

Housing the Workers

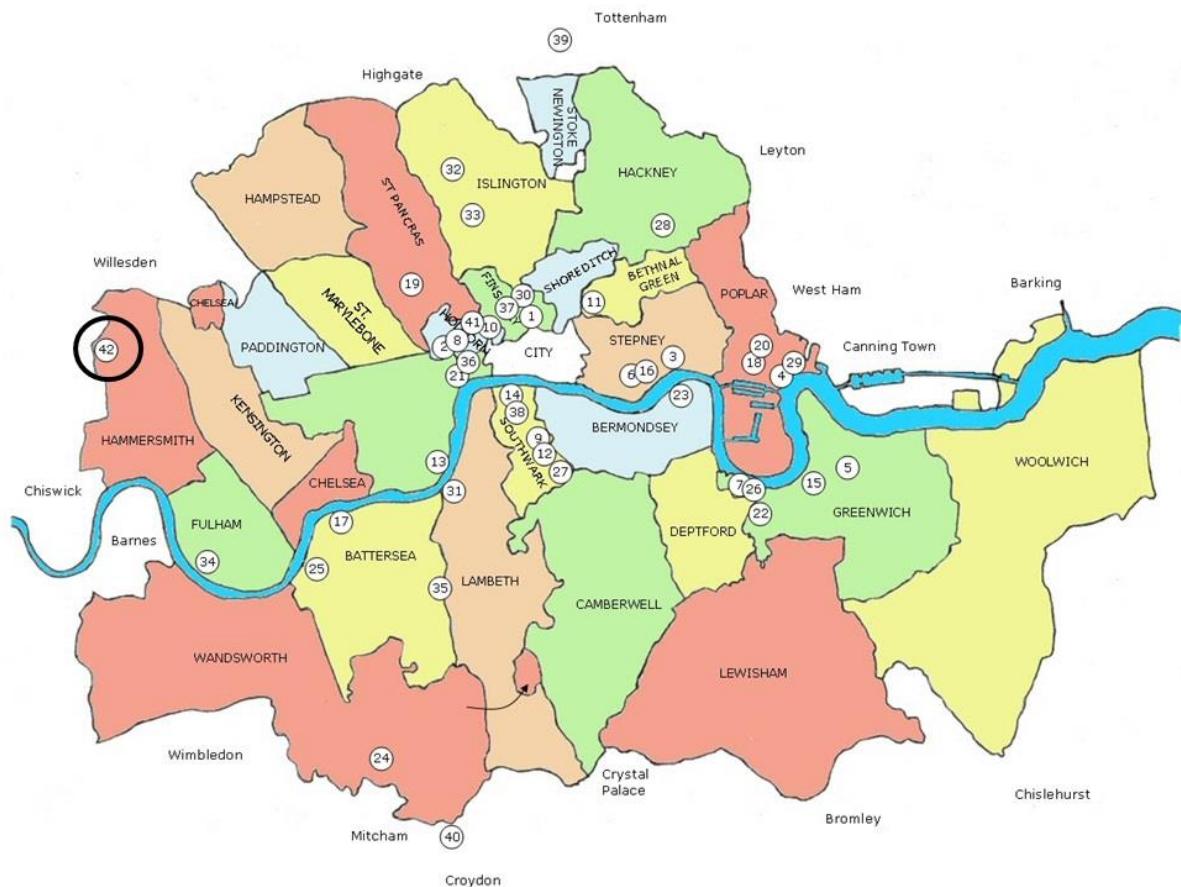
Early London County Council Housing

1889-1914

Martin Stilwell
August 2015

Part 3 – the schemes in detail

42 – Old Oak Estate, Hammersmith



Old Oak Garden Estate, Hammersmith, 1906

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

This is the last housing development to be undertaken by the Council before virtually all house building came to a halt because of the outbreak of WW1. The majority of the estate was completed after WW1 and it was not until 1927 that the development was completed.

The site, as purchased, was $54\frac{1}{4}$ acres near Wormwood Scrubs, $5\frac{1}{4}$ miles from Charing Cross, and was acquired from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners (the Church of England) for £29,858 (£550 per acre). This compares to £400 per acre for the White Hart Lane Estate land, £600 per acre for the Norbury Estate land, and a high £1,150 per acre for the Totterdown Fields land. The purchase took from 1902 until 1905 to complete due to legal and other difficulties. During this time the Great Western Railway purchased 8 acres from the Council for an extension of their railway to Shepherds Bush. The GWR paid £10,500 for this land (a useful income of £1,250 per acre to the Council). However, the curved strip of land for the railway made the development of the estate more difficult and split the estate into two distinct halves. The smaller south-western section was built upon before WW1. The railway was not built until 1920 and eventually became part of the western extension of the London Underground Central Line. East Acton Station sits in the middle of the estate.

The map below shows the extent of the site as originally purchased. The saw-tooth north-east boundary was inconvenient and was adjusted to be a straighter line, with the permission of the Army Council who were responsible for Wormwood Scrubs.

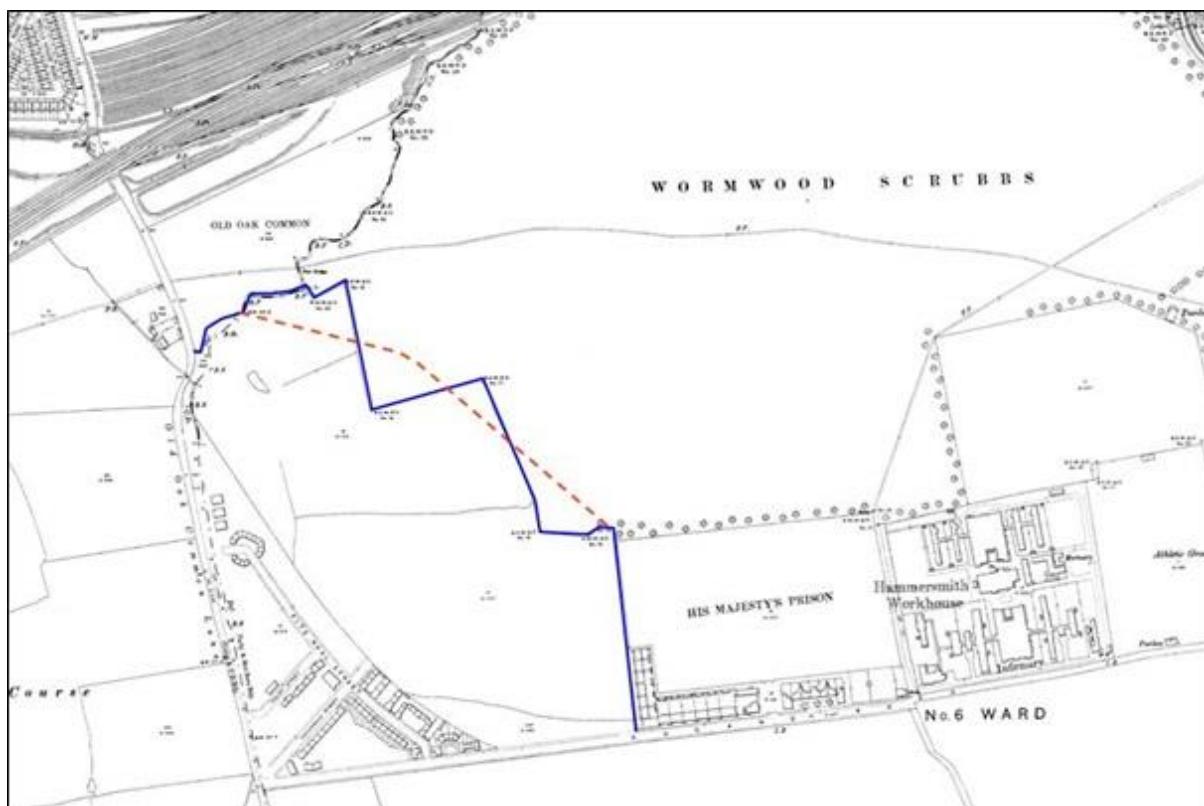


Fig. 1: 1916 OS map showing the original (blue solid line) and re-aligned border (red dashed line)

The 1916 OS map above shows how little of the site had been developed by the time the map was first drawn (probably in 1912). In contrast, the Council papers show that most of the housing in south western corner of the site (west of the proposed railway line) had actually been completed.

The map below is from GLC papers from the 1960s and claims to be the site as developed before WW1. However, the plan is clearly just that – a plan. This south western phase was completed during WW1. Note that all the roads are named after Bishops of London, probably as a link to the land being purchased from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.

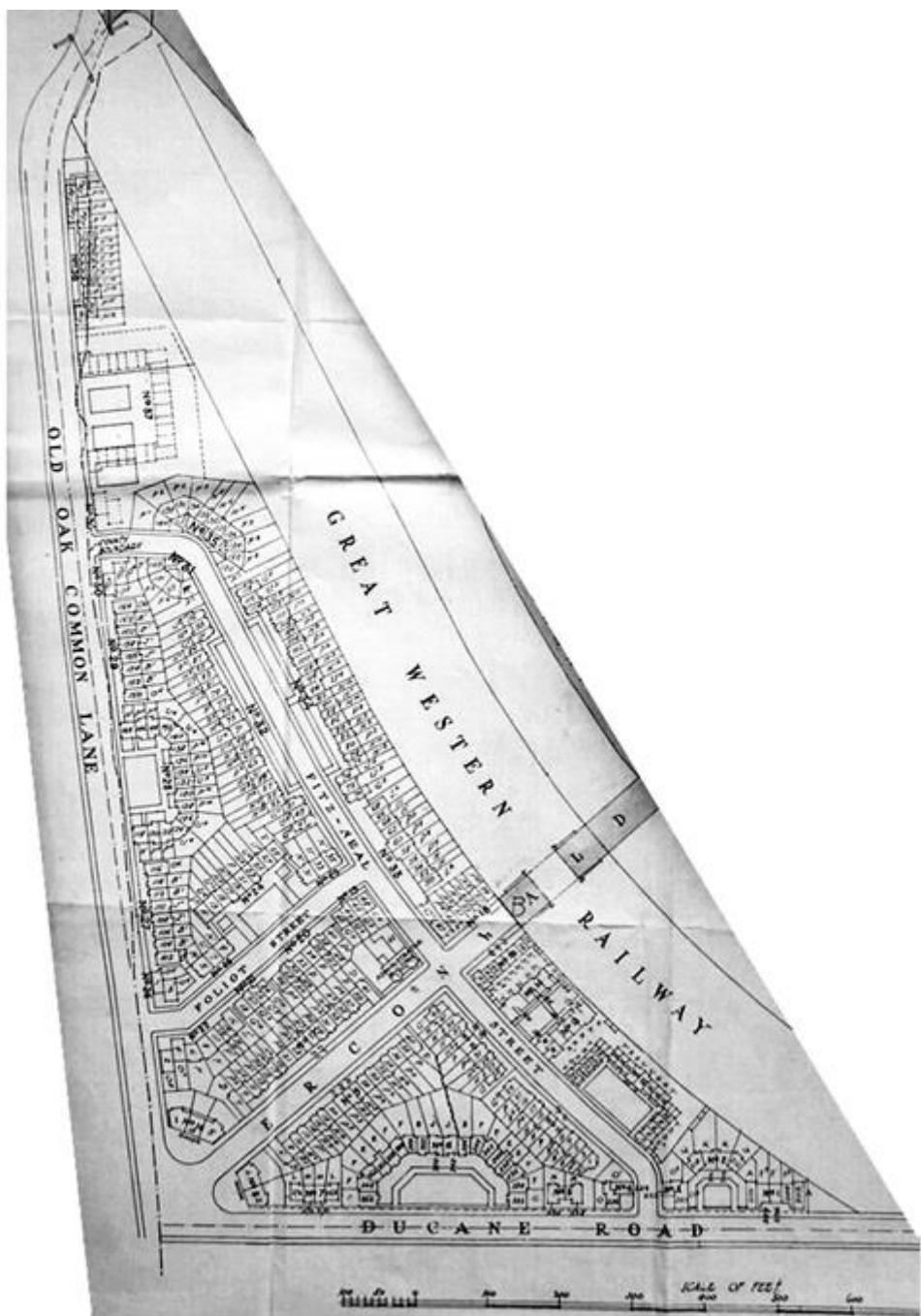


Fig. 2: Proposed pre-WW1 development (LMA ref: GLC/AR/BR/17/026119)

Comparing the above maps with the completed estate on the 1935 OS Map shows the extent of the task ahead of the Council after WW1.



Fig. 3: The Old Oak Estate as finally completed in 1927 (from 1935 OS map)

The western section consisted of 333 cottages and five shops. The cottages were in the following sizes: 42 with five rooms, 27 with four rooms plus a box room, 92 of four rooms, 23 of three rooms + box, 101 of three rooms, 6 or two rooms + box and 16 of two rooms. In total, they were planned to accommodate 2,260 persons (the box room was calculated as being suitable for one person). Following what seemed to be a common practice in the Council at the time, the roads across the whole estate were named after bishops, but of London this time.

The architect who contributed most to the designs was Archibald Sinclair Soutar. His brother (J. C. S. Soutar) was the supervising architect for the Hampstead Garden Suburb from 1914 and there are some clear similarities in the designs of the two estates. The two brothers would eventually set up their own architectural practice.

This estate introduced two design features new to social housing. The first was mock Tudor, which was more commonly known as 'tudorbethan' at the time. The second was having the roofing extending below the upper storey with dormer windows for the bedrooms. It was also the first to do away with one common design feature that had been mandatory in London since the 1700s – party walls extending above the roof level and dividing each dwelling. Archibald Soutar would have been the driving force behind all these features and they are described in more detail below.

The layout of the cottages was simple and all were built with bathrooms of which some were on the ground floor and some on the upper floor.

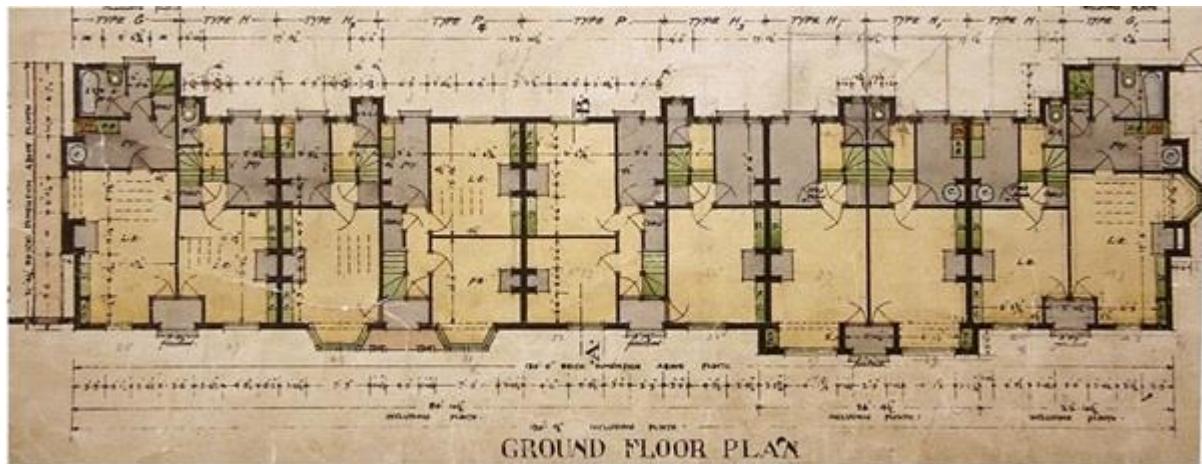


Fig. 4: Example ground floor plan. (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/035)

The photographs below show a mixture of designs. The mock Tudor influence can be seen in Fig. 5. Very similar mock-Tudor corner bays can still be seen in the housing in the Hampstead Garden Suburb of 1909 and the two Soutar brothers would have worked together to influence others to introduce this design feature onto both developments. One new feature for the Council's designs is the appearance of cottages with roofs that come down to the top of the ground floor (see Fig. 6 below). This design creates a visually pleasing country style with dormer windows in the roof. This clever design hid a secret advantage to the Council as it resulted in a lot less brickwork which meant lower labour and material costs. This design feature became common post-WW1 when bricks and brick-layers were in short supply, but timber for roofing from Canada and north Europe was plentiful.



Fig. 5: Fitzneal St from Ducane Rd, 1912.
(LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0839)



Fig. 6: Fitzneal St and Erconwald Rd, 1912.
(LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0839)



Fig. 7: Fitzneal St from Ducane Rd, 2009



Fig. 8: Fitzneal St and Erconwald Rd, 2009

As described in the introduction to this section, the housing was the first of the Council's to remove a design feature that had been present in London housing since the 1700s and can be seen when comparing Fig. 9 to Fig. 10, and Fig. 11 to Fig. 12. It will be seen that the roofing of the two photographs on the left do not have extended dividing walls above the roof line that appear in the housing in the right-hand photographs.

Fig. 13 shows a close-up of typical extended party walls. These were introduced into regulations for London Housing (and in other cities) as a result of fire regulations introduced after the Great Fire of London in 1666. Most Georgian designs have extended parapets around the outside of housing to remove the exposed timber roof beams. As terraced housing started to be developed in the 1700s the regulations were extended to include a fire barrier between each dwelling. Just raising a party wall to the level of the roof slates was considered not sufficient fire prevention as flames could travel between the top of the wall and the underside of the slates, and so the extended party wall became the norm. This proved to be very successful in preventing fire spreading and, no doubt, still does. In contrast, builders were not happy at the extra expense, and architects felt that the pureness of line of the roof was being spoilt. The first development in London to not have this feature was the Hampstead Garden Suburb of 1909, although that estate had few semi-detached houses and no terraced housing. A. S. Soutar, Old Oak's lead architect, probably took legal advice and decided to remove extended party on the last Old Oak housing to be designed before WW1, and a cleaner roof line is the visible result. None of the housing on the post-war western part of the estate has the extended party walls.



Fig. 9: 118-148 Old Oak Common Lane, 1912. The lack of traffic a complete contrast with today. (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0839)



Fig. 10: The Quadrangle Fitzneal St., 1912 (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0839)



Fig. 11: Fitzneal St, 1912.
(LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0839)



Fig. 12: Fitzneal St showing Clerk of Works office,
1912. (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0839)



Fig. 13: Close-up of typical extended party walls.



Fig. 14: Two of the shops, 1912.
(LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0839)



Fig. 15: 118-148 Old Oak Common Lane, 2009



Fig. 16: The Quadrangle, Fitzneal Street, 2009

Costs are in the table below. The total number of people, as based on 2 persons per room, has been used to calculate the maximum number of persons at 13,834. It has not been possible to extract from the published figures just those rooms considered to be box rooms and so only suitable for one person. As a result, the estimated costs per person may therefore be a little low as the maximum theoretical capacity of the estate, as calculated, may be slightly high. The Council's 1913-14 accounts show that a very good profit of 13.9% was being achieved.

	Outgoings	Income	
Cost of land (54½ acres)	£29,858		
Purchase of strip of land by GWR (8 acres)		£10,500	
Total cost of development ⁱ	£666,000		
NET COST			£685,358
Cost per person (based on 13834 persons)			£50pp
Balance of Accounts 1913-14	£4,133	£4,798	£665 (13.9%)

Table 1: Old Oak Garden Estate costs

No houses had been completed by the day of the 1911 census and therefore the latter cannot be analysed for this estate. The estate today looks in very good condition with the majority of the houses looking in their original condition. The whole estate was sold by Hammersmith & Fulham Council to a private housing management company and is run by a housing association with its offices on the estate. The estate is protected by a preservation order and the owners strictly enforce it. The countrified Old Oak Common Lane in the original photo in Fig. 9 is now a very busy road during the week.

Footnotes

ⁱ LCC; “London Housing”; G.H.Gator, 1937; p135