

DRAFT

CHAPTER 6 – ST MARY’S AND MORRIS WALK AREAS

This chapter covers the areas that lie inland from the former naval dockyard. The land here billows across gently rising hills, its slopes now unified by twentieth-century social housing. A history of that housing is preceded here by accounts of the area’s first phases of speculative development, largely late-Georgian in date, and of its numerous institutional buildings, mainly churches and schools, mostly built during the Victorian era. The territory that is covered is bounded north by the grounds of the parish church of St Mary and Woolwich Church Street. It extends as far south as the west end of Wellington Street, east across John Wilson Street and, to the west, straddles Frances Street to continue as far as the Morris Walk Estate, which spills across the parish boundary.

Opposite the dockyard, houses and pubs were strung along Church Street by the eighteenth century, but the land behind, mostly part of the Bowater family’s manorial estate, remained open. Westwards ribbon development kept step with expansion of the dockyard, while the gradual spread of bricks inland began in the 1780s with the formation of Warwick Street. Crucially, John Bowater, in exile on the Continent to avoid his creditors, had obtained an Act of Parliament in 1779 to permit the granting of building leases on his entailed lands. The scale was humble, but in the late 1790s some bigger houses were built. Huge growth in the population of Woolwich during the Napoleonic Wars encouraged speculative development of the fields south of the parish church, much of which was glebe. From 1809 St Mary Street, Rectory Place and most of Kingsman Street were laid out as the Rectory estate, alongside gradual filling out of the western flank of the Powis (later Ogilby) estate that included a sizeable Methodist chapel of 1814–16 (now Gurdwara Sahib). The houses ranged from hilltop villas to mean courts.

DRAFT

To the west, beyond a path known as Hedge Row (now Prospect Vale), a large triangle of land (the Morris Walk area) was modestly built up in the 1840s as a response to the dockyard's steam-factory extension.

The South Eastern Railway Company's line knifed across all this in 1849, in cuttings and tunnels through combes and promontories. Elsewhere in this now densely residential and solidly working-class district the Victorian period saw the insertion of two big Anglican churches, in large measure a response to the entrenchment of Nonconformist worship. These were St John's, and St Michael and All Angels', a Tractarian initiative that came to involve William Butterfield. Other arrivals were four schools and a fire station. A maternity hospital followed in the 1920s. Three of the schools have been rebuilt; the fourth, Woodhill Primary, is a good example of Board School architecture. Robert Pearsall's fire station of 1886–7 is another notable survival.

Around these institutions the housing stock deteriorated, and slum conditions spread. The present character of the area is largely due to the formation of the St Mary's Comprehensive Development Area in 1951. There were important preliminaries on the Rectory estate in the 1930s, when the Ecclesiastical Commissioners began an ambitious rebuilding project. But post-war redevelopment was initiated by Woolwich Borough Council, a formidable house-building authority. This was the only project of its kind and date in London overseen by a borough rather than by the London County Council. Within twenty years the area's housing had been thoroughly recast in nearly 1,500 new homes. Woolwich Borough Council struggled against the constraints of the place and the tenor of post-war housing policy to maintain conservative cottage-estate standards. Despite inevitable defeat by the high-rise tide, manifest in Norman & Dawbarn's fourteen-storey butterfly-plan towers of 1959–62 on Frances Street, limited success in this fight kept the area attractively

DRAFT

habitable. It remains humane and open in aspect, well planned and decorous.

More spectacular, if not more successful in either housing or aesthetic terms, was the LCC's parallel initiative at Morris Walk, where the building of a concrete-panel estate of 562 dwellings in 1962–6 was at the cutting edge of technological innovation in housing. The first use in Britain here of the Larsen-Nielsen system of industrialized building and associated publicity made this a portentous development. Land between the St Mary's and Morris Walk estates saw a later phase of renewal in developments of around 1990 led by the London and Quadrant Housing Trust, alongside an instance of Walter Segal's model of self-build development at Parish Wharf. Finally, a short terrace on Sunbury Street represents a revival of council-house building in 2010. Together all these episodes represent an instructively broad range of approaches to social housing, a subject further explored in chapters eight to ten.

Early housing

NEAR THE DOCKYARD

Church Street and Lord Warwick Street area

There was early ribbon development at the western extremity of settlement in Woolwich, along the south side of Woolwich Church Street as far west as what is now Frances Street. This was dependent on the naval dockyard, and across a road that the Navy maintained. Church Hill may have had a medieval nucleus, and comprised more than twenty properties by the end of the seventeenth century. Shipwrights and other dockyard artisans no doubt led the way in building, leasing and occupying houses. By the 1740s the whole Church Street frontage was solid. Uneven development appears to have included a number of substantial properties with good-sized gardens, and there were several public houses. From east to west in the 1850s these were the Canterbury

DRAFT

Tavern (formerly the White Lion and perhaps also the Jolly Shipwright), the Golden Cross (formerly the Anchor), both on Church Hill, then the Roebuck (rebuilt after a fire in 1851 and previously the Horse and Star), the Ship and Punch Bowl, the Black Eagle, the Globe and the Old Sheer Hulk.¹

The south side of Church Hill had houses large and not so large climbing up to the church in a picturesque ramble. Further west a grand pedimented building probably antedated a group of four houses of the early 1750s that lay beyond. Around 1810 there was rebuilding and refacing. By the 1840s Richard Pidcock, a solicitor, had control of a small estate encompassing all of Church Hill. Former waste on the north side was not wholly built over until the 1880s.² A few of Church Hill's late-Georgian houses – Nos 20–22, a narrow pair laid out with central chimneystacks, and Nos 30 and 32 – were included on the Ministry of Housing and Local Government's supplementary (non-statutory, local or Grade III) list of buildings of architectural or historic interest in 1954, but Woolwich Borough Council then earmarked the whole row for redevelopment. W. H. Gimson, the Borough Engineer, was willing to retain some old buildings, as the LCC wished, but Thomas Standing, the Medical Officer of Health, deemed several unfit for habitation and full clearance was agreed. Shortly before demolition in 1957 the row was recorded for the LCC by Tibor Biro.³

Further west along Church Street small houses, most of which came to incorporate shops, were generally of two storeys, often with garrets, of timber as well as of brick, in ones, twos and threes, piecemeal development that was probably seventeenth century in its origins. There was some rebuilding in the mid-eighteenth century, and more, further east, after the road was widened in 1785–6. To the west there was a coherent early eighteenth-century development of eight units (Nos 232–

DRAFT

246), with taller gabled or pedimented ends projecting forward in a Palladian form. The east end of this terrace survived into the 1950s, after bomb damage, but it appears not to have been recorded and its origins remain unknown. Further west, between the Globe and the Black Eagle and set well back behind front gardens, stood a row of five-room central-chimneystack houses, probably new in the 1740s. Three of these houses (Nos 222–226) survived to be listed (again only at Grade III) and recorded before their demolition in 1956. On the pavement near this site there is now a stench pipe or sewer ventilation chimney, made by Adams Hydraulics, possibly in 1897, and a horse trough of similar date. To the far west in the 1740s, near where Frances Street now debouches, was ‘doudies Carribbe’s’, mysterious, but possibly a West Indian settlement, perhaps freed slaves in a lodging house.⁴

Warwick Street (given the preface Lord in 1939) was the first street to be laid out in Church Street’s hinterland, an early fruit of John Bowater’s building-lease Act of 1779.⁵ It was divided into parcels for speculative developers, who probably emanated from the dockyard’s workforce, and 61-year leases were granted; the freeholds fragmented in 1812. The street’s western end was built up in the late 1780s with opposed rows, each of about twenty brick-built four-room houses, and the rest, about another thirty houses, followed, mostly in the 1790s. From the outset there was an Earl of Warwick public house on the north side, and the street’s name may derive from the hostelry. It is an intriguing name in Woolwich, possibly, given the radicalism of dockyard artisans in the later decades of the eighteenth century, a commemoration of Robert Rich, 2nd Earl of Warwick, the naval commander, parliamentarian and staunch ally of Cromwell’s. The Powerful and the Yorkshire Grey were other public houses, both at the street’s west end. Much of the north side of Warwick Street was rebuilt in the 1880s. A greensward on the south side that now opens through to Lamport Close marks the site of Paradise

DRAFT

Place, a wide court of 1799–1807 that benefited from open ground beyond.⁶

The north end of Kingsman Street was also formed in the late 1780s, as Coleman Street, a name of unknown origin; the present name arises from a merger with King Street in 1904. Bowater granted leases for more than twenty houses in 1786–92, and a few were up in 1790. A row of the early 1790s on the west side, south of Warwick Street, survived into the 1950s. The rest of the street was not built up until after 1800, with further leases issued in 1808–9; Bowater property here and near by was leased to John Long in 1810 and auctioned off in 1812. On the east side was the Nelson Inn, adjoining the North Kent Saw Mills, not replaced with houses until 1890.⁷

Other infilling south of Church Street after 1800 included Hulk Alley, a tiny court behind the Old Sheer Hulk, and, only slightly roomier, Martyr's Passage, with cottages of around 1806–7 roughly on the present-day site of Kingsman Parade, and probably named after Richard Martyr, a Greenwich surveyor. A mission hall was inserted in 1889.⁸

Behind Church Hill, Sunbury Street was originally Sun Alley (Sun Street by the 1880s), present in the late eighteenth century with a few small houses and soon extended through to St Mary Street. Catholics built a simple brick chapel on the east side in 1813, without church authority. Four years later they moved to larger and authorized premises. The Sun Alley building was taken by Independents in 1819 to become the Union Chapel, galleried with sittings for 550. Primitive Methodists took over in 1873, keeping a graveyard on the north side. After clearance in 1903 the whole site was made a children's recreation ground, which it remains. Elsewhere the alley had been somewhat built up in 1847–8.

DRAFT

Orchard Street (renamed Greenlaw Street in 1915 after William Greenlaw, Rector of Woolwich from 1837 to 1851) was formed and lined with small houses in the early nineteenth century. To its west George Place followed in the 1850s. The area became an enclave of deep poverty – all labourers, prostitutes and drink according to Booth.⁹

Around Bowling Green Row

Lands further west are marked as Sand Wharf on Rocque's map, indicating the long-exploited pits on the Bowater estate that extended up to a cliff face in front of Bowater House (beyond present-day Borgard Road). From here sand and chalk were shipped from the riverside west of the dockyard. There were no buildings in this area before 1790 except at the lower-lying northern corners where there had been limited development in the preceding two decades.

Around 1770 two small houses were built in isolation on the site now occupied by shops at 128–132 Woolwich Church Street. Beyond them the road bifurcated, swooping through an S curve towards lower Charlton, or, to the south, heading uphill along Hedge Row (later Prospect Row, now Prospect Vale), a path that led to Hanging Wood and the rest of the Maryon-Wilson estate around Charlton House. Westwards expansion of the dockyard in the 1780s stimulated further development, made possible through Bowater's Act of 1779. The outlying houses were joined by three more, including the first Navy Arms public house, in 1780–2. Day's Passage (Bowling Green Row from about 1800) was formed with a row of six houses on its west side by 1786. Further east, near the new dockyard gate at what came to be called Ship Tavern Corner, the Ship Inn was also up by the 1780s – owner of the bowling green. It was rebuilt in 1888–90 as the Royal Ship Hotel, with John Oliver Cook as architect.¹⁰

DRAFT

Inland, near the present-day junction of Samuel Street and Frances Street, Baptists who had parted ways with the Enon Chapel (High Street) congregation built their own chapel in 1786. Later known as the Queen Street Chapel, this was a large galleried hall with room for 600. Always prominently pedimented, its Doric portico was an addition, perhaps part of a 'reconstruction' of 1867–9. A school room at the back had then already been twice rebuilt, in 1806 and 1842–3. All was demolished in 1960.¹¹

Between the chapel and the Ship, and evidently of about the same date, there stood a surprisingly imposing pair of houses. Just one room deep behind ample front gardens, this pair, seemingly designed to profit from open views uphill and upriver, was probably erected by or for superior dockyard men. Development soon intensified. In 1793–6 an eleven-house terrace was built on the south side of Hedge Row. On the main road, this part of which was then George Street, a uniform three-storey terrace of eleven central-chimneystack houses (later 146–166 Woolwich Church Street) took the space in front of the Ship's bowling green around 1800. Other infilling hereabouts included several houses or shop-houses with wooden canted bays or oriels that looked across the dockyard and river. What is now the northern stretch of Samuel Street was mainly built up in the decade after 1800 as Bowling Green Place, later Queen Street. On the south side was the second Navy Arms public house, an insertion of about 1840.¹²

A path to the east of the Queen Street Chapel was probably made into a short road in the late 1780s when new houses at the junction with Warwick Street included a timber cottage. Further inland were the sandpits and Cally Hill Field, extending from where Cardwell School, St Michael and All Angels' Church and Woolwich Dockyard Station are now, across a triangle of ground between what became Chapel Row (later

DRAFT

Chapel Street, then Chapel Hill and since 1961 the south end of Frances Street), Queen Street and Henry Street. These lands, also called Vinegar Hill (conceivably a radical gesture to the Irish uprising of 1798, put down at Vinegar Hill, County Wexford), were sparsely, erratically and poorly built up with numerous small houses in 1806–14. This happened through Bowater leases, mainly by two associated developers, William Limbery (1759–1840), from Deptford, who, presumably profiting from his speculations, set himself up as a gentleman (and later as a naval captain) in Montpelier Row, Blackheath, in 1808, and George Henry Harrington (1759–1812), from Southwark and later Eltham. Harrington both granted and took Bowater Estate leases in these years; he may have been John Bowater's attorney, possibly operating with a fairly free hand while Bowater was in debtor's prison in 1807–8. No evidence has been found to link him to Joseph Harrington who later inherited parts of the Bowater estate through marriage. Some of this poor housing, which included tiny hovels on Chapel Street called Harrington's Buildings, was in multiple occupation from the outset; it mainly accommodated labourers. South of Warwick Street, a few small groups of cottages and the Warrior beerhouse were scattered in front of Limbery's Buildings and Eustace Place, after William Eustace, another developer of this low-grade assemblage. Numerous others were responsible for single houses. Henry Street continued south to join Frances Street (of which this stretch became part in 1938), but this frontage was not built up until the 1830s, much of it as Devonshire Place, long runs of two-storey cottages. Back building to the north-east created even meaner courts.¹³

More public houses accompanied this gradual spread of housing for working people. The Britannia Tavern, at the southern apex of the Chapel Row–Henry Street triangle, was a large presence from about 1808 to the 1950s. In 1835 the landlady, Elizabeth Browning, was murdered at the bar, hoist on the bayonet of Corporal Patrick Carroll, RM. The

DRAFT

British Museum stood opposite the Queen Street Chapel, the Trafalgar and the Jolly Sailor were at the George Street–Hedge Row junction, and the General Havelock traded on George Street west of Bowling Green Row from around 1860 to 1968.¹⁴ Joseph Grimaldi (1778–1837), the original pantomime clown, retired, almost crippled, to this undistinguished part of Woolwich in 1832–5, living briefly at addresses on George Street and Prospect Row. After a failed joint suicide his wife Mary did die, and he moved back to north London, keen to ‘return from Transportation’.¹⁵

The North Kent Railway arrived in 1849, in a tunnel under Queen Street and Chapel Street and in cuttings to either side, with a station on what had been open land south of Warwick Street. South of that, skirting round the courts west to Henry Street and east to where Coleman Street had been extended as King Street was Station Road, laid out when the line opened in 1849. This was renamed in 1904 as Borgard Road and Belson Road, after Gen. Albert Borgard and Lt. Gen. George John Belson, RA (c.1788–1868), who was active in local government.¹⁶ A large frontage was substantially developed in 1851–2 by Henry William Rowlstone, a surveyor, builder and estate agent based on Church Hill. Opposite the station he placed the Freemasons’ Tavern, with, to its east, North Kent Terrace, twenty-five good-sized houses. North Kent Grove and Place had twenty-six more much smaller dwellings, stitched in to the rear facing the cliff up to Bowater House.¹⁷ West of this and south-west of the station, on land now school playground, William Parry Jackson followed on in 1862 with Cambridge Terrace, the Cambridge Hotel and some shops, employing William Gosling, another local surveyor, as architect. Jackson and Gosling built more houses here in 1875, and yet more extended up to St Michael and All Angels’ in 1889.¹⁸

Between Queen Street and Prospect Row was Marshall’s Grove, probably named after William Marshall, a local builder. It began as two footpaths

DRAFT

heading west from Bowling Green Row. Courts of two-storey cottages were built here between 1843 and 1862, eventually forming three sides of a square that survived as a surprisingly amenable enclave into the 1960s. Bowling Green Row's houses were rebuilt in 1850–2.¹⁹ The north side of Queen Street was wholly rebuilt in 1885–7 around which time there was also scattered redevelopment close by. Albion Hall was a small Christian Spiritualist chapel on the east side of Bowling Green Row, known to local children in the 1930s as Spooky Joe's. Among numerous local shops there was an RACS branch at the west end of George Street from 1926.²⁰

Samuel Street

The curve of Samuel Street skirts what was Cally or Vinegar Hill. The route, not called Samuel Street until about 1819, and then for reasons unknown, had come into existence by the 1770s as a footpath from what became Queen Street round to early (upper) Frances Street and the scarp on which Bowater House stood. First development was on the outer or west side of the curve. In 1796–9 a group of eighteen substantial houses, Unity Place, was built on Bowater leases of varying lengths of from 61 to 99 years. Despite its name, Unity Place was a heterogeneous terrace, though three full storeys throughout, stepping gently up the hill. There were good doorcases, fanlights and some wooden canted bays, and internal decoration included neo-classical elements. Nearly all the houses had central-chimneystack layouts. The biggest, built for Mark Ball, a Woolwich carriage maker, was double fronted.²¹

From Unity Place, 76 and 94–104 Samuel Street were listed in 1973, but Greenwich Council was then planning clearance of the row for replacement with council housing. This was the last substantial group of Georgian houses left in Woolwich and there was vigorous resistance from the Woolwich and District Antiquarian Society, the Georgian Group and

DRAFT

the GLC, for which, at a Public Inquiry in 1975, Dr Philip Whitbourn conceded, 'It need hardly be said that an elderly lady, now living without basic amenities on her own on four floors may well be more concerned about having an inside WC, than with the Adam-like detail of the decoration around her fireplace.' But, in what had been designated 'Architectural Heritage Year', he concluded that 'It is not necessarily in itself enough in life for some people merely to occupy a Public Health Inspector approved dwelling with a dampproof course and such facilities as a fixed bath.'²² The argument was lost and demolition followed in 1979–80, the GLC salvaging decorative features. It was more than another decade before the houses were replaced.

At the south end of Unity Place and freestanding was the **Edinburgh Castle public house (110 Samuel Street)**, built in 1796–7 with canted oriel windows that offered views across Woolwich to the east and over open grounds to the south.^a Those to the front were removed when the establishment was given a stucco-enriched façade, probably in the 1840s when Thomas Reynolds was the proprietor. To the rear or west (extending to where Carr Grove is now) there was a disused chalk pit that Reynolds laid out in the late 1840s as 'Woolwich Rosherville Gardens', a reference to the popular pleasure gardens on the Thames near Gravesend that opened in 1839 in another disused chalk pit. Entered from the south side of the public house, what was soon renamed Reynolah Gardens – a play, no doubt, on Ranelagh – comprised nearly seven acres of landscaped grounds that included aviaries and stepped hillsides. The gardens were short-lived, evidently no longer kept up in 1860. They lapsed thereafter into a wilderness, about half of which survived another sixty years, in part, at least, because of disputed

^a George Scharf's Samuel Street watercolours reveal his background and interest in the depiction of military uniforms. Scharf came from Bavaria to London via Belgium in 1814–16 as a lieutenant of baggage in the Royal Engineers, finding work as a military portraitist.²³

DRAFT

ownership.²⁴ The public house endured and was listed in 1973. Despite closure and fire damage around 2000, and works since for a conversion to flats, the building stands as a fragmentary reminder of the neighbourhood's former character.

The east side of Samuel Street was gradually developed in the early decades of the nineteenth century, mainly around 1820 in a south-eastern sweep to what was called Bowater Crescent, but only filled up in the 1840s. Here the houses were generally smaller, mostly of two storeys. Party-wall stacks had become the norm. Near the north end there was a big five-bay villa, set well back; this became a vicarage for St Michael and All Angels' Church in 1884 when it was refurbished with H. H. Church as architect; Harry Hems and Frederick Drake, craftsmen engaged at the church, added decorative touches. Another villa, opposite Unity Place, had a large garden on which brewery store-sheds were built for Fremlin Brothers of Maidstone in 1891. Prominent on the triangular corner at the south end and facing Frances Street was the bow-ended and Gothic-embellished Rose and Crown public house, built in 1845 by George Hudson and Robert Jolly in partnership; this ended its days in 1961 as a doctor's house and surgery. Open ground on Samuel Street's west side north of Unity Place was not filled until two rows of seven houses were built in 1884–91.²⁵

Scharf's views make it clear that military occupancy was a feature of this area in the 1820s. But the speculative development of the 1790s was not, it seems, a response to military presence other than in the broad sense that war brought Woolwich prosperity. It was only after 1815 that officers began to move in to Unity Place. By 1818 residents included a captain, two lieutenants and a colonel; by 1826 two lieutenants, three colonels and a major held a third of the row of eighteen, and there were five more officers on Bowater Crescent. There were somewhat fewer such

DRAFT

residents in the 1830s, and yet fewer a decade later. The area had filled out and become less desirable. Samuel Street was predominantly artisanal, even in Unity Place; in 1841 it housed seven shipwrights and several engineers, but few soldiers.²⁶

Morris Walk area

Until the 1840s, the triangular area now enclosed by Woolwich Church Street, Prospect Vale and the western parish boundary, the site, that is, of the Morris Walk Estate, was almost entirely open. It was used for agriculture and, from 1806, in part by John Long as a sand and chalk pit with a limekiln, later adapted as a brickfield. There was a small cluster of eighteenth-century buildings to the far north-west, opposite what has become Warspite Road (A glimpse of their last days can be seen in the film *Blow Up*). But this was in Charlton parish – indeed settlement here spread westwards as New Charlton. The curving route of the main road in Woolwich, along which stood a few dwellings known as Adam’s Cottages along with Charlotte Place on the dockyard side, was wholly replaced in 1844 by Albion Road (now the west end of Woolwich Church Street), set out on a straight line further south that gave the Admiralty extra land. The western section of the triangle to the south, the site of Long’s pit, was part of the diminished Bowater estate held by Joseph Harrington. A steep ridge on the east side of the pit survives beside Glenalvon Way. A south-western acre was acquired from Long by the Woolwich Town Commissioners in 1809 for a water-supply system, but it proved unsuitable and was soon after used for the building of a few houses. The remaining eastern sub-triangle was known as Shersby’s Field, after John Shersby who had inherited it from his father-in-law Samuel Hardin, the farmer of many Woolwich fields up to 1810.²⁷

From 1838 the dockyard steam factory began to take shape on the land north of Albion Road. Adjoining landowners responded quickly with

DRAFT

residential expansion. By 1845 Shersby's land had new streets with family names – John, Ann and Harden, and house-building had begun. On Harrington land, Sand Street, which previously led only to the limekiln, was extended to Prospect Row, on the south side of which houses went up in 1842–3. Much more building followed in the late 1840s, with smaller houses packed in towards the centre of the district. Work proceeded despite substantial disruption in 1849 when the railway line was cut through straight down the middle of Harden Street. This separated much of the new residential area from the dockyard, but two footbridges, a pedestrian tunnel and a level crossing ensured ease of movement.²⁸

Numerous rows of speculatively built two-storey terraced houses, designed for skilled working-class families and built in small groups by a variety of landlords and builders, had transformed the character of the area by the 1850s. The smallest and meanest were among the last to be built, squeezed inside the ridge of the sand pit on a road originally called Taylor's Mews, after John Taylor of King Street, one of the area's most prolific builder-developers. This was renamed Chestnut Place in 1869, then, by the 1890s, Morris Street, and eventually Morris Walk. Its houses opened directly onto the pavement, had small back yards, and were singularly free of any embellishment.

The Albion Road frontage was treated more generously. The central section had been immediately graced with the Albion public house, a fine stucco-enriched building. After 1845 more followed, including Albion Terrace, a distinctive composition of eight houses close to where the pub's successor now stands. George Starling, a baker, appears to have been the main developer here; James Bennett of Sandy Hill was also active, as was Robert Jolly, who perhaps had a design role.

DRAFT

The wider area supported five public houses and a Wesleyan Methodist chapel. It also contained a number of workshops and shops, particularly along Albion Road. Just across the parish boundary was St Thomas's Church of England School of 1854, and, facing the park on Mount Street (now Maryon Road), there were more substantial houses which, though terraced, gave the impression of being semi-detached.²⁹

The intensity of the development is explained by the dockyard and by the speed with which the area was occupied by the families of skilled workers. The census of 1851 reveals the most common householders' occupations as engineer, boilermaker, blacksmith and shipwright. Save for the creation of Acorn Street north of the railway around 1861 the fabric remained essentially unchanged until the 1960s. However, closure of the dockyard in 1869 brought a marked decline to the neighbourhood, from which it could not recover. Censuses record growing numbers of unskilled workers, though the slightly larger houses on Albion Road and facing Maryon Park did retain skilled occupants. House farmers moved in and in 1908 Booth's investigator described the occupants of Morris Street as especially 'poor, vicious and rough'.³⁰ The district was classed among the worst in Woolwich, rivalled only by the Dusthole.

Kidd Street (part of Woodhill since 1939) was formed via leases from Henry Kidd. Twenty-five houses were built in 1842-3 and the Royal Albert public house was on the south-west corner with Prospect Row. In 1863, once Reynolah Gardens had closed, the road was extended south to link to Wood Street (Woodhill), but the new frontages stayed open until the 1880s when a school was built on the west side. A long terrace went up on the east side in 1886, along with other rows of houses continuing on Godfrey Hill and Godfrey Street right round to the Edinburgh Castle.³¹

WOOLWICH RECTORY ESTATE

DRAFT

Three fields south of the parish churchyard, an inverted L of just over nineteen acres, were glebe pertaining to Woolwich Rectory. Ringed by fences in the eighteenth century, this land was opened up for development by an Act of Parliament of 1809 that invoked the town's greatly increasing population as reason to permit the Rev. Hugh Fraser to grant building leases; the Act also allowed him to put up a new rectory. St Mary Street, King Street (the southern sweep of Kingsman Street) and Rectory Place were laid out by 1811, extending the inland town westwards from the decade-old Powis estate.³²

About 180 houses were built following the granting of sixty-nine leases, generally of 99-year duration, all but three of them sealed by 1821, the last by 1834. Most were for small parcels of land, for just one to three houses. Irregular development arose – it is not evident that there was an estate surveyor, and profits were said to be disappointing. The biggest parcel, the whole north side of St Mary Street east of Orchard Street, went to John Long in 1810. He immediately sublet to two local bricklayers, James Braden and John Mariner Mase, and building ensued up to at least 1815. Across the road it continued into the 1820s. Among the more ambitious developers on this estate was Thomas Neville Hopkins, a Woolwich shipwright, who had built at least one house on Powis Street before, in 1812, he took a large plot on the south-east corner of King Street and Rectory Place. Robert Jolly, early in his career, developed small plots on St Mary Street and King Street through leases of 1815 and 1817. Both Hopkins and Jolly lived on Rectory Place, which, though a superior address, was just as irregularly built up through the 1810s, by John Mortis and Joseph Hudson, among others. Heading up the hill to link with the earlier Mulgrave Place, this street had respectable occupancy in its odd mix of houses. In 1860 there were solicitors, surgeons, a surveyor, a captain, academies and a seminary. Fortunes changed somewhat after closure of the dockyard in 1869, though some

DRAFT

professionals did remain, notably Charles H. Grinling, the Christian Socialist activist, here from 1889 to 1939. Rectory Place was still in 1921 said to be ‘the best part of old Woolwich’.³³

The Rectory (*demolished*). Fraser found the old riverside rectory too small, dilapidated and badly situated. Having gained his Act he moved uphill to the east side of Rectory Place, roughly where Charles Grinling Walk now ends, into a new rectory for which John Buonarotti Papworth was the architect. Completed in 1811, this house was one of Papworth’s earlier commissions for an entire building. It stood at a diagonal to the street, a plain brick cube, facing north-west with a full-width stuccoed porch. This allowed two sides to give fully onto the ample garden that contained a pond and an orchard. The Rev. Adalbert Anson added a single-storey room in 1881–2 and the Rectory was demolished in 1959.³⁴ The present rectory at 43 Rectory Place, across the road to the south, began as a vicarage for Holy Trinity. It was built in 1934–5 by Woodward & Co. to designs probably by Wright and Renny, of Powis Street, the usual architects for the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in Woolwich at this date. The house became St Mary’s Rectory only after complex negotiations for a replacement of the Papworth building ran into the sands.³⁵

The South Eastern Railway line bisected the Rectory estate in 1849 and some redevelopment followed on King Street up to 1852. Infill and replacement included the Railway Tavern on the newly formed Station (Belson) Road corner. The Glebe Land Brewery that had been on the south side of St Mary Street was displaced and the George the Fourth public house, across Rectory Place from its present site, was rebuilt in large and richly pilastered form. Rectory (Escreet) Grove was laid out on Ogilby Estate land in 1850–2, Robert Jolly and Thomas Smith, a timber

DRAFT

merchant and builder of Upper Market Street, carrying forth the house-building. On its west side, facing Kingsman Street, the RACS erected a large motor garage in 1919–20, to maintain and repair its growing fleet of vehicles.³⁶ The Ecclesiastical Commissioners initiated wider redevelopment in the 1930s.

BREWER STREET AREA

Mulgrave Place (the south end of Rectory Place since 1920) was formed before the Rectory estate developments and the wartime road improvements to its south. It appeared around 1790 as an isolated cul-de-sac at right angles off Love Lane, possibly following a Bowater lease to Henry Rideout. From 1792 to 1806 more than twenty good-sized houses were built along its west side, with open views back and front, occupancy perhaps in some measure dependent on the proximity of the Royal Artillery Barracks. Around 1810 the east side began to be built up, more humbly, but eventually to include a big double-fronted house north of the Rectory that ended its days in 1957 having been the Whitbread House Hostel for Working Boys. Among the early developers was John Burkitt, dismissed as the Board of Ordnance's local foreman of bricklayers in 1805.³⁷

The Powis brothers, the Greenwich brewers who had acquired a substantial leasehold estate in 1799, held the land east of the Rectory estate. Brewer Street was laid out in 1810 along the west flank of this landholding. At its north end it met Parson's Hill and by 1821 it had been extended southwards from the William (Calderwood) Street junction to Wellington Street, with a side street to Mulgrave Place that was called Red Lion Street (from 1938 Leon Street), after a public house halfway along the west side of Mulgrave Place. The north end of Brewer Street became known as Charles Street by the 1830s, and the whole was renamed John Wilson Street, the north end in 1921, the rest in 1940,

DRAFT

after the charismatic minister of the Baptist Tabernacle. Up to the early 1840s development comprised two-storey houses, some of quality, including a double bow-fronted stuccoed villa of around 1830 on the east side. George Hall Graham, surveyor (d.1872), may have built this for himself. There were also some short neat terraces on the west side. Near the north end of the east side was the Bethlehem Baptist Chapel of 1812, replaced by houses in 1905–6. Further south an infants' school was established in 1838.

The Powis estate reverted to the Ogilby Estate in 1898 causing many houses to be replaced, with H. H. Church supervising. Brewer Place, where there is now open ground adjoining the north end of Charles Grinling Walk, had been formed in 1843; its houses were replaced in 1899–1900, no bigger, but let at double the rent.³⁸ Land to the east (the site of Jim Bradley Close) that had been a timber yard, Thomas Smith's in the 1840s, was developed from 1915 as premises for Pitter's Ventilating and Engineering Co., later the Pitter Gauge and Precision Tool Co., which closed around 1970 as manufacturing in Woolwich collapsed.³⁹

The west end of William (Calderwood) Street was built up from about 1808. On the south side, three houses of 1810–15 and Cambrian Place of about 1830 were replaced in 1899. Opposite, on the north side, four houses were built in 1808–10 to the east of the site that was taken for a Methodist Chapel. Two of these (Nos 4–5) were replaced by the west end of a long terrace of 1896–7, built under Church's supervision by Thomas & Edge. This was otherwise demolished for Monk Street's extension and other post-war work. The other two houses of 1809 were cleared around 2004. There are plans in 2012 for a new building on the site of Nos 2–5.⁴⁰

DRAFT

The west end of Wellington Street, formed in 1811–12, gained a row of eleven two-storey houses on its north side in 1812–15, but was slow to fill up thereafter. The Star Inn was at the Brewer Street corner from the 1840s, and adjoining forecourts were built over for shops in 1874 under the supervision of Church and Rickwood. This was the outer reach of the commercial district in Victorian Woolwich and some shops attracted specialist traders, including photographers, ball and racket makers (the garrison racket courts were across the road), and Turkish baths that were converted to a printing works. The Star Inn was rebuilt in 1894 for a Mr Etheridge, by H. L. Holloway of Deptford. This large and plain public house was among many local hostelries to close in the years around 2000. Its replacement with a six-storey block of flats, to plans by Alan Camp Architects for New Wine International at Gateway House, was approved in 2008.⁴¹ Further west the Queen Victoria Tavern was established on the Mulgrave Place corner in the 1850s. The present public house is a Brewers' Tudor 'inn' of 1926–7, built by Thomas & Edge for Hoare and Co., which specialized in such buildings, to designs by J. E. Jefferson. The nostalgic style is at some odds with the pub's name and the barracks opposite. Closure here came in 2010.⁴²

On Mulgrave Place and Red Lion Lane there was some Ogilby Estate replacement of houses around 1900, and the Bowater Estate redeveloped Back Lane as Belford Grove in 1904–7. Frank Charles Henesy, a Charlton builder, put up twenty-seven bay-fronted terraced 'villas', of which eight survive on the west side. Bomb damage was heavy in this area and a number of Arcon or Uni-Seco prefabs were put in place in 1946–8.⁴³

Places of worship

Gurdwara Sahib

DRAFT

The former Wesleyan Methodist Chapel of 1814–16 at the west end of Calderwood Street is the only substantial physical trace left of Woolwich's once thriving dissenting past. It also strongly represents historic connections between the military and the town. Soldiers attended the chapel from its earliest days, it was an official garrison chapel for nonconformists, and an adjunct provided a soldiers' institute. The complex has been adapted to use for Sikh worship and hospitality.

The first small Wesleyan Methodist chapel in Woolwich was built on Woolwich New Road in 1789, a congregation having been built up by Thomas Murrell, a carpenter who had come to work in the Warren. It was soon outgrown, and at the first meeting in 1811 of a newly formed circuit with its head chapel at Deptford the first item of discussion was the need for a site in Woolwich on which a new chapel could be built. In 1812 a plot on William Street, measuring close to 110ft (34m) square, was leased from the Powis Estate. There was then a two-year delay, owing to difficulties disposing of the original chapel and other financial setbacks. A chapel that had been built in Rochester in 1810 – 48ft by 52ft (15m by 16m) and seating 764 people at a cost of £4,200 – was taken as a model and it was estimated that such a building in Woolwich would cost £700 less. In the event the Woolwich chapel as completed in 1816 was bigger – 52ft by 71ft (16m by 22m) to hold 850 people – and more expensive, costing £4,594.⁴⁴

Substantial, but built without extravagance, the William Street chapel bore similarities, outside and in, to Wesley's own chapel on City Road of 1777–8. His description of his church as 'perfectly neat but not fine'⁴⁵ can be applied equally here. The presence of a ritual apse with room for a communion table and communicants behind the centrally placed pulpit also means that the Woolwich chapel was, like Wesley's, designed in a manner compatible with the Anglican liturgy. It belongs, in fact, firmly to

DRAFT

a type, simple, elegant and adaptable, that was inspired by City Road and taken forward into the nineteenth century by the Rev. William Jenkins to serve as a template for decades. Said to have been trained as an architect before entering the ministry, Jenkins set up an architectural practice in Red Lion Square in 1810 and specialized in Methodist chapels.⁴⁶ He was responsible for the chapel in Rochester, and of eleven chapels he is known to have designed, seven certainly had the same front found at Woolwich – five bays, three under a central pediment, all with round-headed windows recessed in round arches. There is no evidence as to the authorship of the chapel at Woolwich, but it is certainly of the Jenkins type.

The chapel's interior was distinguished by deep galleries around a quasi-oval opening. This, which has parallels in three of Jenkins's chapels, and the flat ceiling countered a common accusation that Methodist chapels looked like barns or factories. The decor was sparse in detail and painted a sombre grey. One feature at Woolwich that is unusual in Methodist chapels is the presence of vaults. These were provided here, according to the circuit minutes, 'in case another Death should happen in the Preacher's family'.⁴⁷

In 1858 an organ was placed in the gallery behind the pulpit, and in 1866, for its fiftieth anniversary, the chapel was modernized by raising the ground floor, replacement of pews, colourful redecoration of the walls and ceiling, and cutting down the gallery fronts.⁴⁸ These works meant that for the first time the preacher could see his entire congregation from the pulpit, and all its members could see him.

The Woolwich congregation's first Sunday school was built in 1817 on William Street, on the plot just east of the chapel. It was a long, narrow, single-storey, stucco-fronted building that could take up to 400 children

DRAFT

at a time. In 1888 Alfred James, a former Sunday school superintendent, left a legacy that enabled rebuilding and the chapel's trustees were approached with a view to combining a soldiers' institute with a new Sunday school. The movement to provide soldiers' institutes or homes had begun in Woolwich among the Methodists in 1830 in small premises on Rush Grove. These had closed in 1857 for want of funds, but in the 1860s the Christian public grew more sympathetic towards those in the army. Soldiers' institutes began to spring up across the country to provide for the army's rank and file. In Woolwich a Soldiers' Home and Mission Hall on Hill Street and the Church of England Soldiers' Institute on Wellington Street opened in 1876 and 1878 respectively. By 1888 demand for such facilities exceeded supply and so it was agreed that a new soldiers' institute and Sunday school would be built on the site of the old Sunday school and 1 William Street, which was purchased in late 1888 along with 2 William Street, retained to provide bedrooms for the institute.⁴⁹

The **Soldiers' Institute and Sunday School** went up in 1889–90 to designs by the local architect Walter Whincop. The builders were Multon and Wallis of Gravesend.⁵⁰ A substantial building, it is the last of a locally distinctive type to survive in Woolwich. The main façade is of two storeys and three bays with round-headed windows on the first floor between pilasters and heavy cornices. Single-storey porches, east and west, are at different levels on a sloping site. The main entrance for the lower-level Institute was to the east. On the west return a tall semi-octagonal bay contains what was the children's entrance and a staircase up to the first-floor room where the Sunday school was housed.

The Institute in the basement had five cell-like rooms on its east side in which soldiers could have baths; their refreshment room was at the front. Above this, and under the Sunday school, was their reading room.

DRAFT

The full-height main hall behind this was a schoolroom, also perhaps used for devotional meetings and soldiers' teas. Along its sides there were ten more cells, with decorative ventilation grilles above their doors, originally used as small classrooms or for private study.⁵¹

The complex remained little altered in fabric and use until after the Second World War when the Soldiers' Institute closed. Methodism had remained vigorous in Woolwich, but decline thereafter was severe; by 1977 attendance in the chapel had dwindled to fifteen.⁵² In response the trustees applied in 1971 for permission to demolish the existing buildings and to erect a new church, church hall and residential accommodation. The chapel was listed in 1973 and a redevelopment scheme for the complex was blocked by Greenwich Council and, following a public inquiry, the Department of the Environment. The buildings were put on the market in 1977 with the stipulation that the façade of the chapel would have to be retained in any future development. Use as a theatre or supermarket was suggested.

The premises were soon after acquired for conversion into a Sikh gurdwara. The main alteration to the chapel was the removal of the pews and the insertion of a floor across the gallery, unusable for Sikh worship, to create upper and lower darbar sahibs or prayer halls. The Soldiers' Institute and Sunday School was adapted for use as a langar or free kitchen. Its west entrance was given ornamental doors of wood and brass, made in Rajasthan, and a porch was added in 2009. A flagpole has been erected to the west of the main façade for the Sikh flag or nishan sahib. Plans from the Greenwich Sikh Association for a residential care home for elderly people on the site of 2–5 Calderwood Street, prepared by the Downes Planning Partnership, were approved in 2011.⁵³

DRAFT

St John's Church (demolished)

The Anglican Church of St John was put up in 1844–7 on garden ground between the Royal Artillery Barracks and the Grand Depot on the south side of Wellington Street opposite the end of Brewer Street. In 1840 the Board of Ordnance began to arrange the grant of sites at the margins of its Woolwich estate for the building of Presbyterian and Catholic churches, liberality in part intended to provide for soldiers. In the face of this, and wishing to improve the position of the established church, the Rector at St Mary's, William Greenlaw, formed a committee of local residents, leading members of which were Gen. G. P. Wingrove, RM, Col. H. B. Dundas, RA, Capt. William Denison, RE, Capt. Samuel Rideout, RN, Robert Jolly and Timothy Church. They set the ball rolling in 1841, seeking subscriptions and funds for a new church from Lambeth Palace, arguing that Woolwich, with a population of about 26,000, had only the parish church and the proprietary chapel at Holy Trinity to compete with numerous dissenting chapels and the other mooted churches. Henry Baker and Ambrose Poynter prepared first plans, but Greenlaw was asked to get support himself from the Board of Ordnance and to take forward not one but two new churches, a recommendation that led, St John's aside, to the building in 1849–50 of St Thomas's, Charlton, with a parish that extended east into Woolwich as far as Samuel Street. Greenlaw did as he was bidden and in 1843 the Board agreed to grant a site for St John's, but gave no funds, even though half the 1,270 seats were to be for the military, including a separate gallery for marines. Now Francis E. H. Fowler was the architect. Early English and cruciform plans were settled to include a prominent north tower that would have dramatically stopped the view up from Parson's Hill. Using just the money in hand, the Church Commissioners oversaw the works. The big stone-dressed brick church was built by Charles Kirk, but its completion and opening were delayed by a partial collapse of the clerestory walls during construction, and then by arguments about the adequacy of the

DRAFT

foundations and the use of concrete. It had been clear that there was not enough money to build the spire and the tower was capped halfway up its third stage. And so it stood.⁵⁴

With the building of the Dockyard Chapel and St George's Garrison Church around 1860, and closure of the dockyard a decade later, attendance at St John's declined and galleries were removed in the 1880s. The congregation dwindled to about fifty, but there was a restoration in 1911–12, by W. D. Carøe, architect. The church was a casualty of bombing raids and the site was cleared in 1948.⁵⁵

Rectory Place Congregational Church (demolished)

A group of Independents who had hived off from the Salem Chapel congregation in 1852 gathered a growing following and, under the leadership of the Rev. William Gill, who had been a missionary at Rarotonga in the Cook Islands in the south Pacific, built a substantial Kentish-ragstone Gothic chapel on the west side of Rectory Place in 1858–9. The architects were Lander and Bedells. The galleried interior had room for 830, and there was a two-storey back annexe for school and other community use. These buildings were all demolished in 2007.⁵⁶

St Michael and All Angels' Church

St Michael and All Angels', Woolwich, gaunt and lost-looking now on the hill above Woolwich Dockyard Station, was the upshot of a classic High-Church mission to the London poor, set on foot by a single priest, the Rev. H. R. Baker. A school and temporary church preceded the permanent chancel, built in 1876–7 to J. W. Walter's designs. The nave, by William Butterfield, followed in 1888–9. After Baker's death, internal embellishment took priority. One narrow aisle was added in 1955, but the church was never fully completed and lacks the intended tower.

DRAFT

Hugh Ryves Baker (1832–98), of a family from County Limerick, was consecrated priest at Exeter in the 1850s. He had been working across the Thames at St Mark's, Silvertown, before taking charge in 1865 of this dense district of Woolwich, still then under the parish church. Beginning the next year with a mission church and school in a skittle alley, he soon secured a promise from the Bishop of London's Fund to buy a large plot of land for a church and school from Joseph Spencer of Blackheath. The sloping site ran north–south, with Eustace Place on its west side and the high perimeter wall of what was then the Royal Marine Infirmary, later the Red Barracks, looming over Station Road to the south. It had eleven small houses on it at the time.⁵⁷

This sector of Woolwich was slum-ridden, and later testimony speaks of Baker as 'stamping out immoral houses to make room for the buildings which he erected'. The explosives expert Col. Vivian Majendie, RA, wrote to Baker:

The very poor and difficult district in which your labours lie . . . is exposed to evils of a very exceptional, and I fear extensive character, from its immediate proximity to a large, or I should say several large Barracks. This evil cannot be successfully dealt with by the Military Chaplains, however zealous and faithful. It overflows into adjoining neighbourhoods, and must be stemmed and controlled by those who, like yourself stand, so to speak, on the frontier, and have to guard the passes.⁵⁸

In 1868–9 Baker procured from the firm of Charles Kent a 'tin tabernacle' and schoolroom, timber-framed with corrugated-iron cladding, put up on the future church site.⁵⁹ The permanent St Michael's Schools came next, built to their north in 1870–1. Their designer was J. W. Walter, not a well-known architect. Apart from St Michael's, his only surviving identified English building is a Battersea board school, Westbridge

DRAFT

(formerly Bolingbroke Road) School of 1873–4. That is because around 1880 Walter went to the United States with Peter Paul Pugin, presumably to help with some of Pugin & Pugin's church commissions there.⁶⁰

Fund-raising for the permanent church started in 1873 through two parallel committees, one of civilians, the other of artillery officers. Among the major donors was Richard Foster, a commission agent from Chislehurst, who turned into Baker's most consistent supporter. Once again Walter was the architect. His overall design was an ambitious one in early thirteenth-century lancet style, with aisles, transepts, a level roof from end to end over high vaults, and flying buttresses. In the liturgically north-east position (geographically south-east) a tall tower with pyramidal cap surmounted the organ chamber. All this was to be carried out in brick with Bath-stone dressings. The foundation stone was laid in 1875, but the first part built, consisting of the chancel, chancel aisle, organ chamber and vestries, was undertaken by the builders Kirk and Randall only in 1876–7 and consecrated in 1878, probably indicating short funds. The architectural magazines were impressed by the fragment they saw, to which the temporary church, shifted on rollers to a new position, remained attached as a nave. The *Building News* spotted an allusion to Exeter Cathedral in the design, no doubt pointing to Baker's connection with that part of the country. Two Exeter craftsmen, Harry Hems for the choir stalls and Frederick Drake for the east window, were also involved in this first phase. *The Builder* found the vaulted chancel and chancel aisle 'very imposing', and noted the High-Church changes of level as well as the chocolate-painted ironwork, 'helped by marginal lines of gold'.⁶¹

In 1879 St Michael's acquired its own parochial district. Baker's next priority was a vicarage, found in the shape of an existing house in Samuel Street. Completing the church was postponed until 1886. In that

DRAFT

enterprise Richard Foster was Baker's chief coadjutor, though there were various other donors and supporters including J. G. Hubbard, later Lord Addington. Walter having emigrated, leaving his drawings behind him, Foster decided to discard these and bring in William Butterfield, 'so the plans are sure to be all right', as he put it to the Incorporated Church Building Society. The architect for his part took up the work 'out of compliment to Mr. Foster'.⁶²

The formidable Butterfield was then over seventy and nearing the end of his long church-building career, but he never lacked application. His plans for a nave and aisles for St Michael's, conservative for their date but quite different from Walter's, sailed through the church-building bureaucracy. The three-and-a-half-bay nave and arcade came first, the aisles and west front being left for later. Work went ahead on that basis in 1888–9 under Butterfield's veteran builder, Joseph Norris of Sunningdale. The finishing stage caused Baker some grief. The object of altercation was the gaslights, changed at the last moment without consultation. Against Foster and his architect, Baker regarded them 'as a disfigurement'. But as he put it, 'Butterfield knows his power, and I am condemned without a hearing . . . Mr Butterfield has simply walked through contract specification and everything!'⁶³ Not everyone liked the new nave. Baker's friend, the priest and architect Ernest Geldart, judged it 'Butterfield's latest *ἐκτρώμα* [abortion] . . . with the well known dissenting chapel east end terminal (at the west end in this case)'.⁶⁴

An extra effort was made to complete the church in 1898–9. Butterfield had retired, so his place was taken by W. D. Carøe, who produced an optimistic drawing for the tower, partly based on Walter's old design. All that seems to have been achieved (with Norris once more the builder) was the completion of Butterfield's west front with a five-light window.⁶⁵ The aisles were again postponed, and with Baker's sudden death in 1898 all

DRAFT

heart went out of further enlargement. Only in 1955 was a narrow south (geographically west) aisle added by Thomas Ford & Partners.

The fragmented history of St Michael's construction leaves the visitor ill-prepared for its noble (if now fusty) interior. Its virtues have much to do with Butterfield's skill in making the best of an unpromising brief. The nave is slightly wider than the chancel, and that together with the completeness of the arcade on both sides lessens the sense of amputation conveyed by the want of full aisles. The western bays take the form of high, narrow narthex arches, intended to relate to tall side porches. Perhaps the outstanding feature is the Devon-style wagon roof, a form perhaps once again chosen in deference to Baker (who was buried at Ottery St Mary); its cross-ribs pick up the vaulting of the chancel with economical dignity. Beneath, the sexfoil rose windows of the clerestory are a reminder of Butterfield's unrepentant High Victorian taste. The colour scheme, tamed by whitewashers in 1930, was in his typical strong tones, with alternating stone bands on the piers and further brick banding higher up over the tiled frieze. Walter's east end is finely proportioned but less personal. Both chancel and side chapel have brick-groined vaults (now painted), but while the chancel windows are austere lancets, the chapel ventures into plate tracery.

Baker was a fervent Tractarian whose liturgical practices sometimes sailed close to the wind. The fittings of St Michael's reflect that churchmanship, which survived him. The side or Lady Chapel acquired a second altar in about 1880;⁶⁶ it has a tripartite reredos with low-relief figures. In a corner is a sacrament house of 1927 by Cecil Hare of Bodley & Hare, who made various changes to the church around that time. The main reredos over the high altar is a grander affair, made in 1892 by Cox & Buckley to the designs of Ernest Geldart in Low-Countries taste. Of marble, alabaster, blue Corsham stone and slate, it deploys angel statues

DRAFT

(made in Bruges) left and right of a central painting of Christ in Majesty. Above, Geldart designed for the three lancets a stained-glass scheme showing the nine orders of angels; this seems to have been irreparably bomb-damaged and replaced by a simplified post-war scheme depicting the same subject with angels in the same positions. Geldart also provided low arcading left and right of the reredos, replaced with panelling by Cecil Hare in the 1920s, and a bishop's chair. Elsewhere in the chancel, surviving fittings of 1878 include the oak stalls made by Harry Hems, and the encaustic tiled pavement by Webb & Co. of Worcester. The mosaic work on the lower part of the north wall, dated 1890, is by Butterfield. The painted decoration in the chancel and over the chancel arch is of various dates, the insipid figures against the east wall (by F. A. Jackson of Ealing, working under Hare) arriving as late as 1928. In the nave, both font and pulpit are typical Butterfield fittings, as are the benches; the unusual wooden lectern is probably not his. The largest fitting is the elaborate oak chancel screen and rood of 1903, a memorial to Baker but rather a disappointment; its designer is unknown. Of later fittings, the most significant is the war-memorial altar, dossal and large crucifix on the south side at the west end, by Ninian Comper, 1919. Following war damage, most of the older stained glass has disappeared. The Lady Chapel windows are by Goddard & Gibbs, 1948.⁶⁷

At Baker's death, St Michael's was said to have had more communicants than any other church in the deanery. But inexorable replanning and social change in Woolwich after 1950 broke up its tightly knit setting of low houses and made it a growing anomaly. At the time of writing there were plans to declare the church redundant and make it available to the Deeper Life Church, a Pentecostal group with American links which has been using the building for some years. Redevelopment displaced the vicarage on Samuel Street. Its replacement, 21 Borgard Road, was built in 1960–1 by Woolwich Borough Council.⁶⁸

DRAFT

St Martin's Mission Church (demolished)

This mission was built in 1879–80 on Back Lane (Belford Grove) in an initiative by the Rev. Adalbert Anson in an area of slum cottages. It was a humble shed-like structure with room for 250 worshippers, on ground now occupied by Mulgrave School. In 1906 the mission moved to the north side of Church Hill, into a building (later St Martin's House) on the triangular western corner, cleared in the early 1960s.⁶⁹

Schools

St Mary Magdalene Church of England Primary School

The primary school on the corner of Kingsman Street and John Wilson Street has early Victorian origins. In the late nineteenth century the first schoolhouse was rebuilt and an infants' school added. All was replaced on a larger scale in 2009–11.

The earliest National (or Church of England) School in Woolwich was in a converted hall on Powis Street. This was succeeded by a new building on the Rectory estate, initially Woolwich National Schools, later known as St Mary's, in 1840–1. It also took in girls who had previously been schooled on Ropeyard Rails. The Rev. William Greenlaw promoted the project and, with influential backing from officers and their wives, it was funded largely through subscription. The architect was R. P. Browne of Greenwich. The site was originally small, squeezed in between gardens behind an entrance passage from King Street, with narrow airing grounds enclosed by 6ft(1.8m)-high brick walls. The faintly neo-Tudor building comprised two schoolrooms, for girls above boys, 315 of each, with a front block for two small classrooms and ancillary spaces that included a first-floor room for bonnets. Further classrooms filled the re-entrant angles in 1850.⁷⁰

DRAFT

A separate infants' school was built to the north-west, tight up against houses, in 1880. The designer is not known, but it might be noted that the Rev. Adalbert Anson, who planned this enlargement in 1877, was then courting a range of eminent architects with a view to rebuilding the parish church. This single-storey red-brick building adopted a neo-Tudor idiom and shaped gable as simple echoes of the main block to which it stood at right angles. A further classroom was added to the north in 1888–9, and the school now had 250 boys, 250 girls and 230 infants. This extension was enlarged eastwards in 1898, with another gable, less carefully shaped. Meanwhile, the main building of 1840–1 had been replaced in 1895 as a plain six-bay block with an assembly hall below classrooms.⁷¹

Space for playgrounds was gradually obtained from 1958. Clearances, in part for the dual carriageway to the east, were followed in the late 1960s by the addition of a single-storey classroom range. A plain stock-brick nursery school was added along Kingsman Street in 1998, with Horsley, Huber and Associates as architects.

The school had become a rambling complex. The Governors, the Diocese of Southwark Board of Education, and Greenwich Council came together in 2007 to propose complete replacement with a much larger building for two-form entry. Plans were prepared by Pellings, with Neill Werner as project architect. Revised in 2009 the project went ahead with Lakehouse as the main contractor. The school that opened in 2011 is an L-plan building that rises to four storeys. It was placed close to the roads, to screen playgrounds. Irregularly massed stock-brick and dark-wood-laminate faced blocks loom up behind the hall, to the east, which has coloured-glass windows. Open cantilevered play decks face south to the playgrounds and serve as both corridors and brises-soleil. Multiple roofs, punctuated by ventilation shafts, incorporate expanses of sedum and

DRAFT

solar panels, as well as a terrace. Across Kingsman Street the site of a former curate's house of 1960 has been cleared for car parking.⁷²

Cardwell (formerly St Michael and All Angels') School

This school began as part of the Rev. H. R. Baker's Anglican mission at St Michael's. The first temporary schoolroom of 1868–9, on the site of the church, was quickly followed by brick buildings to the north in 1870–1, designed by John William Walter, a young architect living in Plumstead. This competent essay in High Victorian Gothic was broken into three elements – a single-storey infants' school (for 203) flanking Eustace Place, a two-storey boys' and girls' school (for 191 and 179 respectively) with oak-shingled bellcote across the north side of the site, and a schoolkeeper's house in the south-east position. That is the only part of the composition to survive. Though altered, the house's plain brick elevations, with coloured-brick relieving arches over doors and windows, give a clue to the style of the schools.⁷³

Adjoining sites had been earmarked in the early 1950s for an enlarged school and subsequently cleared, but depopulation during the area's redevelopment caused that plan to be shelved. The Victorian school closed in 1963, its roll down to about fifty, and was demolished in the late 1960s. But rehousing, both completed and newly intended, shifted demographic calculations and the larger site was given to the Inner London Education Authority for a new school. This was built in 1971–5 to designs prepared in the GLC Architect's Department's Schools Division. Initially called Cardwell Cottages School after a housing project of a few years earlier, this single-storey complex for 120 infants and 160 juniors spread north and east up to Frances Street, where houses had been cleared. It was a rambling scatter – a then old-fashioned 'hen and chickens' layout or cluster plan of lightly framed flat-roofed classroom blocks, either side of a north-lit assembly and dining hall and a top-lit

DRAFT

spine corridor. The sloping windows and rooflights, typical of the time, have been replaced. A plainer 'temporary' classroom block that had been built first in 1968–9 on the south-west part of the site was not replaced until around 1990 when eight more classrooms were provided in a two-storey yellow-brick faced building. A nursery was added and in 2006–7 the Frances Street side of the school was further altered to designs by Architype, with a brightly coloured wall to enclose new entrance and play areas for the nursery and a children's centre, part of a network required by central government.⁷⁴

St John's District Schools (demolished)

St John's Schools stood immediately east of St John's Church and south of Love Lane, on land given up by the War Office. The Rev. John Oxenham Bent started to scrape together funds in 1870 and the schools complex, again designed by J. W. Walter, was built in 1872–3. In diapered brick, it was attractively ranged round three sides of a yard rather like Walter's slightly earlier St Michael's Schools, though differently disposed, with the taller boys' and girls' range along the left-hand side and the infants' range across the back. In deficit, and with a declining role, the schools were transferred to the School Board for London in 1888, then rapidly abandoned, though briefly reused as a church school from 1897 to 1906. Woolwich Borough Council compulsorily purchased the derelict bomb-damaged buildings and their site in 1954.⁷⁵

Woodhill School

Woodhill School is a fine example of Board School architecture. It was built in 1882–3 after several years of disputatious preparation. The site, which had been the west end of Reynolah Gardens, gained a road frontage when Wood Street and Kidd Street were linked in 1863, but, in a district thereafter stricken by closure of the dockyard, it remained open.

DRAFT

The School Board for London spotted it in 1878 and earmarked it for a large school for 800 pupils, in preference to a site on what is now Warspite Road, near the river. This choice was supported in a petition from inhabitants of lower Woolwich. However, Wood Street was more genteel. Its residents, led by William Dent, an Arsenal chemist at Bellevue House, and Admiral Robert Robertson at No. 175, objected to the plan, representing that the school would be ‘nearly surrounded by houses which are occupied by a class of persons not likely to send their children to a Board School’.⁷⁶ They gained support from the Education Department, but the Board responded that the children of lower Woolwich would not pass down Wood Street to reach the school. Opposition had been fought off by 1881 when the school was designed, nominally by E. R. Robson, the Board’s architect. By this date much of Robson’s Board work was delegated, but he exhibited a drawing of the south elevation at the Royal Academy in 1883. Collaboration here was perhaps with T. J. Bailey, his successor from 1884. The scheme had been enlarged to accommodate 1,200 (boys, girls and infants) in seventeen classrooms, all on the north side away from direct sunlight, behind upper and lower halls, that below for infants. This was an early and notably pure instance of a layout (the central-hall plan) that, though first introduced in Stepney in 1873, only became standard much later under Bailey. The upper hall has an ornamental ceiling, the lower exposed composite girders. Building work by Kirk and Randall included the two-storey caretaker’s house to the south, as well as WC blocks and open play sheds. A southern play shed, for girls and infants, still stands.⁷⁷

The difficulties with smart neighbours to the south explain the primacy and pomp given to that side and the orientation of the entrances and playgrounds; boys kept away from the south side. Densely fenestrated staircase and cloakroom blocks, in which the former girls’ and infants’

DRAFT

entrances have been altered, flank the central hall range which has neo-Tudor enhancements in the shape of corbelled-out semi-hexagonal turrets and ogee hood-moulds of stone with fleurs-de-lis finials. Such touches are unusual in Robson's work, of which the wider brick polychromy and free massing is more typical. There is a broach spire on the bulkier and flatter north classroom range. This lacked its west section until 1904 when it was added by William Harris, builder. The semi-open plan interior was then reordered with the insertions of timber and glass partitions (that remain in place) and a gallery corridor across the upper part of the main hall.

At the far north-west corner of the site a plain two-storey block was built in 1890 to house north-lit technical or manual training above an office and stores for the Board's District Clerk of Works. Its builder was B. E. Nightingale of the Albert Embankment. To the south-east a girls' drill hall was added in 1907, by C. Bowyer of Upper Norwood. The little-altered main building was among the earlier board schools to be listed in 1973. Additional land to the south was acquired and there, beyond an early nineteenth-century boundary wall, a low brown-brick nursery school was built in 1980 and extended in 1994.⁷⁸

Mulgrave School

In 1889 the School Board set in motion the building of another new school for 800 children in Woolwich. By 1891 a site behind the north side of the west end of Wellington Street had been chosen, St John's Schools near by having been found inadequate. Properties on Mulgrave Place and Back Lane were cleared and, after a false start in 1891–2 (contract tenders had to be invited three times), Mulgrave Place Schools were built in 1893–4 by Kirk and Randall, to plans overseen by T. J. Bailey. Squeezed onto a handful of house plots, this was a tall narrow triple-decker, of red brick and quite plain, with twelve classrooms, three

DRAFT

halls and a schoolkeeper's house to the north-east above cookery and laundry centres for girls and, to the north-west, a two-storey manual-training school for boys. The main block was enlarged westwards in 1900–1, as always envisaged, and the capacity of what became a successful Technical Science and Art School rose to more than 1,200. A report of 1912 noted that 'a certain slowness of mind was noticeable among the older children . . . this was explained as a characteristic of the locality'.⁷⁹

Mulgrave School suffered a direct hit in a bombing raid of 1941. A larger site up to Wellington Street was cleared, save the Queen Victoria public house, and a school for 200 was built in 1949–50, just behind the pub. This was one of eleven 'transitional' primaries that the LCC put up on bomb sites at this time, in what was its Architect's Department's first foray into prefabricated schools; reinforced-concrete structures incorporated precast elements. A U-plan of single-storey flat-roofed ranges was extensively glazed, with full-height windows to the taller assembly hall. Plans for further extension to the rear for a total of 560 places were not realized until 1969–71 when the GLC Architect's Department oversaw an L-plan addition for juniors, again mostly single storey with light steel-frames constructed in the ILEA's Rationalized Building System – 'neat, simple, rapidly constructed but bloodless'.⁸⁰ The site now extended back beyond the end of Belford Grove. Into this playground area some huts were placed in 1975. A nursery block was added at the front in 1988.⁸¹

Arson by a former pupil destroyed the junior school in 1999. After interim use of the remaining buildings as a pupil referral unit Greenwich Council decided to redevelop the site to permit merger with the nearby Cyril Henry Nursery School. In 2002 the project was taken on by Dannatt Johnson Architects, working with Colvin and Moggridge,

DRAFT

landscape architects, and William Verry, contractors. The new school, with 520 places, opened in 2005. It had been moved back from the road, behind a flat sports playground and cocooned within high perimeter fences. Much use was made of recycled constructional material (cladding boards made from wine bottles, newspaper insulation, aluminium roofing), but it is the untreated oak cladding that, inside the fences, catches the eye. A big entrance lobby stands at the junction of three wings laid out as an uneven Y – a tall assembly hall to the south, a two-storey classroom block with a top-lit central corridor to the west, and single-storey early years' buildings, including a children's centre, to the north. The north-west part of the site nearest Mulgrave Pond was landscaped with new planting; natural play spaces had become an important part of school design.⁸²

The forerunner of the nursery, Cyril Henry Nursery School, had been on St Mary Street, on its east corner with Greenlaw Street, close to where there had been a back-land schoolroom from about 1860. Single-storey sheds were built there for the Woolwich Advisory Committee on Women's Employment in early 1917 alongside a converted house, to be a crèche for children whose mothers were munitions workers. This early nursery school was a gift from Lady Henry, née Julia Lewisohn, the wife of Sir Charles Solomon Henry, a Liberal MP. It was named after their son who died in the battle of Loos in 1915. Lady Henry passed the premises on to the LCC and the sheds were used after the war as a clinic, particularly for tonsillectomies, reverting to nursery use when war again required mothers to work. Medical use returned briefly in the late 1940s before the buildings became a nursery school proper. After the move to Mulgrave School the St Mary Street site was redeveloped in 2007–9 as Hawke House (No. 57), a crude brick block of eight two-bedroom flats, built for the London and Quadrant Group by Classgrade Ltd,

DRAFT

contractors, to designs by Harper Sarraf Sheppard Associates, architects.⁸³

Other public buildings

Woolwich Dockyard Station

This station was built in 1849 for the South Eastern Railway Company's North Kent Line, which opened that year. Peter William Barlow was the engineer, responsible for plans, and Samuel Beazley the architect, for elevations, with John Brogden junior as contractor for the railway and John Kelk for the buildings. The line here sits in a brick-lined cutting on land that had been a sand pit. Originally there were twin station buildings, one either side, tripartite white-brick blocks with central ticket halls and flanking offices and waiting rooms, that to the north set lower and embraced by a tall retaining wall. Apart from this wall, all that is upstanding after mid-twentieth-century demolitions is the two-bay south-west office section; blocked-up lower elevations still face the platforms. Two late nineteenth-century footbridges were succeeded by one, and the platforms have been extended to run the full distance between Coleman Street Tunnel and Woolwich Dockyard Tunnel, on the far side of which an original dentilled portal survives.⁸⁴

Woolwich Fire Station

A large plot on the west side of Sun (Sunbury) Street long remained open ground, housing no more than a well until the Metropolitan Board of Works acquired it as a works site for the making, directly below, of the mile-long 'Woolwich Tunnel' part of the Southern Outfall Sewer in 1860–2. Following the formation of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade in 1866, the south part of the plot was taken for the erection of a fire-brigade station in 1868; previously, a Woolwich fire engine had been maintained by the Vestry. This is a peculiar back-street location for a fire station, but the

DRAFT

land was in hand and more central sites were not available. The first station, designed by Edward Cresy, was a simple two-storey structure, comprising an engine room and mess room, with a flat above and outbuildings to the rear.⁸⁵

The much more substantial MBW building that remains extant replaced this in 1886–7. Hidden away, this is London's oldest fire station still in operational use (an older part of Southwark Station is a museum). Its architect was Robert Pearsall, working under Alfred Mott in the Fire Brigade Branch of the MBW's Architect's Department. The builders were Lonergan Brothers of Plumstead.⁸⁶ Few of Pearsall's stations survive, but here his characteristic free-Gothic style still provides a striking profile, pinnacled buttresses leading the eye to tall chimneystacks and the prominent five-storey round watchtower, itself a rare survival. The polychromatic-brick façade incorporates ornamental terracotta spandrels and Portland stone dressings. Internally the engine room is open under composite iron girders, supplied by Archibald Dawnay. The staircase in the tower winds neatly round a matchboard-lined hose-drying cupboard. The upper storeys housed a mess room, bedrooms and apartments – twelve men were stationed here.⁸⁷

The LCC extended the fire station southwards in 1909–11, there being insufficient accommodation for married staff. The LCC Architect's Department's Fire Brigade Branch supplied plans; William Johnson and Co. of Wandsworth Common were the builders. The red-brick addition, sympathetic but not entirely harmonious, was accompanied by the insertion of a half dormer into the first build. A recreation room, latterly a gymnasium, was provided on the ground floor, and there was extensive rebuilding and extension to the rear.⁸⁸

Dispensary (demolished)

DRAFT

The closure of the dockyard in 1869 struck these western parts of Woolwich harshly, bringing acute poverty. To alleviate this in 1871 the Woolwich Board of Guardians made use of a gap on the west side of Rectory Place, above the railway tunnel, and built a dispensary and poor-relief office, to designs by Church and Rickwood. It was demolished in 1960.⁸⁹

Mortuary (demolished) and Public Shelter

A parish mortuary of the 1830s in the cliff-face north of St Mary's Church was too small for post-mortems and incapable of enlargement. Discussions about alternatives opened in the early 1890s when the churchyard began to be remade as a recreation ground, and the Woolwich Local Board of Health offered to build a mortuary on land north of the Sun Street fire station. But parallel proposals (never realized) for a Coroner's Court in Woolwich complicated matters, and it was 1896 before plans for the Sun Street facility were prepared. The Board decided to put a single-storey mortuary at the back of the site, behind a two-storey range that would provide a house for a caretaker and, to the north, a 'public shelter', a pair of two-bedroom flats for the temporary housing of those displaced when the Board undertook disinfection of houses affected by outbreaks of infectious disease. Such shelters were a requirement of the Public Health (London) Act of 1891, after which a house on Samuel Street was adapted to this purpose. After delays over land conveyance and loan sanction the Board built the Sun Street complex in 1899–1900. H. H. Church was the architect, with Thomas & Edge as builders. The mortuary was extended to the north in 1927–8 and then demolished around 1970. The front block (30–30A Sunbury Street) continues in use as council housing.⁹⁰

British Hospital for Mothers and Babies (demolished)

DRAFT

The British Hospital for Mothers and Babies of 1920–2 was the first teaching hospital of its kind and a much-visited model. It grew out of the British Home for Mothers and Babies and Training School for District Midwives, founded on Wood Street in 1905 through the efforts of Alice Gregory and two other nurses. Reforms in midwifery and the Midwives Act of 1902, aiming to reduce mortality around childbirth, had given rise to a need for training. From the outset the Wood Street home aspired to the establishment of a National Training School and a building fund was formed in 1908, at first for a general hospital with a maternity block, but from 1910 for an institution specifically devoted to maternity. In 1914–15 the organization was boosted by amalgamation with the British Lying-in Hospital (founded in 1749 and the country's oldest maternity hospital) and the acquisition of a three-acre site west of Samuel Street, the still-empty remnant of Reynolah Gardens (now the site of Carr Grove). There were plans for a complex of buildings and substantial funds were in hand, but war meant that it was 1920 before work began, with Young and Hall as architects. By 1922 two-thirds of the butterfly-plan neo-Georgian hospital was up. There was a three-storey east-facing administrative block with radiating rear wings, that to the centre a vaulted chapel dedicated to the Holy Nativity. A two-storey southern ward block for ante-natal patients had verandahs at its end, to sit out in. The grounds included a tennis court. The northern ward block for post-natal complications was never built; temporary timber sheds had to serve. Vindication of the enterprise came in 1926 when the scheme of training introduced from the start at Wood Street was adopted as a national standard. The hospital saw extensions, first to the north, and then, in 1936, with a twelve-bed eastern annexe called the 'House of the Star', funded by Hovis through the personal involvement of J. F. Morton, Managing Director. The hospital continued under the NHS to provide, in particular, for premature babies and post-natal complications, and the south ward block was extended in the 1950s. Closure, proposed in 1967,

DRAFT

was averted and a northern block with two operating theatres was added in 1969–71. The hospital did close in 1984 and demolition followed.⁹¹

St Mary's Comprehensive Development Area

By the end of the 1930s many of the late-Georgian houses in the area covered by this chapter had been designated slums. Some of these and others were then lost in air raids. Much replacement was achieved through a notable post-war renewal programme. The St Mary's Comprehensive Development Area was the only scheme of its kind in London overseen by a borough council. Bracketed together with its story here is an account of a related earlier housing project.

Renewal by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, 1930s

A significant prelude to the post-war campaign was played through the hands of the Church of England. The Woolwich Rectory estate had been sold to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 1893. When leases came up for renewal from 1908 short new leases were issued, generally to sitting tenants, this being a solidly working-class area that held little prospect of profitable improvement. Towards the end of the long-lease reversions in 1931 the Commissioners began to plan the replacement of the estate's 'worn out' early nineteenth-century buildings. Low rents notwithstanding, it may have been calculated that in the longer run replacement would be more economical than continuing repairs and it would, of course, provide better housing. There appear to have been no serious thoughts of selling sites for speculative redevelopment. The Commissioners mobilized themselves to be large-scale housing providers on, for them, an unusual scale. But progress was slow. By the end of the decade only twenty-two flats and sixteen houses had been built.⁹²

The project was carried forward through Cluttons, the Commissioners' agents, who worked with local architects, Wright and Renny, based in

DRAFT

Powis Street. They began with a scheme for ‘tenement houses’ on Kingsman Street, between Rectory Place and Rectory Grove, proposing seventy flats in ten blocks of three and four storeys, for which designs were produced only in 1934. In planning this there was collaboration with Woolwich Borough Council with a view to housing those displaced by nearby slum clearances. Plans were scaled down to sixty-three units, and balconies introduced, before in 1937 the first fourteen flats were built, each with its own kitchen and bathroom, in Preston House and Pickering House, facing Rectory Grove, which was renamed Escreet Grove in 1938 after the Rev. Charles Escreet. Had the scheme been seen through as then intended, the two-storey porch on the east side of Preston House would have supported one side of an arch across the roadway into the internal courtyard. Two more blocks, Lindsay House and Fraser House, for 18 three-bedroom flats, were begun in 1939, but war stopped work. They were completed in 1946–7, costs having all but doubled. This was the only south London housing that the Commissioners built at this difficult time.

Better progress had been made with two-storey cottage developments on St Mary Street in the 1930s. The Commissioners’ first building on the estate was at Nos 4–10, four two-bedroom flats of 1933–4. More attractive are the short terraces of 1935–8 at the east end of the street, mostly two- and three-bedroom houses. In 1938 there were plans for similar groups at Nos 28–66, suspended in 1940, though the site was soon after cleared.

The Commissioners’ began to encounter opposition to their good works in early 1938. The St Mary’s Tenants’ Protection Association was formed, in protest at the high rents of the new houses – outsiders were displacing locals who could not afford the hike. The Commissioners complained that they could not compete with local authorities, whose rents were

DRAFT

subsidized, but they were even so pressed into reducing their rents by twenty-five per cent, in part because the borough's clearance plans depended on the Commissioners' buildings for rehousing. After the war these difficulties, increased building costs and the prospect of having to recast development plans persuaded the Commissioners to sell the Woolwich estate to the Council, which was, in turn, persuaded to take the whole lot, rather than just vacant sites. First discussions in 1950 bore fruit when the land was taken into the Comprehensive Development Area in 1951; the sale went ahead in 1952.⁹³

Setting up the CDA

It is to Woolwich Borough Council that the story now turns.⁹⁴ In the inter-war period Woolwich, the only Labour stronghold in London that was not already largely built over, put up more than 4,000 homes across its southern parts in Eltham, essentially as cottage estates. The Council and its large Direct Labour Organization (DLO), established in 1923, gained a reputation as efficient and productive house-builders. The cottage-estate ideal was standard in housing authorities in the 1930s, but Woolwich appears especially to have deplored the idea of housing its people in 'barracks' – more than others, perhaps, it knew what they were like. From 1933 slum-clearance designations paved the way for a turn back to old Woolwich, for the renewal of housing in long-inhabited parts of the borough. After the Housing Act of 1934 pressure from the Ministry of Health to designate slums gathered pace. In 1935 the London County Council and Woolwich Borough Council, both Labour-run from this time on, together earmarked some small clearances, including at Limbery's Buildings, the occupants to be rehoused in Eltham in new Woolwich Borough Council cottages on the Middle Park Estate.

Significant steps were taken in 1938 when a clearance area at the top end of Rectory Place was declared, and, more so, when the LCC bundled

DRAFT

eleven small areas together as the Warwick Street slum-clearance plan. This covered more than ten acres, everything between Frances Street and Kingsman Street, from Woolwich Church Street south to Borgard Road, railway land excepted, and took in 318 dwellings. A further three acres and fifty-three houses east of Kingsman Street were also earmarked for purchase with a view to displacing 1,616 people in all, for redevelopment in fifteen four-storey and eight two-storey buildings to provide 480 dwellings for 2,309 people. The LCC was thus already pushing for a form of mixed development, but Woolwich protested vigorously against the erection of blocks of flats instead of houses. The LCC, which had been forced since 1934 to back away from Labour's commitment to cottage estates,⁹⁵ responded that elsewhere five storeys was its norm, and that the lower heights it was proposing at Warwick Street were already a concession to the Woolwich preference for open development. For Woolwich the Ecclesiastical Commissioners' St Mary Street cottages seemed an appropriate model – even the three- and four-storey 'high-rise' tenements on Escreet Grove would have been suspect. A public inquiry was held in August 1939, but war intervened. There was some bomb damage in and around what was now renamed Lord Warwick Street, but it was not extensive. Living conditions only deteriorated; post-war occupancy in Lord Warwick Street included, in one front room, a donkey.⁹⁶

Despite the pre-war differences, for the LCC in the late 1940s and early 1950s Woolwich was an exemplary borough. Both councils remained firmly Labour and Woolwich had both its particular importance in early Labour history and its heavy-hitting connections – not just Herbert Morrison, but also Ernest Bevin, briefly MP for Woolwich East in 1950–1. Woolwich also had an unusually highly skilled and educated working class, whose political representatives, though determinedly independent, could be relied on to get on with things. Further, post-war housing

DRAFT

problems were particularly acute in Woolwich because of heavy bomb damage and the return of Arsenal workers who had been transferred to other parts of the country during the war.

Woolwich, with its big DLO, prided itself as a peerless house-builder among London boroughs, but it had run out of open space in its southern parts once it took on Coldharbour Farm in Eltham, where building started in 1947. By 1953 that project was close to completion ‘as the finest advertisement the Woolwich Labour Council could ever hope to have’.⁹⁷ Adherence to cottage ideals had held, though scarcity of land did oblige the insertion of a seven-storey point block in 1953–5. When the planning of 1,800 dwellings on the Coldharbour Estate had begun straight after the war, the Council had on its books 9,739 families in need of housing. It was already then evident that ‘it was henceforth necessary to knock down before putting up.’⁹⁸

The Council’s Medical Officer of Health, Thomas Standring, was keen on a clean sweep, advocating wholesale replacements of the borough’s older houses. David Jenkins, Town Clerk from 1933 to 1962, was another leading figure in the post-war housing drive, instrumental in organizational terms, as was A. V. Walker, Director of Housing to 1961. The most directly involved senior Council officer was Wallace H. Gimson (1895–1974), Borough Engineer from 1939 to 1960. Gimson was responsible for both architectural work and the DLO. Robert L. Gee, Gimson’s deputy from 1949 to 1953, succeeded and continued for a time from 1965 in tandem with J. M. Moore, who became Greenwich Council’s Chief Architect.⁹⁹ The two most closely engaged councillors over the longer run were Mabel Crout and Ronald Bryson Stucke. It is perhaps unjust, though not altogether surprising, that neither has had a St Mary’s building named after them. Crout had worked for Woolwich Labour Party since the age of nineteen in 1909, and was its Secretary

DRAFT

from 1941 to 1950. An LCC councillor and the chairman of Woolwich Borough Council's Housing Committee for long periods in the 1940s and 1950s, she continued to be politically active after local-government reorganization in 1965, as the London Borough of Greenwich's first chairman and Alderman of its Housing Committee. Stucke, the son of an Arsenal foreman, had been a council employee before becoming a councillor in 1949. He chaired Woolwich Borough Council's Works and Development committees in the 1950s and was the Council's leader at reorganization in 1965.¹⁰⁰

In 1950 the LCC was set to deal with the Lord Warwick Street area (extended across Frances Street to Samuel Street, where there had been slight bomb damage) and Woolwich Borough Council to take forward further clearances to the north and east of the Rectory estate. Woolwich persuaded the LCC to rezone the Lord Warwick Street area for purely residential use. Redevelopment was to start immediately and Woolwich would carry out the work, to keep its DLO ticking over. In November Jenkins sent the LCC a plan by Gimson that delineated about seventy-five acres as the 'St Mary's Neighbourhood Reconstruction Area', an appellation that referred to a category introduced in the *County of London Plan* (1943), which had not mentioned Woolwich in this regard. For this change Woolwich was advocating use of the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. But this planning role pertained unequivocally to the LCC, so, in advancing its desire for a 'preconceived architectural plan' to get 'something really worth while', Woolwich was expressing a desire not only to take on the building work, but also to contribute to the formulation of plans. A tentative five-year plan was advanced for what was envisaged overall as a twenty-year programme – a timescale that, remarkably, held. Residential zoning across the area meant that small-scale industry and commerce was pushed to other parts of Woolwich. An outer-suburban density of seventy persons per acre (ppa) was projected to provide

DRAFT

housing for 5,000 and avoid any overspill. It was an important point that the whole Woolwich DLO could be transferred to the area once the Coldharbour Estate was finished. Across the river at the Lansbury Estate in Poplar, the LCC was in 1950 having difficulty with multiple contractors impeding each other, a circumstance that perhaps rebounded in favour of Woolwich. Its unusually large DLO workforce of more than a thousand had been building about 400 units a year and, with no more vacant land in the borough, there was nowhere else for it to go. Woolwich Borough Council's aim was not just the supply of homes, but also the protection of jobs.

The LCC was wary of delegating its planning powers, but Woolwich was 'very anxious' to do its own planning and Gimson worked up further drafts. The approach was hammered out in 1951. The 'St Mary's Redevelopment Area', now seventy-two acres, was to be framed north and south by the former dockyard and the Frances Street barracks, extended west up to Prospect Vale and east almost to Powis Street. Woolwich wanted to proceed with cottage development under planning powers and persuaded the LCC, where responsibilities for housing were in flux, to shift from a preference for action under housing powers that would have tended to mean blocks of flats. Robert Matthew, the LCC Architect, agreed to all this provided Woolwich took full financial responsibility, and St Mary's became the eighth and last Comprehensive Development Area to be listed in the County of London Development Plan published later in the year. These eight areas were priorities among 'upwards of 100 areas in need of reconstruction' and St Mary's was the only one delegated to a borough. The Plan's slum-clearance map showed Woolwich as having black areas as extensive as those of Bethnal Green. The number to be housed was now 4,094 at 70ppa (the existing population being 4,130). There was provision for widening Woolwich Church Street, and for a new link road for ferry traffic via widenings of Thomas Street and John Wilson

DRAFT

Street. Fewer shops would be gathered together in small shopping centres and there would be more space for schools.¹⁰¹

The LCC refused to help with decanting (evictions) and rehousing, but had far from let go of the project. It came within the purview of Percy Johnson-Marshall (1915–93), leader, since its formation in 1949, of the Reconstruction Areas Group of the Town Planning Division that was led until 1955 by Arthur Ling, from within Matthew's Architect's Department. Johnson-Marshall was discussing the plans for the CDA with Woolwich officials in July 1951, and continued to be involved until at least 1955. As an architect, he was a fervent advocate of social improvement through planning. His multi-disciplinary team of architects, planners, landscape-architects, surveyors and, innovatively, a sociologist, Margaret Willis, was much taken up in 1951 with the Lansbury Estate and the Festival of Britain's Live Architecture Exhibition there through the summer.¹⁰² Woolwich embarked on its work immediately in the autumn of 1951, prior even to Ministry approval, but no houses had yet been completed in 1953 when the Woolwich Labour Party, celebrating fifty years since its *annus mirabilis*, declared the St Mary's project a 'stupendous piece of pioneering work'.¹⁰³

Building the St Mary's Estate

In fact, 1952 had been a frustrating year for Woolwich Borough Council. Champing at the bit to crack on with bricks and mortar as it was used to doing in the fields of Eltham, it found its efforts repeatedly held back even though it convened a 'Special Committee' to take forward the Comprehensive Development Area (CDA).¹⁰⁴ Gimson had already submitted layout plans and type designs for vacant and bomb-damaged sites, sensible starting points to minimize rehousing problems, as well as a scheme for two-storey houses and three-storey flats on the east side of Rectory Place (this anticipated acquisition and clearance of the Rectory

DRAFT

and its garden). In proposing a new through road and blocks around a central green on an east–west axis, keeping existing trees with spaces between the blocks and roads laid out with small formal gardens, Gimson conceived a ‘residential unit’ that could be adapted to other sites in the area. It was, but things did not turn out quite as he hoped.

In January 1952 the Ministry of Housing and Local Government refused to approve Gimson’s plans, finding the two-bedroom flats excessively roomy. They were scaled down, but, more fundamentally, both the LCC and the Ministry insisted on an agreed master layout before things went any further. A joint team made up of officers from both Gimson’s and Johnson-Marshall’s departments prepared this and sites for buildings, heights and the distribution of flats, maisonettes and houses were agreed. They were dealing with distinctly hilly ground, so contours were carefully considered and a model was made. In what must have been a prickly relationship, Gimson, in his late 50s and an engineer used to building cottages in high volumes, took on board the intellectual and modernist ideas emanating from Johnson-Marshall, twenty years younger and a trained architect. Johnson-Marshall supplied the master layout, but Gimson was responsible for the layout plans and type designs. Woolwich remained determined to keep heights down to three storeys, but was shown that this would result in a seventy per cent quota of flats and a monotonous appearance. The LCC pushed for blocks of up to five storeys, to permit sixty-five per cent in houses or maisonettes, and in March Johnson-Marshall showed the Woolwich Development Committee slides of housing at Lansbury, Hackney and Copenhagen. By May the point had been won. In the dichotomy of the time that differentiated ‘soft’ Communists dedicated to picturesque or vernacular planning and materials from ‘hard’ Corbusian aesthetic modernism, Woolwich remained, like Lansbury, soft. Johnson-Marshall was on the soft side of the split within the LCC, but even so Woolwich was too

DRAFT

impure and compromised for him. When he came to publish a review of his work, *Rebuilding Cities* (1966), it went unmentioned, unlike the Stepney CDA where he worked more directly.

In this agreed master layout Gimson redeployed his 'residential unit' with a central green idea for the land west of the parish church, 'to open up a view of the Church which is of pleasing appearance and well situated on rising ground'. As many as forty-two new shops were to be provided, twenty-six of them concentrated in two rows under dwellings, laid out on LCC advice as two sides of a 'piazza' open to Lord Warwick Street and Kingsman Street, so as to open up further the vista to the church. Blocks further west along Church Street were left facing the road rather than aligned north-south as the LCC preferred. At the LCC's request a site on Sunbury Street was allocated for an old people's home (Sunbury Lodge), to be provided by the LCC under the National Assistance Act or welfare legislation. The LCC undertook a photographic survey of the whole CDA and requested the retention of Grade III listed buildings on the south side of Church Hill and west side of Rectory Place, but Standring, the Medical Officer of Health, in particular kept Woolwich opposed. While the councils managed broad agreement, there were stiff objections elsewhere, principally from the Ogilby Estate, which held property in eastern parts of the area. There were public inquiries in 1953, and when the St Mary's CDA Plan was formally confirmed in April 1955 it had been reduced to sixty-two acres, with the Ogilby Estate allowed to retain control of its land east of John Wilson Street.

These hold-ups were compounded by the practical difficulties of decanting, compulsory purchases and the relocation of businesses, especially public houses – twelve were to be reduced to four or five. Despite all this, building work did begin in July 1952. Progress across the area was on an ad hoc basis, jumping here and there, 'contracts'

DRAFT

sequenced simply according to when sites became available. The first was on the empty south side of St Mary Street (Nos 26–68), where there was no master-plan disagreement with regard to the building of a two-storey terrace of six houses and a three-storey block of eighteen flats, both extremely plain buildings. The flats derived from a type used on the Coldharbour Estate, but were pared back from that and from Gimson's hope for a 'contemporary elevational treatment' with a curved front and private balconies. Woolwich was also able to get on with completion of the Church Commissioners' scheme for further flats on the west side of Rectory Place, simply taking over the plans for four more three-storey blocks with which the Commissioners had persevered into 1951, adopting the designs prepared by J. V. Hamilton, staff architect at Cluttons. As before, these were simple hipped-roof blocks, in a manner rather more Scandinavian than neo-Georgian.

The east side of Rectory Place (Contract 3) was more problematic. The plans that had been prepared in late 1951 had been largely rejected by 1953 when Gimson reworked the scheme. The through road was rerouted as a dogleg and named Charles Grinling Walk in 1955 in honour of the former local resident. Nearly all the buildings here were to be of four storeys, for sixty-two maisonettes in seven blocks, still fairly plain, but with elegant proportions and decorative touches that seem to derive from buildings on the Lansbury Estate designed by Geoffrey Jellicoe. But the Rectory site was still not available so only five blocks could go ahead at first. The lower units had back gardens, the upper ones balcony access, private rear balconies and, in some cases, front gardens. Another short row of houses, 4–12 Charles Grinling Walk, was a hold-over from the earlier scheme, following the Coldharbour precedent as on St Mary Street, but with projecting porches and separate kitchen doors on the fronts. In these and other early St Mary's buildings, the walls were always of load-bearing brick, with hollow-tile reinforced-

DRAFT

concrete floors. The conservatism of the buildings was in large measure a reflection of the direct-labour set-up. The housing was built to last and space standards were high, but the organization had a limited repertoire.

Detailed plans for the Lord Warwick Street area were prepared in 1953, but the Ministry insisted, against strong objections from Woolwich, that costs and ceiling heights in the flats be reduced and that in future other flats in the CDA should be smaller in area. An intended five-storey 'point block' at the west end of Lamport Close was deferred, as were four-storey blocks on the north side of Lord Warwick Street. Work on ninety-seven other dwellings in fifteen blocks, all but one of two and three storeys, began in April 1954, with another small greensward laid out between the street and the close. The austerity of design was leavened in the groups on the north side of Lamport Close, where four-bedroom houses form dark-brick end pavilions to yellow-brick rows. Three four-storey blocks followed on to complete Lord Warwick Street and Lamport Close in 1957. The Kingsman Parade scheme was worked up in 1954 to include the Greyhound public house and the first range of shops below maisonettes. This was all that was built in 1956–8; demand proved insufficient to justify building the second shops range. In the predominance of yellow brick and details such as the porches and window architraves, these buildings are a trace more Lansbury-like, if still unadventurous. The anti-architectural and vernacular role played by Woolwich made the St Mary's CDA a distinctively hybrid place, unlike others where the LCC had unfettered control.

Steadily, these and other sites were brought forward, but in 1954 only forty-eight dwellings had been completed and there were still 569 houses awaiting clearance. This was frustrating for an authority so used to building – since 1945 Woolwich had erected 2,219 permanent and 986 prefabricated dwellings; in the period up to 1960 no other metropolitan

DRAFT

borough council save Wandsworth built so much permanent housing.¹⁰⁵ Gimson blamed slow progress on Johnson-Marshall's team's insistently close control. But it was more fundamentally due to the inherent difficulties of rehousing. A. V. Walker urged upping the density from 70 to 100 ppa in November 1954, to help cope, in the long run, with the problems of decanting. This was an alteration that Woolwich had considered proposing back in 1952, but had held off, not wanting to create delay. The question was referred to the LCC, and once again in early 1955 plans passed back and forth between Johnson-Marshall and Gimson.¹⁰⁶ To provide the increased density, and 240 additional dwellings, the LCC proposed five eleven-storey point blocks, an LCC standard, along the west side of Frances Street, but only in due course. Woolwich demurred, averse to such height; Gimson was directed to respond with a scheme that kept down to eight storeys. He introduced a slab block on Kingsman Street, but could not manage densities above 87 ppa. In July 1955 Woolwich caved in and accepted the need for the eleven-storey blocks. The amended plans also replaced rows of two-storey houses with more three- and four-storey blocks of flats and maisonettes. Pressure towards adopting multi-storey solutions was inexorable and higher-rise building was the only way of catching up with decanting backlogs – in late 1955, 222 families from the CDA had been rehoused, but only 122 of these had remained in the area. These problems were typical of housing projects across the country; the Housing Subsidies Act of 1956 institutionalized a preference for high-rise, as subsidy rates increased with height.¹⁰⁷ The Frances Street towers were immediately stepped up to fourteen storeys and the Kingsman Street slab to nine. In 1960, plans for houses on the south side of Kingsman Street were abandoned in favour of a four-storey block, explicitly in order to obtain a higher rate of subsidy.

DRAFT

Blocks like those previously built were completed in the late 1950s, using the same type plans but sometimes with an extra storey or two added to what had earlier been intended. Outside contractors had to be taken on to design and build the reinforced-concrete frame of Gimson's slab block (1–99 Kingsman Street) in 1958–9, but direct labour finished the job, with chequered brick end walls. Despite this aesthetic gesture, G. P. Youngman, the Council's consultant landscape architect, proposed shrubs and climbers on the slab's north face in 1961, 'to relieve the present rather hard appearance'. The risk of vandalism was dissuasive.

The LCC gave up part of the Sunbury Street plot earmarked for an old people's home in 1955 for the relocated Woolwich Parochial Almshouses, and prepared a layout scheme for both buildings, putting the almshouses on the west side of Greenlaw Street and proposing a low quadrangular complex behind, with an enlarged recreation ground beyond. Trustees oversaw the building of the almshouses in 1958, four over four, to designs by Eley and Rickcord, local architects, in the CDA's plain-brick idiom, but with windows set especially low to enable occupants to see out whilst seated. Open fireplaces were designed to burn smokeless fuel – from 1954 the St Mary's area was London's first smokeless zone outside the City. The LCC Architect's Department's plans for the home were revised and it was built by James Miller and Partners, of Hayes, Middlesex, in 1960–2 and opened as Hill Reach. A quiet yellow-brick complex with three courtyards, it was designed to house sixty-four in a mix of single and double rooms, with communal and staff spaces. An entrance-court fountain incorporates a sculpture by Alan Durst depicting a group of sea-lions.¹⁰⁸

Gimson prepared layout plans for the south side of Belson Road and Kingsman Street in 1958 – three six-storey point blocks flanked by four-storey maisonettes and two-storey houses. This depended on the

DRAFT

acquisition of some open land from the War Office, pushing the margin of the CDA further south, so the work was postponed until the early 1960s. The modest point blocks show some LCC influence, as from the type launched in the early 1950s at Alton East in Roehampton.

Architectural panache arrived in the Frances Street point blocks. In 1956 Woolwich had decided that they warranted specialist advice. Crout, Walker and Gimson went in search of architects with relevant experience and, after looking at their work in St Pancras and Harlow New Town, appointed Norman & Dawbarn, perhaps on LCC advice. This firm had also contributed to Lansbury and Graham Dawbarn had worked for St Pancras since 1945. They promptly suggested going higher, proposing four towers of fourteen storeys instead of five of eleven, to increase open space. This bold step upwards was agreed, objections within and without the council chamber were navigated, and Norman & Dawbarn were asked to take on the whole banana-shaped island east of Samuel Street, to be laid out as mixed development, as in Johnson-Marshall's revised scheme, with the towers ranged along the hillside curve of Frances Street and, facing Samuel Street, groups of two-tier crosswall construction maisonettes, with two shops, a range of bedsits for the elderly and a doctor's house and surgery to replace premises in the former Rose and Crown. Fifty-five garages and other parking spaces were included, but the overall density had crept up to 141ppa. Wates Ltd were taken on as contractors and the 279 dwellings were built in 1959–62, with the aid of a tower crane, an early instance of something that became a Wates trademark.

The 138ft(42m)-tall towers have piled foundations, reinforced-concrete frames with pinkish flint-lime brick infill panels and patterned cast-concrete panels under the windows. Electric under-floor heating quickly became problematic.¹⁰⁹ Their butterfly-plan form, to maximize light (living

DRAFT

rooms have ‘picture frame’ windows), ventilation and privacy, followed the lead of Denys Lasdun’s cluster blocks in Bethnal Green. But these towers were novel and impressive, the only part of the Woolwich CDA project to be widely written up in the professional press.¹¹⁰ Princess Margaret bestowed on them a royal opening on 11 May 1961. It was the Borough Council’s diamond jubilee and, ten years in, the event crowned the CDA programme. A commemorative leaflet opened with the statement that, after the LCC, Woolwich ‘is, and always has been, the foremost housing authority in London’, and explained that only scarcity of land necessitated the building of ‘tower flats’, and that these were anyway redeemed by views of the Thames.¹¹¹

Intended landscaping of the Frances Street/Samuel Street island with plane trees never happened, and one of the shops was already vacant in 1962. However, in their early days at least, the high-level flats here and elsewhere in the CDA were indeed popular for their views. The towers were thoroughly refurbished for Greenwich Council in 2004–7 by Woodward Ambrose Architects and Apollo London Ltd. Additional flats were formed in ground-floor pram stores and a former shop, metal windows were replaced and re-landscaping included the demolition of garages and the other shop.¹¹²

From 1961 the DLO, still a workforce of about 1,300, was obliged to submit competitive tenders for new contracts; that for a block at 150–194 Frances Street came in some fifteen per cent cheaper than those of other contractors and so the DLO continued its work. Garages became more numerous, eighty-nine being provided with 119 dwellings that were built in 1963–5 to fill out Belson Road, Kingsman Street and St Mary Street. Here Robert L. Gee began to introduce a few changes to Gimson’s types, one being crosswall construction, which worked well in echelon terraces, several of which went up in the mid-to-late 1960s, as on

DRAFT

Charles Grinling Walk. The George IV public house was moved across Rectory Place to a building of 1966–7 put up by Courage Ltd.¹¹³

Uncertainty over ownership and road-building had delayed work in the eastern parts of the CDA. The Ogilby Estate had been allowed in 1955 to hold on to much of its land, and then in 1958 the LCC revisited the scheme for a new road for ferry access. War Office land around Wellington Street had become available, so Woolwich lobbied to be able to extend the CDA to permit John Wilson Street to be both widened and extended southwards to form the east end of the South Circular route, as well as to keep ferry traffic from the town centre. The LCC revised its Development Plan along these lines in 1959, proposing that Woolwich should take the whole west side of John Wilson Street and a part of its east side for the CDA. But the Ogilby Estate had planning permission to build an eleven-storey tower on the west side of the street and, through another inquiry, and in the person of W. H. P. Burnyeat, was able to resist compulsory purchase until 1963. The dual-carriageway John Wilson Street was then begun, and height was unequivocally embraced with first plans for a nineteen-storey tower at the top of Rectory Place. Plans for 270 homes in this area were revised in 1964, with district-heating pipes laid under the new road, completed in 1967. The housing was seen through in four stages by 1970.¹¹⁴

A minuet of land exchanges with the Ogilby Estate meant that in the end there was only one CDA project east of John Wilson Street. Plans for this site shifted from four low blocks, to a twelve-storey point block, reduced to eight storeys before further revision in 1964 in the light of the novel methods used on the LCC's Morris Walk Estate. Output had always mattered in Woolwich, but now a new labour-saving approach to mass production had come in from outside. Here Woolwich was the first metropolitan borough to embrace 'industrialized' building methods, in

DRAFT

the shape of Concrete Ltd's Bison Wall Frame prefabrication system, not in fact a frame, but precast large-panel concrete construction for load-bearing walls. Two eight-storey blocks providing eighty-eight flats were completed in 1966 with Howard Farrow Ltd as Concrete Ltd's contractor. Austere and grey, they were not about appearances.¹¹⁵

This trial of system building led to bigger things. The tower at Rectory Place was finally built as Elliston House (named after the local historian, F. C. Elliston-Erwood), ninety flats and one of seven system-built 22- to 25-storey tower blocks put up across Woolwich and Plumstead in 1967–71. Joyce Carroll, the chairman of Greenwich Council's Housing Committee and a sociologist, spearheaded this huge project to house about 2,000 people as part of an even more ambitious scheme to move population away from the centre of Woolwich. It was argued in 1966 that building tall and slender might avoid the perceived monotony and low architectural quality of the John Wilson Street blocks. There was concern about surface treatment and it was decided that the facing panels should adopt split-face concrete in what was called 'elephant house' finish, after Casson and Conder's building at London Zoo – vertically ribbed panels, bush hammered to expose white calcined flint aggregate and provide robust modelling, with smooth spandrel panels in Thurrock-flint aggregate. The GLC's request that the Rectory Place tower be reduced to fifteen storeys so as not to spoil views of the Royal Artillery Barracks was successfully resisted on cost grounds, though Ministry-imposed reductions did mean abandoning district heating. The towers were built together by J. M. Jones & Sons of Maidenhead, as general contractors on behalf of Concrete Ltd, again using the Bison Wall Frame system, the most widespread nationally by 1966, the year in which industrialized high-rise building peaked. Standard Bison tower blocks were made up of only twenty-one precast components, including prefabricated bathrooms. Deviations from the standard form were expensive, so few occurred

DRAFT

despite the system's claims to flexibility. Elliston House was refaced in a refurbishment of 1998–9 overseen by Hunt Thompson Associates.¹¹⁶

The Bowling Green Row area also came in at the end of the CDA programme, one reason being that rebuilding this locality involved closing three pubs. Clearances and design work (by Gee) only began in 1961, but development was still then deferred. A small group of shops had always been intended and a start was made with a replacement shop for the RACS at 128 Woolwich Church Street; an intended public house adjoining was not taken up, so two more shops followed. The bulk of the Bowling Green Area housing was built in 1965–8. It comprised a fifth tower block on Frances Street, copying those by Norman & Dawbarn and built by Concrete Ltd, four blocks of maisonettes, brick-built with concrete floors and cantilevered bedrooms, laid out in a quadrangle around a car park under a play area – where vandalism was immediately a problem, and a row of five houses on Marshall's Grove. The central cost-yardstick constraints of 1967 were bypassed through the injection of additional local money, and the project was completed in 1968–70, with a similar block of fourteen maisonettes on the west side of Samuel Street and an echelon terrace of ten crosswall houses with double front entrances on Prospect Vale.¹¹⁷

Another block on Rectory Place did follow, but the handovers in 1970 at the west and south-east ends of the CDA effectively marked the completion of the St Mary's Estate; since 1952, 1,434 dwellings had been provided in eighty-eight new buildings.

Gazetteer of housing on the St Mary's Estate

b = bedroom, f = flats, h = houses, m = maisonettes, s = storeys

Ecclesiastical Commissioners (Cluttons, agents, Wright and Renny, architects, E. H. Smith of Croydon, builders, except as noted)¹¹⁸

DRAFT

St Mary Street

- 4–10 – 4 2bf in 2s, 1933–4 (*Harry Groves and Son, Greenwich, builders*)
- 59–69 – 6 2sh, 1935–6 (*Thomas & Edge, Woolwich, builders*)
- 70–80 – 6 2s 2/3bh, 1937–8
- 71 – 4f in 2s, 1937–8
- 73–79 – 4 2sh, 1937–8

Kingsman Street/Escreet Grove

- Pickering House – 7f in 3/4s, 1937
- Preston House – 7f in 3/4s, 1937
- Lindsay House – 12 3bf in 3s, 1939 and 1946–7
- Fraser House – 6 3bf in 3s, 1939 and 1946–7

Woolwich Borough Council (Greenwich Borough Council from 1965, built to the Borough Engineer's designs by direct labour except as noted)¹¹⁹

Belson Road

- 1–11 – 12 2bm in 4s block, 1963–5
- 12–17 – 6 2s 3bh, 1963–5
- 18–64 – 47 1/2bf in 2 6s point blocks, 1960–3

Bowling Green Row

- 1–14, 15–26 – 26 2/3bm in 2 4s blocks, 1965–8

Charles Grinling Walk

- 1–15 – 8 2bm in 4s block, 1960–2
- 17–55 – 20 2-4bm in 2 4s blocks, 1953–5
- 2–2d – 5 2sh, 1965–6
- 4–12 – 5 2s 3bh, 1953–5
- 14–26 – 7 2s 3bh, 1968–70
- 28–38 – 6 2s 3bh, 1968–70
- 40–62 – 12 2s 3bh, 1968–70

Church Hill

- 2–46 – 23 1bf in 3 4s blocks, 1958–9

Frances Street

- 71–177, 179–285 and 287–393 – 162 1/2bf in 3 14s point blocks, 1959–62 (*Norman & Dawbarn, architects, Wates Ltd, builders*)
- 395–497 – 52 1/2bf in 14s point block, 1965–8 (*Concrete Ltd builders*)
- 499–525 – 14 2/3bm in 4s block, 1965–8
- 140–148 – 5 2s 3bh, 1954–6 (*extended 1 unit to south (138) in 2005–7, by J. S. Designs for Mrs B. Lloyd¹²⁰*)
- 150–194 – 23 1/2bf and doctor's surgery in 4s block, 1961–3

Greenlaw Street

- 9–12 – 4 3b 2sh, 1963–5

John Wilson Street

- 59–89 – 88 1bf in 2 8s blocks, 1964–6 (*Bison Wall Frame system contract*)
- 2–32 – 16 2/3bm in 4s block, 1965–6
- 34–64 – 16 2/3bm in 4s block, 1967–8
- 66–96 – 16 2/3bm in 4s block, 1967–8
- 98–128 – 16 2/3bm in 4s block, 1967–8
- Elliston House, 90 1/2bf in 24s tower block, 1967–70 (*Bison Wall Frame system contract*)

Kingsman Parade

DRAFT

8 shops with Greyhound PH under 9 2bm and 2 2/3bf, also 6 garages,
1956–8

Kingsman Street

1–99 – 40m over 10 bedsits in 9s slab block, 1958–9 (*frame designed by Johnson's Reinforced Concrete Engineering Co., built by O. H. Groves & Co.*)

101–121 – 10 2s 3bh and 1 2s 4bh, 1956–8

121A–187 – 34 1/2bf in 5s block, 1963–5

189–257 – 34 1/2bf in 5s block, 1963–5

265–275 – 6 2s 3bh, 1965–6

2–48 – 24 1/2bf in 6s point block, 1960–3

50–76 – 14 3bm in 4s block, 1963–5

Lampport Close

1–24 – 24f in group of 4 3s blocks; 25–32 – 8f in 4s block; 33–44 – 12f in 3s block; 45–50 – 6f in 3s block; 71–82 – 12 2sh, 3b with 4b at ends of 2 groups, *all 1954–6*

51–70 – 23f in 4s block, 1955–7

Lord Warwick Street

1–24 – 24 2s 3bh in 4 groups, 1954–6

25–78 – 54 1-3bf in 2 4s blocks, 1955–7

Marshall's Grove

1–5 – 5 2s 3/4bh, 1965–8

Marybank

1–6 – 6 2s 3bh, 1954–6

Prospect Vale

1–19 – 10 2s 3/4bh, 1968–70 (*John Shirlow, job architect*)

Rectory Place

Watergate House (12f in 2 blocks), Glebe House (6f) and Grinling House (6f) – 2/3bf in 3s blocks, 1952–3 (*completion of Church Commissioners' scheme, designed by Cluttons, J. V. Hamilton, architect*)

70–78 – 10 2-4bm in 4s block, 1960–2

80–102 – 24 2-4bm in 3 4s blocks, 1953–5

101–125 – 13 1bf in 2 and 4s blocks, 1972–5 (*Norman Truscott, job architect*)

St Mary Street

1–13 – 7 2s 3bh, 1956–8

15–41 – 28 1bf in 3s block, 1956–8

2–2A – 2 2s 4bh, 1963–5

12–22 – 12 2bm in 4s block, 1963–5

26–56 – 18 1/2bf in 3s, 1952–3

58–68 – 6 2s 3bh, 1952–3

82–90 – 5 2sh, 1965–6

Samuel Street

1–99 – 37 3bm and 13 bedsits in 5 4s blocks; 101–103 – 2 1s shops; 105–121 – 8 bedsits and 1 3bh in 2s block; 123 – 3h and surgery; 125–137 – 57 1/2bf in 15s point block, 1959–62 (*Norman & Dawbarn, architects, Wates Ltd, builders*)

32–58 – 14 2/3bm in 4s block, 1968–70 (*John Shirlow, job architect*)

Sunbury Street

32–108 – 38 1/2b f in 5 4s blocks stepping up hill, 1958–9

DRAFT

Woolwich Church Street

128–132 – 3 shops, 1965–8

142–196 – 28 2/3bm in 4s block, 1965–8

198–220 – 12 2b m in 4s block, 1961–3

222–252 – 16 2b m in 4s block, 1956–7

280–338 – 30 2b f in 2 4s blocks, 1958–9

Morris Walk Estate

The London County Council's Morris Walk Estate of 1962–6 holds a distinctive position in the history of mass housing. As Britain's first housing estate to deploy the Larsen-Nielsen industrialized building system, which would be used extensively for the rest of the decade, it was a major step in the promulgation of technological innovation as a solution to housing shortages. Morris Walk did not simply use the system; it embraced prefabrication as a fundamental virtue, not just of construction and efficiency, but also of aesthetics. The fifteen-acre estate replaced 389 houses on terraced streets with 562 dwellings in an open array of blocks that merged into adjacent Maryon Park.

Small slum clearances around Kidd Street were intended in the 1930s and in 1950 the LCC and Woolwich Borough Council joint five-year slum-clearance plan earmarked for demolition the worst of the houses on Morris Walk and Pett Street (formerly Ann Street, and renamed after the shipbuilding family). Earliest proposals envisaged the displacement of 467 families to provide 350 dwellings in a brick-built cottage estate. There was, however, little urgency about putting this plan into action. The forty-four slum houses were still standing in 1954 when Woolwich decided to purchase and clear adjoining properties to create a more flexible site and proposed to the LCC that it should handle the entire site itself under the provisions of that year's Housing Repairs and Rents Act. The question of who should develop the site passed back and forth with, if not aggression, an intentional lack of tact on both sides. It was 1956 before it was agreed that the LCC would not only develop the entire site,

DRAFT

but also extend it into the Borough of Greenwich, up to and including Maryon Road, to make an estate of over twelve acres. There was no increase in tempo. From the beginning it was acknowledged that, with the exception of the designated slums, there were far worse areas in Woolwich and that it was the size of the site rather than especially poor housing that had brought it to the Council's attention. The compulsory purchase order was not issued until 1958, and, after an inquiry, only completed in 1959. Even after this no real progress was made on plans for the site until 1962.¹²¹

By then the wider housing situation had changed dramatically. There were increasingly acute shortages not only of accommodation, but also of the materials and labour to build – particularly in the finishing trades such as carpentry and glazing, as well as of architectural staff. At the same time, in the light of the Parker Morris report, the standards of living expected of social housing were rising. The original plan for Morris Walk, which depended on traditional building methods, already the cause of delays elsewhere, no longer seemed viable.¹²²

Under similar pressures elsewhere, and the demand from central government that solutions be found, LCC housing policy had evolved towards high-density estates using prefabricated or industrial systems under the direction of architects. In November 1961 the LCC commissioned a report on the possibility of using a large-scale industrial prefabrication method for housing. This was presented in March 1962 and considered five systems: Balency, Camus, Coignet and Schul from France, and Larsen-Nielsen from Denmark. All of these were designed to be faster and more efficient than traditional building methods because 'internal and external finishes and many of the services are incorporated in the factory and in consequence the site labour consists of very little more than the placing of the units one on top of the other, house of cards

DRAFT

fashion.¹²³ Industrialization of the building process would, it was believed, bypass shortages and answer London's housing needs.

The report considered many aspects of the available industrialized systems: the improvement of existing standards; the minimum size of the first order; the minimum space needed; the level of investment required in the factory; the method of cost control; the cost in comparison to traditional methods; the minimum rate of production; the minimum number of identical dwellings; the man hours and training required; the radius of operation; the method of transport; the quality of the finish, and, lastly, licenses for use in the UK. The Larsen-Nielsen system, which had long since, in 1951–2, been introduced to the LCC by Ove Arup, the Danish engineer, was judged to come closest to meeting the LCC's requirements. Negotiations began immediately with Taylor Woodrow-Anglian Ltd, formed specifically to be the licensee of the Larsen-Nielsen system in England. This firm combined the expertise of Anglian Building Products, which had demonstrated the quality of its workmanship at St Catherine's College, Oxford, being built at this time to designs by Arne Jacobsen, another Dane, and the clout of Taylor Woodrow, the second largest construction firm in the country. The advantages of such a licensee may have inclined the LCC's Housing Committee towards the system.¹²⁴

Taylor Woodrow-Anglian organized and accompanied a Housing Committee visit to Copenhagen in August 1962. The report that arose from this is full of enthusiasm for the Larsen-Nielsen system and the savings in time, labour and resources it was expected to make in comparison to traditional building methods. Possible monetary savings were mentioned, but a reduction in cost was 'not the main aim'.¹²⁵

DRAFT

Like all the other systems considered, Larsen-Nielsen did not use structural frames. Instead, heavy concrete slabs complete with internal and external finishes were set one on top of another. Bolts cast into the slabs ensured level joints while the space between was filled with dry concrete. Once this had set the bolts were loosened so that the whole weight of the slab rested upon the concrete. The weight of the structure and friction held the structure together.

Having committed itself to using the Larsen-Nielsen method, the LCC quickly chose the Woolwich site as the first to benefit from this new approach. It was chosen not because it was suitable for industrial methods, indeed it was said that ‘almost everything is against this’.¹²⁶ In particular, the unevenness of the site meant that heavy groundwork was required before a single panel could be erected. Despite the inevitable delay this would cause, Morris Walk was chosen for two simple reasons: it was large enough for the economical minimum of 500 units, and it was immediately available.

A sense of competitive urgency descended onto Morris Walk as a design team of over a hundred was mobilized under the enthusiastic project architect Martin Richardson (working alongside R. M. Parker and under George Bailey) with the aim of completing the first heavy concrete-panel estate in the UK. Only two months after the Housing Committee’s visit to Copenhagen the overall design and layout of the estate was presented at a major conference to promote industrialized system building, and Morris Walk was heralded as the start of a technological breakthrough.¹²⁷

The pace of the project was aided by expertise from Copenhagen, to which Richardson made regular visits, not simply to take advantage of local expertise, but also to acquire a thorough understanding of the system.¹²⁸ This was vital for the architects’ vision of industrial building,

DRAFT

which aimed for an aesthetic that flowed directly from the industrial techniques used to construct the buildings.¹²⁹ Morris Walk was based on the premise that: ‘Designs for industrial production should begin by rejection of the vernacular common to other methods of construction and put in its place the very few simple concepts which are valid for industrial methods and nothing else.’¹³⁰ Monotony had already been observed in industrial-housing schemes on the Continent, but Modernist ideologies that tended to conflate productivity and aesthetics sustained the view that design specifically for the particular system, deriving forms directly from most efficient uses, would arrive at aesthetic success.¹³¹

To fulfil the potential efficiencies of the system, minimization of panel types and an effective production line for on-site erection were both essential. It was decided that the panels for two complete flats would arrive each day from the factory at Lenwade near Norwich, where Anglian Building Products had been based, via the river and a rail link to Charlton where specially adapted lorries would carry the panels the last half mile to the site. In each block, therefore, two flats form every floor. Staircases, lifts and services are all consistently contained in separate external blocks, to avoid imposing on or complicating the residential blocks. This separation of services would minimize noise for residents, and express the use and circulation of the structure with grace and geometry, in accordance with a then-fashionable theory of ‘served’ and ‘servant’ zones.¹³²

Post-clearance construction work began in April 1964. The estate was scheduled to take eighteen months to build and to cost about 3.5 per cent more than if traditionally built. It was the speed of construction, nine months faster than traditional methods, that was thought the greatest advantage. It was hoped that future developments would, in the light of experience, become cheaper. However, teething problems with the

DRAFT

joints meant that although the first tenants were housed in December 1964, the estate was not completely finished until the autumn of 1966; it also went considerably over budget.¹³³

In order to minimize the number of standard panel types required (there were only seventeen) the housing is uniform both internally and externally across two types of blocks – ten-storey point blocks and three-storey ranges, most given a ‘Danish’ name in honour of the system’s origins, thus Viking, Frederick, Zealand, Elsinore, Lolland, Denmark, Jutland and Tivoli Gardens; Harden, Albion and Glenalvon perpetuate earlier local names. Variation in floor area occurs only because of the presence of corridors or storage space, as where smaller corner kitchens were formed in bedsits for the elderly by extending the corridors and inserting storage space. The only major flexibility was the location of the party wall between the units, enabling the flats to vary in size from bedsit to four-bedroom, and different sizes of flat to surmount each other. Each type of room is essentially the same, regardless of the size of the flat. Externally, the panels are given depth and colour by a facing of Norfolk flint, hinting at their East Anglian origins, but the simplicity of design rooted in system is celebrated in the unflinching repetitiveness and reductive purity of the blocks. Part of this, the parallel or *Zeilenbau* north–south layout, was to some extent dictated by the use of a self-propelled crane to erect the buildings. Unencumbered by water tanks, chimneys or balconies (all features of earlier Larsen-Nielsen blocks in Denmark and later ones in England) the blocks at Morris Walk were one of the purest examples of Modern Movement design yet seen in Britain.¹³⁴

Such architectural dynamism as the estate does possess arises not from the building technique but through inspirations traceable to the evolution of English social housing, as in the ‘served/servant’

DRAFT

articulation, already mentioned. The placement of the towers on the highest ground emphasizes the picturesque variety of the site and the curved layout of these towers fringing the neighbouring parkland has distinct echoes of the slab blocks on the LCC's Alton West Estate in Roehampton. The combination of low- and high-rise buildings also perpetuated the orthodoxy of mixed development, though the decision to put three-bedroom flats at the top of one of the towers immediately compromised this ideal – keeping children close to the ground was one original motivation for mixed development.

Morris Walk was one of the LCC's most ambitious, even heroic, experiments in estate building. At the time it was deemed a success. Problems with the new technology had not allowed the whole estate to be finished as quickly as anticipated, but the speed with which the first tower was constructed was impressive. The system was also particularly admired for the quality of its finish – which remains remarkable fifty years later – and for the ease with which it provided a range in flat sizes. The contemporary success of Morris Walk is amply demonstrated by the enthusiasm with which Larsen-Nielsen and other industrialized blocks were erected elsewhere, as well as near by in Woolwich. Identical point towers were put up in Fulham, and Bison schemes in Kidderminster and Birmingham were actually completed first.¹³⁵

Popular support for tower-based social housing waned, and the collapse at Ronan Point in 1968 demonstrated possible weaknesses in a different version of the Larsen-Nielsen large-panel system. As the flagship of such system building, Morris Walk fell from favour. It had been an experiment in a new constructional form so problems did occur almost immediately. By 1967 severe condensation led to suggestions that the workmanship and design of the estate were faulty. Such allegations were firmly rebuffed, but expensive and inefficient heating exacerbated the problems

DRAFT

with condensation (common to nearly all tower blocks of the time). Other early problems included a plague of mice in cavity walls, inadequate soundproofing between flats, and the vandalism and closure of the underground car parks, again all fairly common.¹³⁶

Ronan Point raised fears that the reinforcement of load-bearing walls with steel angles addressed, although Morris Walk, it was said, did not have the same weaknesses and would not have collapsed in the event of a similar gas explosion. New fears about fireproofing and safety in high winds led Morris Walk to be re-examined and extensively refurbished in 1984–5. This work was not only structural, but also included kitchen refitting and new heating systems.¹³⁷

Despite these improvements and the durable quality of the buildings the estate has continued to be one of the least popular in Woolwich. In 2006 it was announced that Morris Walk would be demolished (or, euphemistically, ‘remodelled’) as part of Greenwich Council’s Decent Homes programme. Demolition notice was served in 2011 and it is intended that new housing will be built in its place, in a mixture of social, joint-ownership and freehold housing.¹³⁸

Other post-war redevelopment

Outside the CDA to the south-east was the empty site of St John’s Church. Woolwich Borough Council acquired this and in 1956–7 put up a four-storey block of sixteen flats (107–137 Wellington Street), designed by W. H. Gimson and built by direct labour. For the adjoining Wellington Street frontage to the east the Ogilby Estate was planning to build housing for the elderly and a community centre. Permission to stop up the west end of Love Lane was obtained, and the Estate made overtures to the Council proposing joint development. These were resisted but a land swap agreed in 1959 made the former St John’s School site

DRAFT

available to the Estate. In 1960–2 it built five blocks to designs by Albert M. Selves, an Eltham surveyor and Conservative councillor, four stepping along Wellington Street, and one at right angles to the west, to provide twenty-five flats, with names (Robert, James, Leslie, Alexander and Limavady) derived from the Ogilby family and its Northern Ireland base. These remain the property of the Ogilby Housing Society. The plan to provide for the elderly was relocated to Calderwood Street, where in 1961 Herbert Morrison opened the Ogilby ‘Over 65 Club’ and in 1966–7 the Calderwood Housing Society built a seven-storey block to designs by Selves to provide thirty-six flats for the elderly. This was named Sir Martin Bowes House after the Tudor occupant of Tower Place, marking the 400th anniversary of his death. The Estate’s long-standing plans to redevelop the south side of Castile Road were delayed by discussions over the future of the Methodist Chapel, and it was the early 1980s before the two rows of five yellow-brick houses at 91–99 John Wilson Street and 1–9 Monk Street were built.¹³⁹

The bitty redevelopment of this side of John Wilson Street was completed in 1983–4 when Greenwich Council contracted Kirk and Kirk to build Jim Bradley Close, thirty-one informally grouped terraced houses in brown brick with some tile hanging, on the former Pitter works site, and Bill Walden House (70 Wellington Street), a three-storey brown-brick block, named after a Woolwich mayor, that provides forty-three units of sheltered housing.¹⁴⁰

Further west lies another example of the final twentieth-century and neo-vernacular phase of council housing in Woolwich. In 1978–82 Greenwich Council redeveloped the sloping land north of Godfrey Hill up to Woodhill and Samuel Street. Forty-six houses replaced forty, in straight street terraces in front of short irregular rows, densely grouped in eleven two-storey blocks, some yellow brick, some red, as Paradise Place, Rosebank,

DRAFT

Eleanor Walk and Richard Close. Mike Cadwallader was the job architect under J. M. Moore.¹⁴¹

Subsequent rebuilding between this site and the St Mary's and Morris Walk estates followed on from the closure of the British Hospital for Mothers and Babies in 1984. There was continuing demand for new housing, but political changes meant this could no longer be provided through the local authority. The task fell principally to one housing association, the London and Quadrant Group, which built extensively here in the early 1990s. The east side of the lower reach of Woodhill (formerly Kidd Street) and the triangular plot between Woodhill, Prospect Vale and Lyford Street (also once a part of Kidd Street) had been almost wholly cleared of their early Victorian houses in the early 1960s, but it was only in 1991–2 that these sites were reused. London and Quadrant put up fifty terraced houses and four small blocks for twenty-eight flats, as 29 and 33–71 Prospect Vale, 1–12, 14–40 and 89–119 Woodhill, Hawkins Court and McIntyre Court. They deploy yellow and block brick under hipped roofs. Carr Grove followed on the actual site of the hospital in 1992–4 when Rydon Construction built twenty-eight houses and twelve flats in a starker brick pattern. The site of Unity Place, the twenty-five house terrace fought over and cleared in the 1970s, was redeveloped as 60–108 Samuel Street, twenty-six terraced houses laid out as if a row of seven villas under hipped attics, with smaller houses paired in lower link blocks articulated with black-brick upper storeys. Samuel Close was the approach drive to the hospital. By 1991 it had three low blocks on its north-west side to provide sheltered housing for vulnerable people. The former 'House of the Star' survived opposite until 1997–8 when it was replaced for the Hexagon Housing Association, again by Rydon Construction.¹⁴²

DRAFT

Parish Wharf, off Woodhill, is of the same period, but it is something different. The self-build method espoused by Walter Segal was followed here in 1992–5 to produce eight free-standing four-bedroom houses. Using modular, dry-jointed and cheap post-and-beam timber frames, on stilts to avoid the cost of foundations, these chalet-like houses were built for themselves by members of Co-operative Housing in South-East London (CHISEL). Their architects were Architype, then led by Jon Broome, Segal's leading disciple, with Bob Hayes as the job architect. The name, which seems puzzling here on the landward side of the railway, reprises that of a municipal depot that lay east of the former dockyard.¹⁴³

Across the railway line was ground that had been sidings for the dockyard depot's railway since the 1870s. Reduced after the widening of Woolwich Church Street, this was used for a playground in the 1970s. What is now the Woolwich Adventure Play Centre was connected by subway to the Woolwich Dockyard Estate through a former railway tunnel. Across Pett Street the Albion public house is a plain building of 1966 designed by Eley and Rickcord.¹⁴⁴

Back to the east, eight bungalows of the early 1960s were replaced in the late 1990s at 104–118 Rectory Place. This red-brick terrace comprises a house and six flats, in part for disabled occupancy. It was built for the London and Quadrant Housing Trust by the Calford Seaden Partnership, with Burgess Mean architects and Hilfe Construction Co.¹⁴⁵

On the east side of John Wilson Street and north of the system-built blocks of the 1960s, is the Bexley and Greenwich Health Authority's **Ferryview Health Centre** of 1999–2000. This arose from another kind of industrialized building – Yorkon Ltd's prefabricated modular building

DRAFT

system. Sixty-six steel-framed modules were made in York and speedily erected here to form a two-tone clad block for a seven-GP practice.¹⁴⁶

Finally, the pendulum of housing provision swung back when the Local Authority New Build programme of 2009 provided central funding through the Homes and Communities Agency for a small-scale revival of council-house building. Greenwich Council claimed to be the first London authority to take advantage. Among the earliest projects seen through was **McGhee Terrace, Sunbury Street**, a three-house row put up in 2010–11 where there had been garages. The Council's architects were Pellings, the contractors Lakehouse. In a shallow yellow-brick-faced slab of three storeys under a green roof, each house has five bedrooms, to meet rising demand from large families.¹⁴⁷