

Housing the Workers

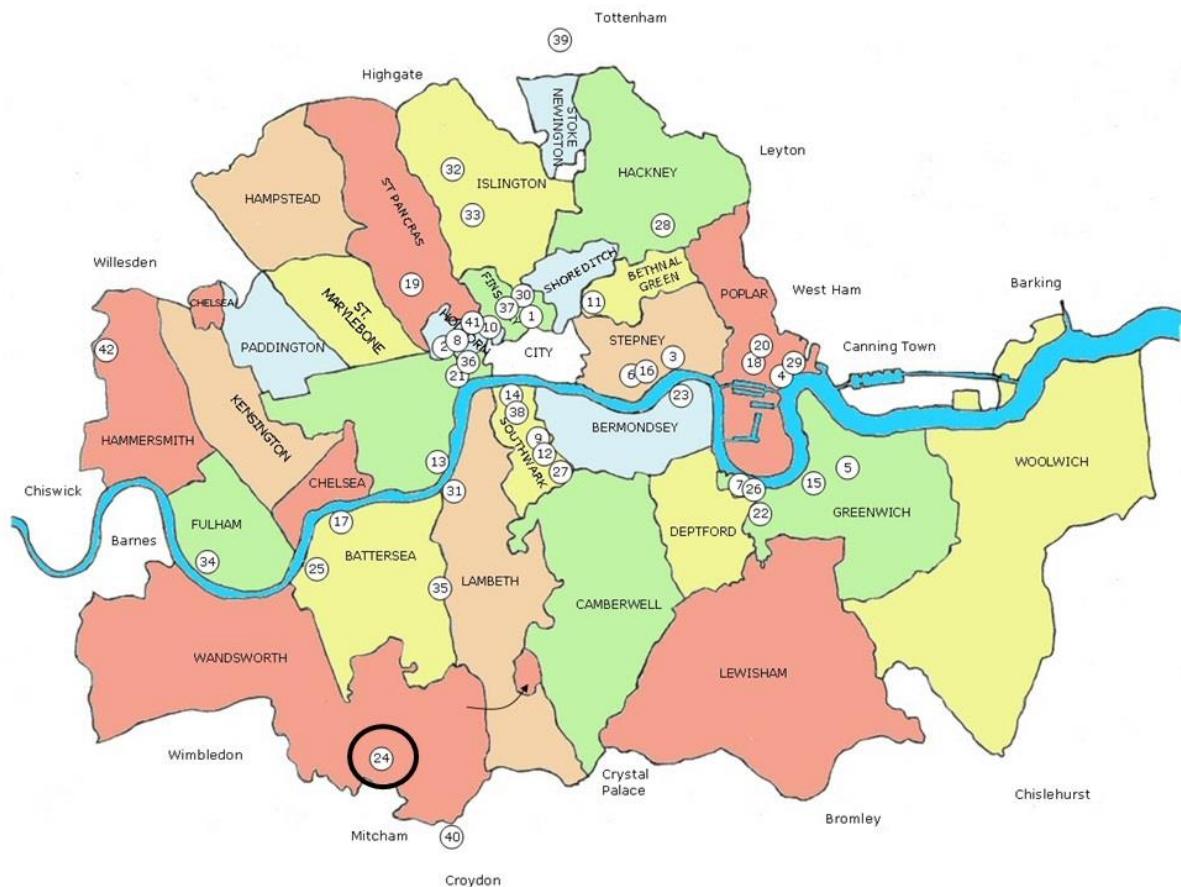
Early London County Council Housing

1889-1914

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Part 3 – the schemes in detail

24 – Totterdown Fields Estate



Totterdown Fields Garden Estate, Tooting

Constructed between 1903 and 1911

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

We now come to the first of the many very successful garden estates built by the Council. It had long been a desire of the Council to provide every working man with the opportunity to rent a cottage with a garden. The economics of such a scheme in the inner London area did not make this possible, but the cheaper land on the outskirts of London, 'in the country', made a scheme like this economically viable.

The Council were planning a number of these schemes, and the others started before World War 1 were the White Hart Lane Estate in Tottenham, the Old Oak Estate in Hammersmith and the Norbury Estate near Croydon. These are all described later.

Totterdown Fields enabled the Council to provide quality housing with spacious rooms and good sized gardens to those who were willing to commute the relatively short distance to their place of work. Tooting did not have much industry although the industrialised Wandle Valley was not far away. The expectations were that many of the tenants would be amongst the higher echelon of the working class such as artisans, skilled labourers and junior clerical workers. These people would have regular work and be able to afford the cheap trams to London. Note that the nearby Northern Line, including Tooting Bec and Tooting Broadway tube stations, were not built until 1926.

It is difficult to imagine Tooting as being 'the country' but the series of maps below shows just how much the area was undeveloped at the turn of the century, and how suburbia had swamped it by WW1.

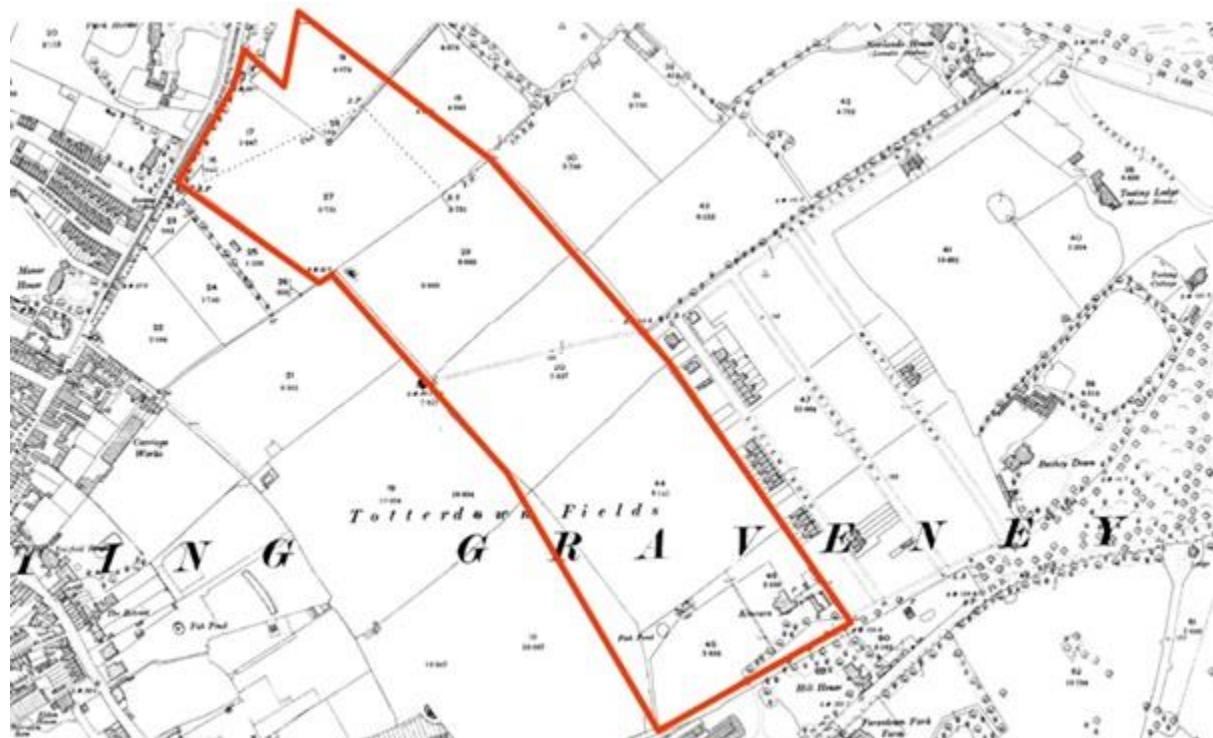


Fig. 1: Totterdown Fields from 1896 OS map

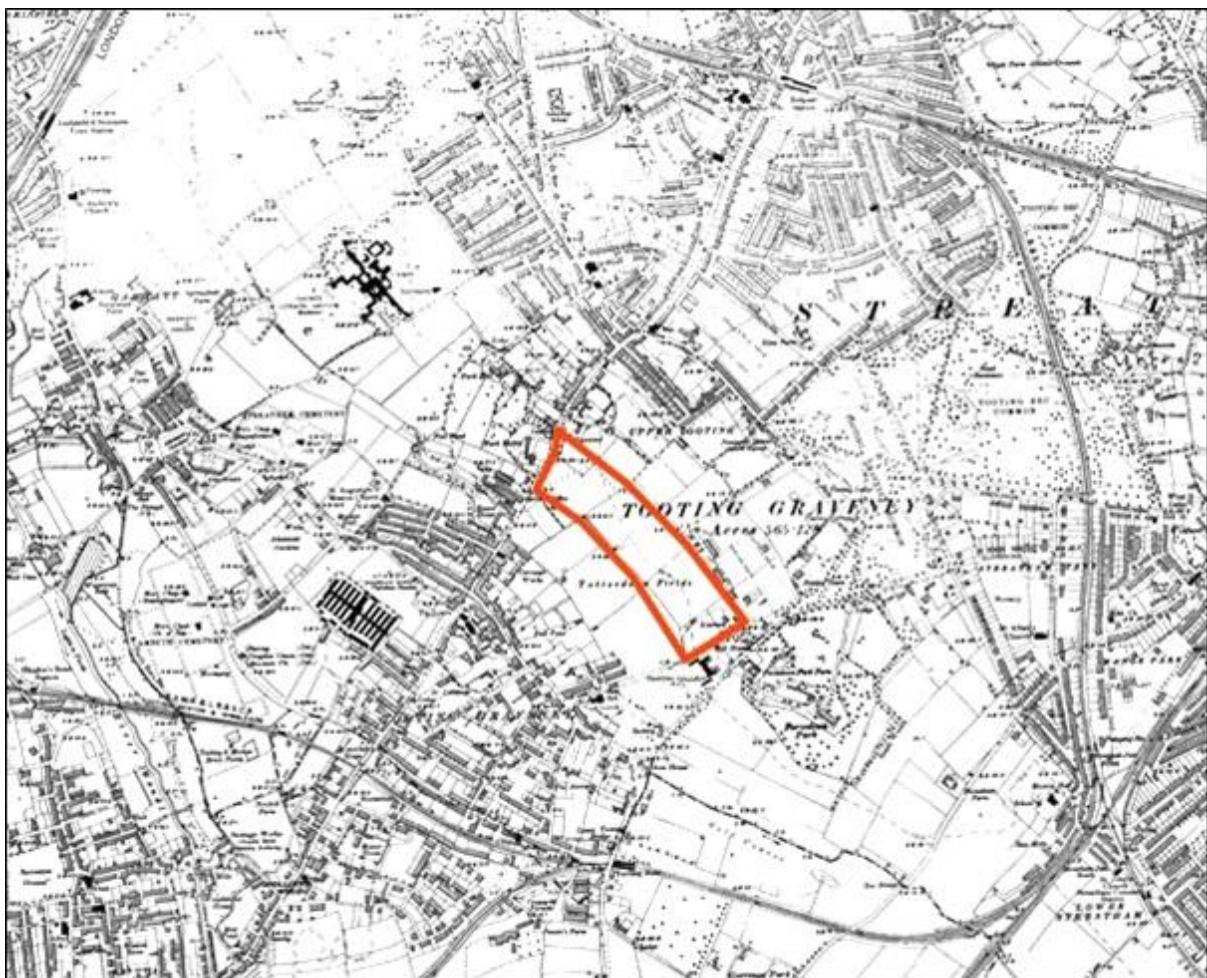


Fig. 2: Development area in 1898 showing the how little Suburbia had encroached.



Fig. 3: Totterdown Fields estate on the 1916 OS map showing a typical suburban sprawl.

It may also be no coincidence that Totting Bec Asylum, Middlesex County Asylum and Fountain Hospital (later to become St George's) are close by. All these establishments would have required a large number of good reliable staff.

A closer view of the site, as developed, shows that it is little different from many of the privately-built houses in the surrounding suburbs. The plots or gardens do not look any larger. So why would anyone rent one of these houses instead of a nearby suburban house? The answer lies in the quality of the housing.

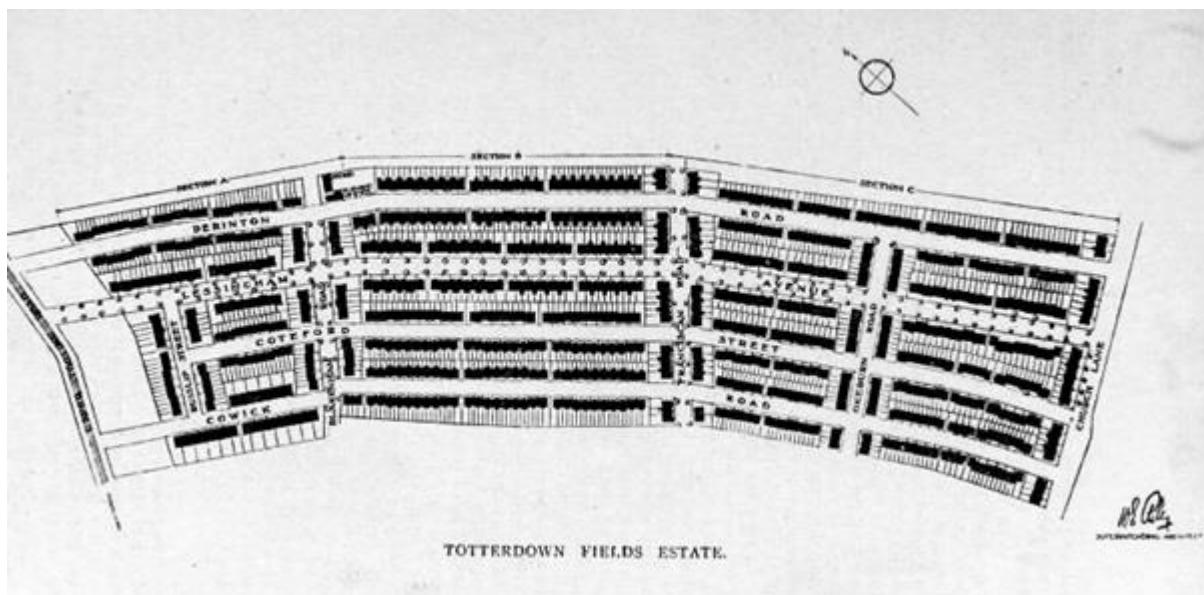


Fig. 4: Totterdown Fields Estate plan¹

Starting with the site, a number of undisclosed problems were encountered with the negotiations of the purchase of the $38\frac{3}{4}$ acre site and these were not overcome until 1900. The most likely problem was competition from local developers who were also trying to build in the area and the land owners were probably trying to extract the maximum price per acre. The Council paid £1,150 per acre, making the whole purchase £44,238 – a considerable sum for country land.

The construction of the estate was undertaken in three phases. The western section (the left hand wing in Fig. 4 above) was developed first with 260 cottages built between June and December 1903 (twelve more cottages were added in 1906). The centre section was completed in 1906 and consisted of 429 cottages. On the eastern section initially 90 cottages were built in 1909 but a plan to build 410, half of which were to be 5-roomed, was altered to consist of 438 three and four roomed cottages. Enquiries had shown that there was little demand for the larger cottages but much more demand for the smaller ones. This final phase was built between 1909 and 1911. This gives a total of 1,229 cottages designed to accommodate a maximum of 8,788 persons, plus 4 shops. The roads were wide and planted with trees to create a pleasant living environment. The roads are all named after English estates of the Abbey of Bec.

The bricks for the estate were provided by the Council from their brickworks on the site of the delayed Norbury Estate. Although that scheme had been delayed, the on-site brickworks had already produced 11 million bricks and 2.3 million were used on the Totterdown Estate. See the section for the Norbury Estate for more information on the brickworks.

The plans shown below give an insight into the size of the cottages – in many cases much more spacious than block dwellings in inner areas.

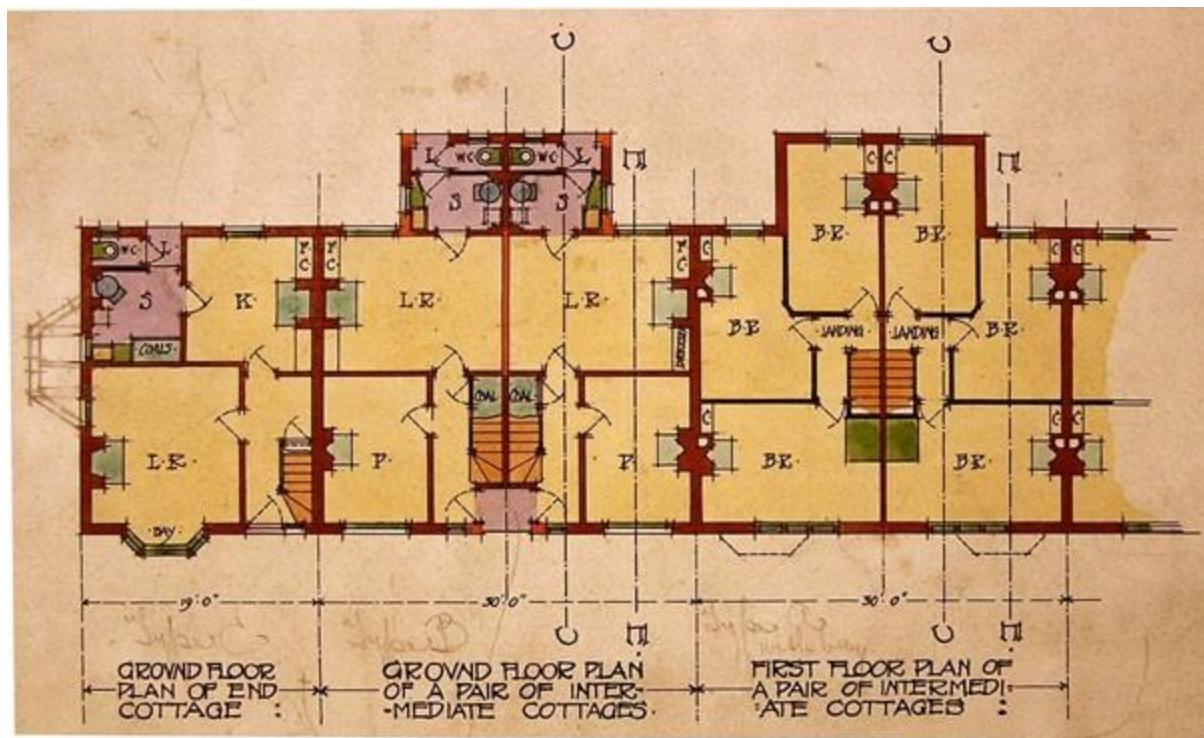


Fig. 5: Totterdown Fields. First Class cottage plan - ground and first plan combined into one plan.
(LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/0050)

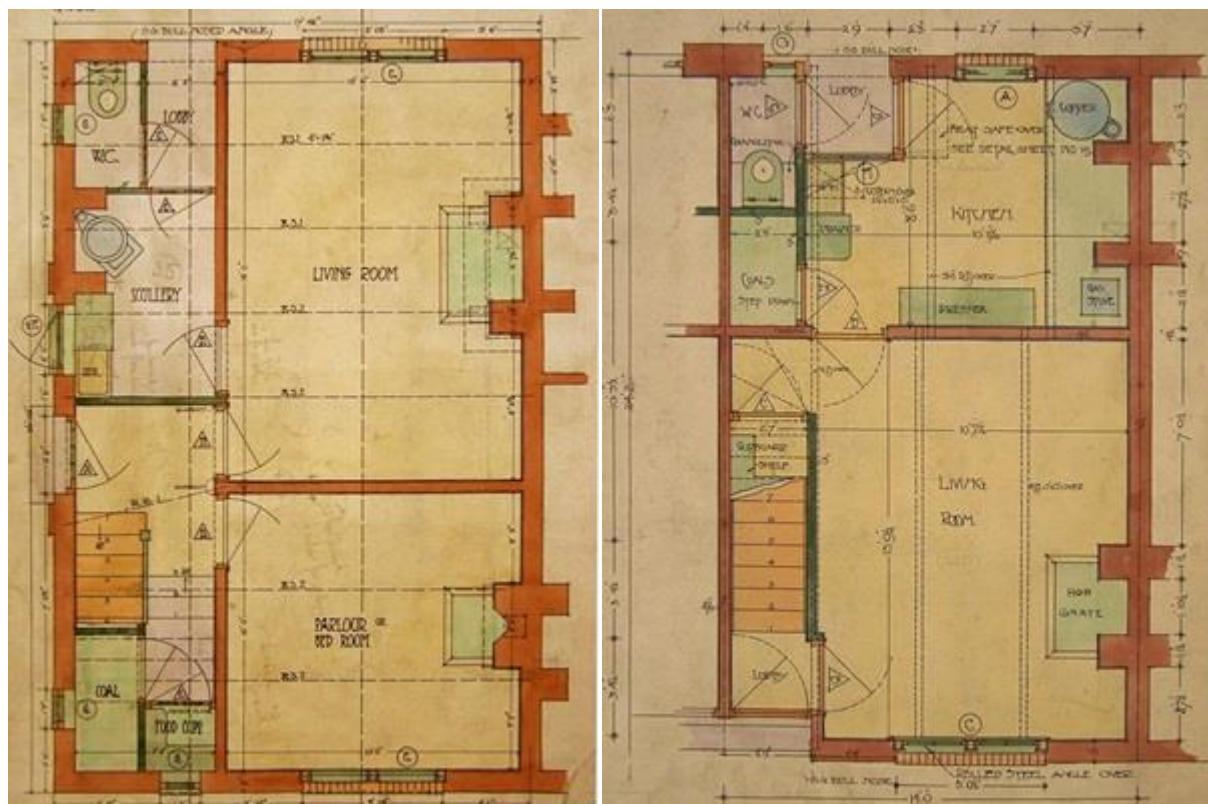


Fig. 6: First Class cottage ground floor plan
(LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/0050)

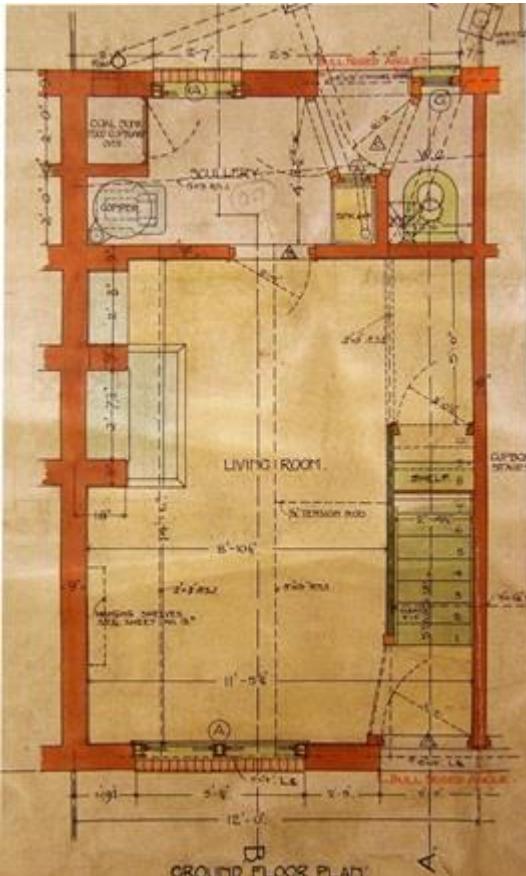


Fig. 8: Third Class cottage ground floor plan
(LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/0050)

Fig. 7: Second Class cottage ground floor plan (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/0050)

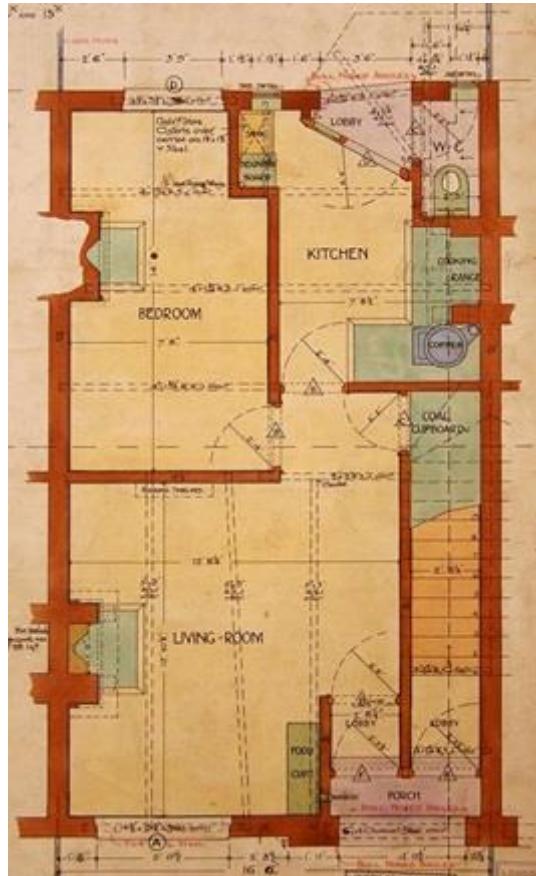


Fig. 9: Fourth Class cottage plan
(LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/0050)



Fig. 10: Lessingham Ave 1907
(LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0880)



Fig. 11: Lessingham Ave, 2009



Fig. 12: Blakenham Road 1907
(LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0880)



Fig. 13: Cowick Road 1910
(LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0880)

The estate was inaugurated on the 14th May 1903 by the Prince and Princess of Wales (the future George V and Princess Mary). The photographs below make interesting viewing. The sheer quality of the housing is very apparent.



Fig. 14: The royal party visit a house on the corner of Ruislip St and Lessingham Ave. Note the two small sailors. The one on the left became Edward VIII and the one on the right, George VI. (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0880)



Fig. 15: The royal party leave after viewing a house in Ruislip St.
(LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0880)

The opening of the estate was not Their Highness's only duty. The new LCC tramway from Westminster Bridge to Tooting was also inaugurated on that day. There was a large civil reception for 2,500 people in the grounds of St Thomas' Hospital in Lambeth and the Royal Family travelled to and from Tooting on the top deck of a tram. The Times two days later reported on the day's proceedings and how the princes seemed very excited with the journey by tramⁱⁱ.



Fig. 16: The opening ceremony view, 2009

The costs of the development were, not surprisingly, substantial but the cost per person was very reasonable and provided good value to the Council. The houses were showing a healthy profit in 1913-14.

	Outgoings	Income	
Purchase of land	£44,238		
Cost of works	£35,295		
Cost of buildings (incl. admin buildings and shops)	£318,798		
NET COST			£398,331
Cost per person (based on 8,788 persons)			£45pp
Balance of accounts, 1913-1914	£26,811	£29,118	£2,307 (7.9%)

Table 1: Totterdown Fields scheme costs

The 1911 census would be expected to indicate houses occupied by families headed by those who could afford the cost and time to commute to London using the new tram line (the nearby London Underground line was not built until 1926). The local asylum and hospitals might also be expected to provide employment. The census returns do indicate the most of the heads of the households are in occupations in London with few in unskilled labouring jobs. The majority of occupations are artisan, skilled labourer, clerical, and service industry (cab driver, hotel industry, etc.). Being the first garden estate away from central London, where the families came from is an important indicator of the success in attracting families to the suburbs. The census indicates 28% were from south of London within a 6 mile radius of the estate and 25% from north of the Thames. It is not surprising to find that 31% of the heads of household are not from the southeast of England and therefore had to family ties to any particular area of London. There was a tram depot to the north at Streatham and a high 6% of heads of household work for the LCC Tramways Company, presumably based at the depot a little northwest of the estate in Marius Rd, Upper Tooting. There are few unusual occupations but one 5-roomed house in Lessingham Avenue is occupied by a 53 year-old widow whose occupation is recorded at "Foster Mother (Licensed LCC)", and her 22 year-old daughter. With them are 6 children between 1 and 8 years old as boarders. Also with them are two borders. There are less Policeman than would be expected, but that could be as a result of Policemen at the time still being expected to live close to their base station. Similarly, there are few people working in government offices and most that can be identified are ex-military who are working as messengers or the like. There are few heads of household who are employed locally in Tooting asylum, local hospitals, or the local borough council. One small surprise is that in Lessingham Avenue there are 12 households headed by men serving in the Royal Navy or HM Coastguard. It is probably that most of these men would be stationed at The Admiralty or other London 'stone ships', but this group of men in the same road suggests that the Admiralty took up a one-off opportunity to take up rents. Occupancy of the housing in the estate is generally low at between 41% and 63% but the figures need to allow for the fact that the housing hadn't been completed in the southeast corner of the estate and that the housing is new and so family sizes had not had time to build up. There was little overcrowding but some of the 5-roomed houses were occupied by large families.

The estate today looks similar to when it was built apart from the maturity of the trees and the inevitable parked cars. It comes under the control of Wandsworth Borough Council. The whole estate was made a conservation area in 2008 to ensure sympathetic modernisation. The rules

of the conservation area include controlling replacement window styles, wall coatings, consistency of boundaries (encouraging hedging) and the banning of satellite dishes visible from the road. The preservation order also provides for assistance in reinstating buildings back to their original state, including removing brick paint. These rules are now common across most of the original LCC housing estates in London.

Footnotes

ⁱ LCC; Housing of the Working Classes in London; LCC; 1913; p71
ⁱⁱ The Times, 16th May 1903.