

Housing the Workers

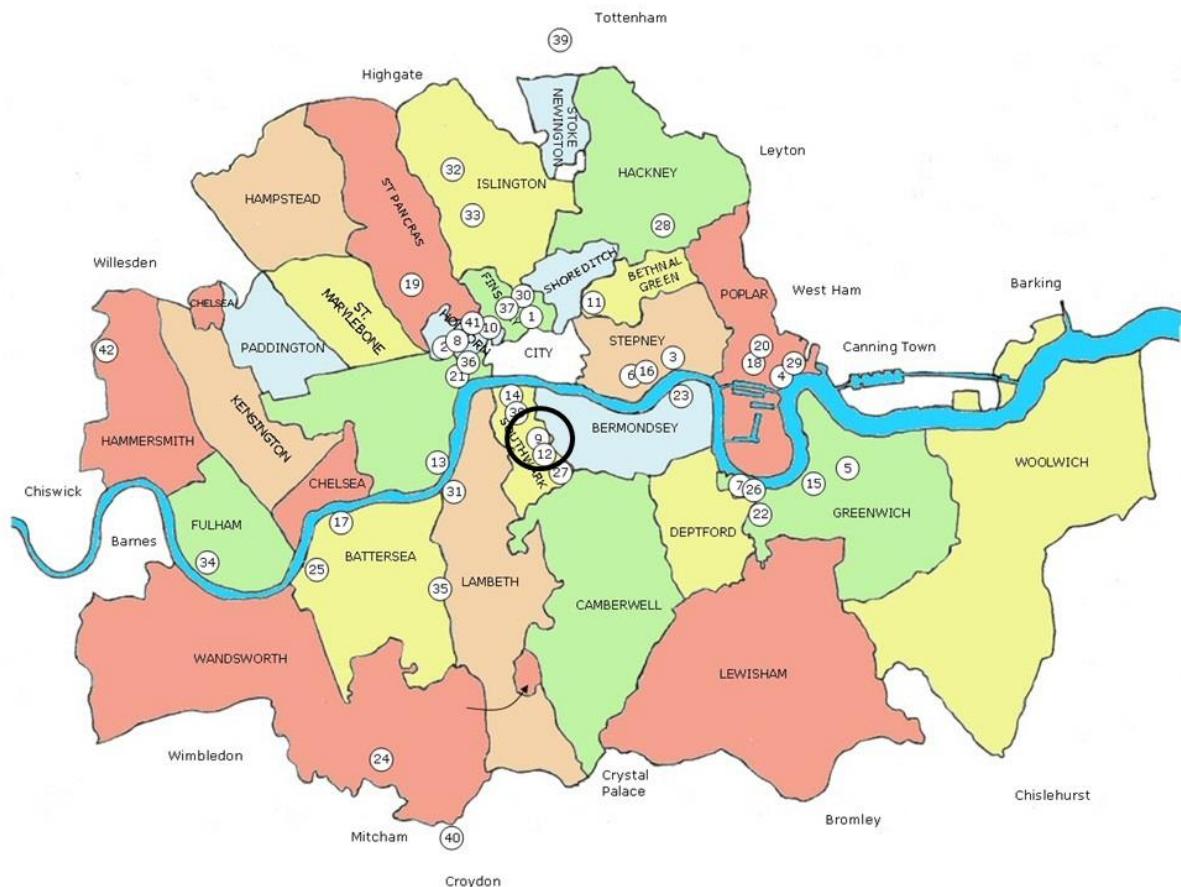
Early London County Council Housing

1889-1914

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Part 3 – the schemes in detail

9 – Green and Gun Street Scheme



Green & Gun Street schemes, Southwark

Clandon, Albury, Ripley and Merrow Buildings, 1897 (also referred to as Rushworth and Boyfield Street Dwellings)

Built under Part III of the 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act

These housing schemes in Southwark were originally to be developed in 1890 by the Vestry of St. George-the-Martyr under Part II of the 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act, with financial assistance of 1/3rd of the cost from the LCC. The Council considered the Vestry scheme inadequate and so took it over in 1891, but still under Part II of the Act.

These relatively low-rise blocks were designed by the LCC architect Arthur Philips and were the first LCC buildings in Southwark. Ripley and Merrow Buildings were erected on the site of the Green Street scheme, and Clandon and Albury on the site of the Gun Street scheme. Both these slum areas were brought to the attention of the vestry by the medical officer of St. George-the-Martyr in 1889, but were proceeded with under the 1890 Act. The plans were submitted to clear the sites and erect working class dwellings for 128 persons (Green St) and 144 persons (Gun Street). The former was reduced to 72 persons when both schemes were sanctioned in 1893, with the difference in planned capacity being taken up by the later Falcon Court scheme. Note that Green, Flint, Gun and Martin Streets are now Rushworth, Silex, Boyfield and Miniver Streets respectively.

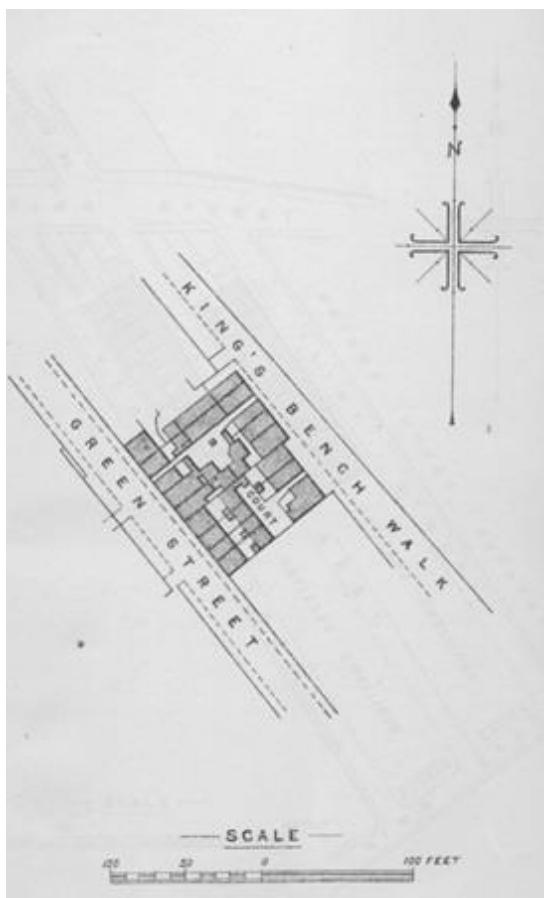


Fig. 1: Green St site – pre clearanceⁱ

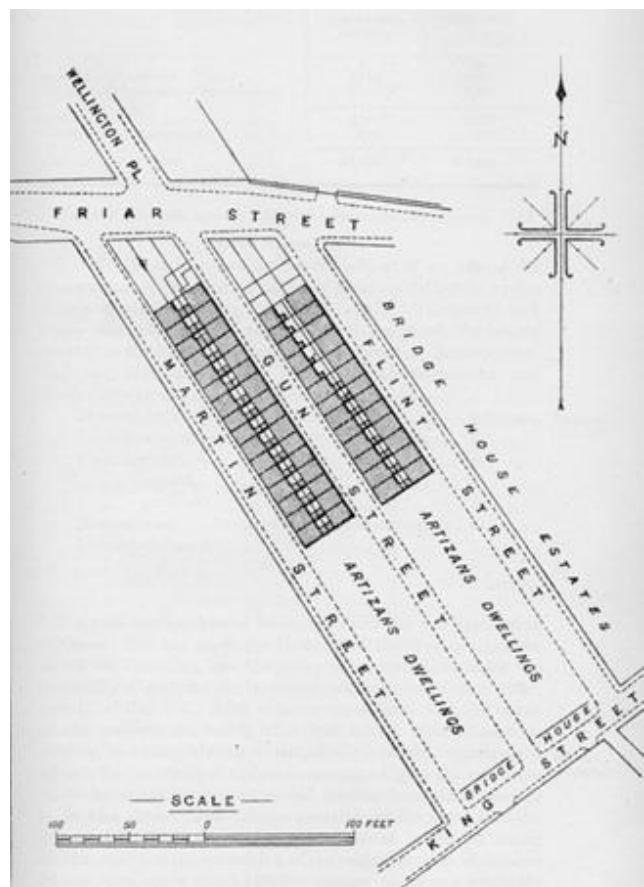


Fig. 2: Gun Street site – pre clearance

The vestry modified their plans after clearing the sites to enable them to sell the land to the Council under Part III of the 1890 Act. The vestry was able to sell some surplus land to help

recover part of the costs, but the sale of the remaining land to the Council for £3,860 resulted in a net loss to the Vestry of £1,388 (Green St) and £1,848 (Gun St)ⁱⁱ. These costs would have been passed onto the local rate payers and would have created an uncomfortable situation for the vestry officers.

The Council erected the four buildings in 1897 for £20,983, which compared favourably to their initial estimate of £18,300 when one considers that the Council was relatively inexperienced in the design and construction of its own dwellings at that time. Ultimately, the buildings erected were larger than planned and housed twice as many as sanctioned despite only having 3 storeys. Their names started a trend in the Housing Department of naming their buildings after pleasant towns in Surrey or the Thames Valley.

Self-contained accommodation was provided for 420 persons in 13 tenements of 1 room, 71 tenements of 2 rooms, and 18 of 3 rooms. The resulting buildings were considered by the LCC's successor, the Greater London Council (GLC) as "*Arthur Philips' masterpiece of block design*" as they contain many practical and artistic features to help alleviate the normal barrack-like appearance of typical block dwellings of the timeⁱⁱⁱ. One obvious improvement over earlier designs is that they are only 3 storeys high. The four blocks are almost identical in style with the smaller Ripley & Merrow Buildings facing each other across a pleasant and secluded courtyard, and Clandon & Albury facing each other across a road. The main architectural difference between the buildings is that Clandon Building has a wider and more ornate central staircase than Albury Buildings on the other side of Boyfield Street.

Ripley and Merrow Buildings, facing each other across a courtyard, are virtually identical as can be seen in Fig. 3 and Fig. 5 below. Note the narrow entrance to the courtyard in Fig. 3 (still the only access today). The living rooms are all above the minimum of 144sq. ft. but many of the bedrooms are right on the 96 sq. ft. minimum.

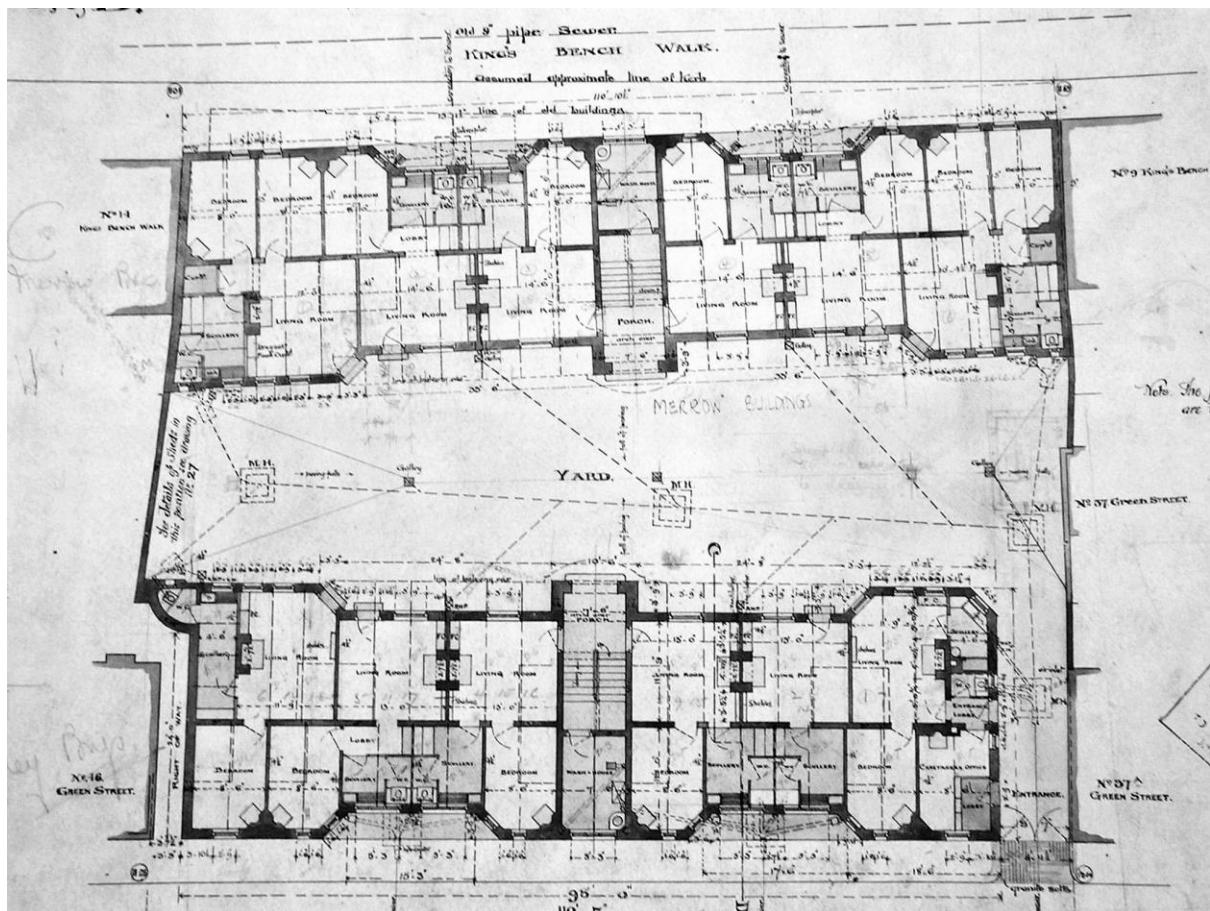


Fig. 3: Plan of Ripley and Merrow buildings showing its courtyard design (LCC ref: LCC/AR/HS/3/41)

Seen today, there are architectural details in these buildings which raise them visually from the typical block dwellings of the time. The freehold is now owned by Southwark Council and the buildings have been well maintained throughout their life and are showing little sign of decay. The lowest part of the external ground floor walls are of glazed brick which is a feature also seen in many later LCC designs. This glazing created a hard-wearing surface that has hardly weathered or degraded in the ensuing years.



Fig. 4: Albury and Clandon Buildings
(LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0855)



Fig. 5: Ripley and Merrow courtyard from 1960s



Fig. 6: Clandon Buildings 2007 showing all the signs of a popular and well maintained building



Fig. 7: The 'church style' entrance to Clandon Buildings 2007 - note the glazed brick

	Outgoings	Income	
Purchase of land from vestry	£3,860		
Cost of buildings	£20,983		
TOTAL COSTS			£24,843
Cost per person (based on 420 persons)			£59pp
Balance of accounts, 1913-1914	£1,575	£1,717	£142 (8.8%)

Table 1: Costs for the Green & Gun Street scheme

The £59 cost per person is very good value and reflects the low purchase cost of the cleared site by the Council after the vestry initially purchased the buildings and land. The buildings were returning a very satisfactory 8.8% profit in the 1913-14 financial year.

It is interesting to note that Charles Booth was not impressed with the area when his visited in 1899^{iv}.

Gun Street: Buildings at the end of Gun Street is the worst spot in the area. Rough low classes of coster. The LCC buildings have rather a better class in them because rents are more strictly extracted. These are not good buildings because they have no back yard. The vestry neglects all these streets & they will probably remain in the state in which you saw them. Rents in Gun St are 6/- & 6/6 for 2 rooms. In one case they have 10 persons in two rooms. But it is useless to report any except very extreme cases of overcrowding. The Medical Officer told us that he should take no notice of any but extreme cases.

His reference to “10 persons in one room” would have applied to other property in Gun Street as the council would not have tolerated such overcrowding in their property, and the 1901 census for the buildings show that to be the case. It is interesting to note from his comments that the area was so bad, and so the new buildings in the photographs above must have been in stark contrast to existing old property.

There is an interesting article in an LCC Report of the Housing of the Working Classes Committee produced on 16th December 1903. The London Fire Brigade planned to expand its headquarters in Southwark Bridge Road and this would have displaced 57 people. All those being displaced by the development were offered vacant tenements in the Green and Gun Street developments but not one person accepted the offer. This would seem to indicate that the rents and regulations were not meeting the needs of the poorest^v. However, the 1901 and 1911 census returns indicate that few tenements are vacant and that there were no problems filling the property.

The 1901 census returns show that only 2 tenements were unoccupied, both in Albury Buildings. The occupations varied widely with the local printing industry quite prominent, as was the iron and brass industry that Southwark was famous for. The leather and hat industries were not represented in any tenement indicating that those local industries have finally collapsed. One clear observation concerns the birthplaces of the heads of households. Out of 102 tenements only 18 were headed by local-born people. The others were generally from the south east of England. Overcrowding was widespread but not out of control with 25 tenements overcrowded, but most by only one person. The

overcrowding was much better controlled in the smaller Ripley/Merrow Buildings that faced each other across a courtyard.

The 1911 census shows that only 4 tenements are unoccupied: still a very good record. The occupations varied widely just as they did in 1901 with working in the printing industry still relatively common. There were fewer people recorded working in the iron and brass industry, despite those industries flourishing. This suggests that the rents were higher than those workers could, or would, afford. Some Constables were now in residence and there was a move towards the service industries with waiters, cooks, and people working in retail. A few widows who are heads of household were office cleaners in the LCC's headquarters in Spring Gardens (near Trafalgar Square). The number of local-born as head of household was 18, as it was in 1901 (although a different 18). The majority of the occupants were mainly from the southern England with a few from as far afield as Ireland and Scotland with one person a US resident (married to an English-born lady). Overcrowding instances were similar to those in 1901 with, again, Ripley and Merrow Buildings being much better controlled. Comparing the two census returns indicates that not one tenant in 1901 census was in the buildings in 1911. This backs up the concerns of the Council that the buildings were not meeting the needs of the local population or industry. A 100% turnover of tenants in 10 years is a very expensive way to manage a building. One entry for a 2-roomed tenement in Clandon House has a 38 year old single lady from London whose occupation is a stenographer for the Cape Electric Tram Company. One assumes she worked in the London office of the Cape Town company.

The buildings survived the bombing of WW2 but it must have been a close thing for Clandon and Albury Buildings. The artisan dwellings immediately to the south of Clandon Buildings were destroyed, as was the building immediately to the north of Albury Buildings.

Footnotes

ⁱ C. J. Stewart; The Housing Question in London; The London County Council; 1900; pp246-247

ⁱⁱ The Housing Question in London; LCC; pp265

ⁱⁱⁱ GLC; "Revolution in London Housing"; GLC; 1980; pp48-52

^{iv} Booth walk B363 pp188-189, 7th June 1899

^v LCC Minutes; Minutes of the Housing of the Working Classes Committee; 22nd Dec 1903.