

Housing the Workers

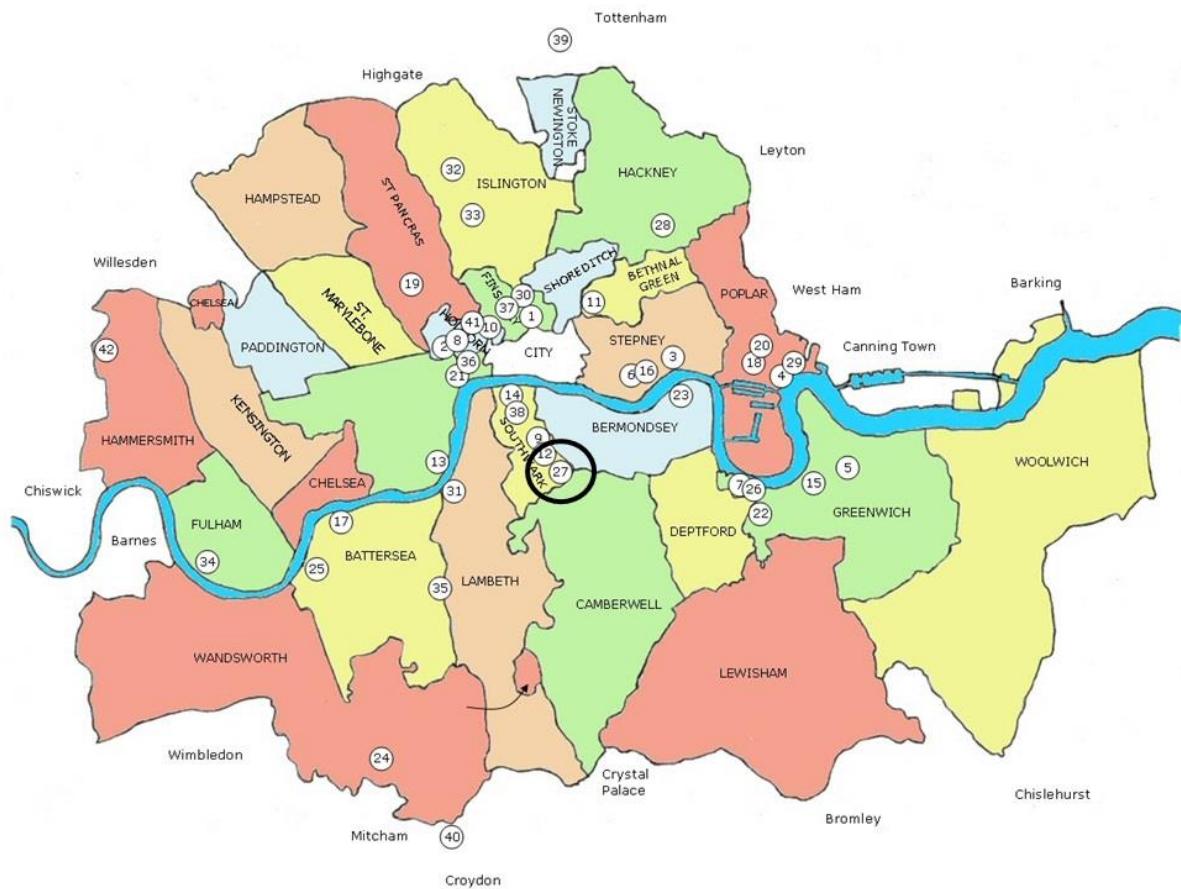
Early London County Council Housing

1889-1914

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Part 3 – the schemes in detail

27 – Long Lane & Tabard St, Southwark



Long Lane & Tabard Street Scheme, Southwark (1st development)

Barnaby Buildings, Long Lane, 1904

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

This building was the first of a large slum clearance and working class housing scheme for the Long Lane area of Southwark. Long Lane was always a notorious slum area and it is surprising the Council did not try and address the problem earlier. This part of Southwark was an old part of London with many bad slums. Most of the slums to the west of Borough High Street had been cleared by the turn of the century, but Long Lane was next and clearances began in the early 1900s. New buildings were slow to be built and much of the re-development did not take place until the 1920s.

The cost of the scheme was probably the reason the re-development took so long. The whole area was riddled with slums and unscrupulous landlords who were keen to extract the most value from their land. The Booth map of the area in Fig. 1 shows the whole Long Lane area, with the bad housing in dark blue or black.

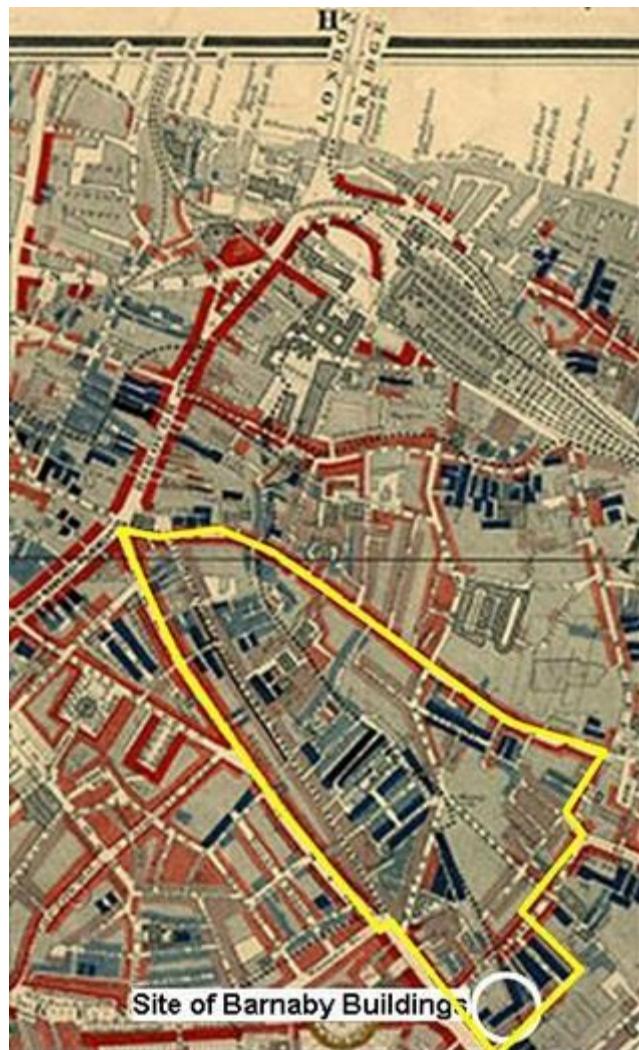


Fig. 1: Long Lane re-development area from Booth Poverty Map of 1899

The photo in Fig. 2 below is of Little Britain, an alley in the NE corner of the Tabard Street area. This is just an example of the unhealthy housing to be found in the area.



Fig. 2: Little Britain, off Long Lane, Bermondsey, date unknown (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0737)

Fig. 3 is an even more vivid illustration of the squalid housing that existed in the area. The map is from an MBW scheme, started in 1883, to clear a slum at the top of Tabard Street and just south of St George the Martyr church. The area was cleared in 1887 and part of the site sold to a private developer, a Mr Goodwin, to erect working class housing for 280 persons. The net cost of the scheme was £8,229 which equates to just under £29 per person – a very good return for the Council at the time. Reading the medical report leaves nothing to the imagination:

“The houses were stated by Dr Iliff to be insanitary in the highest degree. They were entered through narrow passages and had no through ventilation. The areas in front of the houses also were confined by high walls, depriving the inmates of light and air. In one of the four courts the houses had a small back yard, but the fronts were close to and faced a high wall. The courts were the receptacles of all kinds of filth. As a rule, the tenements were old, dilapidated, patched and out of repair.”ⁱ

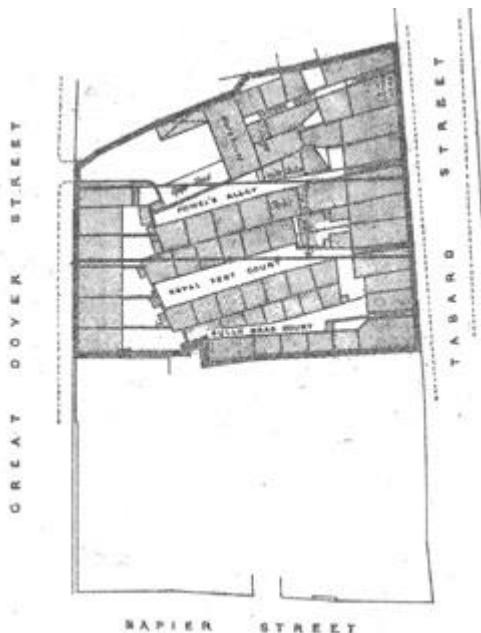


Fig. 3: 1883 Tabard Street clearance areaⁱⁱ

Returning to the Barnaby Buildings development, the area in question was at the opposite end of Tabard Street from that in Fig. 3. The OS maps below show the area before clearance and after construction.

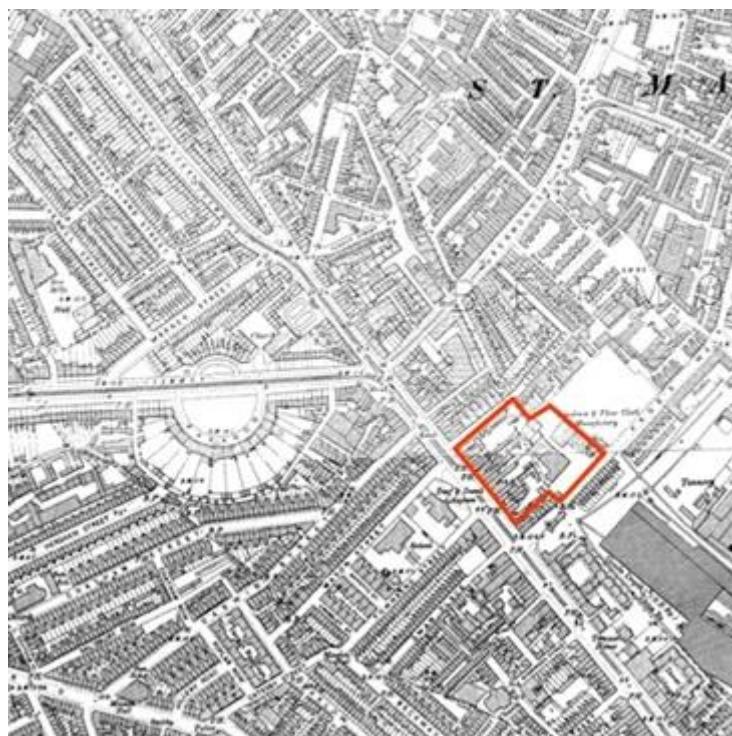


Fig. 4: Barnaby Buildings area before clearance, from 1896 OS Map

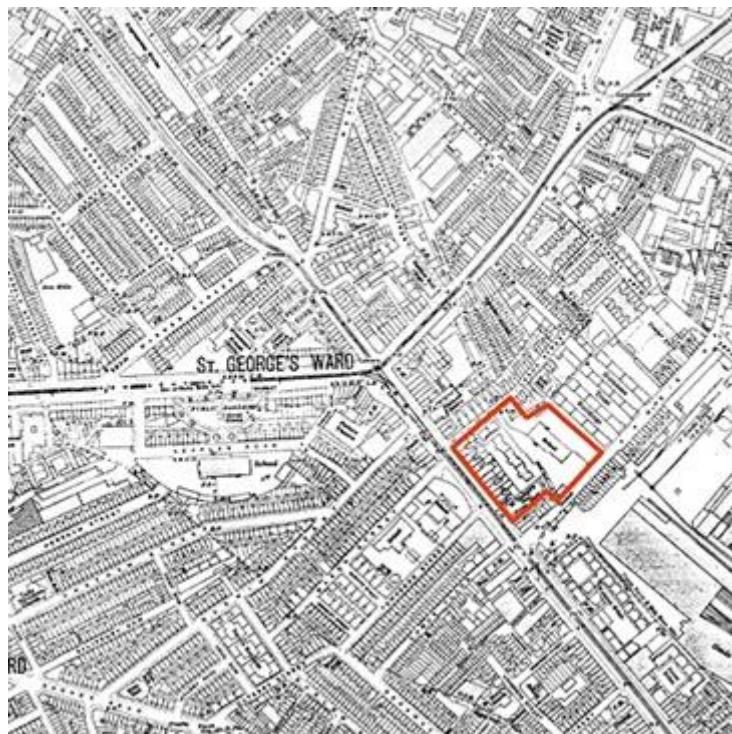


Fig. 5: Barnaby Buildings area after construction, from 1916 OS Map

Purely as an observation, the maps also show a considerable difference to the west of the site in question. On the 1896 map there is a Georgian development called “*The Paragon*”, with Union Crescent to the north of it. The former was built by Michael Searles in 1805 for the Rolls family. It would normally be expected that such a prestigious development would last a long time but it was demolished in 1898 for the Paragon School to be built. The Union Crescent was pulled down in 1903 to build the St Saviour’s and St Olave’s Grammar School for Girls. The relatively short life of the buildings may be explained by the less-than-salubrious area they were built in.

The erection of the Barnaby Buildings was not straightforward as the Secretary of State rejected the first plans for reasons that are unrecorded, but presumably on the grounds of quality or size. The resulting buildings, opened in June 1904 and built by Messrs W. Smith and Sons, are of slightly different style than normally seen in Council designs of the time. A notable improvement over recent designs was the thickness of some of the walls, although it is disappointing to note that there are still worryingly thin walls between some tenements as illustrated in Fig. 6 below. The plan lists the average room sizes as 148.9 and 99.5 sq. ft. for living and bedrooms respectively, just a few square foot above the minimum.

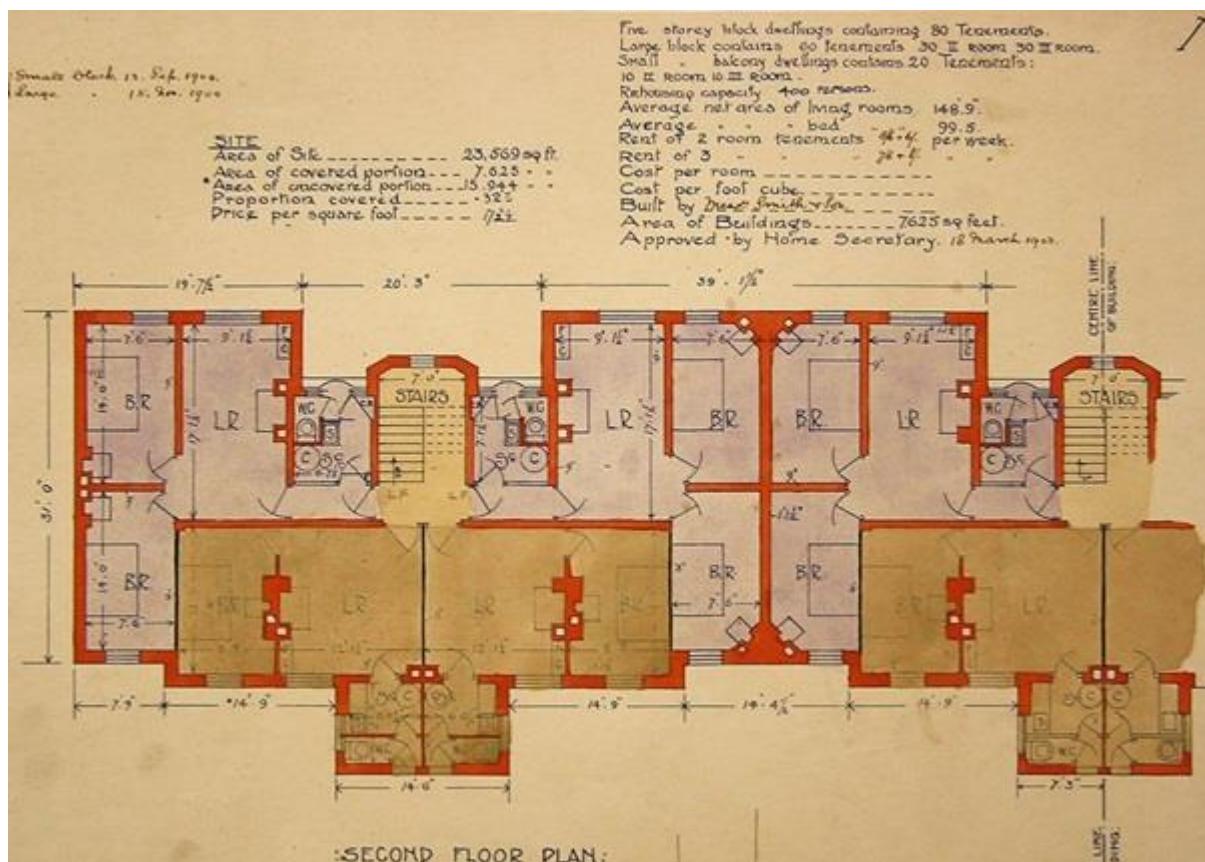


Fig. 6: Barnaby Buildings (large block) floor plan (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/057)

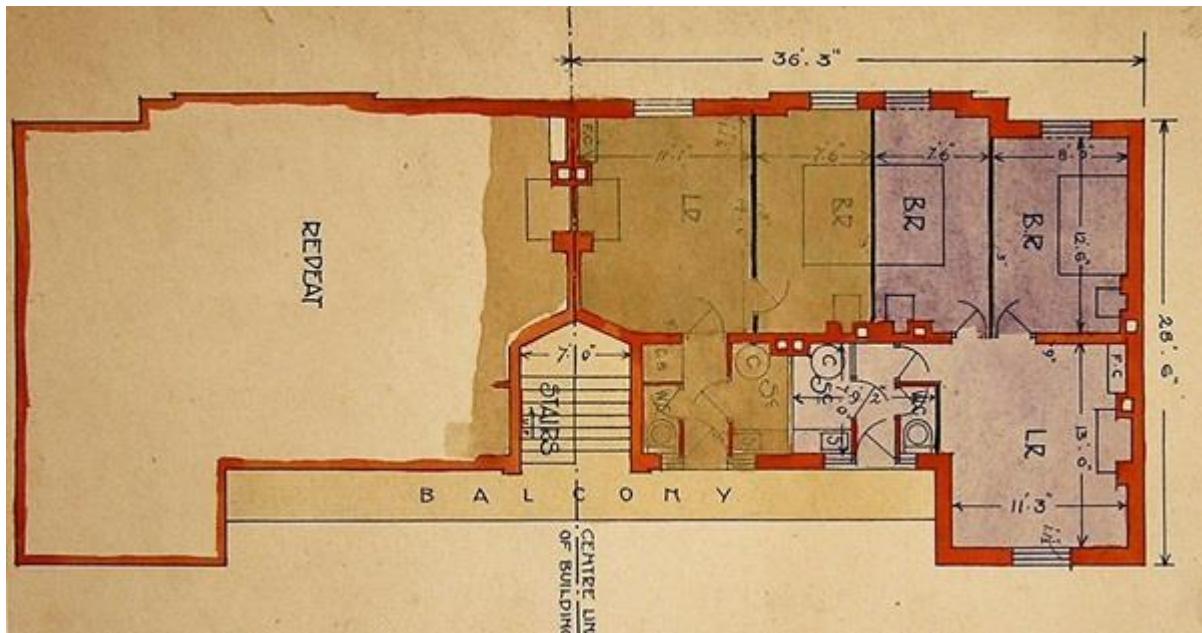


Fig. 7: Barnaby Buildings (small block) floor plan (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/057)

The accommodation, as finished, comprised of 40 tenements of two rooms and 40 of three rooms. The cost of the buildings cannot be extrapolated from the Council balance sheets as the area was part of the Tabard Street, Grotto Place and Crosby Row scheme in Southwark; a massive 17 acres whose clearance alone was estimated to eventually cost £389,900. The majority of the replacement buildings did not open until after 1914. Barnaby Buildings were just about breaking even in 1913-14 with a small loss of 0.9% against income.

The resulting buildings showed some architectural style with mansard roof, dormer windows and extended bays on the front face. However, the rear of the building is typically bland with open walkways; the preferred method of access to the tenements.



Fig. 8: Barnaby Buildings (small block) Aug 1905
(LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0753)



Fig. 9: Rear of small block of Barnaby Buildings taken in the 1960s (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0753)

The 1911 census returns indicate that these buildings were serving the local population well. The actual occupancy is 80% as against a maximum of 400 occupants. Only 4 of the 80

tenancies are unoccupied but 14 are overcrowded, and to a surprising extent in some cases. One 3-roomed tenancy has 9 occupants and another 8, whilst two 2-roomed tenancies have 7 occupants and another has 6. All the other 9 overcrowded tenancies have just one more tenant than permissible. All the overcrowded tenancies have young children living there. Just over 50% of the heads of household claim to be born in parishes in Southwark or adjoining boroughs. Most of these heads of household are in manual trades or occupations that you would expect to see in the area. All the above indicates buildings that were popular are in demand.

The buildings were badly damaged in WW2 bombing but deemed by the council to be worth repairing, which backs up the analysis of the 1911 census as to their popularity. They have since been demolished and replaced by blocks of flats of comparable size.

Footnote

ⁱ C. J. Stewart; The Housing Question in London; The London County Council; 1900; pp162-164
ⁱⁱ The Housing Question in London; LCC; pp162