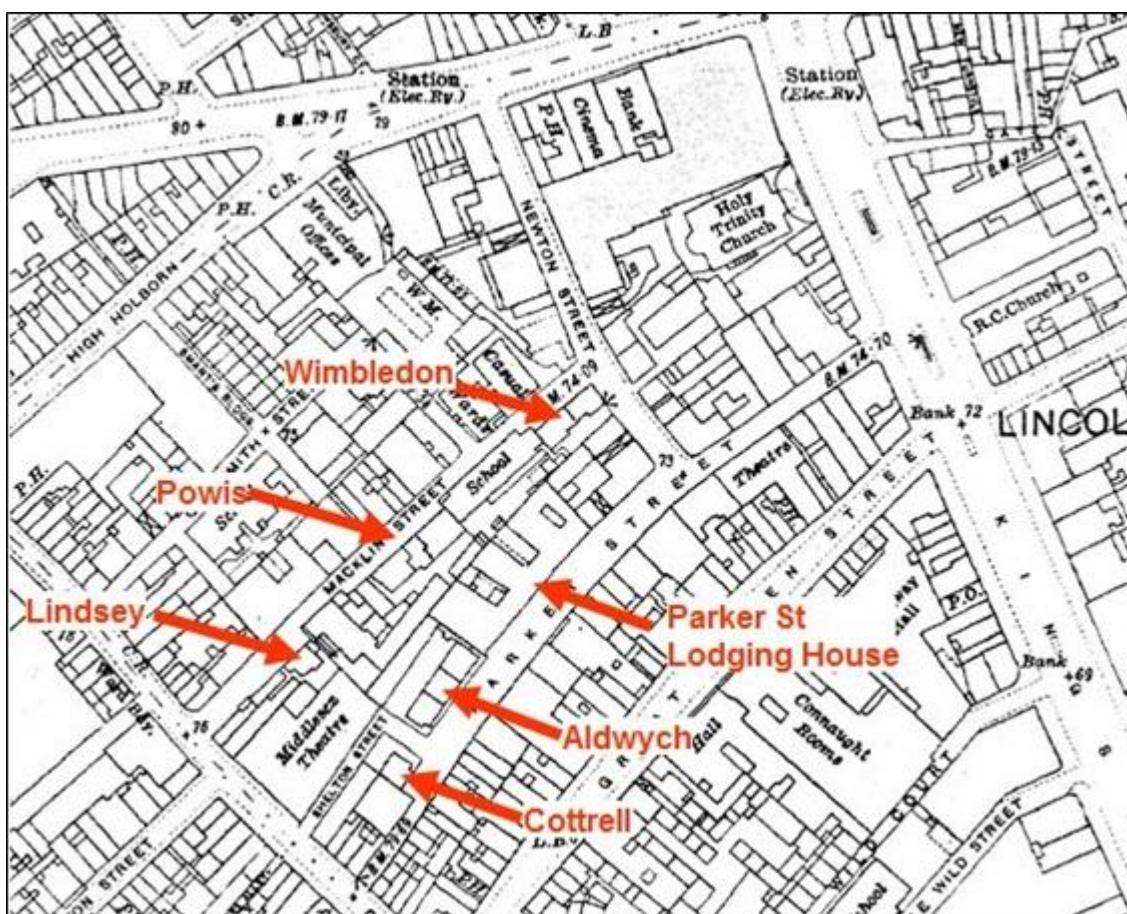


Fig. 3: The Shelton Street area from the 1916 OS map

The 5 blocks were unusual in that they all used the same floor plan yet were 2, 3, 4 and 5 storeys high.



Fig. 4: Aldwych Buildings, Parker Street (LMA Ref: SC/PHL/02/0864)



Fig. 5: Wimbledon Buildings, Parker Street (LMA Ref: SC/PHL/02/0864)

The photograph of Wimbledon Buildings in Fig. 5 above has an interesting observation. Under the windows in the commercial building behind (Hansard Printers) are plaques proclaiming “ANCIENT LIGHTS”. Long-term owners of buildings who have enjoyed uninterrupted daylight for 20 years or more can proclaim Ancient Lights and claim the right to a continuation of a reasonable level of natural daylight illumination under the 1832 Prescription Act. As one can imagine, the cases for the prosecution and defence are not always clear-cut, and the Council were probably right in avoiding any protracted court case and is the likely reason why Wimbledon Buildings is only 2 storeys high. The law has not changed and anyone can currently claim Ancient Lights today. The floor plan for all the buildings is the same and is illustrated in Fig. 6 below. The average sizes of the living and bedrooms are about 10% above the recommended minimum of 144 sq. ft. and 96 sq. ft. respectively.

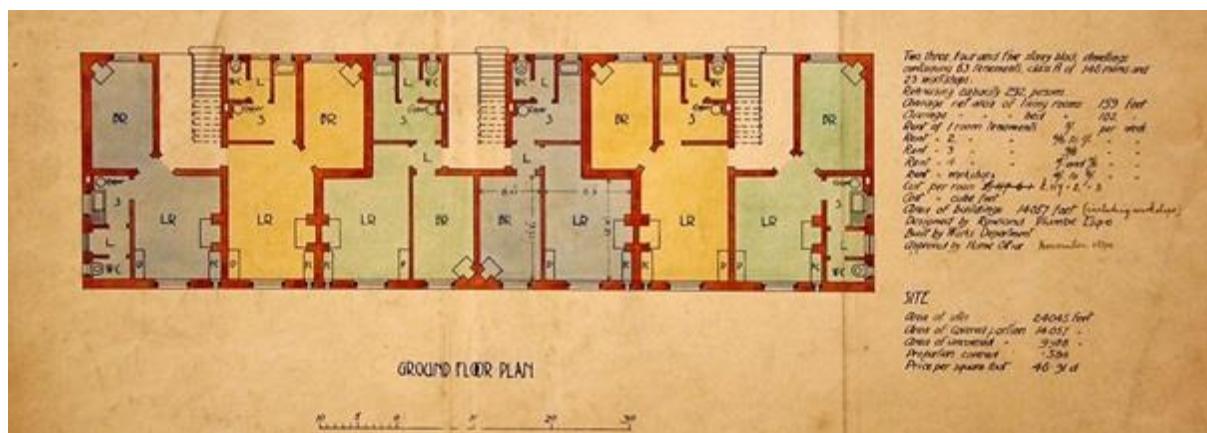


Fig. 6: Shelton Street Buildings plan. (LMA Ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/059)

The 1901 census returns indicate a diversity of trades as the occupation of the head of the household. Few trades are industrial, as would be expected of housing in the West End and away from the more industrial east and southeast London. The Aldwych Buildings tenements contained a surprising number of couples of various ages and with no children. This is indicative of early occupation of a building where newly married couples had not yet produced

many children. It may also indicate that bigger families may not have been able to afford the rents. Of the 30 tenements, 7 were occupied by police constables and one by a sergeant. This suggests an agreement with the Metropolitan Police. The small Cottrell Buildings only had 4 tenements of 4 rooms and the 1901 census shows that these were well occupied by extended families with many children of teenage years. The even smaller Lindsey Buildings had five 2-roomed tenements and one single roomed. The 1901 census indicates occupancy in line with those in Aldwych Buildings but with no policemen. Powis Buildings had a mixture of 2 and 3 roomed tenements and the census shows, once again, no overcrowding with only one tenant being a constable. Finally, Wimbledon Buildings had 8 tenements of 2 and 3 rooms that seem to be a little more densely occupied from the census returns, with one police constable and one sergeant.

The 1911 census continues to show a diversity of trades occupying Aldwych House. Of the 30 tenements, just one is unoccupied and 6 are occupied by Police Constables (as against the 7 in 1901). Overcrowding was a small problem with 6 tenements occupied by more than the desired maximum. All the tenements were 2-roomed and one was occupied by 7 people (the family of one of the PCs) and three were occupied by 6 people. Unusually, one of the 2-roomed tenements was occupied by a single lady who gave her occupation as an umbrella shop manageress. All the other buildings were fully occupied. The small Cottrell Buildings with just 4 tenements of 4 rooms had one of them occupied by 9 people with only one person under 10. The small Lindsey Buildings were occupied by a wide variety of trades seen in the other buildings. The eight tenements in the Wimbledon Buildings were occupied by two PCs, three Covent garden Porters, one newsvendor (not married) and two widows; one with 5 children. Finally, Powis Buildings had 4 PCs and a wide variety of trades in the 15 tenements. This building and Wimbledon Buildings had no overcrowded tenements. Total occupancy for the five buildings was 242 persons, against the theoretical maximum of 292, giving a healthy 83% occupancy.

The costs of the Shelton Street development are as follows:

	Outgoings	Income	
Cost of land and buildings	£77,051		
Street works*	£1,101		
Sale of building materials		£471	
Sale of surplus lands		£1,075	
TOTAL CLEARANCE COSTS			£76,606
Cost of construction	£19,836		
TOTAL COSTS			£96,442
Cost per person (based on 292 persons)			£330pp
Balance of accounts, 1913-1914	£1,454	£1,546	£92 (5.9%)

* Construction of the new street was carried out by St Giles' District Board for £155 12s 6d and is not included in this calculation.

Table 1: Cost of Shelton Street Schemeⁱⁱ

The £330 cost per person is excessive and would have been a big shock to the council. Not surprisingly the council were careful about not publishing the full costs of the scheme and even the very detailed "*The Housing Solution in London 1855-1900*" published by the Council is careful not to include all the relevant costs. One reason for the high cost was that the five buildings were fitted in the various gaps in the extended plot. The provision of workshops was an interesting innovation but the experiment seems to have stopped with this scheme. They were at least providing a profit of 5.9% in 1913-14.

Powis, Aldwych and Wimbledon Buildings still stand today which probably indicates the difficulty of redeveloping a fragmented housing scheme with surrounding land in private ownership. The very small Lindsey and Cottrell Buildings no longer stand with that end of Parker Street having been redeveloped for the New London Theatre. Macklin and Parker Street are now included in the Seven Dials Conservation Area as managed by the London Borough of Camden.



Fig. 7: Aldwych House, Parker Street, 2009



Fig. 8: Wimbledon House, Parker Street, 2009



Fig. 9: Powis House, Macklin Street, 2009

Footnotes

ⁱ C. J. Stewart; The Housing Question in London; The London County Council; 1900; p186
ⁱⁱ The Housing Question in London; LCC; pp167-171