

Housing the Workers

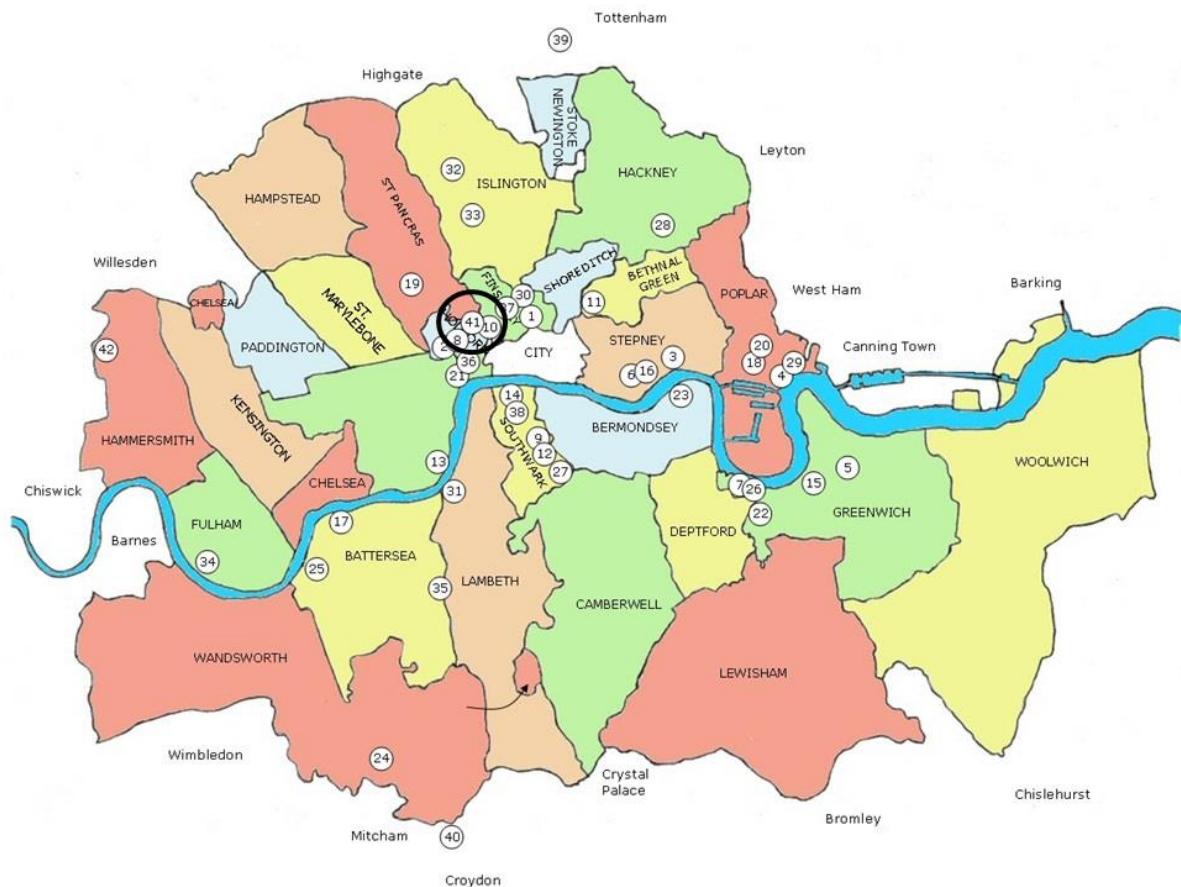
Early London County Council Housing

1889-1914

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Part 3 – the schemes in detail

41 – Aylesbury Place and Union Buildings, Clerkenwell, Phase 2



Aylesbury Place, Clerkenwell and Union Buildings, Holborn, clearance scheme

Union Buildings, 1907

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

Union Buildings was the last block development by the Council before WW1. The first phase of the re-housing resulted in Mallory Buildings in 1906. Union Buildings was a much larger development and was sized to re-house the numbers displaced in the original Union Buildings site.

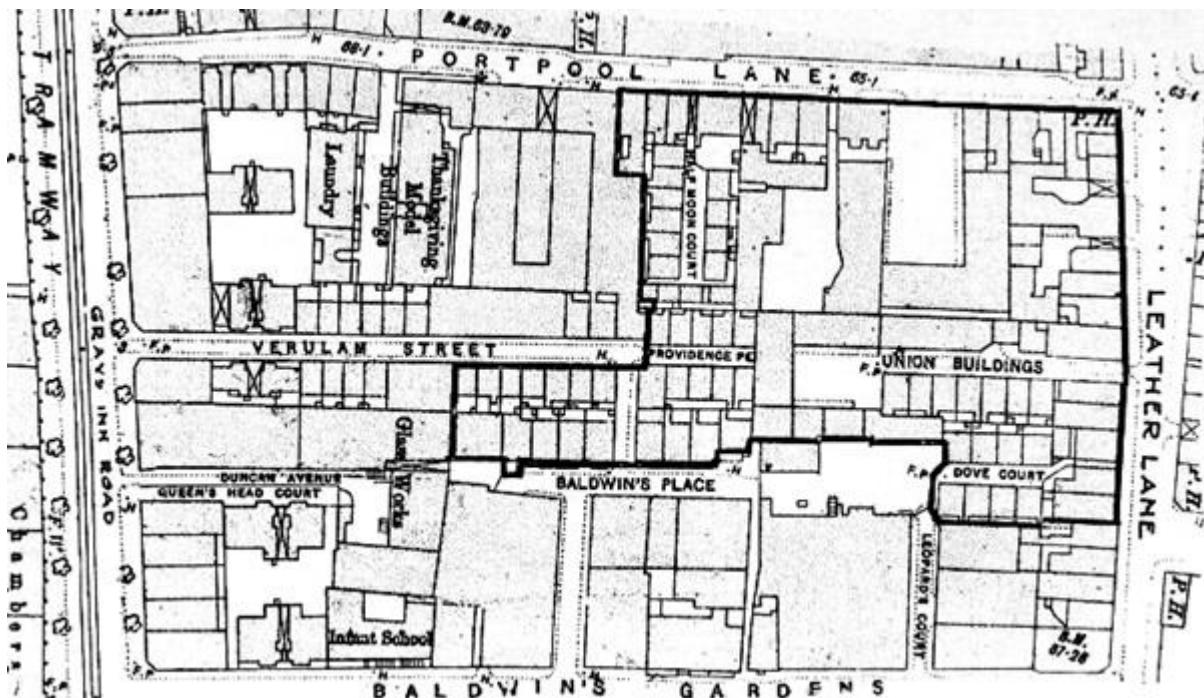


Fig. 1: The Union Buildings clearance siteⁱ

The Council had already built the large Bourne Estate (3,902 persons) on the north side of Portpool Lane. This Union Buildings development on the south side could be considered a final extension of the clearance scheme in this part of London.

The old buildings in the Union Street area were demolished in 1905-6 and the new buildings erected for 1,260 persons in 1907-8. The new blocks were named Nigel, Laney, Kirkeby and Buckridge Buildings, after Bishops of Ely. Their design matched closely that of the Bourne Estate on the north side of Portpool Lane. The re-housing requirement for the whole scheme was 1,414 persons and Mallory buildings contributed accommodation for 164 persons. The two developments provided just 10 more places than legally required. All remaining land after Mallory and Union Buildings had been constructed was disposed of at commercial rates.

Union Buildings consisted of 15 one-roomed tenements, 69 two-roomed, 96 three-roomed, 46 four-roomed and 1 five-roomed. On the ground floor were 15 shops and there were 14 storage sheds at the back. The average living room size was 150 sq. ft. and the average bedroom size was 101 sq. ft. Both these figures are below the minimum recommended sizes for post-1897 Part I housing, and the tenements could not be considered roomy by any measure.

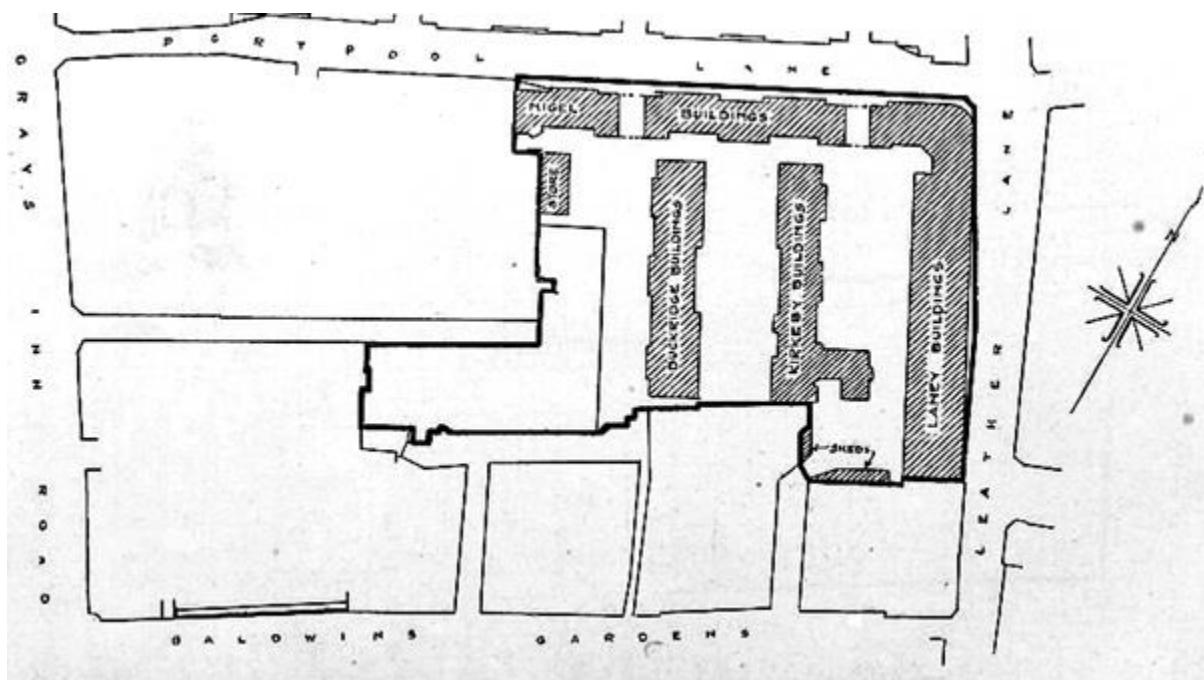


Fig. 2: The Union Buildings as developedⁱⁱ

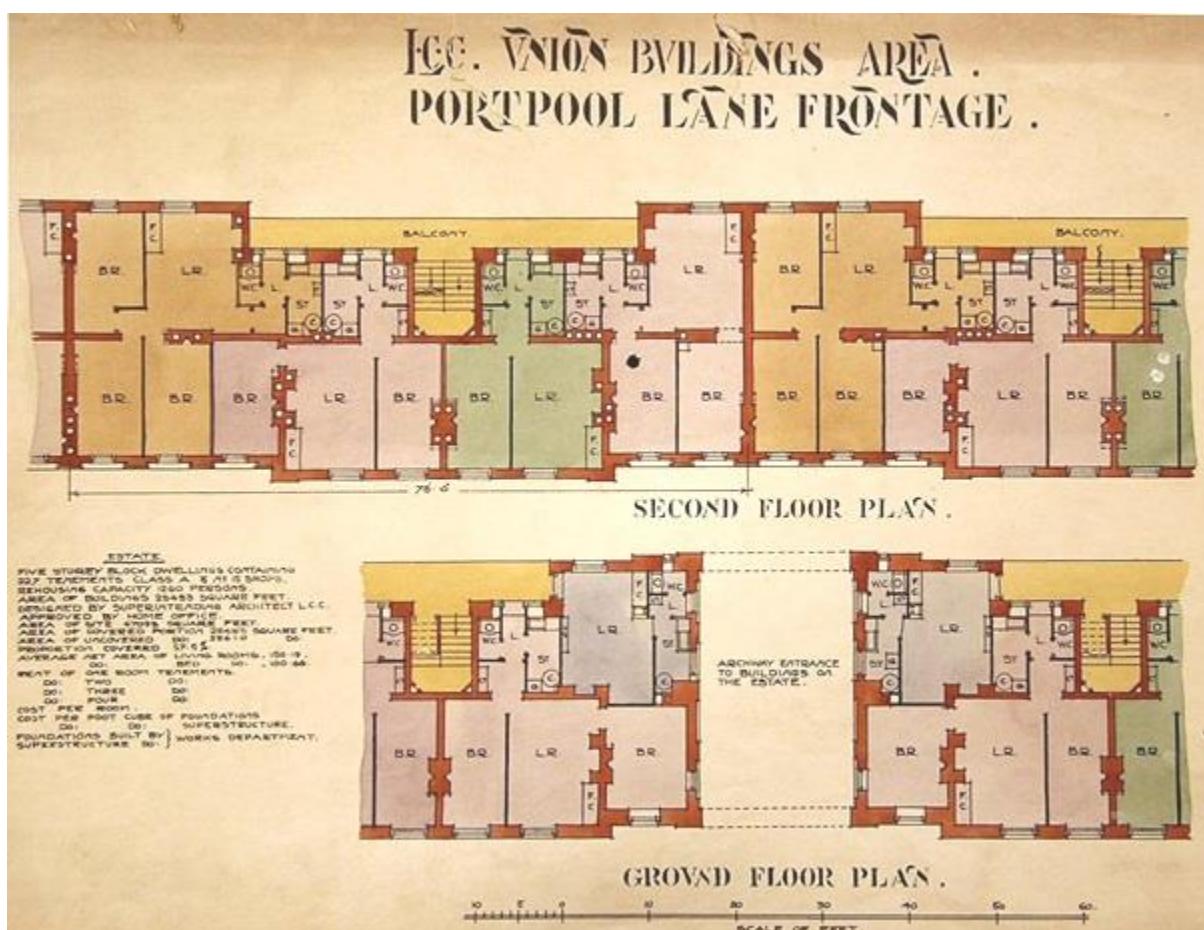


Fig. 3: Union Buildings. Compare to earlier Bourne Buildings in Fig. 4 below
(LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/057)

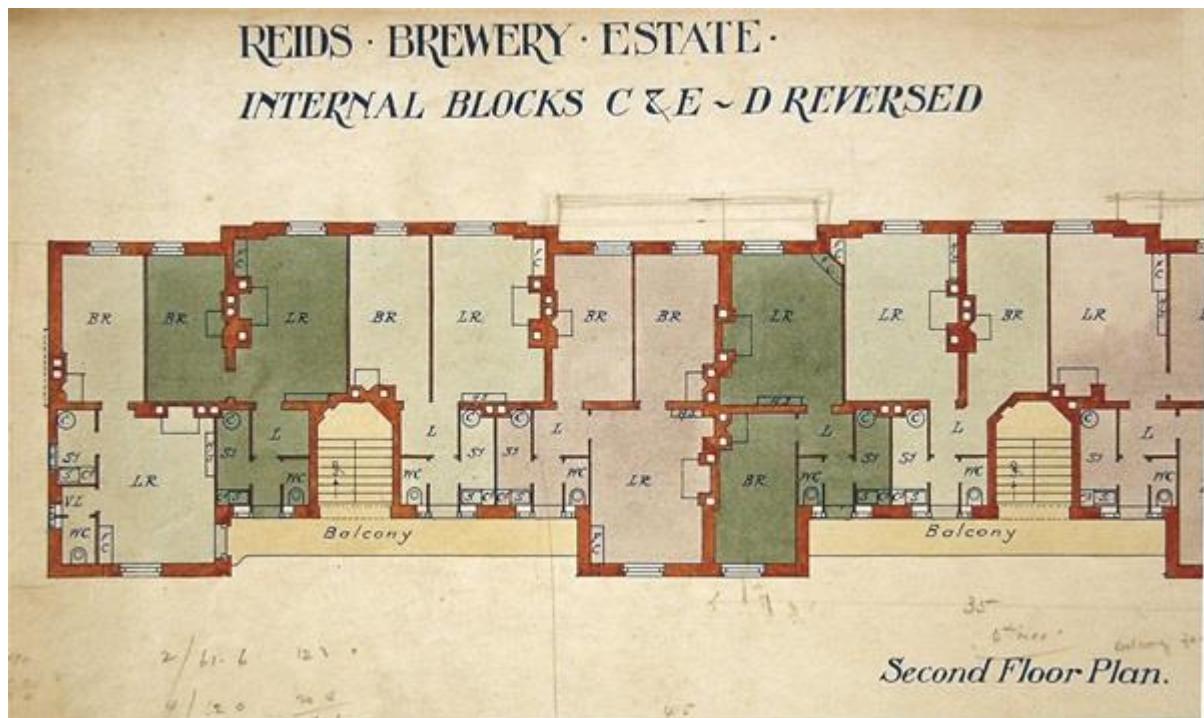


Fig. 4: A plan of one of the nearby Bourne Street buildings (1903-5) showing an almost identical layout to the later Union Buildings (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/059)



Fig. 5: Laney Buildings (right), 1909 (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0769)

The large arched windows on the ground floor of Laney Buildings in Fig. 5 above are the rear of the shops shown in Fig. 8.



Fig. 6: Kirkeby Buildings (right) 1909
(LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0769)



Fig. 7: Entrance under Nigel Buildings. Kirkeby Buildings on the right, 1909.
(LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0769)



Fig. 8: Laney Buildings along Leather lane, 1909. (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0769)

The costs of the whole Aylesbury Place and Union Buildings Clearance Scheme were as followsⁱⁱⁱ.

	Outgoings	Income	
Net cost to purchase all three areas, incl. receipts for sale of surplus land	£155,174		
Cost of new buildings	£82,756		
NET COST			£237,930
Cost per person (based on 1260 persons)			£189pp
Balance of Accounts 1913-14	£5,667	£5,908	£247 (4.1%)

Table 1: Union Buildings scheme costs

It is not clear from the figures extracted from the 1913 memo whether they include an estimate of proceeds from the sale of all the surplus land, which had not been completed even by then. If it does include the estimate of the value of the land (as the wording in the memo suggests) then £189 per person is the second most expensive block development carried out by the Council before WW1. The 1913-14 accounts show a marginal profit of 4.1%.

The 1911 census should show a similar pattern to the earlier and adjacent Bourne estate with many tenants being local people and working in local trades or businesses and with a good level of tenancy. Of the 1260 tenancies just 8 are unoccupied, which is a very low level and indicates the buildings are meeting the housing needs of those working locally. Overcrowding is generally under control and the occupancies of each building varies between 64% and 73% of theoretical maximum. The proportion of those born in and around the Holborn and Clerkenwell districts is very low at just 5%, and the proportion of those born in London is still a low 16%. The occupations are very much of the artisan and clerical types. There are few of the more unusual occupations indicating a set of buildings providing accommodation for the typical worker of the time and area.



Fig. 9: Buckridge House front, 2009



Fig. 10: Buckridge House rear, 2009



Fig. 11: Laney House, 2009. Windows at rear of shops bricked in



Fig. 12: Kirkeby (left) and Nigel Houses, 2009

The estate survived the WW2 bombing although all the buildings to the west of the estate in Fig. 2 above were badly damaged.

Footnotes

ⁱ Housing of the Working Classes 1855-1912; LCC; 1913; p51

ⁱⁱ Housing of the Working Classes 1855-1912; p52

ⁱⁱⁱ Housing of the Working Classes 1855-1912; p148