

Housing the Workers

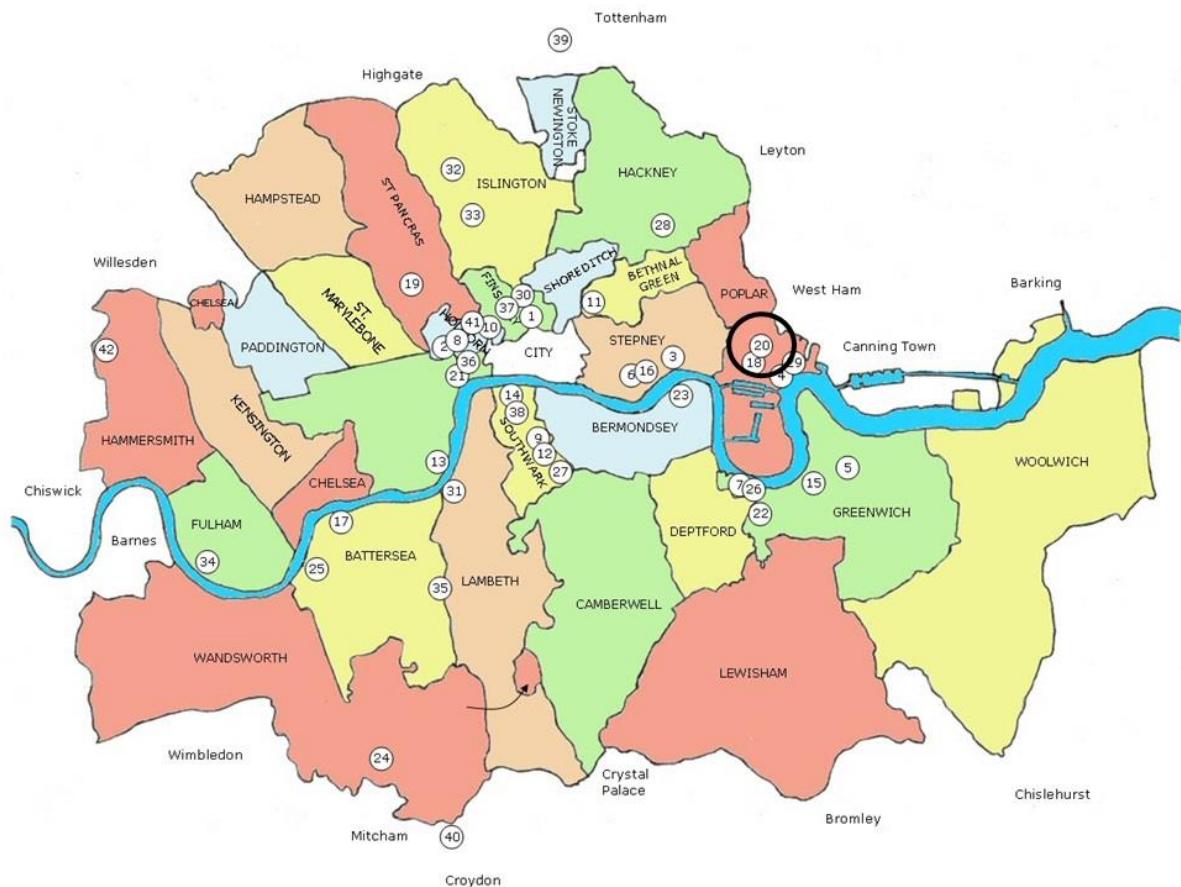
Early London County Council Housing

1889-1914

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Part 3 – the schemes in detail

20 – Anne Street, Poplar



Ann Street scheme, Poplar

Adelaide (1901), Sydney and Melbourne (1902) Buildings Built under Part II of the 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act

This site was originally proposed for re-development in 1889 as a response by the medical officer for Poplar in reply to the Council for details of insanitary areas in Poplar.

When the 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act came into force the following year the medical officer for Poplar tried to close many of the houses as being unfit for human habitation. This was unsuccessful, and the Council decided to deal with the area under Part II of the Act. Not surprisingly the District agreed to leave the matter in the hands of the Council. This scheme was approved on the 7th February 1893 and was fully sanctioned on the 28th May 1894 following a Local Government Board enquiry.

The area in question was quite small as can be seen in the 1896 OS map below.



Fig. 1: The Ann Street clearance area from the 1896 OS map



Fig. 2: Detail plan of the site before clearanceⁱ

The scheme was estimated to displace 261 persons and accommodation was to be provided for a minimum of 180 persons. Unusually, and commendably, the clearance order required the Council to provide alternate accommodation for 100 persons before 150 persons, or more, were displaced. Whether any of the 150 persons displaced would take up the new accommodation was not considered, but the staggering of the development was a commendable approach and one that tried to reduce the impact on those displaced.

The District was required to contribute £4,400 towards the costs and they paid this to the Council with due speed in March 1896. This unusual speed in paying the contribution, before a brick had been laid, was the result of the Council having an agreement in the same month for the East End Dwellings Company (EEDC) to purchase the site and build the new dwellings. One assumes that any delay in the District paying their share would have jeopardised the deal.

The EEDC agreed to pay £2,250 for the site and submitted the plans for the housing to the Council for their approval. These plans were twice rejected by both the Council and the Local Government Board as not providing accommodation for sufficient numbers. The Board also imposed a rule that single tenements were to be occupied only by childless couples, two girls, or two elderly persons of the same sex. The EEDC felt that this imposition was one too many and withdrew its offer for the land. As the EEDC was a respected philanthropic housing developer, the finances of any rebuilding on the site must have been marginal, at best. This withdrawal left the Council with no choice but to develop the site themselves and Messrs Perry & Co. tendered successfully to build the new blocks as designed by the Council's architects.

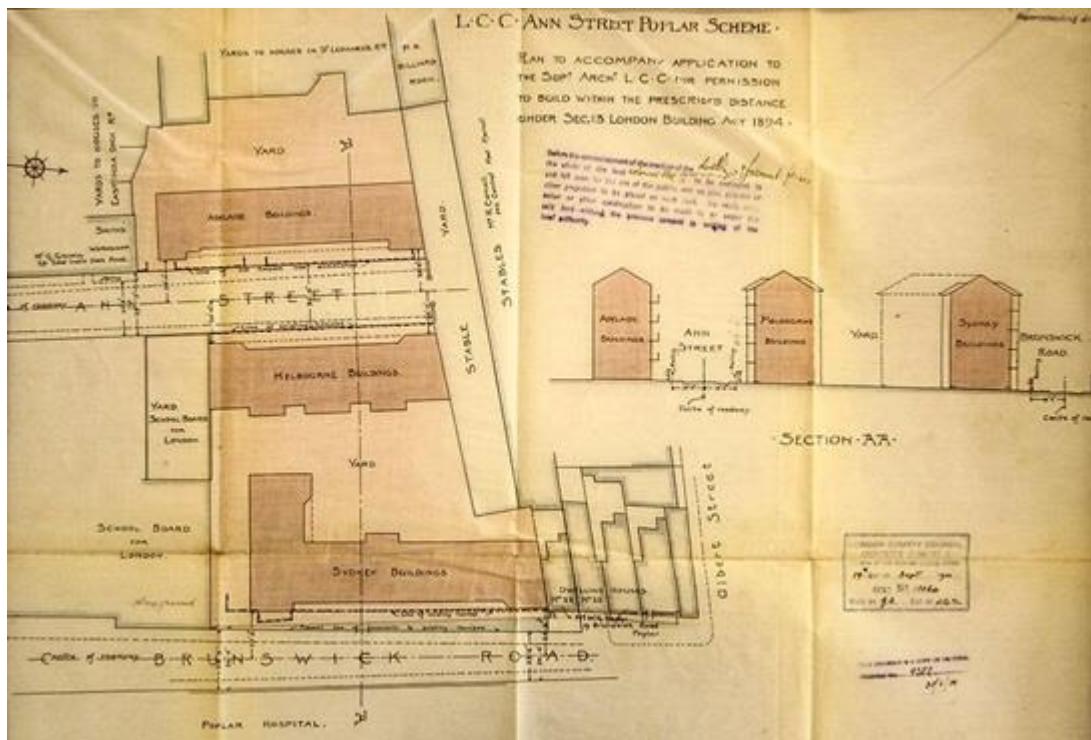


Fig. 3: Whole site plan for the Ann Street scheme (LMA ref: GLC/AR/BR/22/017597)

The first new block was called Adelaide Buildings and accommodated 190 persons, and was opened in September 1901. This block was joined by two more blocks, Sydney and Melbourne Buildings in December 1902. The Council must have seen a need for new housing in the area to commit to building housing for 630 persons when the requirement was for a maximum for 180.

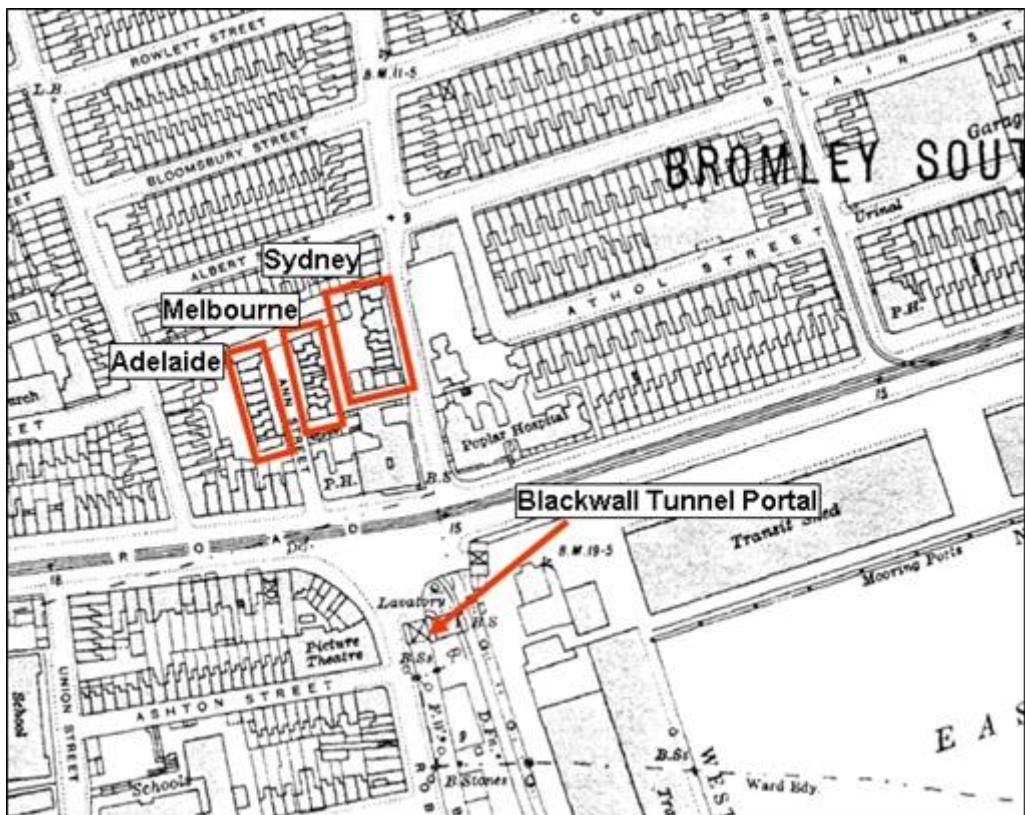


Fig. 4: Ann Street Area as developed, from 1916 OS map

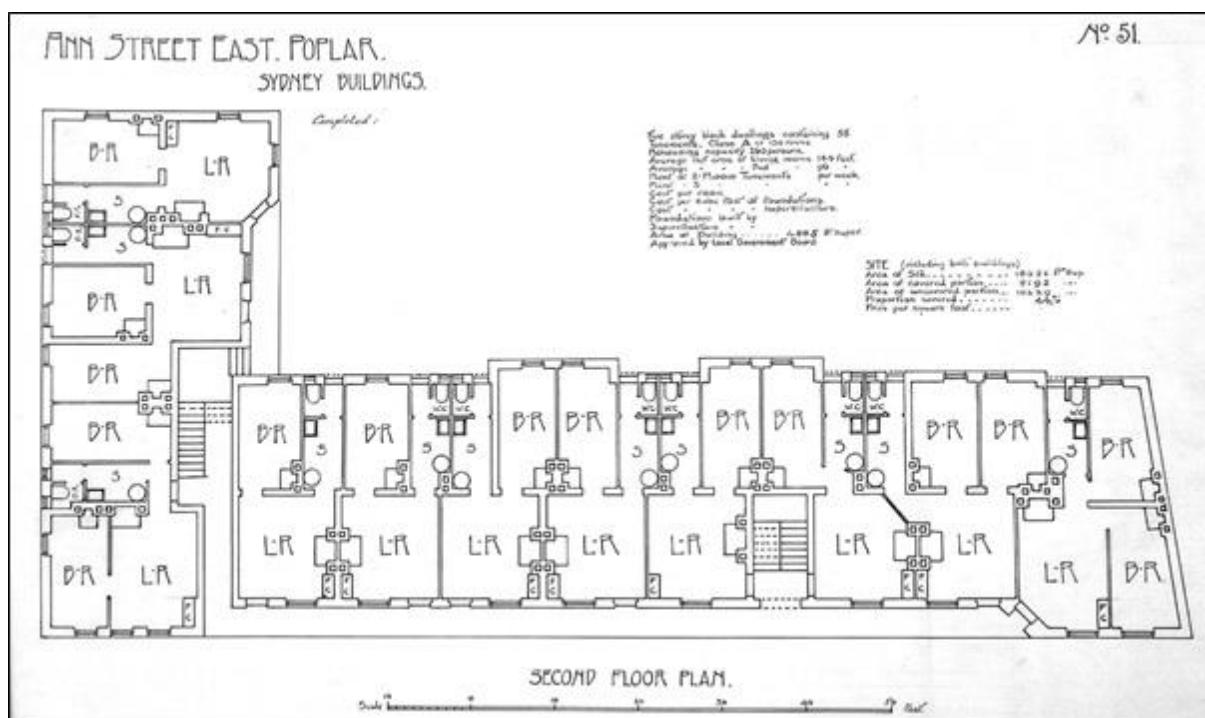


Fig. 5: Sydney Buildings floor plan (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/059)

Note that the plan states the average sizes for living and bedrooms and these are right on the minimum set by the Council at 144 and 96 sq. ft. respectively. Some party walls look very thin.



Fig. 6: Sydney Buildings in the 1960s
(LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0749)



Fig. 7: Rear of Sydney Buildings in the
1960s (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0749)

No photographs from the early 1900s can be located but, as can be seen in the 1960s photographs in Fig. 6 and Fig. 7 above, the buildings lack any architectural features of note. The rear of the buildings seem particularly barrack-like.

The 1911 census shows that the tenants have a typical spread of trades you would expect in Poplar with manual workers and river trades. Of the 40 tenements in Adelaide Buildings six are unoccupied, which is a large number and untypical of LCC properties in Poplar. Of the 34 occupied, 19 have heads of household born in the vicinity, indicating that the buildings are serving the local community. There are few tenants working for government or local authorities, but 3 are LCC tram workers. Four tenements are over-occupied with one spectacularly so with 8 occupants in a 2-roomed tenement. The head of household was a lighterman born locally. The 38 tenements in Melbourne Buildings show a similar pattern with 2 unoccupied and 3 overcrowded with the worst being 6 people in 2 rooms. Only 8 tenants are known to have been born in the vicinity which is a low proportion. Possibly the presence of the LCC caretaker and assistant caretaker in tenements in the building puts off some locals due to an inherent distrust of authority. The occupations of the tenants are more “trade” than “labourer” compared with Adelaide Buildings. The larger Sydney Buildings had 55 tenements but only 2 were unoccupied. And only 3 over-crowded – a better record than for the other two smaller buildings. Under half are unoccupied by heads of household born in the vicinity and occupations vary between trade and labouring with a number in the river and railway companies. One locally-born tenant lists his occupation as a ploughman for the LCC. One wonders what he would have ploughed for the LCC in the very built-up Poplar area. The statistics for the three buildings are a total occupancy of 527 against a theoretical maximum of 630, giving an occupancy of 84%.

The whole site was cleared when the new eastern bore of the Blackwall Tunnel was built and the approach roads reconstructed and extended northwards directly through the Ann Street site in the 1960s.

The costs are in Table 1 below and show a very reasonable £45 per person

	Outgoings	Income	
Purchase of land and property	£8,754		
Cost of buildings	£23,812		
Contribution from Poplar District		£4,400	
NET COST			£28,166
Cost per person (based on 630 persons)			£45pp
Balance of accounts, 1913-1914	£1,924	£2,059	£135 (6.5%)

Table 1: Costs for the Ann Street scheme

Footnotes

¹ C. J. Stewart; The Housing Question in London; The London County Council; 1900; p242