

Housing the Workers

**Early London County Council Housing
1889-1914**

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August 2015**

Part 3 – the schemes in detail

21 – Clare Market and Strand Improvement Scheme

Clare Market and The Strand Improvement schemes

Duke's Court: Beaumont, Fletcher and Sheridan Buildings (1902)

Russell Court: Siddons and Stirling Buildings (1903)

Bourne Estate: Shene, Ledam, Skipwith, Frewell, Denys, Scrope (1903), Redman (1904), and Radcliff (1905) Buildings

Herbrand Street: Thackery, Dickens and Coram Buildings (1904)

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

Following the problems of the funding of the Churchway scheme, the Clare Market slum clearance scheme started off as a more straightforward one, although the scheme covered 3 separate areas. Eventually, the scheme was merged with the one to construct the Aldwych and Kingsway roads. Walking around The Strand and Drury Lane area today it is difficult to visualise that the area was rife with slums, narrow alleys and rookeries. The OS map from 1896 shows the area in question. The Kingsway and Aldwych roads now dominate the area as can be seen in the 1916 map in Fig. 2.



Fig. 1: Clare market area (centre), from 1896 OS map



Fig. 2: Clare market area following the building of Kingsway and Aldwych, from 1916 OS map

The Council's medical officer first brought the Clare Market area to the attention of the Council on 19th September 1892. The area was subsequently reported to the Council a number of times until October 1895 when a scheme for improvement was submitted. The telling figure is that the population density of the northern-most of the three areas was 800 persons to the acre - 6 times denser than the Strand area as a whole. The houses in all 3 areas were in close proximity of each other and a clearance of the area was the only viable solution. The proposal was presented to the Secretary of State in January 1895. The Council were concerned that the Strand District Council may oppose the plan and therefore included a proposal to widen Blackmoor and Clare Streets which the District would have problems opposing. Even so, the proposal took until January 1897 to gain approval.

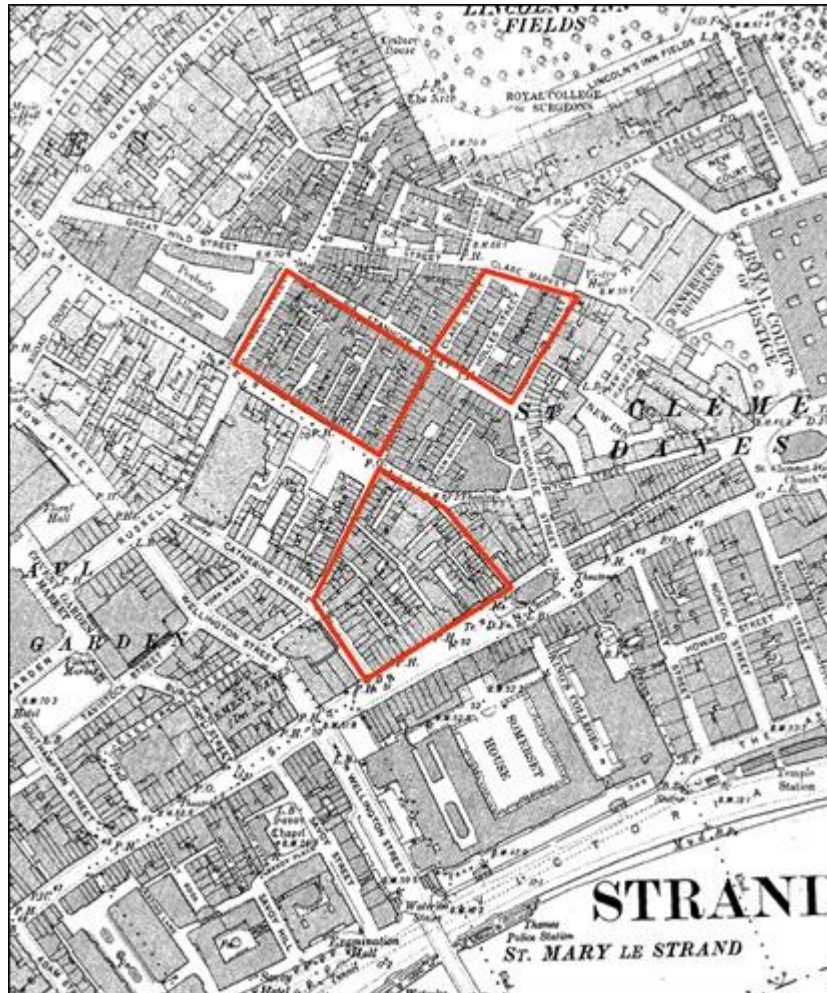


Fig. 3: The slum areas to be cleared under the Clare Market scheme

The scheme estimated that a massive 3,172 people would be displaced and that 2,250 were to be re-housed. This is a large number to be re-housed in a relatively small space and was not possible in the Clare Market area. The Council solved this problem by allocating 1,500 people to be re-housed on the Millbank Estate, leaving 750 to be re-housed on the original site.

The property was acquired by negotiation and arbitration and cost a substantial £379,150, with the street improvements a further £2,250. This cost was offset by the sale of some surplus land which realised £164,900 resulting in a net cost of £216,500 to which admin and design costs were added to give a total of £256,079.

During the period of acquisition the Council proceeded with the extensive road improvement called the Strand Improvement Scheme that resulted in the Kingsway and Aldwych roads. As this was close to Clare Market, the re-housing plans of the two schemes were combined. This added a further 3000 people to be re-housed in addition to the 2,250 already being planned for. It was decided that the original site would not be ideal for the erection of the new buildings and would be affected by the Strand Improvement scheme. Because of this, the Council purchased sites in nearby Russell and Duke's Courts; in Herbrand Street to the north (all the property of the Duke of Bedford); and the Reid's Brewery site in Clerkenwell to the northeast.

The Russell Court and Duke's Court sites were close to the cleared area, but the Herbrand Street and Reid's Brewery site were some way to the north. The map in Fig. 4 below shows the four development sites. Note that the other housing allocated to this scheme, in the Millbank Estate, is some way to the SW of the map area, past the Houses of Parliament, and space for 1,536 people was allocated there.

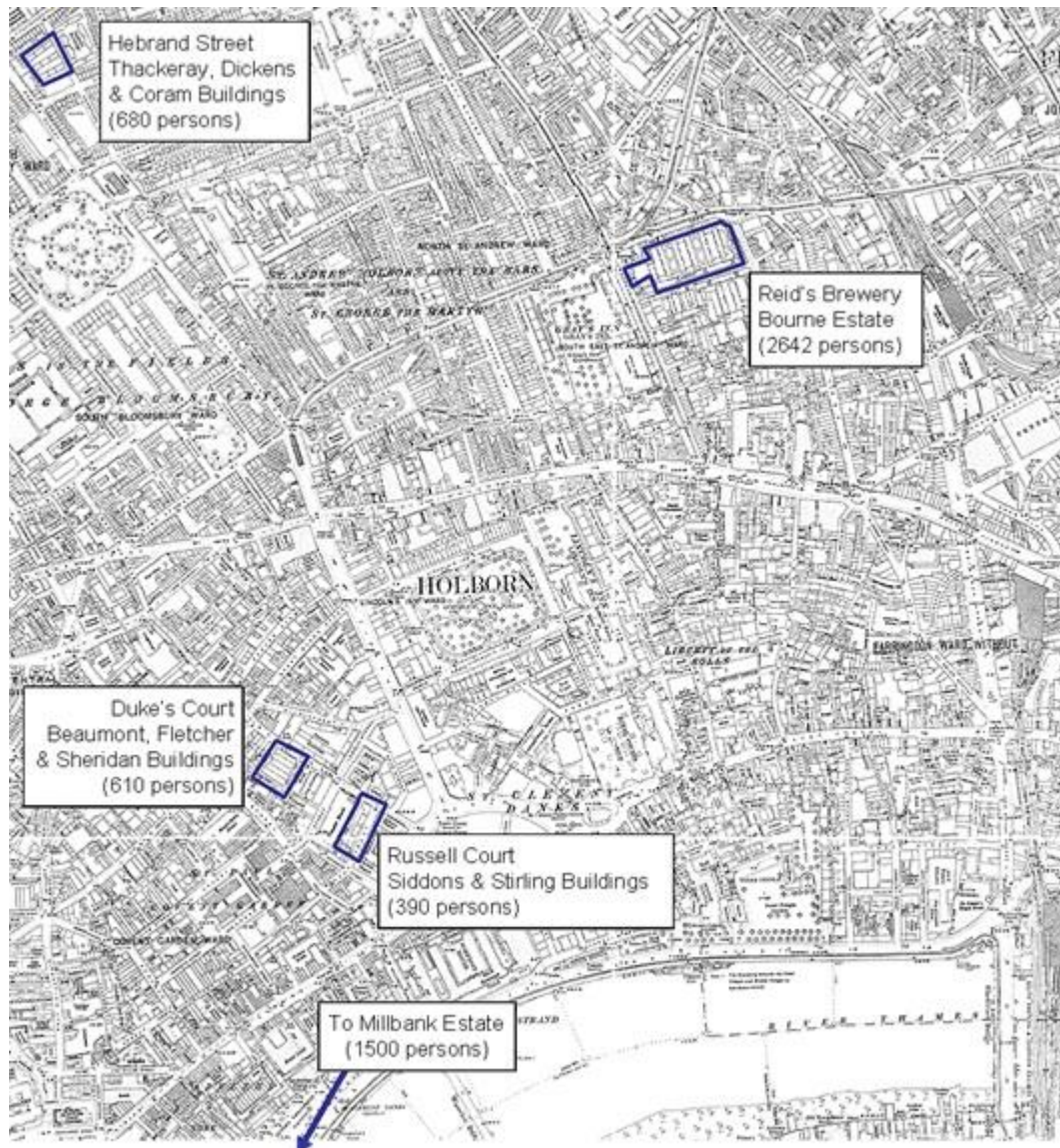


Fig. 4: The location of the 5 housing developments for the Clare Market and Strand Improvement schemes (OS map 1916)

The first stage of the re-development was the purchase of Duke's Court, Russell Court and Herbrand Street sites from the Duke of Bedford, and the Council decided to purchase these under Part III of the 1890 Act. The resulting agreement included special terms whereby the Duke would purchase, at a fixed price, the land "*on the new circus from Holborn and the Strand*". This would be the land on the northwest side of Aldwych now occupied by prestigious buildings including the Waldorf Hotel. The three sites were purchased by the Council for £118,400 and possession obtained in 1899. The original plan was to build a women's lodging house on the Russell Court site but the Secretary of State rejected this plan. Although the reason given was that those displaced from Clare Market "*would not be of such a character*" one

cannot help feeling that the Secretary and the government felt that a women's lodging house so close to the London's theatre land was not a good idea. The Council submitted plans to build two block dwellings on the site. At the same time as Russell Court site was being planned, the Duke's Court site was planned to hold three blocks. With some style all the resulting buildings were named after famous names from the London theatre scene: playwrights Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher and Richard Brindsley Sheridan (Duke's Court site); and playwright Edward Stirling and actress Sarah Siddons (Russell Court site).

The plans for the development on the Herbrand Street site were sent to the Secretary of State in March 1900 and were approved. The three buildings were named Thackeray, Dickens and Coram Buildings. The former two were named after famous authors of the time (Charles Dickens and his rival William Makepeace Thackeray), but Coram Buildings was named after the adjoining Little Coram Street - itself named after Captain Thomas Coram, the founder of the nearby foundling hospital. The Herbrand St site formed part of a larger MBW clearance scheme (called the Little Coram Street scheme) on land owned by the Duke of Bedford and from which the MBW was able to sell much of the cleared site to the Peabody Trust in 1884. The Duke, to his credit, re-housed those displaced on other parts of his estate at his cost. The resulting Peabody Buildings are opposite the Council's buildings across Herbrand Street and can be seen in Fig. 6.

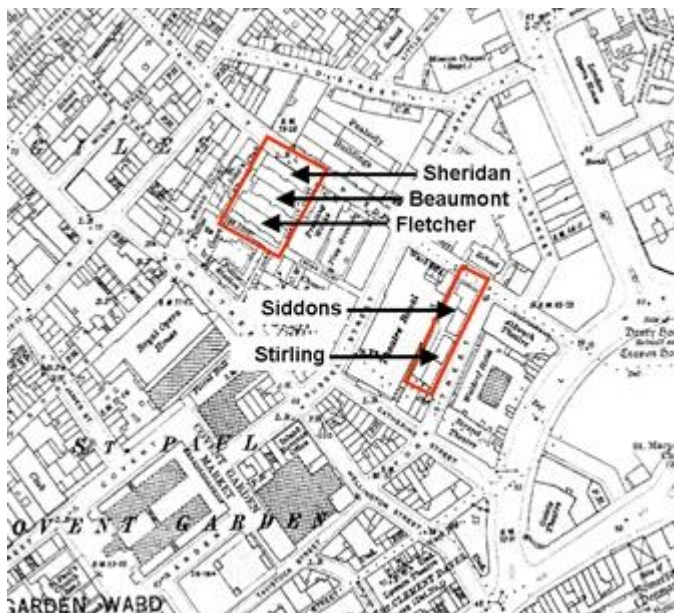


Fig. 5: Duke and Russell Court sites from 1916 OS map. Note Peabody Bldgs across Drury Lane from Sheridan Bldg.

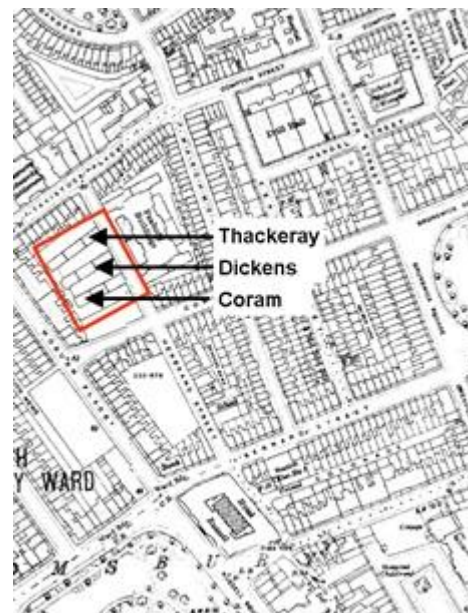


Fig. 6: Herbrand Street site from 1916 OS map. Again, note Peabody Buildings.

The Reid's Brewery site was purchased from Messrs. Reid and Company for £200,000. The company, along with Combe Delafield and Co, had been acquired by Watneys in 1898 to form the large brewing company, Messrs. Watney Combe and Reid. The site must have been surplus to requirements but the brewery had to clear the site themselves and no doubt stripped the brewery of everything useful, possibly even the bricks. The Brewery's address was the aptly-named Liquorpond Street and this street was sensibly renamed Clerkenwell Road when the brewery was demolished and before the housing built. With all the sites in a state of acquisition or clearance the construction of the new buildings could start.

The first buildings, completed in June 1902, were Sheridan, Beaumont and Fletcher Buildings, and accommodated 610 people in 10 tenements of one room, 35 tenements of two rooms, 35 tenements of three rooms and 10 tenements of four rooms. Next were Stirling and Siddons Buildings in June 1903, which accommodated 390 persons in 10 tenements of one room, 30 tenements of two rooms, 35 tenements of 3 rooms and 5 tenements of four rooms. Confusingly, the latter buildings were often referred to as York Street Buildings as the street they faced onto was known as York Street but is now Tavistock Street. Beaumont, Fletcher and Sheridan were typically plain buildings of the time, with open balconies and little architectural style as can be seen in Fig. 7. Stirling and Siddons Buildings differed in that they had no walkways and so were quite ‘barracky’ looking as a result. Fig. 9 and Fig. 10 are from the 1960s but give good views of the front and rear of the buildings. As can be seen in the ground floor plan of Stirling Buildings in Fig. 13, the design is very straightforward but with some surprisingly thin walls between some of the tenements. Note the thin wall between the scullery of tenement “B” and the bedroom of tenement “A” (bottom left), and between bedrooms of tenements “D” and “C” bottom right. As the Council prided itself on the quality of its structures, these thin walls suggest an element of cost-cutting. The plans show that the sizes of the living rooms are all less than the 144 sq. ft. minimum although all bedrooms seem to be on or just above the 96 sq. ft. minimum. As a post-Boundary Street development under Part I of the 1890 Housing Act, the room sizes should have been designed to the Secretary of State’s later regulation of 160 and 110 sq. ft. respectively. Stirling and Siddons Buildings are the first Council buildings with rooms that are noticeable smaller than the minimum. The interiors of other buildings were a little more spacious with room sizes at or a little above the minimum.

The buildings have been sympathetically renovated with the walkway railings replaced by modern equivalents that give the old buildings some style.



Fig. 7: Sheridan Buildings, 1910 (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0797)



Fig. 8: Fletcher (left) & Beaumont Houses 2009



Fig. 9: Siddons (foreground) and Stirling (distance) Buildings in the 1960s (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0797)



Fig. 10: Rear of Siddons Building – note lack of walkways (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0797)



Fig. 11: Siddons House 2009



Fig. 12: Rear of Siddons House 2009

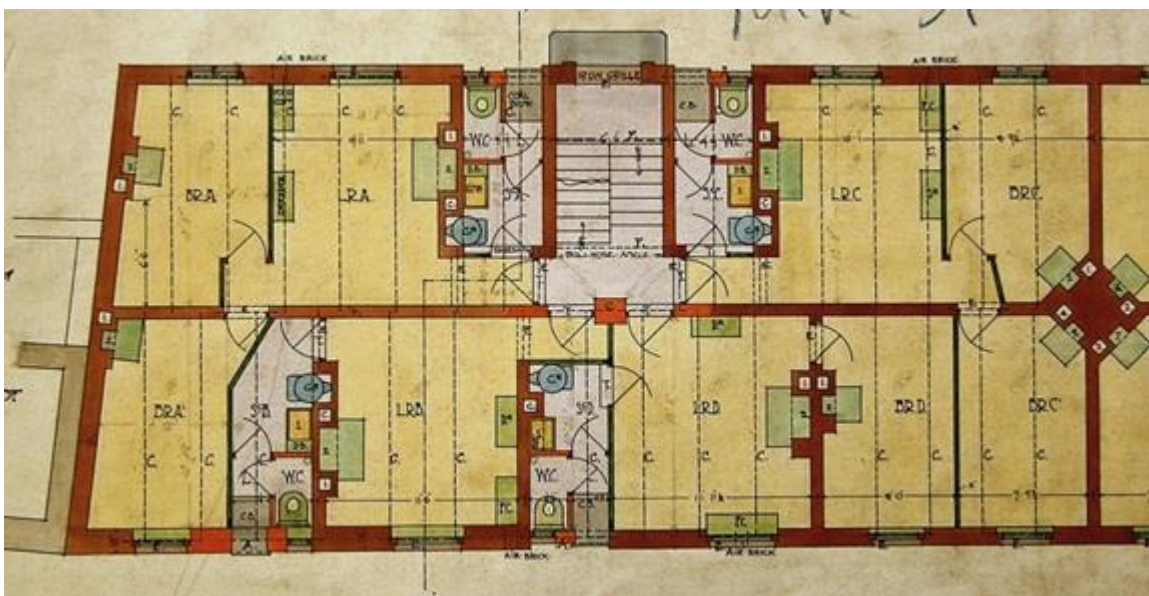


Fig. 13: Stirling Buildings ground floor plan (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/058)

Thackeray, Dickens and Coram Buildings in Herbrand Street are very similar to Siddons and Stirling in that they do not have external walkways. The plans were approved in November 1900 and the buildings started in August 1902. Built by Mr B. E. Nightingale, they took until March 1904 to be completed which was, for the time, a protracted construction period for three fairly straightforward buildings on a site already cleared. This suggests that Mr Nightingale had some problems with obtaining labour and materials. The buildings provided accommodation for 680 persons in 20 tenements of one room, 100 tenements of 2 rooms and 40 tenements of 3 rooms.

The ground floor plan of Coram Buildings in Fig. 14 below shows the continuing squeezing of the space although the living rooms are a little larger than in Stirling and Siddons Buildings. The space for the WC is the minimum that can be provided and has left more space for the scullery. Although, at first glance, the construction would seem to provide thick walls between the tenements, this is only the case with the central tenements. There are some worryingly thin walls between the tenements at either end.

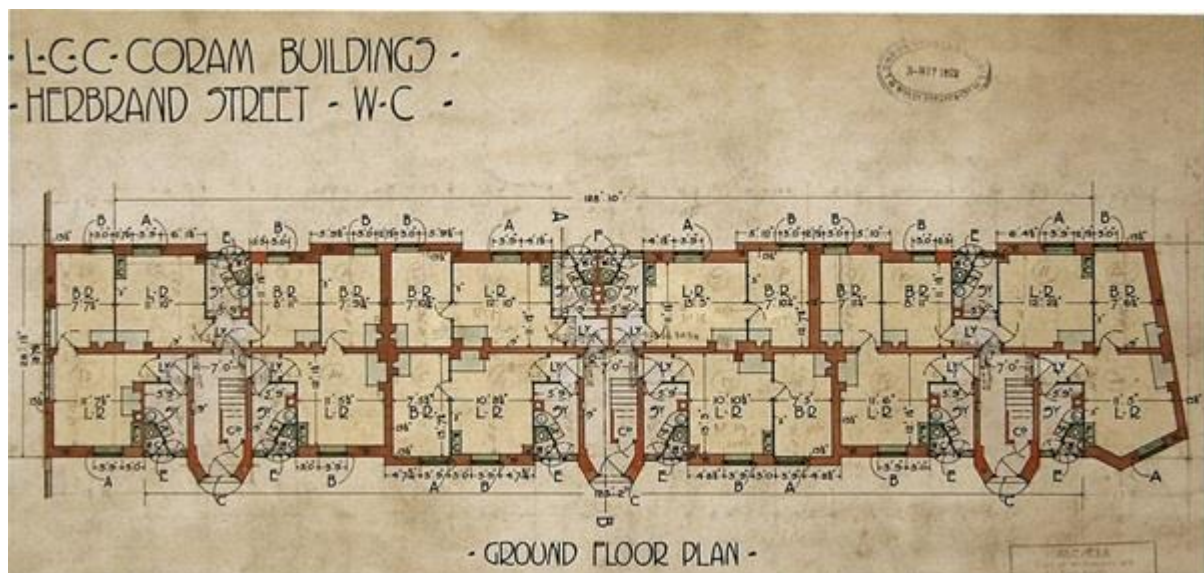


Fig. 14: Ground floor plan for Coram Buildings (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/026)



Fig. 15: Dickens Buildings, August 1905 (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0808)



Fig. 16: Dickens & Thackeray Buildings 1907. Note the imposing Peabody Buildings in the distance (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0808)



Fig. 17: Thackeray House 2009



Fig. 18: Dickens House 2009

The Herbrand Street buildings have not had any stylish makeovers but the open stairway windows have been bricked in and windows added that are out of symmetry with the rest of the design.

The costs of the Clare Market scheme can be calculated for the Dukes Court, Russell Court and Herbrand St developments, but the costs of the Millbank allocation for 1,536 persons (Rossetti, Ruskin, Morland and Millais Buildings) cannot be separated from the rest of the Millbank development and are excluded. The Fig. of £132pp seen in the table below may not be that accurate as the cost of construction was not broken down in the LCC publications of the time and just stated that they are the total costs after allowing for incidentals¹. The total cost of the purchase and clearance of the three original sites at Clare Market (£256,039) was transferred to the Strand Improvement scheme which had to purchase other surrounding land. If the costs of the construction of the allocated buildings in Millbank Estate could be isolated, the unit cost may well be much lower after allowing for the theoretical 1,536 persons planned to be housed there.

All three new housing developments were showing a very healthy profit in 1913-14

	Outgoings	Income	
Net cost of 3 sites	£118,400		
Cost of constructing all buildings	£102,535		
NET COST			£220,935
Cost per person (based on 1680 persons)			£132pp
Balance of accounts, 1913-1914, Duke's Court	£2,046	£2,398	£352 (14.7%)
Balance of accounts, 1913-1914, Russell Court	£1,328	£1,500	£172 (11.5%)
Balance of accounts, 1913-1914, Herbrand Street	£2,344	£2,747	£403 (14.7%)

Table 1: Costs for constructing buildings on the Duke's Court, Russell Court and Herbrand Street sites

The final housing built for the Clare Market/Strand Improvement schemes was extensive and was to result in the large Bourne Estate on Clerkenwell Road. As described earlier, this site was vacated by Reid's Brewery and cleared by the owners. The cleared site came into possession of the Council on May 1900.

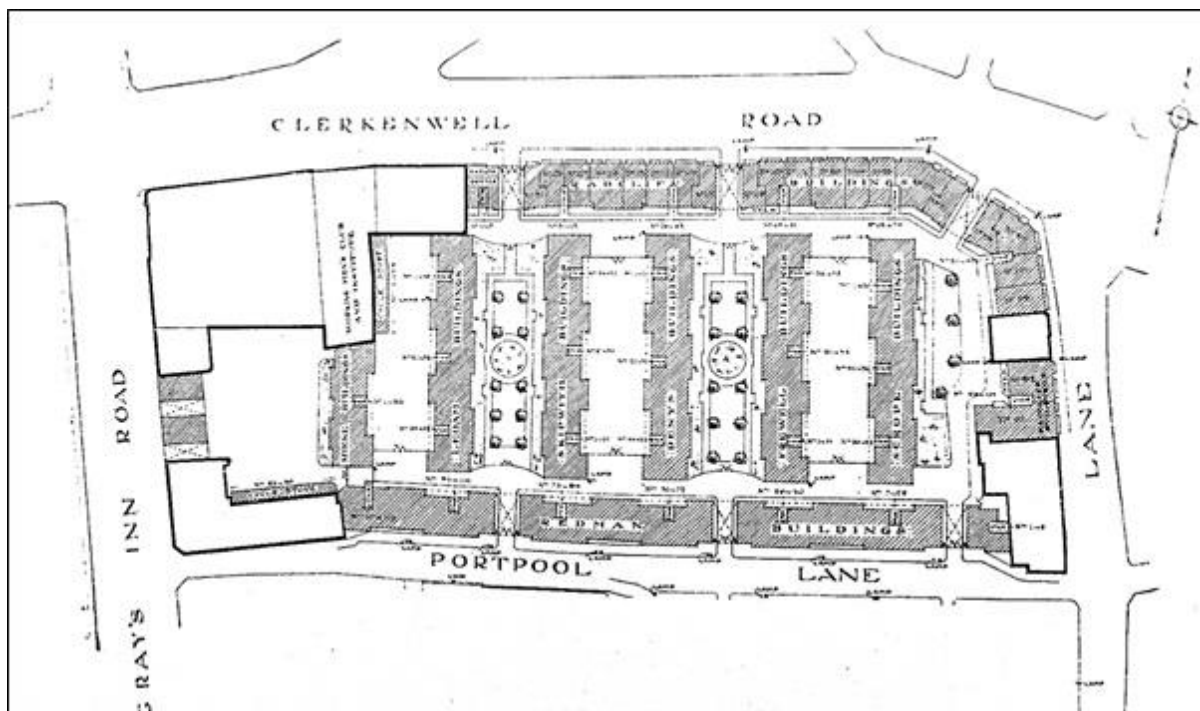


Fig. 19: Bourne Estateⁱⁱ

The foundations of all the blocks with the exception of Radcliff Buildings were constructed by the Works Dept. The superstructure of Shene, Ledam and Skipwith Buildings was constructed by Holloway Bros. and was the first completed early in 1903. The other three inner blocks were constructed by the Works Dept. and also completed early in 1903. They accommodated 1,330 persons. The superstructure of Redman Buildings was also constructed by Holloway Bros. and was completed in October 1904, and housed 710 persons. Radcliff Buildings was constructed by the Works Dept. and completed in January 1905 and accommodated 602 persons. The whole site housed 2,642 persons. This made the Bourne Estate the third largest LCC housing complex at the time behind Boundary Street (5,524) and Millbank (4,430). When the Union Buildings were constructed on the south side of Portpool Lane in 1908 the Bourne Estate finally accommodated 3,902 persons.



Fig. 20: Internal blocks looking towards Redman Buildings, 1907 (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0769)



Fig. 21: Redman Buildings, 1907 (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0769)



Fig. 22: Denys (left) & Frewell Houses, 2009



Fig. 23: Redman House (right), 2009

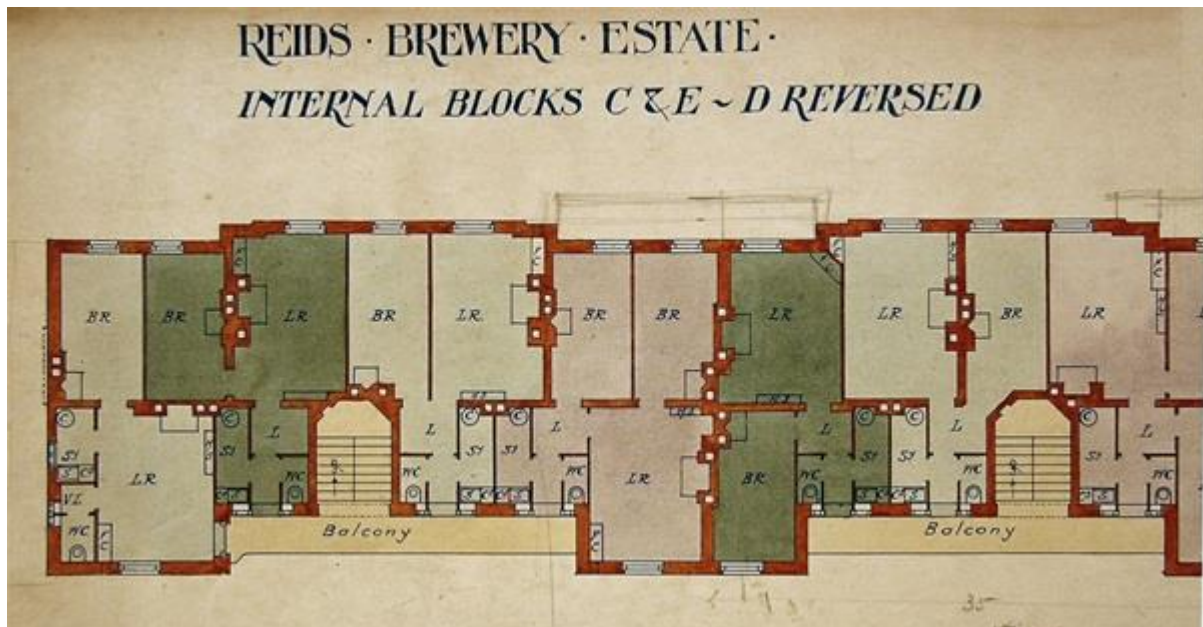


Fig. 24: Floor plan of internal blocks (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/059)

It is not known how the naming of the buildings was decided. No obvious connection has been discovered to link the names Shene, Ledam, Skipwith, Frewell, Denys, Scrope, Redman and Radcliff together, but they seem to be surnames.

As can be seen in the photographs and the floor plan, the Bourne Estate design utilised external walkways. Fig. 25 below is a poor reproduction but is an example of the front facing internal blocks. Note the pleasant gardens and attempts to instil some architectural features on the roof line.



Fig. 25: Denys Buildings (left) and Frewell Buildings (right) looking towards one of the estate entrances through Radcliff Buildingsⁱⁱⁱ

The Clare Market scheme cleared more than just slums and so it would be expected that the new buildings would have housed many of those displaced as they would be able to afford the new rents. Many of those displaced would have found employment in Covent Garden to the west, Fleet Street to the east, coachbuilders to the north, and local publishing companies and theatres.

Analysis of the 1911 census returns is best described estate-by-estate, starting with the Beaumont/Fletcher/Sheridan Buildings group off Drury Lane. According to the census, of the 130 tenements in the three buildings only 1 is unoccupied, which is quite exceptional and indicates a stable tenancy. The maximum theoretical occupancy was 610 persons and the actual occupancy of 492 represents a healthy 81% of maximum. Overcrowding is under control with 18 of the 130 (14%). An indication that the buildings are meeting the needs of the local population is that 46% of heads of household are from the local parishes. This latter figure is much higher than normally seen for housing that replaced just slum clearances. The occupations are typical of those expected to be seen in the area with 14% in trades found in Covent Garden (including most who state they are porters at Covent Garden); 12% in publishing, printing and newsagent trades; but only 5% who can be tracked to government or local authority employment. A small surprise is the relatively high 19% of heads being widows, most with earning children at home.

Siddons and Sterling Buildings are close to Beaumont/Fletcher/Sheridan and would therefore be expected to have a very similar occupancy, and this appears to be the case from the census returns. Both buildings are fully occupied and have an occupancy of 294 persons as against the theoretical maximum of 394 which equates to a relatively low 75% occupancy. Only 9 tenancies are officially overcrowded but some interesting manipulation by the Council has resulted in some tenants having occupation of multiple tenancies. In Siddons Buildings tenancies 1 to 5 are occupied by a “working Girls House” with 7 single ladies between the ages of 18 and 37, overseen by a single lady of 50, plus a 27 year old female servant. Assuming the lady in charge has her own room that leave 14 rooms to be shared between just 7 ladies and a female servant, suggesting the idea was not successful or cost-effective. In Stirling Buildings one family of six occupies three 2-roomed tenancies. The occupancy by people born in local parishes is much lower than the 41% for Beaumont/Fletcher/Sheridan, at 27%. The occupations follow a similar pattern to the other buildings, as would be expected.

The Bourne estate is further away from the clearance area and would be expected to be occupied by more local people to that area than those who would have been displaced from the scheme. This is the case, according to the 1911 census with very few tenants claiming to be from the parishes in and around The Strand. Redman Buildings is the largest single tenanted building in any pre-war LCC estate with a theoretical maximum of 710 people, with Radcliffe close behind with a maximum of 602. Overcrowding is generally under control and the occupancies of each building varies between 67% and 83% of theoretical maximum. In none of the buildings does the proportion of locals as head of household exceed 11% of the total tenants. The proportion of heads of household who work in government, local authority or Police jobs is very low indicating that this development is serving the local industry well. This is also borne out by there only being 12 vacancies in the 537 tenements on the estate. The occupations are generally what you would expect in the area with few having the word “labourer” in their occupation. There are a few more interesting occupations. In one two-roomed tenement the Irish-born head of household claims his occupation to be “Chairman to LCC Arch and Surveyor”. This clearly needed investigation. His name appears nowhere on the

LCC records and the enumerator was not fooled as his occupation has been classified with code 330, which is a “labourer”. One tenement is occupied by an engineer at the aviation school at Hendon, his LCC teacher wife and student teacher daughter. Radcliffe Buildings had a few interesting occupants. There are two tenements with a dock labourer as head of household, one from Kent and the other from Ireland. It is a mystery as to why two dock labourers were living so far from the docks. Neither are any of the Regents Canal wharfs close by. This building also has a spectacularly overcrowded tenement. There is a family of 11 living in a 3-roomed tenement (maximum capacity 6). The husband is a groom from Devon and his 9 children range from 11 to 2 years old. It is a surprise that this severe overcrowding was allowed. Also in Radcliffe Buildings is a family of 9 headed by a 71 year-old unemployed weaver from Holborn. This man must have been one of the last weavers in the area. The silk weaving industry of Shoreditch and Bethnal Green had all but died out by the 1880s.

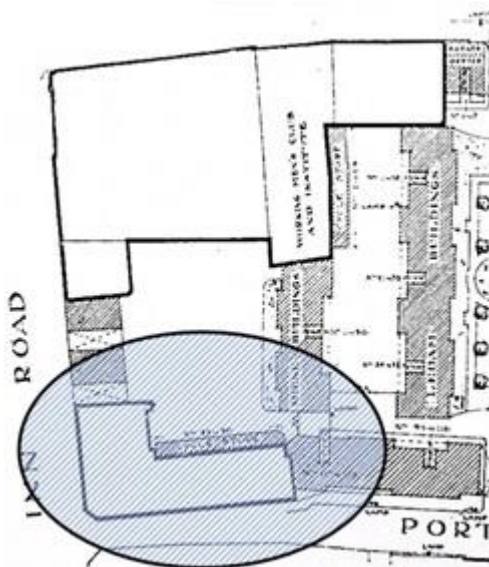


Fig. 26: Area of WW2 bomb damage on the Bourne Estate

The southwest corner of the Bourne Estate was badly damaged by bombing in WW2 to the extent covered by the shaded area in Fig. 26 to the left. Little evidence can be seen of the repairs to Shene Buildings but the front of the left-hand end of Redman Buildings is clearly newer than the rest of the building although an effort has been made to match the style.

The costs in the table below show the price per person to be a very high £181, which is a little surprising as the Council purchased the site as a vacant one. However, the site returned a healthy profit in 1913-14 showing that the scheme was looking to be economical.

	Outgoings	Income	
Net cost of site purchased from brewery	£196,436		
Cost of constructing all buildings	£141,468		
NET COST			£337,904
Cost per person (based on 1,864 persons)			£181pp
Balance of accounts, 1913-1914, Bourne Estate	£11,840	£13,220	£1,380 (10.4%)

Table 2: Costs for constructing the Bourne Estate

Footnotes

ⁱ Housing of the Working Classes 1855-1912; LCC, 1913; p148

ⁱⁱ Housing of the Working Classes 1855-1912; p86

ⁱⁱⁱ Housing of the Working Classes 1855-1912; p88