

Housing the Workers

Early London County Council Housing

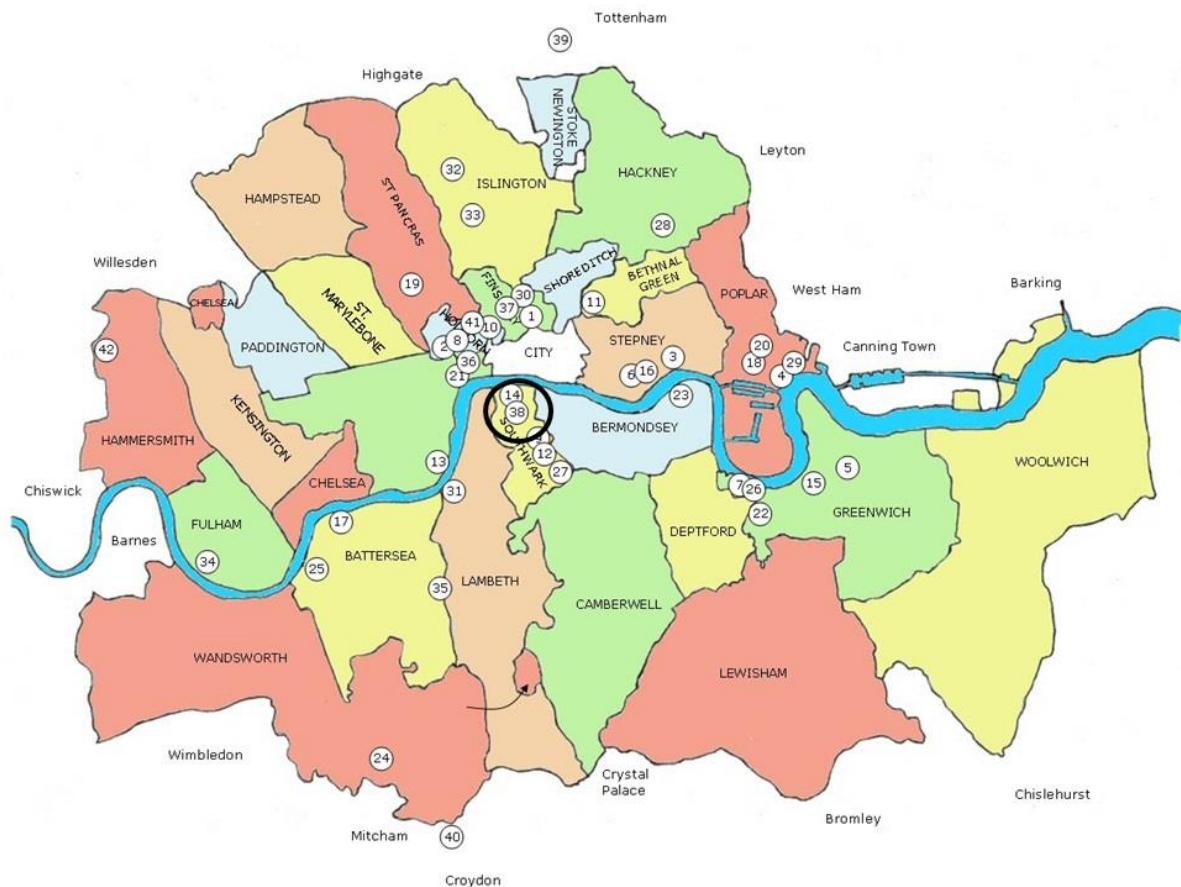
1889-1914

Martin Stilwell

August 2015

Part 3 – the schemes in detail

**38 – Webber Row, Kings Bench and Wellington Place,
Lambeth**



Webber Row, Kings Bench and Wellington Place clearance schemes, Southwark

Mawdley, Dauncey, Algar, Delarch and Overy Buildings, 1906
Built under Part I of the 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act

This LCC development was part of a larger scheme proposed in 1899 by the local medical officer of health, Dr F.J. Waldo. The condition of Webber Row is described as “...small and dilapidated and insanitary houses exist close to an open space upon which small, dark and tumbledown almshouses abut”ⁱ. The death-rate for Webber Row was calculated at 30.6 per 1000, compared with 18.4 in London and 24.9 in St-George-the-Martyr. The under-5 death rate was far more alarming at 148.4 per 1000, as against 61.7 and 87.6 for London and the parish respectively. Nearby slum areas called Wellington Place and Kings Bench Walk were included in the scheme and had similar, although not so severe, death rates. The Kings Bench Walk clearance scheme resulted in Cobham Buildings (described earlier).



Fig. 1: Webber Row site before developmentⁱⁱ

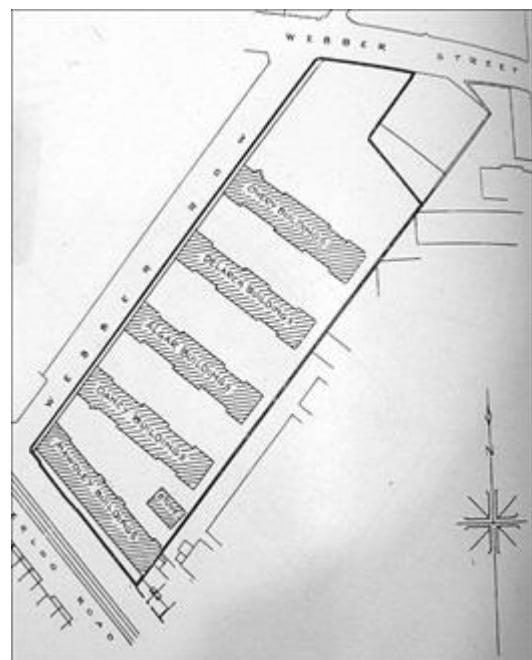


Fig. 2: Webber Row as developed. Note incorrect spelling of Dauncey Bldgsⁱⁱⁱ



Fig. 3: Kings Bench Walk and Wellington Place clearance areas (outlined in black) ^{iv}

Fig. 3 above shows the substantial Kings Bench Walk and Wellington Place slum clearance boundaries (in black). Some clearance had already taken place resulting in the Gun and Green Street Buildings outlined in red (Ripley, Merrow, Clandon and Albury Buildings), constructed by the Council in 1897.

In all, 245 persons were to be displaced by the clearance of Webber Row, and 658 by the clearance of Wellington Place and Kings Bench Walk, making a total of 903 persons, all to be housed on the Webber Row site.

Designed by James Rogers Stark, the new buildings represent the pinnacle of LCC block development that was never surpassed after WW1 because of increasing labourer and materials costs put pressure on the architects to reduce the costs. The Webber Row blocks include a number of features carried over by the LCC from earlier developments, including the external walkways that overlooked communal areas. The staircases are wide and well lit, leading to balconies faced with ornate iron railings. The blocks are arranged in pairs so that the balconied sides face each other and give views of the communal courtyard providing a secure area for children. They were named after people who were involved in the founding of St Mary Overy, the Priory of Southwark which became Southwark Cathedral in 1905: Mawdley, Dauncey, Algar, Delarch and Overy Buildings. Algar was Prior from 1131 to 1132, and William Pont de l'Arche and William Dauncey were Norman Knights who helped found the Priory. The only mystery concerns Mawdley. No connection with Southwark has been found for a Mawdley, Maudley or Mawdesley.

Each balcony provided access to five tenements which had been cleverly designed to use the maximum available space on each floor and this can be seen on the diagram below. The complete site provided 3 one-roomed, 93 two-roomed, 116 three-roomed, 4 four-roomed and 5 five-roomed tenements, totalling 220 tenements and 574 rooms. This gives a provision for 1,148 persons^v. The average rooms sizes, once again, fall a little short of the 160/110 sq. ft. minimum for living and bedrooms required for post-1897 Part I housing developments.

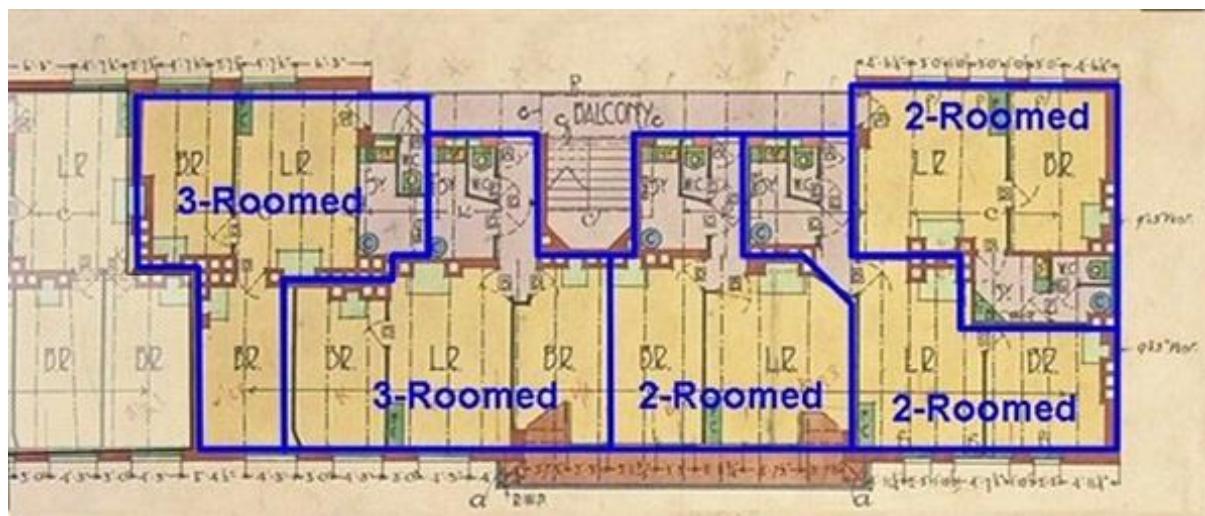


Fig. 4: The original plan of Webber Street with the individual tenements outlined
(LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03053)



Fig. 5: Mawdley Buildings facing Waterloo Rd., 1909
(LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0889)



Fig. 6: Webber Row blocks facing each other looking over the yard, 2007



Fig. 7: View down Webber Row showing the ends of the blocks, 2007



Fig. 8: Rear of the blocks facing each other across a grassed area, 2007

The net cost of the scheme to the LCC was £152,950 which includes Wellington Place and Kings Bench Walk clearances and road improvements^{vi}.

The costs are in Table 1 below.

	Outgoings	Income	
Net cost of all sites (Webber Row, Wellington Place and Kings Bench Walk), incl. receipts from sale of surplus land.	£66,739		
Construction of Webber Row buildings	£43,041		
NET COST			£109,780
Cost per person (based on 1148 persons)			£96pp
Balance of Accounts 1913-14	£3,974	£4,783	£809 (16.9%)

Table 1: Webber Row costs

These costs are quite high when compared with other schemes recently completed. Admittedly, the clearance scheme was for 3 sites in the vicinity, but the Council was able to sell much of the spare Wellington Place and Kings bench Walk land at commercial rates. Even with this, the cost is a not inconsiderable £96 per person. Compared with the recently opened Briscoe and Wessex Buildings, the Webber scheme did not seem a good return for the ratepayers, but the former were both built on sites that did not require slum clearance. However, the Council's 1913-14 Accounts show that the buildings are making a very good profit of 16.9% on income. This is backed up by the high occupancy extracted from the 1911 census returns.

The 1911 census would be expected to show a predominance of skilled workers in local industries of engineering, printing and railways. However, the returns show very few heads of household working for railway companies and few engineers (or labourers). As regards people working in the printing industry, that does follow the expectations and 12% of households are headed by someone working for printers or book binders. The rest of the tenements are headed by a wide variety of occupations that would be expected from dwellings near to the West End and The City. With hotels and theatres a short walk away in the West End it is not surprising to find 12% in those employment opportunities. The buildings showed a good 72% occupancy against maximum. Only 5 of the 220 tenements are unoccupied but 15 are overcrowded against allowable maximum. The building superintendent is living in a 3-roomed tenement with his

wife and 11 year old son, yet also has two male borders. Making this slight suspicious is that the 2-roomed tenement next to him is unoccupied. As for the demographics, 23% of heads are born locally with 32% from the rest of London. This is typical for blocks near to central London.

Footnotes

ⁱ C. J. Stewart; The Housing Question in London; The London County Council; 1900; pp227-228

ⁱⁱ The Housing Question in London; LCC; pp226

ⁱⁱⁱ Housing of the Working Classes 1855-1912; LCC; 1913; p48

^{iv} The Housing Question in London; LCC; pp226

^v Housing of the Working Classes 1855-1912; pp10-11

^{vi} The Housing Question in London; LCC; p228