

# **Housing the Workers**

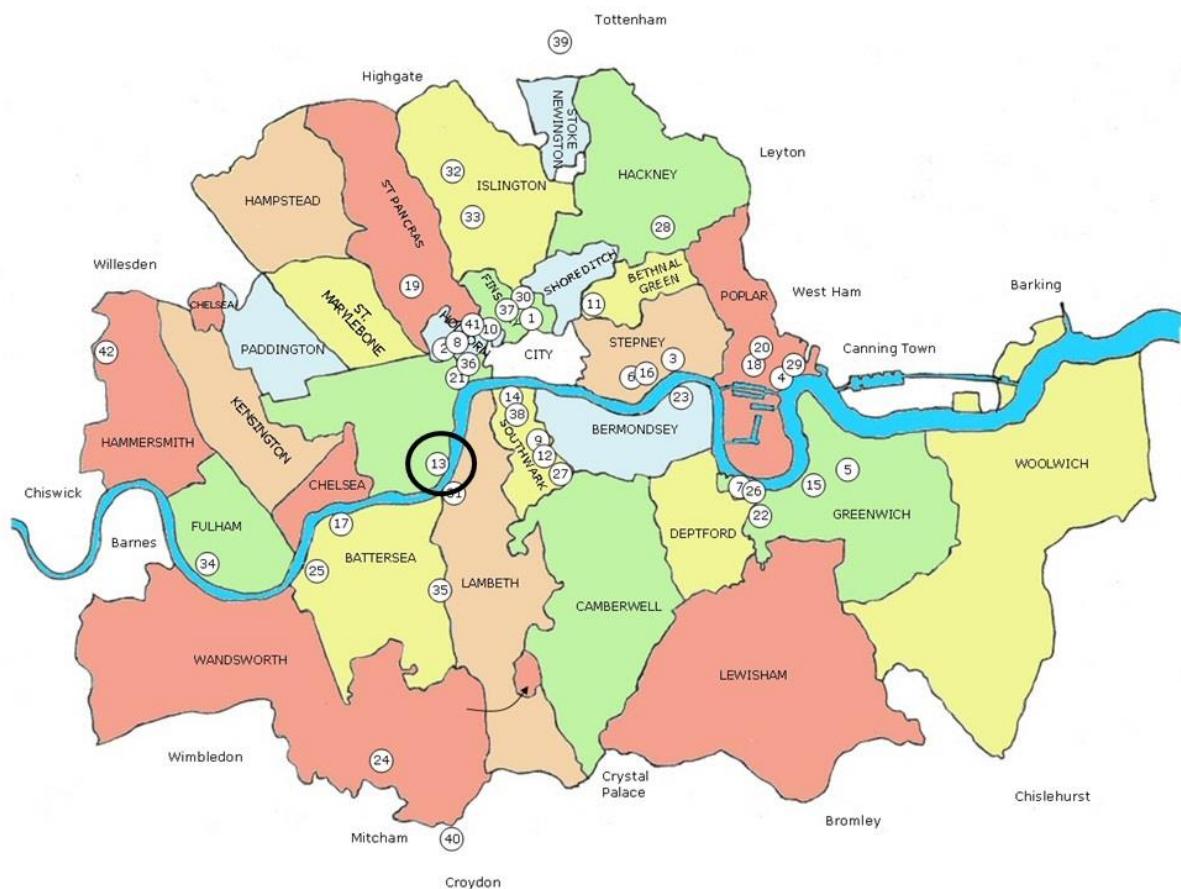
## **Early London County Council Housing**

### **1889-1914**

**Martin Stilwell**  
**August 2015**

#### **Part 3 – the schemes in detail**

##### **13 – Millbank Estate, Westminster**



## **Millbank Estate, Westminster**

**Hogarth Buildings, 1899**

**Leighton, Millais, Romney and Turner Buildings, 1900**

**Ruskin, Rossetti, Reynolds and Mulready Buildings, 1901**

**Maclise, Landseer, Lawrence, Morland, Wilkie and Gainsborough Buildings, 1902**

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

The Millbank estate was developed on the rear half of the site that became vacant when the Millbank Penitentiary near Lambeth Bridge was demolished in 1890.

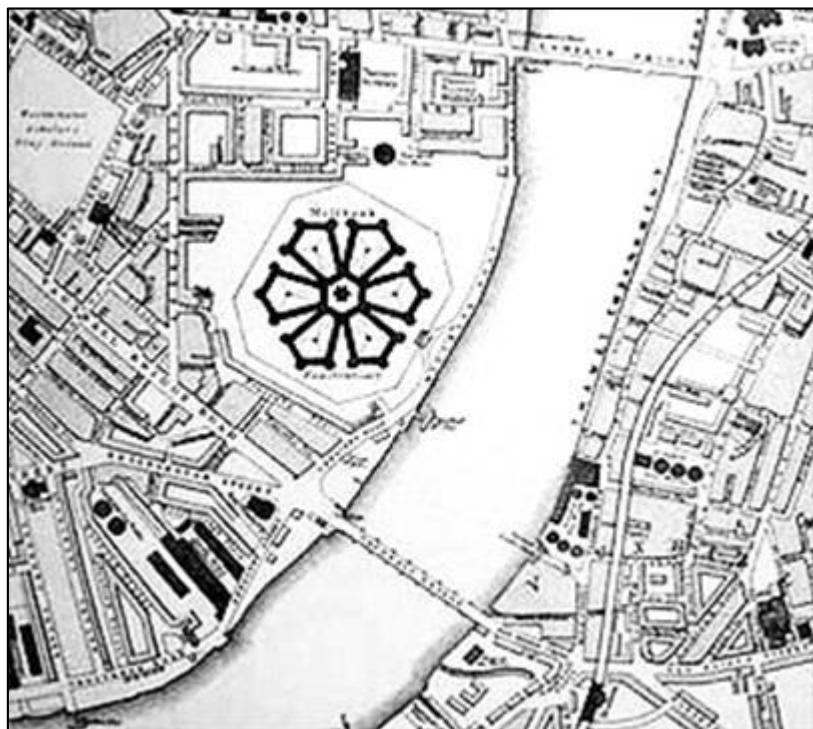


Fig. 1: Millbank penitentiary from Cassell's map on London dated 1867

The negotiation of the sale of the vacant land, by one government department to another, was very protracted. The Home Secretary wanted as much as £5,000 per acre for the whole plot but the Council would not pay this stating that they could not build cost-effective working class housing at that price, and they offered £3,000, which was turned down. After years of delay, the Council offered £2,000 per acre for the whole site but this was turned down by the Home Office. Eventually, after much discussion and delay, H. M. Treasury stepped in and offered the site for £2,500 per acre and the council offered to purchase the rear 10 acres. This purchase came with some restrictions on the Council regarding road layout and estate access, and that all the housing had to be completed in 5 years. It was only in December 1896 that an agreement was finally settled and the Council purchased it for £22,242 after a portion of the site was allocated to the School Board<sup>i</sup>. The site was laid out with 17 blocks of 5 storeys around new streets, and there was even space for a garden. The design of the blocks was influenced greatly by architect R. M. Taylor<sup>ii</sup>.

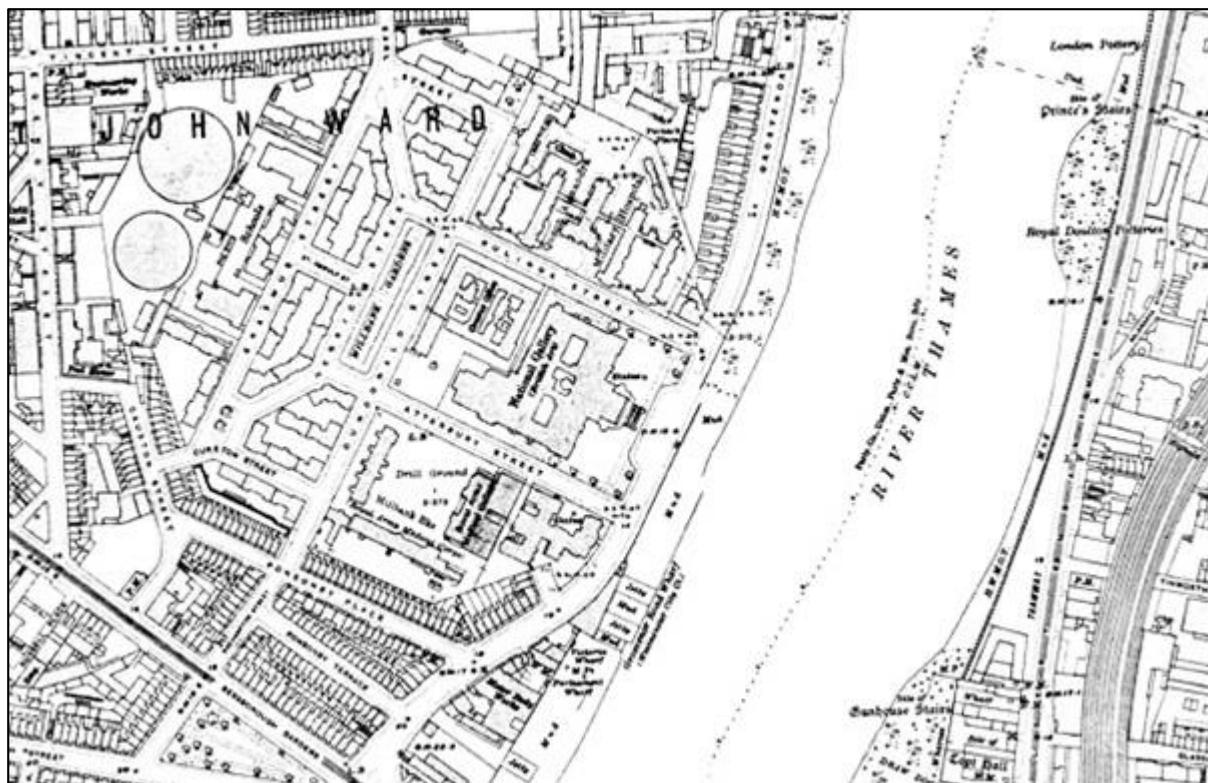


Fig. 2: Millbank Estate site from 1916 OS Map

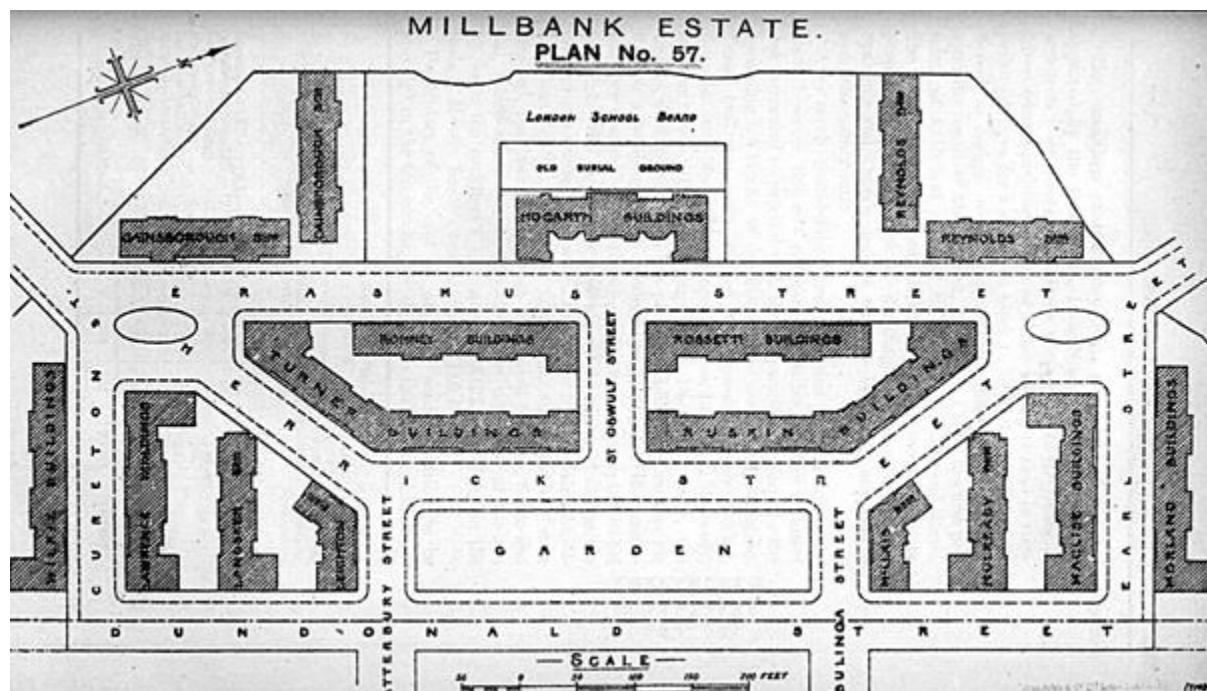


Fig. 3: Millbank Estate plan<sup>iii</sup>

The whole Millbank site was eventually occupied by the Tate Gallery (1897), the Census Office (1901), the LCC Millbank Estate (1899-1902), the Army Medical College (1904-7) and the Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital (1905). The Millbank Estate buildings were all named after British artists, reflecting its proximity to the Tate Gallery. The building names, theoretical capacity, builder and date of opening are in Table 1 below.

|                        |     |                     |           |
|------------------------|-----|---------------------|-----------|
| Hogarth Buildings      | 306 | Works Dept          | May 1899  |
| Leighton Buildings     | 120 | Holloway Bros.      | June 1900 |
| Millais Buildings      | 120 | ditto               | July 1900 |
| Romney Buildings       | 290 | ditto               | Nov 1900  |
| Turner Buildings       | 430 | ditto               | Dec 1900  |
| Ruskin Buildings       | 430 | ditto               | Mar 1901  |
| Rossetti Buildings     | 290 | ditto               | Apr 1901  |
| Reynolds Buildings     | 396 | Spencer, Santo & Co | Dec 1901  |
| Mulready Buildings     | 230 | ditto               | Dec 1901  |
| Maclise Buildings      | 296 | ditto               | Feb 1902  |
| Landseer Buildings     | 230 | ditto               | Mar 1902  |
| Lawrence Buildings     | 296 | ditto               | May 1902  |
| Morland Buildings      | 300 | ditto               | May 1902  |
| Wilkie Buildings       | 300 | ditto               | July 1902 |
| Gainsborough Buildings | 396 | ditto               | Aug 1902  |

Table 1: Millbank Estate buildings, capacities, builder and opening dates <sup>iv</sup>

The estate provided a much needed ‘soak’ for the requirement to re-house an equivalent number displaced by slum clearance or road building schemes in London. The building of the Millbank Estate on an available plot of land not requiring house purchase and clearance was an opportunity to ‘clear the books’ for a number of outstanding improvement schemes. Each building was allocated for the re-housing of tenants in a number of London slum clearance and road improvement schemes. A percentage of those displaced by the Clare Market clearance scheme were allocated to Reynolds, Rossetti, Ruskin, Morland and Millais Buildings (1,536 persons). The building of Kingsway and Aldwych was offset by allocating Maclise Building (296 persons). The Westminster Improvement Scheme (mainly street widening and extensions, which displaced 2,242 persons in the vicinity of Millbank), was offset by allocating Hogarth, Leighton, Romney (also known as Stubbs), Turner, Landseer, Lawrence, Wilkie and Gainsborough Buildings (2,368 persons). This just left Mulready Building (230 persons) as not being for the specific purpose of re-housing displaced people.

All the buildings had a solid, if somewhat plain design and all had internal landings. In the designs of Leighton and Millais Buildings in Fig. 4 and Fig. 5 below, some of the fancier details for the entranceways and windows seen on earlier LCC designs are still there, if somewhat toned down. Note the design of the ground floor window frames, and the turret where the building turns through 45 degrees. Even the rear of the building (containing the main entrance) has some style features, although the result is still somewhat ‘barracky’.



Fig. 4: Front elevation of Leighton and Millais Buildings (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/3/006)

Fig. 5: Rear elevation of Leighton and Millais Buildings (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/3/006)

Fig. 6 below is the plan of Leighton Building and shows the very unusual turret detail in the outer angle and the clever use of the awkward inner angle as a staircase. Turner, Ruskin and Millais Buildings have the same turret features. The layout uses space quite cleverly but some sculleries were small, as can be seen in tenements 1 and 5. The size of the tenements in the plan are: 3-roomed, 2-roomed, 2-roomed, 3-roomed and 2-roomed respectively for tenements 1 to 5. An unusual but somewhat retrograde feature is that some tenements have their WCs accessed from the hall/landing and only tenements 1 and 5 have a private entrance to their WC's. This older design feature of having WCs accessed from the hall/landing area is one that had appeared in Peabody designs since the 1880's and must have caused the Council's architects much soul-searching as they wanted their buildings to be more modern. The Boundary Street buildings being designed at the same time had the majority of their WC's accessed privately from the tenement.



Fig. 6: Leighton Building, ground floor plan (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/3/006)

The compactness of the building design can be seen in the example of the two scullery/WCs that were to be found in many of the rectangular-shaped buildings and illustrated in Fig. 7 below. Although a very small kitchen by today's standards it should be remembered that many tenants would have come from property with shared kitchens, or no separate kitchens at all. Note the two doors between the scullery and the WC. This is a welcome and forward-thinking health measure but, despite many people's belief, there never has been any regulation stating two doors are needed between a WC and a food-preparation area; only one.

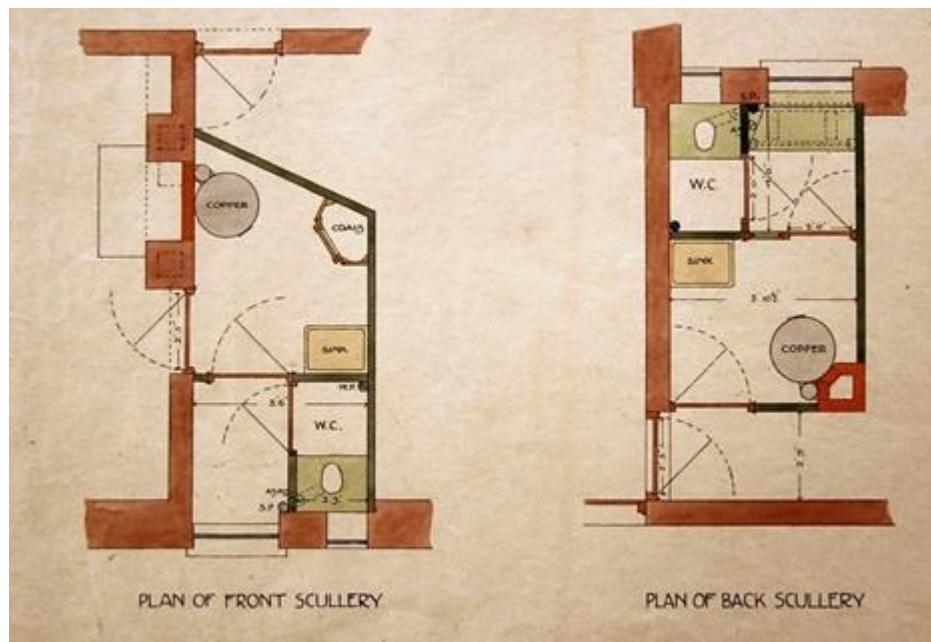


Fig. 7: The two scullery designs for Reynolds Building (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/3/006)

The compactness of some of the sculleries is better illustrated from the two photographs below of a scullery and WC, which were taken in 1960, prior to modernisation.



Fig. 8: Scullery from one of the Millbank Buildings in 1960 (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0832)



Fig. 9: WC from one of the Millbank Buildings in 1960 (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0832)

The plan for the Wilkie Building in Fig. 10 below shows a typical layout for the more straightforward rectangular buildings. Once again there are tenements with WCs accessed from the hall/landing. This is the first development where some of the plans are showing that some living and bedrooms are smaller than the recommended 144 and 96 sq. ft. minimum. When

compared to the Boundary Street Estate, the Millbank Estate does appear to consist of smaller tenements.

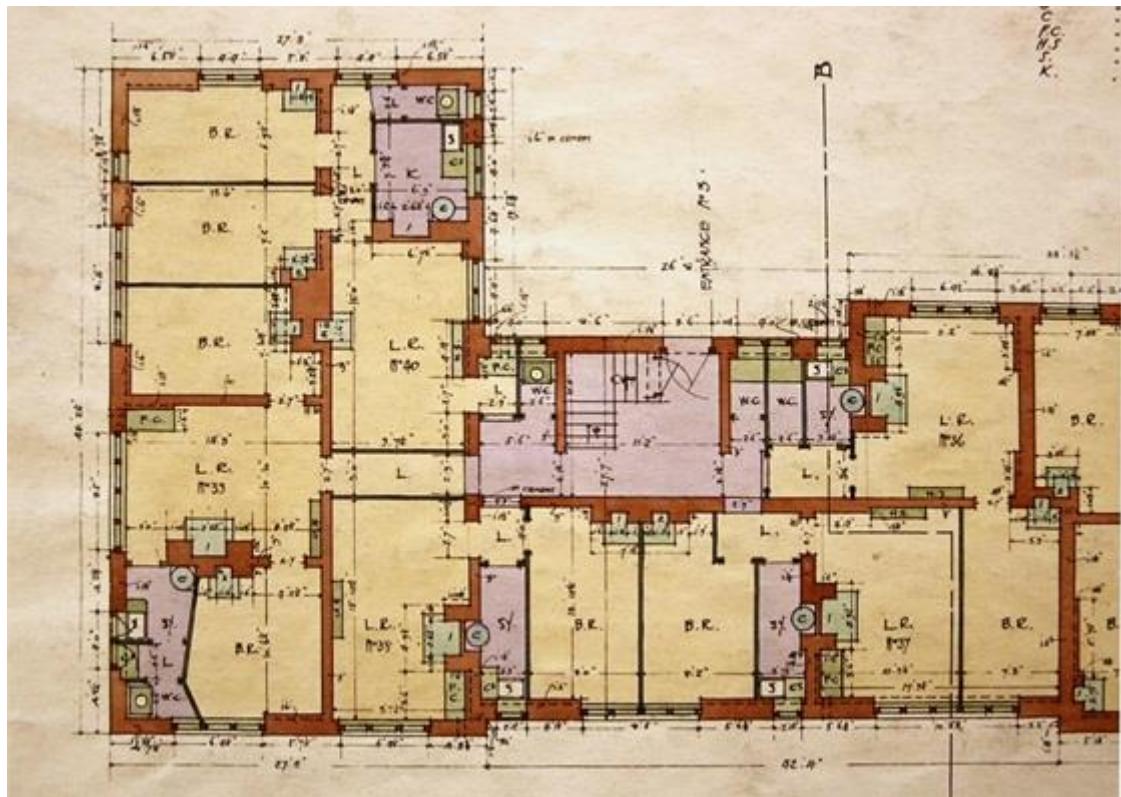


Fig. 10: Ground floor plan for the Wilkie Building (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/3/006)

The costs of Millbank Estate are as follows.

|   | Outgoings | Income  |                 |
|---|-----------|---------|-----------------|
| Cost of land                            | £22,242   |         |                 |
| Street works                            | £5,379    |         |                 |
| Paving                                  | £14,731   |         |                 |
| Open Spaces                             | £2,850    |         |                 |
| Cost of construction                    | £206,959  |         |                 |
| <b>TOTAL COSTS</b>                      |           |         | <b>£252,161</b> |
| Cost per person (based on 4430 persons) |           |         | £57pp           |
| Balance of accounts, 1913-1914          | £15,357   | £18,790 | £3,433 (18.3%)  |

Table 2: Costs of the Boundary St Scheme

The cost per person of just £57 is remarkably low by any measure for such quality housing. It compares well with the best Peabody costs whose buildings, although of excellent construction, were not usually as spacious or well-appointed as the Millbank tenements. This low cost of £57 per person shows the advantage of not having to purchase buildings from landlords and then clearing the site, plus the economies of scale with such a large scheme. The buildings were also showing a very good profit of 18.3% in 1913-14. Millbank remained the most cost-effective of all the pre-WW1 housing developments.



Fig. 11: The Millbank estate in 1906 (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0832)



Fig. 12: The same view in 2009



Fig. 13: Hogarth House, 2009

The space and cleanliness of the new estate is well illustrated in the 1906 photograph above. The children posing in their Sunday best only adds to the feeling of well-being and prosperity. The same view today in Fig. 12 is entirely recognisable apart from the mature trees. The picture in Fig. 14 below is of a living room in Hogarth Building. Although the picture is not labelled as such, it is assumed that the room was deliberately laid out for the photograph as it dates from 1906, six years after the building was opened, yet seems almost new. Unusually for Edwardian

housing, the picture rail is at ceiling height, which is a clever idea to hide the inevitable plaster cracks that occur in new buildings at ceiling joints. Why have a picture rail and expensive plaster coving when a simple wooden picture rail will do the job of both?



Fig. 14: Living room in Hogarth Building, 1906 (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0832)

The gardens at the front of the site were no less impressive as seen in Fig. 15 below. The rear of the Tate Gallery is just to the right of the picture.



Fig. 15: Millbank Gardens, 1905 (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0832)

The estate provided 50 sheds for storage of bicycles and prams, but at a rent of 3d per week. It is not known how successful these shed rentals were, but many tenants on the lower floors would surely have preferred to carry their cycles and prams up a few floors than spend 3d - the cost of three trips on a tram. Unusually for an estate of this size, there was no laundry room although drying courtyards were provided. In contrast, the Boundary Street Estate included a large laundry.

With this estate comparable to the Boundary Street one in size and date of opening, the 1911 census gives an opportunity to compare the two estates. The Boundary Street Estate is Bethnal Green had considerable overcrowding and nearly 75% of the heads of household were foreign born or first generation British. The census shows that the Millbank Estate was considerably different in demographic mix and capacity. The highest capacity building was Romney at 77% of maximum, with Millais being the lowest at 57%. The occupations of the heads of household are very varied and typical of the LCC buildings at the time, but the legacy of being used to rehouse those displayed in the West End shows up with a predominance of hotel, club and bar staff (many being foreign born). The other common occupations are those in the Gas Works behind the site and the Royal Army Clothing Depot (RACD) nearby, particularly for widows. Another regular employer is the Army & Navy Stores. This seems a little odd at first but is explained by the store's warehouse being in nearby Pimlico. Those in Government or Local Authority employment include Policemen, GPO employees, Military men and RACD employees as well as those employed directly by the LCC, Government and Borough Councils.

| Building               | Capacity | Actual | Over-crowded | Vacancies | In Govt/Auth. employment | Westminster born |
|------------------------|----------|--------|--------------|-----------|--------------------------|------------------|
| Hogarth Buildings      | 306      | 197    | 2            | 0         | 9 (5%)                   | 7 (4%)           |
| Leighton Buildings     | 120      | 74     | 2            | 2         | 9 (12%)                  | 2 (3%)           |
| Millais Buildings      | 120      | 69     | 2            | 1         | 9 (13%)                  | 4 (6%)           |
| Romney Buildings       | 290      | 222    | 8            | 4         | 3 (1%)                   | 9 (4%)           |
| Turner Buildings       | 430      | 305    | 6            | 2         | 19 (6%)                  | 12 (4%)          |
| Ruskin Buildings       | 430      | 271    | 2            | 4         | 20 (7%)                  | 15 (6%)          |
| Rossetti Buildings     | 290      | 209    | 5            | 1         | 11 (5%)                  | 9 (4%)           |
| Reynolds Buildings     | 396      | 283    | 6            | 2         | 23 (8%)                  | 11 (4%)          |
| Mulready Buildings     | 230      | 166    | 3            | 1         | 16 (10%)                 | 12 (7%)          |
| MacLise Buildings      | 296      | 200    | 1            | 0         | 9 (5%)                   | 5 (3%)           |
| Landseer Buildings     | 230      | 154    | 3            | 0         | 14 (9%)                  | 7 (5%)           |
| Lawrence Buildings     | 296      | 207    | 7            | 2         | 17 (6%)                  | 9 (3%)           |
| Morland Buildings      | 300      | 197    | 5            | 1         | 21 (11%)                 | 10 (5%)          |
| Wilkie Buildings       | 300      | 214    | 9            | 2         | 21 (10%)                 | 7 (3%)           |
| Gainsborough Buildings | 396      | 267    | 4            | 1         | 25 (9%)                  | 4 (1%)           |

Table 3: Millbank Estate statistics from 1911 census

As the statistics show in Table 3 above the level of overcrowding is very low when compared to other block buildings. This indicates the estate is well managed and with tenants who prefer not to live in overcrowded conditions. The percentage of tenants who are Westminster born (as noted in the census returns) is low for all buildings, indicating that many of those displaced from the clearance schemes have not taken up the opportunity to live at Millbank. However, the estate must have been popular with such a low number of vacancies. Compared to the similar Boundary Street Estate, Millbank is clearly well managed and the tolerance of the severe overcrowding of Boundary Street must be questioned as it contravened all the regulations and is not repeated at this or any other LCC estate.

The estate suffered some damage in the bombing in WW2 and the main areas are indicated in Fig. 16 below, but all damage was repaired to bring the buildings back to their original state.

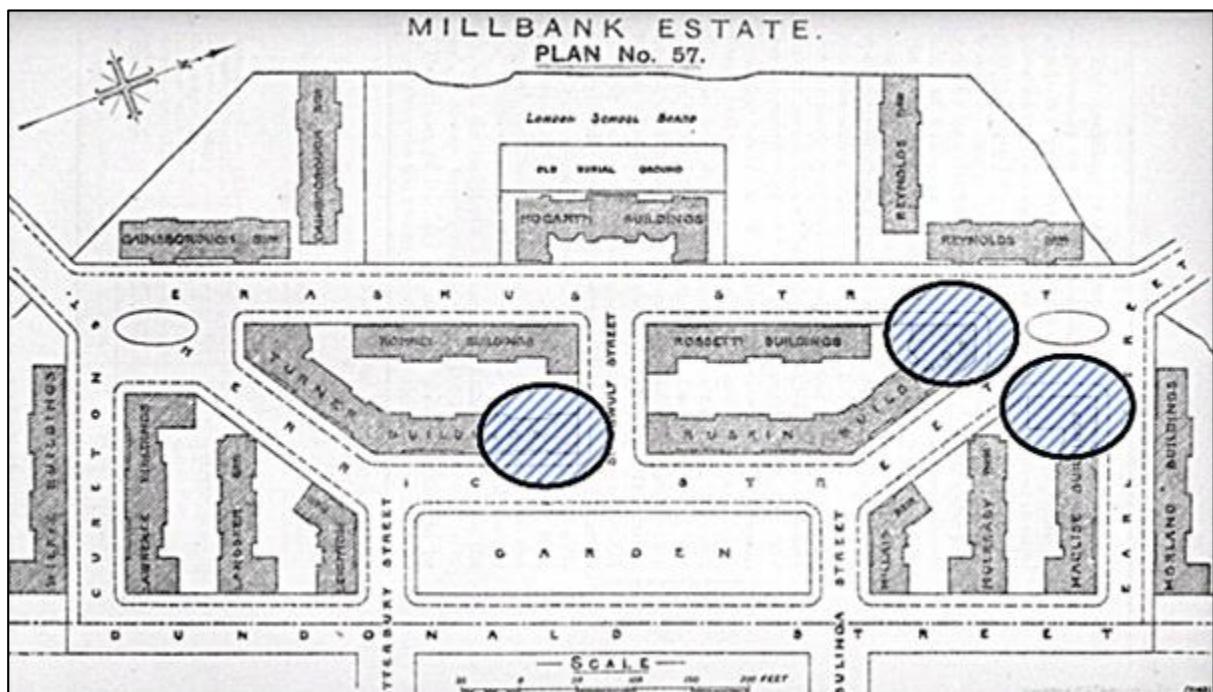


Fig. 16: Main areas of WW2 bomb damage

The estate still stands unchanged and all the roads are tree-lined and even the gardens remain. The trees, now they have matured, have removed much of the airiness of the original streets and the garden, but this is a small price to pay and is much preferable to open paving with nothing to break the monotony of the view. The whole area, including the Tate Gallery, government buildings and the Millbank Estate is a conservation area. The estate itself is Grade II listed and is managed for Westminster City Council by a housing management company.

## Footnotes

<sup>i</sup> Private Visit of Their Majesties the King and Queen to the Millbank Estate; LCC; 18<sup>th</sup> February 1903; LMA ref: LCC/CL/CER/03/003/020

<sup>ii</sup> Beattie, Susan; A Revolution in London Housing. LCC Housing Architects & Their Work, 1893-1914; GLC; 1980; p55

<sup>iii</sup> C. J. Stewart; The Housing Question in London; The London County Council 1900; p271

<sup>iv</sup> Housing of the Working Classes 1855-1912; LCC; 1913; p68