

Housing the Workers

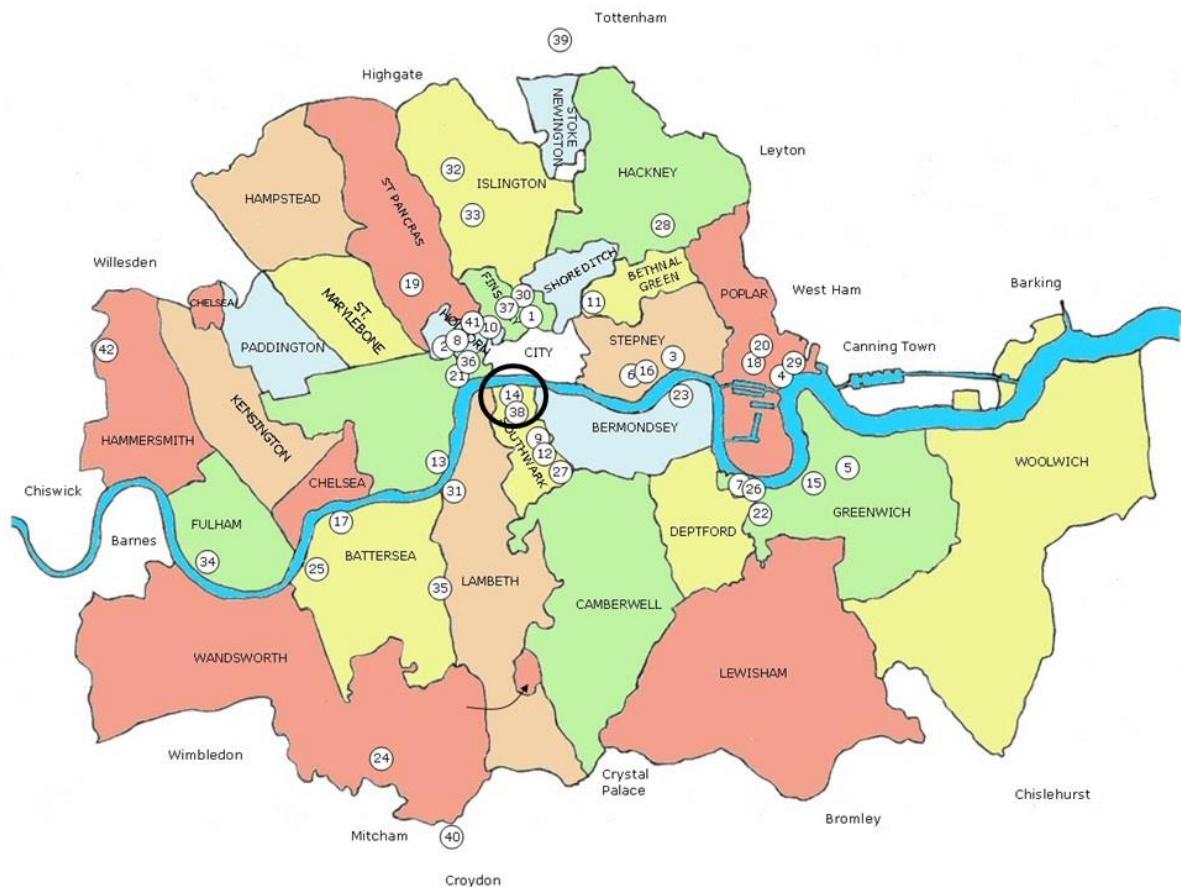
Early London County Council Housing

1889-1914

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Part 3 – the schemes in detail

14 – No. 97 Southwark Street



1.1.97 Southwark Street, Southwark

Holmwood Buildings, 1900

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

This development was unusual for the Council as it was a modernisation of an existing property.

No. 97 Southwark Street was used as accommodation for firemen for the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (London Fire Brigade from 1904) but was abandoned in 1890 when firemen moved to alternate accommodation near to or at their fire stations or at the Metropolitan Fire Brigade HQ in nearby Southwark Bridge Rd (now the London Fire Brigade Museum).

In 1894 the building – already owned by the Council – was proposed to be converted to working class housing but this was not deemed to be cost-effective and the plan was initially dropped. The scheme was re-costed in 1898 and the decision made to go ahead with the conversion. The property was transferred to the housing department under Part III of the 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act and the alterations carried out by the Works Dept. The conversion resulted in spacious dwellings for 72 people in just 16 tenements; 12 of two rooms and 4 of three rooms. Most are entirely self-contained with only four having a WC detached from the tenement. The size of the tenements is indicated by the high rents which varied from 9s to 12s 6d a week. The building was opened in early 1900.

Fig. 1 below shows the unusual shape of the building and the resulting spacious accommodation. The photograph in Fig. 2 shows a handsome building with quality brickwork. The rear of the building is much planer and block-like with a cheaper brick, and reflects the fact that few people would see the rear. The original of the photograph is marked on the back as being taken in 1957. The style of dress (including the lack of hats) of those in the photograph, and the low loading platform of the commercial vehicle on the right, suggest a date some 10 years later. Whatever the date is, the photograph shows a building that seems to be wearing well; something borne out by the fact that the building stands today.

HOLMWOOD BUILDINGS.
97 SOUTHWARK STREET.

Four-Storey block, dwellings containing 16 Tenements (a.i.-r, & ill) classed A & B of 36 rooms. Occupying capacity, 72 persons. Average dimensions of Living Rooms 16x10 feet. Bedrooms 10x8 feet. Rent of one Room (one week) £1.10s.1d. Rent of Room - £1.10s.1d. Cost per room, £1.10s.1d. Cost per cubic foot, £1.10s.1d. Converted from sample store by Works Dept. Area of Building 2,216 Sq. ft. Siting - Area of site = Area of Building. Price per sq. foot.

(No 49)

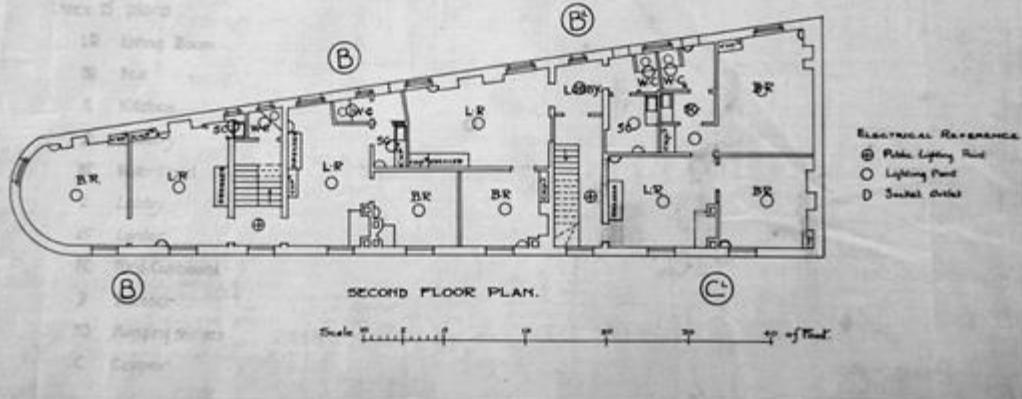


Fig. 1: Holmwood Buildings plan (LMS ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/059)



Fig. 2: Holmwood Buildings in 1957 (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0811)

The conversion cost the council a mere £1,886 which equates to just £26 per person, but there was no purchase price for the building to take into account. The value of the property as transferred to the council was £3,200, but even adding this to the equation meant a cost per

person of £71. The 1913-14 LCC accounts show a less rosy story as the outgoings were £361 as against an income of £344 giving a £17 loss (4.9%). The building suffered from high costs and poor occupancy levels for many years, mainly because of higher rents based on the large room sizes.



Fig. 3: The same view in 2009



Fig. 4: Rear view, 2009

The 1911 census returns confirm that the large room sizes and corresponding high rents, compared to local accommodation led to a predominance of the higher earning working classes. Once of the 16 tenements was unoccupied and two were overcrowded but only by one person in each. The Building was only 58% occupied as against the theoretical maximum. With only 16 tenements it is worth listing the occupations of the heads of household. They were: clergyman, mechanical engineer, clerk, tram linesman, 82 year-old retired man living on own means, timekeeper at a printers, clothing packer, printing hand, LCC house painter, compositor, retired printer's reader (born in Holland), a lady separated from her husband and living on own means, caterer's porter, manager at a factory and a German-born head waiter. Despite the relatively large room sizes there are few young children living in the building, but this probably reflects what family men could afford to rent at that time. Only two tenants, the compositor and LCC house painter, were from Southwark.