

Housing the Workers

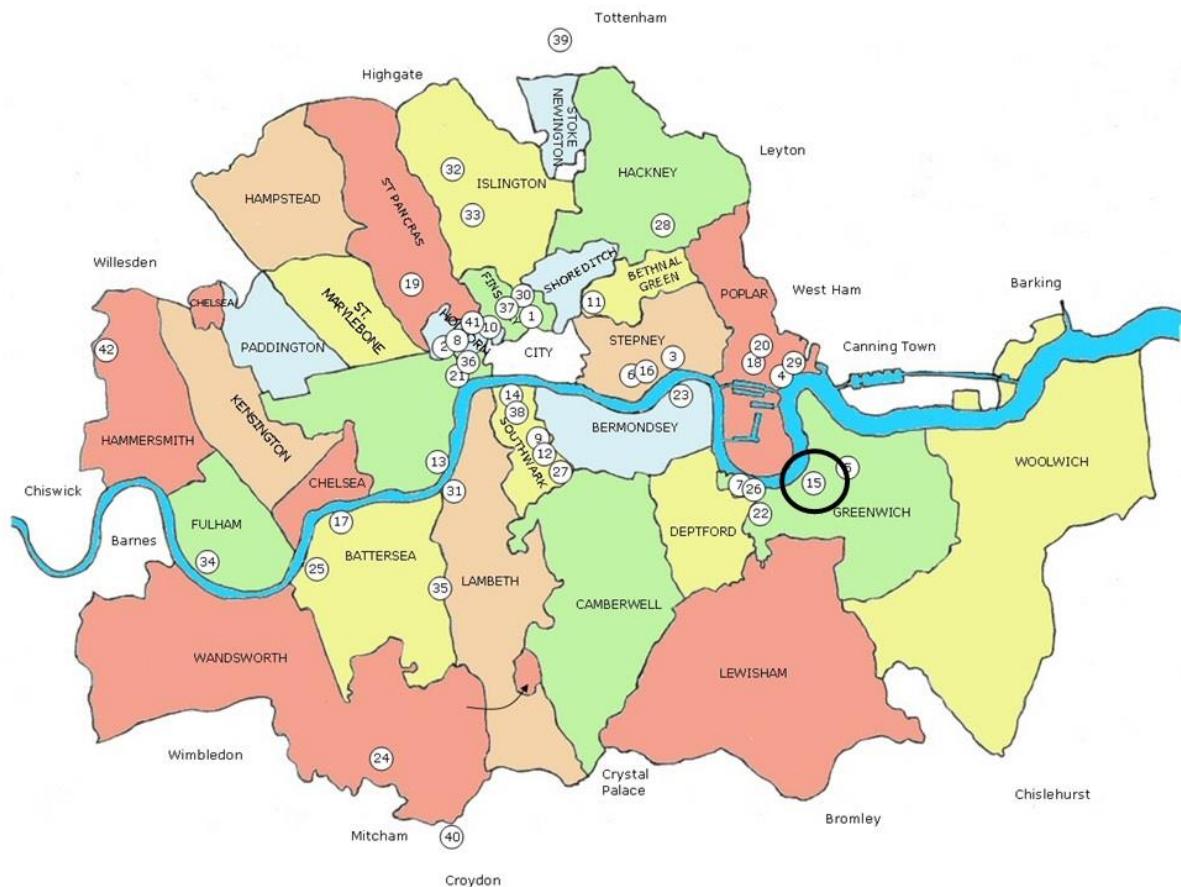
Early London County Council Housing

1889-1914

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Part 3 – the schemes in detail

15 – Trafalgar Road, Greenwich



Trafalgar Road scheme, Greenwich

Hardy Cottages, 1901

Built under the 1882 Artizans' Dwellings Act

This scheme was instigated in 1877 as a slum area put forward for clearance by the medical officer for Greenwich, Mr H. N. Pink. The District decided not to act but Mr Pink re-submitted a proposal in November 1882 and the District decided to approve the clearance, but on Mr Pink's original proposal.

The area was low-lying, densely populated, had dilapidated housing and disease was prevalent. Its close proximity to the splendid Royal Naval College must have been embarrassing. The original scheme included areas to the south and the north of the Old Woolwich Rd, but the scheme was modified to only include the area to the south. Fig. 1 shows the scheme as envisaged by the MBW and Fig. 2 shows the modified scheme south of the Old Woolwich Rd as highlighted.

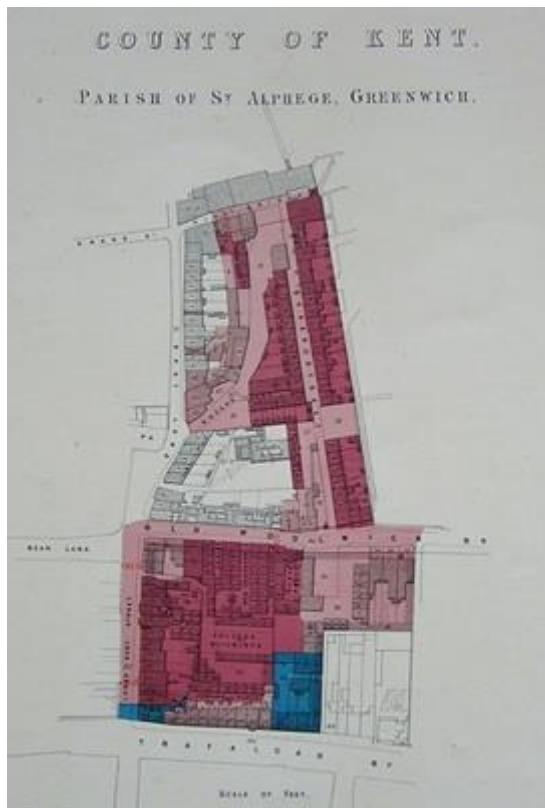


Fig. 1: Trafalgar Rd Scheme as originally planned by the MBW

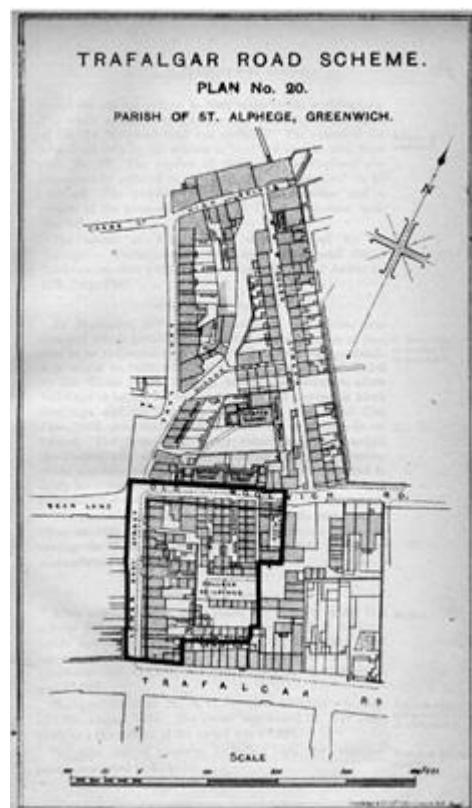


Fig. 2: Trafalgar Rd Scheme. As finally cleared

The original scheme would have cleared the whole area in the map above and widened Old Woolwich Rd, Lower East Street and High Bridge. Although a very large area to clear, the scheme estimated that only 750 persons would be affected and would have resulted in blocks built on the north side of Old Woolwich Rd and none on the south. The plans were deposited with the Secretary of State, Mr D Cubitt Nichols, in 1883 but were returned with considerable modifications. The area to the north was excluded and the resulting smaller area to the south required 380 to be re-housed. Only Old Woolwich Rd was to be widened. The Council submitted a further request in 1889 to reduce the number re-housed to 280 so that cottages could be built. This proposal went through several modifications (explained below) until,

finally, a scheme was approved to re-house 190 in cottages with the blessing of Greenwich Vestry who, for unknown reasons, did not want the larger scheme to proceed. Maybe they had local knowledge to indicate that the larger number was unrealistic and that most of those displaced would not rent the new housing. The scheme was approved on 18th August 1896.

Whilst the schemes were going through much iteration, the housing and land were purchased after some arbitration for £19,742 in June 1886, and the site cleared in October. In the meantime the Council managed to receive rents amounting to £618 for property purchased but not yet demolished. Some land was sold to the London School Board for £1,406.

The MBW first tried to sell the cleared site in March 1888 with the proviso that the purchasers erect block dwellings for 380 persons. As usual with these schemes at the time, no 3rd party was interested in purchasing and the land was offered for sale in March and July 1889 for the erection of cottages for 280 persons. This also produced no purchasers and so the Council, as explained above, finally obtained a reduction in numbers to 190 and decided to build the cottages themselves. They commissioned Rowland Plumbe FRIBA to produce the plans. Mr Plumbe had designed some dwellings for the Boundary Street scheme and the Council must have been pleased with his work. The original cottages, as designed, would have housed 252 persons in 21 two-storeyed cottages, but the cost would probably have resulted in a charge on the county rates and the Council were nervous about doing this and waited until the effects of the opening of the Blackwall Tunnel could be calculated. The results could not have been favourable as the cottages, as designed by Mr Plumbe, could not be built without a charge on the rates, even taking the lowest tender of £11,300 for buildings alone. The Council instructed its own architects to modify the scheme but even these were likely to impose a penalty of £30 per annum on the rates. This sum seems paltry today, and was probably fairly insignificant even then, but the political situation at the time made the Council nervous of any working-class housing scheme being a burden on the rates and so any of the schemes had to be carefully considered to ensure there was a justification. In the case of Trafalgar Rd, there was a justification as the Council were incurring an estimated loss of £127 per annum against the potential earnings from rent and rates they could be collecting on the site. Although a fait accompli in that the clearance was completed and could not be reversed, the Council were able to obtain approval for the scheme that was predicted to result in a small annual loss and this was authorised on 13th March 1900. The resulting 51 three-roomed cottages were named Hardy Cottages, after Nelson's Flag Captain at Trafalgar, and which provided housing for 306.

The cottages were rather modest affairs even compared to those already built, and confirms that the finances for the scheme were not favourable. However, as can be seen in Table 1, the costs of just over £100 per person are not unreasonable for cottage property and compares well against earlier cottage schemes, including the £183pp for the nearby Hughes Field cottages. They showed a small loss of 2.4% in 1913-14.

	Outgoings	Income	
Cost of land	£19,742		
Street widening	£817		
Sale of land to London Board Schools		£1,406	
Rents pending demolition		£618	
Cost of construction	£12,299		
TOTAL COSTS			£30,834
Cost per person (based on 306 persons)			£101pp
Balance of accounts, 1913-1914	£862	£842	-£20 (2.4% loss)

Table 1: Costs for the construction of Hardy Cottages, Greenwich

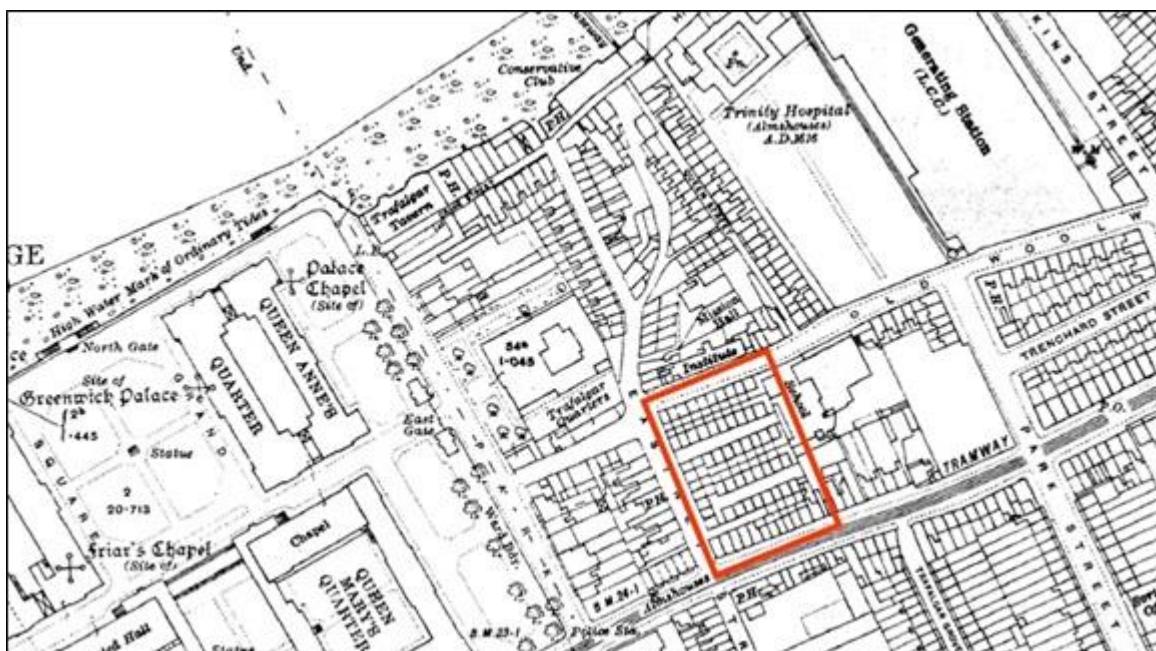


Fig. 3: Hardy Cottages from 1916 OS map.

Note in Fig. 3 above the proximity of the cottages to the Royal Naval College and the Greenwich Power Station to the northeast. Not all the cottages remain today.

The 1911 census returns indicate a well-managed estate although there are 10 overcrowded cottages. The occupancy is a healthy 85% with only one unoccupied. With the Admiralty Buildings and Greenwich Gas Works close by and the area is known for its wharves, it is not surprising that most of the tenants are working in manual occupations you would expect in the area. In the 51 cottages there are 15 heads of household working in Government or Local Authority positions. The census indicates that the cottages were helping meet the needs of the local industry.



Fig. 4: Hardy Cottages WW2 bomb damage

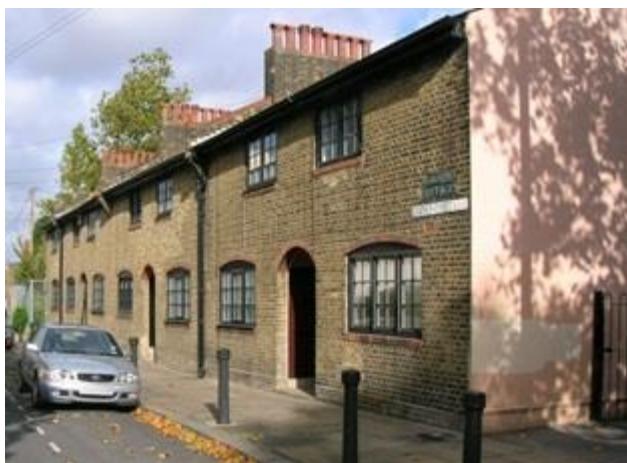


Fig. 5: Hardy Cottages facing Eastney St, 2009

The top two rows were totally destroyed by WW2 bombing along with half the middle row. The older dwellings to the south of Hardy Cottages were also destroyed along with two Hardy Cottages in the bottom row. From the modern photographs below it can be seen that the cottages look well cared-for, but the lack of off-road parking was clearly not a problem that the architects had to consider in 1901, and the cleared-out part of the central block (destroyed by bombing) now provides a dense parking area.



Fig. 6: Hardy Cottages, rear, 2009

Footnotes

¹ C. J. Stewart; The Housing Question in London; The London County Council 1900; p172