CHAPTER 10
Woolwich Common and Royal Military Academy Areas

The southern parts of Woolwich, the narrowing point of the incised triangle that shapes the parish, stretch across Woolwich Common (Ill. 436). This open ground has a distinct character, apart from the rest of the parish, bleak but, thanks to its framing buildings, stately – part blasted heath, part great park (Ill. 437). The southernmost parish boundary is formed by Shooters Hill, a section of Watling Street, the ancient road between London and Dover. From here the common, which extends westwards without break into Charlton, slopes gently down as far north as Ha-Ha Road. The dominant architectural presence is the former Royal Military Academy on what was a south-eastern section of the common. This was Woolwich’s third major Board of Ordnance buildings complex, an establishment for the training of officers that was grandly rehoused here at the beginning of the nineteenth century in a move up from the Warren. By this time there were already a few houses strung along the common’s east side. These multiplied in number through the later nineteenth century to fill the area back to Nightingale Vale, where a brook formed the eastern parish boundary. In the 1760s this built-up area was redeveloped as the Woolwich Common Estate. Elsewhere the parish boundaries, which have varied slightly over time, seem curiously determined. To the south-east zigzagging lines avoid following an early road, Red Lion Lane, which is then crossed to extend a small toe along Shooters Hill. To the west an indistinct dog-leg across the common approximates to the line of a lost watercourse that ran into the ponds in Repository Woods and separated Woolwich from Charlton.

Woolwich Common and its acquisition by the Board of Ordnance

Until the nineteenth century and through ancient custom Woolwich Common was used, as its name implies, by local inhabitants for herbage (pasture for grazing animals), tur- barry (fuel-cutting for fuel) and cutters (the collection of wood and furze for building or fuel), especially by the poor. Ownership of these roughly eighty acres rested with the Crown, which had long held the manor of Eltham, to which land in Woolwich was loosely deemed an appurtenant. But use for military reviews and manoeuvres may have begun in 1788 with a parade said to have been ordered by George III. By late 1803 the Board of Ordnance had decided to take full control of the common. John Pett, the Earl of Chatham, had been appointed Master-General, and major wartime expansions of the Board’s presence in Woolwich were anticipated. The fifth Sir John Shaw, whose estate was due to revert to the Crown in 1810, gave the Board a lease of all the land. Simultaneously, Bowater lands to the north-west were acquired, permitting Barrack Field to be enlarged westwards in 1804 (see pages 342–3). Parishioners objected to what were seen as encroachments, but in early 1813 Joseph Meads Madkins, Bowater’s attorney and a vestryman, tried to persuade the parish to sell the Board its rights to herbage and turbary for £60. No agreement was reached. At the same time, and against a backdrop of invasion fears that led the Duke of York to recommend the building of fortifications on Shooters Hill, the Crown’s freehold of the common was vested in the Board by Act of Parliament; Charlton Common was also acquired. In what amounted to enclosure, the rights of Woolwich parishioners to herbage and turbary were denied, as was access for the extraction of gravel for roads. Under the terms of the Board’s

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CHAPTER TEN

WOOLWICH COMMON AND MILITARY ACADEMY AREAS

The place was remote; in 1767 seven of the thirty-some cottages ‘on the Common’ were empty and some clearance may have ensued. But the attractions of undulating terrain and the proximity of a major road with improved links to Woolwich began to draw attention. In 1767 speculators, including ‘several eminent surveyors’, envisaged a town on Shooters Hill laid out as an ‘elegant Circus’ with radiating streets around a basin of water with an island for a coffee-house and assembly room. This idea, with its hilltop lake, went nowhere. But in 1774, once the Royal Artillery Barracks had been projected for a site facing the common and after the death of Benjamin James, the principal landlord of the cottages, building plots on the common’s east side just south of the junction with Ditchwater Lane were sold off. John Groves, the Board’s master bricklayer who was building the barracks, acquired these, and by 1780 a large house near the corner and an adjacent terrace of five lesser but still good-sized houses (later Rochester Place or 4-8 Woolwich Common) had been built, possibly using plans for field officers’ houses that William Lutinem had prepared in 1778 (see page 143). The wider area’s picturesque possibilities were exploited when Severndroog Castle was built on the Eltham side of Shooters Hill in 1784, and villa-like houses went up on the north side of Ditchwater Lane, as the locale did become a desirable residence for military officers (see pages 244–45). Perhaps, though, it was not all that desirable. In the late 1780s what became the Barrack Tavern was added at the south end of the earlier terrace, and the larger corner house was acquired to be a factory for the Polygraphic Society, which had printed copies of oil paintings under the supervision of Isaac Jehner. This building was destroyed by fire in 1913. A nearby and short-lived chapel may have been used for Methodist worship (c. 1792–93). By this time there was an even larger house at the south end of settlement facing the common: this had been built by Charles Hutton (1757–1821), the son of a Newcastle colliery worker. Of course, Hutton had injured his arm in a street-fight and so been sent to school instead of down the pit, becoming a gifted mathematician, he became a schoolmaster and in 1773, through competitive examination, was appointed Second Master and Professor of Mathematics at the Royal Military Academy, becoming eminent in his field. For the sake of his health he moved from confined quarters in the Warren to Shooters Hill in 1786. On his daily walks to and from the Warren he spotted some land for sale, ten acres with a house of the 1770s and a long frontage to Woolwich Common (south of that River Street now runs as far as the Herbert Road junction). Income from his mathematical publications gave him the means to buy this property and to set about its development. There was good clay, so he saw to the making of bricks and tiles and a house for himself. Then, around 1792, a large stuccoed villa with giant-order Ionic pilasters and north and south bow windows was built at the south end of the plot. The architect of what came to be called Cube House (it had sides of 100 ft/30 m) is not known, but given the building’s form and the landowner’s character, it could have been Hutton himself or his son, George Henry Hutton, an artillery officer and an antiquarian with architectural predilections. Neither, it seems, ever lived in it. Instead, Major-General Forbes Macbride (1808) and, as a Fellow of the Royal Society, no doubt well known to Hutton, was resident from 1812 (when he was appointed Colonel-Commandant of the Royal Artillery’s Invalid Battalion) until his death in 1830. Meanwhile, in the mid-1790s Hutton continued to exploit his land for profit via speculative development. He started to build two big semi-detached pairs of houses (later 5–6 Woolwich Common) and, further north, a row of six more semi-detached pairs (see below). By 1794 he had ‘rear’d a village’, but, ‘disgusted with the business with the villa…’ and left it unfinished. He moved away from the common and Woolwich in 1827 when his health induced him to resign from the Academy.

Royal Military Academy

The still quiet and rural purfle of Woolwich Common changed dramatically in 1807 when the south-eastern

Acts, Commissioners (Board officers, most of whom were locally resident – Vaughan Lloyd, Thomas Blomfield, George Hayter, John Grant and James Murray Hadden) were appointed and a jury of local inhabitants empanelled in 1804 to settle compensation claims. After much deliberation they awarded the parish of Woolwich £1,300 in compensation for all its rights to the eighty-acre common, though only gravel extraction was explicitly mentioned. At the same time, they granted £3,575 for the pasture rights of the 142-acre Charlton Common to its former freeholders, Lady Jane Wilson and Sir Thomas Maryon Wilson. Thus was the ground laid for more than a century of acrimonious dispute whereby the military asserted complete ownership of Woolwich Common, while the inhabitants of Woolwich claimed rights of access based in custom. By 1808, when Pitt affirmed the importance of acquiring Woolwich lands in relation to the desirability of fortifying London, the Royal Military Academy had been built on the common, Barrack Field extended to the south-east, cottages cleared and gravel pits levelled, leaving open ground more or less as it has remained. The Board, finally, purchased the common from the Crown in 1812.

Eighteenth-century houses along the common

The only buildings in the area before 1780 lay as a sparse fringe on the common’s eastern flank (Ill. 73), an isolated settlement that was identified apart from the rest of the parish in rate books as simply ‘on the Common’. Further south and in Plumstead parish, comparably scattered but more substantial roadside buildings stood on Shooters Hill. By the 1730s there were about twenty modest dwellings along the common, all but three of low rateable value and probably no more than single-storey timber cottages built on land that was waste. Landholders in the vicinity included the Clothing Works’ Company, which in 1693 had acquired via Mary Hobby, the widow and executor of John Hobby who left the company a charitable bequest, a triangular field south of Ditchwater Lane (later Nightingale Place) around what would become Nightingale Vale (Ill. 73). Through the eighteenth century the Harding family tenanted this from a farmstead on the east side of Red Lion Lane in Plumstead. Samuel Harding’s use of clay beds in that area for brickmaking followed on from similar local use by the Lidbird family, who had long held property further east in Plumstead.

437 Woolwich Common and the Royal Military Academy from the south in 1812

438 View across Woolwich Common from the west, drawing of c. 1794 by John Charmers. From the Royal Artillery Barracks and shipshape’s windmill (left) to Severndroog Castle (far right), with Charles Hutton’s Cube House looming large towards the right

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Royal Military Academy

The still quiet and rural purfle of Woolwich Common changed dramatically in 1807 when the south-eastern
field was chosen for the relocation of the Royal Military Academy. Founded in 1749, relaunched in 1751, and made ‘Royal’ in 1784, the Academy in the Warren educated future officers of the Board of Ordnance’s ‘scientific’ corps, the artillery and the engineers, for their increasingly technical roles. The history of the Academy’s accommodation in the Warren is covered in Chapter 3. The Academy’s transfers, at first a disparate group aged from ten to thirty, were brought together as a company of gentlemen cadets to learn gunnery, fortification, mathematics and a little French, the last a privilege for which their pay was reduced. To start with, the cadets lived in lodgings in town, but they quickly gained a reputation for notoriety. Quarters or barracks were built in 1751-2 on the Warren’s south side and the cadets were subjected to a more rigorously military lifestyle. The possibility of building anew was also raised in 1783, with the ‘idea of placing the Cadets upon the Hill’ in a new building designed by James Wyatt, appointed Architect of the Ordnance the previous year. Given the reluctance to spend on the cheaper option of Wricklemarsh, it is no surprise that this option was also not pursued. However, the thought recurred, and in 1791 Wyatt prepared three designs for a new Academy. The nature of this uneexecuted scheme is not known.

By the turn of the century the problems of the Warren site had become insurmountable. There was growing wartime pressure for more officers, rising numbers of East India Company cadets were also being trained at the Academy, and in 1801 British and Irish military establishments merged obliging the Academy to accommodate even more cadets, as many as 180 by 1803. There was no conveniently located mansion for sale and, with money flowing more freely under Pitt and large tracts of Woolwich land being acquired, a decision to build was taken. In April 1803 Capt. George Hayter, CRE, was directed with Pitt’s approval to clear the ground that Lt. Gen. Robert Morse had ‘decided upon for erecting a New Academy etc.’. Morse, the Board’s first Inspector-General of Fortifications, had been promoted away from Woolwich, and this decision was probably taken with his close associate, Col. William Twiss, Commanding Royal Engineer of the Southern District and the Academy’s Lieutenant-Governor (its senior officer), who lived in the Warren. Next in the Academy’s hierarchy, under Twiss were Isaac Landmann, Professor of Fortification (also housed in the Warren), and Charles Hutton, Professor of Mathematics. The chosen site was not ‘upon the Hill’ but at the foot of Shooters Hill, on the south-east part of the newly enclosed common, across a road from Hutton’s land. Wyatt provided new designs in May and June 1803 and building work began that summer, with the foundations aligned parallel to and facing the Royal Artillery Barracks. Hayter oversaw construction by the Royal Military Artificers, the locally based direct-labour force of some 400 artisans and labourers, with Charles Weaver as his Chief Clerk of Works and Thomas Weaver as Principal Overseer. Stock bricks were probably supplied from local fields by Samuel Hardin, possibly also from pits in the field directly in front of the buildings. From June 1804 Wyatt was assisted by his nephew, Lewis Wyatt. It was the latter who in late 1805, when the buildings were being fitted out, saw that painting work for which the artificers were thought not competent was contracted to a Mr Hutchinson. Francis Beresmonsi, a Wyatt favourite and the leading purveyor of Gothic stucco work (engaged at this time at Windsor Castle), was contracted to supply ‘composition’, probably using James Parker’s patent Roman cement. A ha-ha enclosed the establishment’s sides and a front lawn. Tripartite Gothic iron gates and railings with openwork piers, made in 1804 by Thomas & Rudge, were placed to centre front where an approach road crossed the ha-ha. The Academy’s four eldest classes (128 cadets) and resident officers (probably seventeen in number) moved to the common in August 1805. The sixty youngest cadets, another two classes, stayed at what had become the Royal Arsenal; another sixty were sent to the Royal Military College at Marlow. This separation of the older and younger cadets was intentional, not a matter of inadequate provision.

**Architecture of the Academy**

The Royal Military Academy had limited precedents. Ange-Jacques Gabriel’s École Militaire in Paris of 1751–3, an academy for training 500 young men, was a long classical range, with opposed colonnades behind its main block. This layout was not taken up in comparable establishments in England. For large schools there was, rather, a preference for long staccato façades, linked blocks with a central focus, this derived from neo-Palladian country-house design, as later followed and adapted by Wyatt among others. Most pertinent and recent was the Royal Military Asylum at Chelsea, built for the army in 1801–3 to designs by John Sanders as a central block with short arcade links to dormitory wings. Wyatt had himself adopted a similar, though longer and more coolly Greek Doric scheme for the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, which he had designed in 1803, though it was not built until 1810–12, and then under Sanders. What was moved at the Academy in Woolwich was the use of a Tudor-Gothic style, even though that style did have long association with places of learning (ills 439, 440). The barracks on the other side of the common were
entirely classical, but Wyatt’s choice of Gothic seems to reflect both institutional links and the genius loci. The central and largest block is most strikingly characterised by its large octagonal ogive-topped corner towers, an echo of the White Tower at the Tower of London, the Board of Ordnance’s headquarters at the time, as well, possibly, as a recollection of the hexagonal Tudor look-out tower next to the original Academy building (ill. 120), which Hutton and Landmann would have recalled and which Wyatt saw before it came down in 1796. Passing thought may also have been given to the Royal Observatory on the hill at Greenwich a few miles away, another turreted building dedicated to applied science. Precedents aside, an embattled Tudor-Gothic profile would have seemed particularly suitable for the Academy’s picturesque rural setting against the wooded backdrop of Shooters Hill, particularly suitable for the Academy’s picturesque rural setting against the wooded backdrop of Shooters Hill, which was itself graced by Severndroog Castle, a triangular tower with hexagonal turrets. Wyatt applied Gothic motifs sparingly to the orderly stock-brick front to create an austere yet light façade that has great scenographic impact – as Baron Charles Dupin noted: ‘Built on the slope of a hill, and in rear of an extensive esplanade, it presents one of the most beautiful points of view which the environs of London, and the banks of the Thames, can offer.’

The massiveness of the central block’s corner towers generates the impression of a Tudor gatehouse, an effect reinforced by the shallow central entrance arch, to which a road originally led. Wyatt was also able to draw on very different precedents in his own oeuvre – his unbuild design for a Gothic cottage at Little Frogmore for Queen Charlotte was a smaller version of the central tower, with polygonal corner turrets and a layout with octagonal rooms. The window tracery recalls that used at Windsor Castle. The larger window surrounds are of dressed stone, but the more plastic work of the arcades and the smaller turrets is of Roman-cement render. Bernasconi stuccoed the arcade interiors. Mouldings for the ribbed vaults were probably supplied by Wyatt from medieval prototypes such as Hereford Cathedral. A simple retaining wall enclosed the courtyards on the other three sides as if a curtain wall. With the ha-ha on the fourth side, the Academy was defended from intruders, and the wider world from the cadets. The layout within was simple, logical and in many ways economical – a central block for large semi-octagonal classrooms, libraries and offices, symmetrically flanked by arcades to outer barrack blocks, with service buildings separated to the rear, leaving large amounts of space for exercise and fresh air in open courts and gardens (Ill. 443). The centre block was given an east–west spine corridor with, at either end, staircases of an imperial type, plain rectilinear versions of the variant used by William Chambers in the Navy State at Somerset House and by S. P. Cockerell at Admiralty House, providing paired lower outer flights to a landing from which single upper flights sail across the stairwells (Ill. 444). The barrack wings kept officers and cadets apart, but in a tripartite pattern which reversed that of the Royal Artillery Barracks, perhaps for the sake of greater separation. Here the taller, three-storey, central sections housed officers, the outer two-storey blocks the cadets, four to a room in thirty-two rooms (Ill. 445). Directly behind the centre block there was a large dining-hall at the centre of a subsidiary rectangular complex (Ills. 444, 446, 445). This room was big enough to evoke a great or college hall, an impression reinforced by its pseudo-hammerbeam roof trusses (replaced with a flat ceiling in 1856 on account of dry rot). Three-storey embattled pavilions stood at the corners of the rectangle, those to the north, to accommodate officers, were linked by another covered arcade. The south-eastern contained more accommodation, and the south-western a kitchen, between there ran a range of service rooms into which there were two stone-faced Tudor-arched site entrances. Low walls and minor buildings connected the pavilions north and south to enclose two more courtyards, that to the west with a well in an octagonal building. Within the further east and west perimeters there were open fives or rackets courts. Along the south wall two outer pairs of smaller pavilions provided servants quarters flanking gateways, as if gatehouses.

Alteration and adaptation to 1850

The East India Company’s cadets had departed to Addiscombe College in 1810 and after the Napoleonic Wars numbers at the Academy dropped sharply as the education of officers was generally slighted. Cadets had to wait longer for their commissions, so in 1819 the Duke

443. Royal Military Academy, a cadets’ barrack room in a lithograph of 1831

444 and 445. Royal Military Academy, ground plan in 1853 (above), with west staircase in centre block in 2006 (below)
of Wellington established a practical class of around forty young men who had finished the Academy syllabus. This group was accommodated in the Arsenal and the junior cadets were moved to the common, housed separately to minimize bullying – new arrivals at the Academy, lastingly known among cadets as ‘The Shop’, were ‘neuxes’, later corrupted to ‘smooks’ then ‘smokers’, from which the name of the game is said to derive. As numbers fell, the practical class began again to increase. In 1840, the complement stood at 100, a year later the practical class returned to the sets at the Arsenal and by 1848, two cast-iron columns had to be inserted.

Another aspect of the Academy that was found wanting was the heating in the main block. There was a single fireplace per room. These were large, with impressive Tudor-Gothic surrounds, but they could not have adequately heated the huge classrooms and libraries. When Charles Sylvester was asked in 1859 to raise the temperature in the first-floor classrooms to 62°F (17°C), the rooms were already heated by stoves, perhaps an original feature – the Wyatts installed stoves elsewhere, as at the Grand Store in the Arsenal. Sylvester’s centralized hot-air system, probably under-floor flues, failed to please, so he returned and tried to improve the situation by enclosing the entrance vestibule in the main façade. The failure of early hot-air heating systems was not unusual. They were almost universally superseded in later decades by pressurized hot-water heating; Burbidge & Healy of Fleet Street installed such a system in the Academy in 1851. This had a boiler and furnace in a triangular space formed south of the main block’s east-west corridor, opposite the spiral stairs. Ventilators were fitted in ceilings. Time-keeping was perhaps another problem – a large clock was erected on the front-range central parapet in 1840. The internal walls of the dining-hall were embossed in 1846 with trophy armour and weaponry brought from the Tower of London. Capt. Frederick Marow Earle-Wilmot, given command of the cadets in 1847 with instructions to break a culture of bullying and heavy drinking, added flags and raised funds for the insertion in 1848–9 of two painted-glass windows by William Bell Scott, Alice Boyd and David Scott. Another addition of the time was a lodge of 1847, placed on the east side of the main gate and the road across the ha-ha, its impact on the long view minimized by ivy that was allowed to cover it entirely (III 445).”

Enlargements of 1859–62

The status of cadets had begun to alter in 1831 with the introduction of fees. This change from a position as a junior but full member of the military to that of a pay- ing student meant that parents’ expectations for their sons’ standards of living gained weight, and it was sug-gested in 1847 that senior cadets should have their own rooms. In 1849, the cadets ceased to be a company so no longer featured on the muster roll. New involvement in...
large-scale warfare and, in particular, the spectacular fail-
ures of the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny were
powerful catalysts for a spirit of reappraisal in military
training. In 1856, after the Crimean War and the abolition
of the Board of Ordnance, there came a sanitary report
and the appointment of a commission made up of Lt. Col.
William Yolland, RE, Lt. Col. William James Smythe, RA,
and William Charles Lake, an Oxford don and educational
reformer, to consider the training of the army’s scientific
corps. This group not only examined the Academy but
also visited its counterparts on the Continent. Its report
of 1857 sought to change the cadets’ training from a basic
to a specialist education and gave rise to wide-
grazing reforms. The minimum entrance age was raised
from the south-west in
incidence to a
severely on the inadequate facilities that were deemed a
cause of indiscipline. Recommendations included more
and more recreational facilities for the cadets.

recommendations. The enlarged Academy was immediately and again
1861 of the Academy and Woolwich. It
comprised an open scarped and brick-parapetted battery
with six emplacements to the west of twin embattled and
lateral asymmetry are unmistakably Victorian. Inside the
classroom blocks there are more big fireplaces and broad
staircases.

Reconstruction for the better-equipped institution was
completed in the early 1860s with a new laboratory block
on the east side and three buildings further south, most
significantly a T-plan block that comprised a gymnasium
with enclosed racket courts and a school of arms (ills
10/11, 10/13). Along the Middle Road and in front of a
gun park there stood a workshop block to the east and a
range of gun sheds to the west (demolished in 2005). On
the site’s east and west perimeters heavy cast-iron railings
were erected.46

Jervois’s designs grew out of and respected Wyatt’s
large enclosed quadrilateral. Replicas of Wyatt’s open
arcades link to the northern classroom blocks, which echo
the levels of the centre block. In replacing the east and
west perimeter walls Jervois accentuated the site’s enclo-
sure by increasing the mass of its boundaries. Punctuation
by squat pavilions at the centres and ends of the new
ranges extended the rhythm of the main façade. Yet the
new wings with their red brick, thrusting bay windows and
laterally symmetric in the use of fieldwork batteries, had been constructed by
1871. This
was replaced in 1890 by a comparably short-lived arrow-
shaped bastion, a siege battery and stockade works, away
to the west. Artillery drill declined at the Academy and
by 1900 a sports pavilion stood immediately in front of
the 1886 barbette. The main battery continued in use, but
had been remodelled by 1912. Its scarps had probably come
to be used as a terrace for watching rugby and football on pitches laid out to the north. The casemates saw use as
430
431
CHAPTER TEN WOOLWICH COMMON AND MILITARY ACADEMY AREAS
432
expansion and later nineteenth-century
1873
scarp as a visible remnant of the battery.
Clearance thereafter has left no more than the earthwork
433
Other walls and ceilings were plastered with Scott's
Johnston, RE, with William Higgs as contractor, and
found to have a cannon ball lodged in it. Once alight,
suspect was the heating system's flue at the centre of
central block (Ill. 448). The new rackets courts to east
his own in Oxford. Equipment included climbing ropes,
horizontal bars, and the adjoining school of gymnastics, also housed a hun-
dred pairs of dumb-bells. The new rackets courts to east
and west were roofed spaces, and underneath the school of
provision until 1889 for cadets to entertain guests. A more genteel tea room replaced this on the north side of
Middle Road in 1901, with a photograph and art studio added a year later, all continuing the site's Tudor-Gothic
demonstrate fortifications and tactics.

Fire in 1875 and later nineteenth-century expansion
On 1 February 1875 fire gutted the Academy's aerial block (Ill. 440). This housed the library and offices, so many of the institution's records were lost. The cause was never exactly determined, but the main suspect was the heating system's flue at the centre of the building; it was impossible to clean properly and was found to have a can-
roll ball lodged in it. Once alight, the books, desks and chairs made ideal tinder and the
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of the Royal Artillery Depot, a hostel for officers of the Admiralty, War Office and Air Ministry, and a technical course for senior military officers. The Royal Artillery used the sports grounds and the front parade was a drill ground for the Women's Royal Army Corps. The Royal Artillery Institution's library and collections, salvaged from bomb damage, were moved to the central block in 1941 where they stayed until 1999, the Institution itself also taking up residence for most of that period. Much of the rest of the complex was used only intermittently. Many and various military departments were accommodated, but large sections stayed empty for long periods. The gymnasium complex was demolished in 1967 to make way for married officers' houses (see below). The main building was listed in 1973, the lodges in 1999 and the chapel in 2003.

Conversion

In the mid-1990s Defence Estates highlighted the incompatibility of a shrinking military presence in Woolwich with the growing cost of maintaining historic buildings. The Academy was declared surplus to requirements in 2002. Danny

| Image 533 | Former Royal Military Academy from the south in 2011. Showing Prince Imperial Road (foreground) and Durkan Estates housing (centre) |
| Image 432 | br. Church of St Michael and All Angels (the Royal Military Academy's chapel), 1902–4. From the south-west in 2008 |
| Image 534 | R–L Red Lion Lane, 2008–12. From the east in 2012 |

Twentieth century

At the turn of the twentieth century the Academy once again found itself stretched. Another report, this time by the Akers-Douglas Committee, was, like its predecessors, largely happy with the educational standards but not with the facilities. The demands of the Boer War were such that in 1900 some of the 306 cadets were housed in iron huts east of the swimming baths (Ill 446). The sharing of rooms continued for nearly half the cadets, a state of affairs the committee found unacceptable: “The practice of making two, three or four Cadets sleep in one small room is on all grounds objectionable, and is the more inexcusable in view of the large sums paid annually by parents for their maintenance of their sons.” New building was strenuously recommended, even if only more huts, but funds were not forthcoming and pressure eased at the end of the war in 1902.

Since the 1890s there had been a desire to provide the site with a chapel. Money had been set aside and plans prepared on two occasions, a contract even put out to tender in 1920, but resistance within the Academy made two, three or four Cadets sleep in one small room is on all grounds objectionable, and is the more inexcusable in view of the large sums paid annually by parents for their maintenance of their sons. New building was strenuously recommended, even if only more huts, but funds were not forthcoming and pressure eased at the end of the war in 1902.

A cruciform plan was intended, but want of money meant that in 1871 the southern transept was not built until 1877. But other provision took priority and the cadets were housed in iron huts east of the swimming baths (Ills 448, 449) and dedicated as the Church of St Michael and All Angels. Maj.-Gen. N. H. Hemming, RE, deployed red-granite decoration and an organ were all funded by charitable subscription and fitting out was gradual through to the end of the 1920s. The most impressive fitting was the First World War memorial west window of 1920 by Christopher Whall and his daughter Veronica depicting soldiers in historical uniforms paying homage to the Virgin and Child. An earlier west window, moved to the east, commemorated the fallen of the Boer War. The Academy's chapel became the main garrison church after the Second World War. It closed in 2003. Thereafter memorials, furnishings and the decorative windows were taken to the Royal Artillery's headquarters at Larkhill, Wiltshire, and Sandhurst.

In the 1920s Ethel Charles, the first female member of the Royal Institute of British Architects, kept house for her brother, the Academy's Governor. She proposed planning the library lobby, apparently without success. The only significant addition in this period was a pair of laboratories for electrical training and experiments, built in 1922. However, the Academy could no longer provide the range of scientific training officers now required. Educational emphasis had changed in 1922 to concentrate on providing a general grounding in science and mathematics; more specialist knowledge was henceforth to be acquired elsewhere, at Larkhill, Chatham or Cambridge. The Academy also suffered from the post-war retrenchment that affected the entire military, though the additional demands of the Royal Corps of Signals, formed in 1920, kept the establishment at about 240 until 1929. All the while the army sought to reduce its costs. As training at the Academy became less specialized, the possibility of amalgamation with the Royal Military College at Sandhurst was raised. This was not a new idea and had in fact been approved by Parliament in the 1860s, but resistance within the army had kept the institutions separate. The idea was again rejected in 1923, 1926 and 1931, but a committee re-examining the possibility in 1938 accepted it as both feasible and desirable, and amalgamation was scheduled to take place in 1940. The outbreak of war brought closure of the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich forward to 1 October 1939.

During the Second World War the Academy buildings housed the Coast Defence, an Anti-Aircraft Wing north apex of the Academy site in 1883. Prince Victor of Hohenlohe-Langenburg (Count Gleichen) designed what comprised a bronze figure on a tall red-granite pedestal with four bronze open-winged eagles. It was moved to Sandhurst in 1943. A statue of Victoria by Henry Price, another bronze figure on a granite plinth, was put up next to the Academy’s centre block in 1914. This too was moved to Sandhurst, in 1943.

The multiple buildings on the site of the old drill shed (Ills 438, 439) were not forthcoming and pressure eased at the end of the war in 1902.
Durkan (Durkan Estates) purchased the twenty-one acre site in 2006 and prepared a scheme to provide 438 dwellings through conversion of the existing buildings north of the Middle Road and the erection of new housing to the south, with John McAslan + Partners as architects. Work started with the southern section, for which there was housing money. In 2006–8 Durkan built three large blocks of flats, stock-brick and black-timber clad, each with an internal courtyard (Ill. 453) – Colbrooke House to the south-east, Ellington House to the north-east, and Kitchener House to the west. Middle Road was renamed Ashmore Road. Along with flats sold on the open market these provided sheltered housing for the elderly and, to comply with social-housing requirements, 15% shared ownership and fixed-rent properties, managed by the London and Quadrant Housing Trust. Facing Red Lion Lane there is a short terrace of five cross-wall timber-faced houses (Ill. 454). The west wing of 1878–8 also converted as part of this phase. Shops projected for the Middle Road were abandoned.43

The northern complex was scheduled to have been refurbished by 2010, but these works were deferred. The project was financed through Irish banks and funding thereby passed into the hands of the Republic of Ireland’s National Asset Management Agency, formed in 2009 in response to financial crisis. The listed buildings remain empty in 2014, yet to be converted. Plans have intended a mixture of dwellings ranging from studios to five-bedroom houses, with small additions inside the courtyards, low enough as not to be visible from the common. The dining-hall and chapel were destined to be used for community purposes, the latter as studios and classrooms.

Nineteenth-century development east of the common

Private settlement on the east side of Woolwich Common was significantly affected by the enlarged military presence. The impact was perhaps immediate and direct. It was said that George III, taken to view early building work for the Royal Military Academy, demanded the clearance of Charles Hanway’s adjacent and unfinished “village.”44 The Crown did purchase Hanway’s land in two parcels in 1804–5. Some of what stood on it was taken down, and a few other houses on the west or common side of the road were cleared. But much survived; Cabe House was converted for a cadets’ hospital, and the two substantial southern semi-detached pairs of houses (63–66 Woolwich Common) (originally with pedimental fronts) to accommodate officers of the Academy, including Isaac Landmann and Olinthus Gregory (Ill. 455). In 1806 Capt. Hare conceived a development elsewhere to house field officers, possibly using plans that James Wyatt had prepared in 1802. Pitt asked for ‘simpler’ plans in 1806 and there was a hiatus. What followed around 1814, presumably via Hayter’s successor, Lt. Col. Robert Pilkington, CRE, was not simple, rather just as grand. On the north side of a path (later Ordnance Road) that led to gravel pits, three similar pairs (later 42–47 Woolwich Common) with pedimental fronts and linked entrance bays probably reused Hurton’s foundations, if not carcasses (Ill. 456, 457). Following Hurton’s lead, all these Field Officers’ Quarters were stuccoed in what had emerged as, in effect, an early suburban park estate that mixed, if somewhat accidentally, free-standing villas with semi-detached and terraced houses. Parts stood into the 1970s.

Cabe House was enlarged and converted as a house for the Lieutenant-Governor of the Academy in 1829–30 (the cadets’ hospital moving to the pair of houses that became 65–66 Woolwich Common). It was then replaced in 1855–7 by an even larger residence for Sir John Miller Adye in Tudor Revival brick with shaped gables.45 The Board of Ordnance had acquired more land yet further north in 1810 for the sake of an even greater cordon sanitary. There were already some houses facing the common here, but the idea of clearance was abandoned and heterogeneous infill was allowed to occur. A large plot just south of Jackson’s Lane (later Street) was given up on a long building lease in 1831 and Robert Jolly began to build a terrace of seven big houses for W. J. Mitchell to a specification from Lt. Col. Sir John Thomas Jones, CRE (Ill. 458). Jolly had completed the two northernmost houses by 1833 when Mitchell fell bankrupt. The first occupants of the corner house (later No. 26) were Maj. Gen. Henry William Gordon, RA, and his wife, Elizabeth, who was the daughter of Samuel Enderby, the eminent Greenwich-based whale-oil merchant. Here their fourth son, Charles George Gordon, was born in January 1833. Col. Sir John May, an Inspector in the Arsenal’s Carriage Department, took the house next door. Jones’s successor, Lt. Col. George J. Harding, CRE, set about planning the completion for the Board of what was designated Kempt Terrace, after Sir John Kempt, Master-General from 1830 to 1834. Concerns about finding building led to the relaxation of the specification, but to no avail, and the Board sold off this and other lands in the wider area in 1833–4. A major purchaser was Sir John Webb, Director-General of the Ordnance Medical Department, who in 1843 employed George Hall Graham to build Chatham House (later 48 Woolwich Common), a large villa that the War Office reacquired in 1853. Through Webb, Kempt Terrace was completed in somewhat more Italianate stuccoed vein around 1850, keeping up the lower-storey bays. At this point smaller low-class housing began to creep back onto the scene, to the rear of the Field Officers’ Quarters in the shape of about forty cottages on Ordnance Place (later Ordnance Road) (Ill. 459). Another beneficiary of the Board’s sales was Rebecca Fenwick, the widow of Capt. Howard Fenwick, RHA, who also owned the houses to the south of Kempt Terrace.46

There had been other spin-offs from the military presence. To the north the Barrack Tavern prospered. John Fensham, its proprietor in the first decades of the century, acquired property to the south that passed to Charles Fensham, through whom the frontage was developed from 1828 by Joseph Hudson and Robert Jolly. Especially feverish activity around 1820 had set the scene for the Kemp Terrace speculation. From north to south there appeared Clarence Place (rebuilt after a fire in 1841), Adelaide Place and Queen’s Terrace, the first and last both regular six-house rows, the second three disparate pairs (Ill. 457). These properties were only gradually occupied, and most of Clarence Place became one of several local preparatory military academies or cramers for the Royal Military Academy. Just south of Kemp Terrace, in a large house called Belle Vue, was Dr William Bridgman’s gentlemen’s boarding school, behind which a school room was built in 1845.47

Woolwich Common and eastern environs

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The Barrack Tavern was remodelled in 1835 and 1900 and its stables were converted to a motor garage in 1913. When it was demolished in 1925 it was the last remnant of early development along the common. The clearance of the houses along Woolwich Common from Clarence Place to Kemp Terrace had only come after a long and bitter conservation battle. Woolwich Borough Council’s first scheme of 1936 for replacing the houses, rejecting proposals for retention of the façades from its Borough Engineer, Robert Gee, was thrown out by the London County Council, which had put a blue plaque on Gordon’s house in 1959. The Ministry of Housing and Local Government was similarly opposed and in 1964 placed the Barrack Tavern, Clarence Place, Queen’s Terrace and Kemp Terrace on the supplementary list of buildings of architectural or historic interest, noting that domestic

445 65–66 Woolwich Common, begun mid-1790s for Dr Charles Hurton, completed c. 1812 for the Board of Ordnance. From the west in 1924. Demolished

456 Belmont Place, 57–99 Nightingale Vale, c. 1840. From the north in 1924. Demolished

457 Queen’s Terrace, 25–28 Woolwich Common, 1828–30. From the north-west in 1924. Demolished

458 Kemp Terrace, 23–29 Woolwich Common, 1831–4 and c. 1839. From the north-west in 1924. Demolished
buildings of this kind were scarce in Woolwich. Gee drew up plans for conversion to flats, but the rest of the council (Greenwich from 1956) paid no heed. Local and national societies joined the opposition, but the Ministry conceded that the Grade III listing had no teeth, so the council gradu-
ally purchased the properties and reaffirmed that repair and conversion were not financially viable. After a public inquiry in 1962 the inspector found that demolition would be economically and architecturally wrong, but housing associations rejected opportunities to take on the de-
eteriorating terraces as uneconomical. By 1971 the Ministry declined any longer to object and demolition proceeded in 1972.

The hinterland of the common terraces had remained largely open until the late nineteenth century. By the 1880s there was a small group of houses on Fensham prop-
erty along Ditchwater Lane (Ill. 439); this was renamed Nightingale Place around 1830 when it gained Nightingale Terrace, ten good-sized houses. About the same time a long run of humble houses cropped up along the outer or east side of the sweep of Nightingale Vale, a place name in use by the early nineteenth century. This, which must have spelt what had been described as ‘romantic seclu-
sion’, curved round Clothworkers’ Company property to Belmont Place, a fine pair of houses around 1840 (Ill. 438); another comparatively large pair was built just to the north-east around 1866. Nightingale Vale linked through to Jackson’s Lane where E. W. James had property and where in 1852–2 Lewis Davis, who owned a brewery in Plumstead, established the Manor Arms public house and his tenant, John Brown, built a couple of houses. Around James Street there was some more sparse development and a thatched villa. With its fields and orchards the area
remained a semi-rural character.

In 1865 H. H. Church and William Rickwood laid out some new streets on Fensham land west of the Clothworkers’ holding – Engineer Road and the western ends of Milward Street and Gildersome Street. William Gosling and Son were the architects and builders of some modest houses here. Around the same time even humbler rows were built south of Jackson Street on Manor Street (later Kempt Street), and, yet further south, Fenwick Street was begun where there was still a brick field that continued to supply the immediate area as and until the ground came to be covered with streets and houses (Ill. 439).

The doubling in size of the Arsenal’s workforce in the 1830s drove demand for housing; districts nearer the fac-
tories had already been built up. From 1851 Gildersome Street and Milward Street were extended onto the Clothworkers’ Company land via building agreements with William Woodford, a tax assessor and collector who lived on Nightingale Place. In 1861 Ritter Street was formed south of Kempt Terrace to meet an extension of Fenwick Street, and Keenmore Street was inserted. By 1871 the frontages had been wholly built up by a number of devel-
opers, including the Standard Freehold Land Company and the Kent and Surrey Building Society (Ill. 462). After

436. East of Woolwich Common, 1857–4

437. Woolwich Common and Military Academy Areas

436. 33–39 Fenwick Street, 1833–4. From the south-east in 1955. Demolished

In 1873 the Rev. John Cavis Brown of St John’s Church on Wellington Street took an interstitial plot north of the junction of Ritter Street and Fenwick Street in 1873 for a mission room to serve the newly popu-
lar district. Here the Church of St Anne was built in 1873–9, to designs by William and Charles Aubrey Basset.

Smith, church specialists. It was a low and plain building,
aisles and nave under a single roof, with lancet windows, a small open belfry and paired side galleries towards the east. It was demolished in the mid-1960s.  

The presence of a brook behind Nightingale Vale and of thousands of soldiers near by encouraged the establish-ment of industrial laundries. Maria Latte opened the Belmont Laundry in 1881 in sheds behind Belmont Place. It extended into larger back buildings, and a receiving office or shop was established on Nightingale Place. The success of the business led the family around 1900 to estab-lish the Standard Laundry, further north on Nightingale Vale. Here too rear workshops were added and, with more than forty employees, enlarged in 1912 and subsequently. Additional premises were taken for Latte Bros, which diversified into light engineering. These works carried on up to 1970s.  

The Woolwich, Plumstead and Charlton Nurses’ Home was founded in 1842 at 42 Nightingale Place to house district nurses to tend the local poor. It was in one of a series of almshouses designed by William Barlow and was described by Thomas Hope as a ‘hospital for whose existence the King’s Fund as “a hospital for whose existence was deemed necessary to remove this obstruction to artillery exercises but, not wishing to cause great distress, Lloyd deemed it expedient to remove this obstruction to artillery exercises but, not wishing to cause great distress, Lloyd gained the Board’s sanction for replacement of the huts, as an exceptional case. In 1812 two rows were built under Pilkington’s supervision, fifty pairs of back-to-back rooms in all, extending to the west along the south side of the road to Charlton, on the present-day site of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (Els 16, 462). These early purpose-built soldiers’ married quarters were rudimentary single-room homes, 12 ft by 10 ft (4 m by 3 m), built for £40 each using cheap bricks and timber. Rents were expected in due course to cover the Board’s expenditure. A decade later Baron Charles Dupin commented: ‘It is thus that respect for manners, and the desire of softening the priva-tions inseparable from military life, have urged the pub-lic authorities in England to the execution of a number of paternal measures, which can only be blamed as some-times carried to too great an extent, but always undertaken with the most laudable motives.’  

A small infants’ school was built just south-east of the cottages in 1843–4 with subscription funds from artillery officers and a contribution from the Board of Ordnance. In the early 1850s six double cottages were added between the cottages for non-commissioned officers with large families. The earlier homes, all maintained by the soldiers themselves, were already then recognized as wretchedly overcrowded and prone to disease. Yet they were not cleared until the late 1870s, after an outbreak of diphtheria and a press campaign for action to replace what had become known as ‘the Duke of York’s Cottages’ but were perhaps more aptly described as ‘kennels’.  

**Military and other uses of Woolwich Common**  

After the Board of Ordnance’s acquisitions of 1802–4 Woolwich Common was kept clear for military use, principally for artillery practice and as an exercising ground. To these ends the greater part of the ground was levelled under the supervision of Lt. Col. Robert Pilkington, CRE, and then sowed to grass in 1816. A veterinary establish-ment for the Board’s horses was set up to the south-west on Charlton Common.  

**Duke of York’s Cottages (demolished)**  

Clearance of the common was complicated by artillerymen and their families camped there. There were no designated married-quarters in the Royal Artillery Barracks, and little space at all to squeeze in the dependents of around 1,200 married soldiers. By 1868 the camp had become a long row of mud huts, put up in the preceding few years by the soldiers themselves, with Comdt. Vaughan Lloyd’s permission. These stood across Ha-Ha Road from the garrison’s south-west guard house (1 Repository Road) and extended to the south in Charlton parish. It was soon deemed necessary to remove this obstruction to artillery exercises but, not wishing to cause great distress, Lloyd gained the Board’s sanction for replacement of the huts, as an exceptional case. In 1812 two rows were built under Pilkington’s supervision, fifty pairs of back-to-back rooms in all, extending to the west along the south side of the road to Charlton, on the present-day site of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (Els 16, 462). These early purpose-built soldiers’ married quarters were rudimentary single-room homes, 12 ft by 10 ft (4 m by 3 m), built for £40 each using cheap bricks and timber. Rents were expected in due course to cover the Board’s expenditure. A decade later Baron Charles Dupin commented: ‘It is thus that respect for manners, and the desire of softening the priva-tions inseparable from military life, have urged the pub-lic authorities in England to the execution of a number of paternal measures, which can only be blamed as some-times carried to too great an extent, but always undertaken with the most laudable motives.’  

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**Public access and other easements**  

At the south end of the common, much of the water-loged open land between the Royal Military Academy and Shooters Hill was leased by 1841 and into the 1850s
was responsible for enclosing part of Plumstead Common Place across the road. It was designed by a civil engineer, late husband, Maj. Robert John Little, barrack-master at Lisk, was given by Anna Victoria Little in memory of her the formation of the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain 1863 in

In 1860 the common was used as a huge spoil heap. Military disputes about access to public footpaths, which sentries cropped up on the south side of Ha-Ha Road in 1892. The military development of what was latterly known as the Ha-Ha Road site, west of Circular Way, had been formed by this time and Jacob's Corner was reclaimed for exclusive military use in 1920.

Circular Road (later Way) had been formed by this time and Jacob's Corner was reclaimed for exclusive military use in 1920 (see above). This aroused opposition that succeeded in eliciting a warning from the Secretary of State for War, Richard Burdon (later Viscount) Haldane, that the land should be treated as a common. Despite this, the exigencies of the First World War led to the common to be used first for troop encampments and then for further enclosures that included building works. A wireless station cropped up on the south side of Ha-Ha Road in 1916 (see below), and a stadium on the Charlton side around 1920. Barrack Field and the common's north-east section were fenced off in 1943 and, to the far south, where there was already a laundry for the Herbert Hospital, a nurses’ home appeared in 1950, which had local groups formed the Woolwich Common Joint Committee, with Charles Grindling to the fore, with the aim of regaining some of the lost open space and preserving the common for pub-

cricket were restricted to Jacob's Corner. The common at

The opposition and the police were both largely suc-

The military development of what was formerly known as the Ha-Ha Road site, west of Circular Way, had its origins in 1844 with the formation of an Experimental Wireless Telegraphy Section of the Royal Engineers, working from a van parked on Woolwich Common. This became the Signals Experimental Establishment and was permanently housed here from 1916. Early work on inter-aircraft communications and field telephones moved after the war into sound location. In 1919-20 there were experiments tracking aircraft with a 206ft (62m)-diameter concrete ‘disc’ above a sound-proof underground shel-

20. Field until the threat of terrorist attack stopped them in the 1970s.

Signals and atomic-weapons research establishments (demolished)

The military development of what was latterly known simply as the Ha-Ha Road site, west of Circular Way, had its origins in 1914 with the formation of an Experimental Wireless Telegraphy Section of the Royal Engineers, working from a van parked on Woolwich Common. This became the Signals Experimental Establishment and was permanently housed here from 1916. Early work on inter-aircraft communications and field telephones moved after the war into sound location. In 1919-20 there were experiments tracking aircraft with a 206ft (62m)-diameter concrete ‘disc’ above a sound-proof underground shelter. By the 1930s around 100 staff worked on ‘internal and external communication of tanks’, the special communications required by Artillery; Direction Finding and Intercept apparatus, secret wireless and cryptography machines, apparatus to eliminate Morse; facsimile trans-

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Royal Artillery ‘At Home’ events continued on Barrack

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The Atomic Energy Authority took over the site in 1949 to form what became the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment (AWRE) Woolwich Common, to oversee the development and production of electronic, electro-mechanical and light mechanical assemblies associated with weapon design and home and overseas trials instrumentation for the British nuclear-weapons programme. Earlier work on the production of atomic bombs had taken place in the Arsenal’s eastern parts, in its Research Laboratories, but this light engineering of detonator and other components for overseas trials was based here in Woolwich parish, extending south to Ordnance Road to include property that the War Office had indicated it would relinquish. A mixed-development scheme proposed five twenty-two-storey towers amid five-storey blocks and two-storey cottages for about 3,000 people (as a density of 219 people per acre), two pubs in place of four, and a youth or community centre in lieu of the Church of St Anne. The LCC rebuffed this, thinking tall towers next to the common unsuitable, and incidentally disregarded the idea of a nursery on top of a four-storey car park. But the stiffest objection was to the demolition of the early nineteenth-century terraces facing the common (see above). Woolwich Borough Council was used to plain sailing with its housing development even when, in 1964, it was one of the first to submit a clear and consistent scheme in 1964 with an insistence that to preserve as much of the common as possible, on the lowest part of the site near the corner of Nightingale Place and Nightingale Vale. Built as Nightingale Heights in 1965–70 (Ills 424, 456), this was of brick and concrete frame system-built blocks that the council commissioned from J. M. Jones & Sons Ltd of Maidenhead, general contractors for Concrete Ltd, for sites across Woolwich and Plumstead. The abandonment of district heating, here in favour of under-floor electric heating, allowed an increase from eighty-nine flats to ninety-three but caused delay, as did strengthening work that had to be undertaken following the Ronan Point disaster.

There was a hiatus in the early 1970s, at first on account of the deferred demolition of the Woolwich Common terrace; later probably because of general economic conditions. The building of the next stages of the project only started in late 1972—nine-storey blocks behind which modest rows of two- and three-storey houses were laid out on reconstituted streets.
The northern parts down to Jackson Street, 335 dwellings, were complete by 1979, with William House as job architect and Costain as contractors; the council’s new shrunk direct-labour force was fully engaged elsewhere (see page 116). The final stage followed on quickly and in the same vein in 1976-78, with 395 more dwellings south to Ordnance Road. For this John Manley was the job architect, with Costain again the contractors.

The most striking feature of the Woolwich Common Estate is the irregular red-brick perimeter or curtain ‘wall’ along Nightingale Place and Woolwich Common (Ills 444, 445, 446), set back to allow Nightingale Place to be widened, and swept round to return along the site of the common-side terraces and ‘to provide a backcloth to the Common with its undulating skyline’. The ‘wall’ also encompassed the rest of the estate, giving the area definition as an enclosed and private residential space, an approach that drew on precedents such as the Byker Wall in Newcastle. Apparently solid, the ‘wall’ is actually permeable, with access ways between its seven linked blocks, which vary in height from four to six storeys. There are setbacks for balconies, and staircase towers further accentuate the dynamic profile. The blocks were named Mabbett, Lawson, Petrie, Ruge, Siedle, Waiping and Wordsworth Houses, invoking mid-nineteenth-century local connections. Mrs Mabbett supervised cartridge-making girls at the Arsenal, James and Henry Lawson, born on Woolwich Common, were mainstays of the Royal Artillery Band; Flinders Petrie, the Egyptologist, was born on Maryon Road, Charlton; Richard Ruge was a writer and editor of the Kentish Independent who lived on Nightingale Vale; Philippine Siedle, the daughter of a German watch- and clockmaker on Wellington Street, gained local acclaim as a singer and actress; Waiping Street is the Roman road that passes just to the south, and William Wordsworth's house is said to have stayed with Edward Quillinan on Nightingale Place.

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Behind the ‘wall’ there are numerous short rows of plain red-, yellow- and brown-brick houses of one to three storeys, many with integral garages, almost all with pitched roofs, most facing directly onto rather mean roads that kept the names of their predecessors, others with eiselon planning and more set back (Ill. 438). Each house has its own small yard or garden as well as access to inner pedestrianized paths and yards. At the centre, the community centre was grouped with a row of shops around a square. On the east side of Nightingale Vale there are more terraces, here again red brick with a juggled sweep of rooflines, and another block of flats.

Problems associated with housing estates with relatively private communal areas quickly appeared at Woolwich Common, there were accounts of vandalism, hooliganism and car dumping even as people moved into the new flats. Their persisted, but despite publicity about crime and anti-social behaviour, the buildings were broadly popular. Refurbishments of 1991-2 addressed both security and maintenance concerns. The medium-rise blocks of the late 1960s were given closed walkways and pitched roofs and their common areas were relandscaped. Nightingale Heights was overhauled by Hunt Thompson Associates in a project that was awarded the RIBA’s Housing Design Award for refurbishment in 1992. The tower was completely reclad, forming a cavity that improved insulation and made little-used balconies into small double-glazed conservatories. The under-floor heating, which had proved prohibitively expensive for tenants, was replaced with communal gas-fired central heating, its boiler in a roof space that was refinished with a swept canopy. The success of this work prompted Greenwich Council to carry out similar refurbishments on its other Bison Wall Frame tower blocks.

Officers’ married quarters

It was not just the local authority that was carpeting the east side of Woolwich Common with new houses in the post-war decades. There were also changes on the military estate, determined by its shrinkage elsewhere, heightened expectations as to housing and the availability of lands for which other uses had fallen away. Scattered precursors sprang up on the south side of the Jacob’s Corner playing fields, where a single house of the 1850s, Herbert Cottage (since demolished), was supplemented in the late 1920s by three houses for married officers, latterly 1-3 Academy Place. Red-brick, tile-hung and typically suburban in character, these are set to be replaced in 2012. The Ministry of Defence intending three houses designed by DLA Architecture. Development extended more systematically eastwards in the early 1960s as the cul-de-sac of Academy Place was formed around the field’s edge, with twelve planer houses in six pairs on its outer side. Other miscellaneous additions to military housing had been made on the east side of Red Lion Lane, across from the Royal Military Academy, where Plantation Cottages, a short row of quarters of the 1860s, had been supplemented by warrant officers’ quarters and other married quarters by the mid-1920s (Ill. 448); from this site there survives a single semi-detached pair at 3-5 Red Lion Lane. Further north, County House, on a south-west corner of Ordnance Road, is a block of military housing of the early 1930s.

A far more ambitious housing scheme was undertaken in the wake of a general masterplan for redevelopment of large parts of the military estate prepared by Birkin Haward. In 1962 the Austin-Smith/Salmon/Lord Partnership was commissioned by the War Office and Ministry of Public Building and Works to design a complex of seventy married officers’ quarters and other married quarters by the mid-1920s (Ills 437, 438); from this site there survives a single semi-detached pair at 3-5 Red Lion Lane. Further north, County House, on a south-west corner of Ordnance Road, is a block of military housing of the early 1930s.

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These amply planned three- and four-bedroom houses were given up-to-date domestic amenities, garages, small private gardens and privacy. Care was also taken to reflect sympathetically the proximity and architecture of the Academy. Trees were retained and the short rows of up to five red-brick houses were laid out in a rectilinear array, most slightly staggered to give some sense of detachment. There are small greens and subsidiary culs-de-sac, suitable places for children to play. Levels vary, and broken parapets suggest castellation to add to a picturesque effect that is comparable to that of contemporary work by Span (Eric Lyons and Partners) at New Ash Green, Kent. Internally the houses have large double-aspect living rooms adjoining dining-rooms deemed suitable for entertaining (Ill. 16), a factor identified in the original brief as particularly important for officers. Residency was on average two years. The Prince Imperial Road development was well received and won a Civic Trust Award in 1970 for the sensitivity of its interaction with the Academy and for its style, described as ‘unfussy, clearcut and possessed of authority without being authoritarian’.

After this the Ministry of Defence shifted its attention to the other side of the Academy, where the Governor's House and remnants of the late eighteenth-century Hutton-period buildings and former Field Officers' Quarters still stood facing Woolwich Common. Haward's revised masterplan of 1966 projected clearance here for more married officers' housing in short parallel rows, as on Prince Imperial Road. But when seventy more married-officers' quarters were built on the site in 1973–5 the layout had been altered, as if in anticipation of the perimeter 'wall' that was yet to be built to the north. Plans had been prepared by the Property Services Agency, seemingly in association with what had become Austin-Smith Lord, with Wallis as contractors. Forty-five three-storey houses in two long terraces back onto the common. The row is broken only for the entrance to a two-pronged cul-de-sac, called Woolwich Common, from which the houses are accessed (Ills 436, 437). On the far side of this cul-de-sac there are four staggered rows of five to seven houses set at right angles to the long terraces. As at Prince Imperial Road, these homes were generously proportioned by contemporary standards, and the focus of the external landscaping was on making a pleasant private enclave with communal space. Finish was similar, in red brick with broken parapets and long windows. For the long terraces garages were made integral.

Finally, a triangle of the military estate on the east side of Red Lion Lane south of Herbert Road was given up for commercial redevelopment, undertaken by Laing Homes Ltd in 1986. A mix of two- and three-storey buildings of standard types, polychromatic brick on timber frames, fourteen houses and seven blocks of six flats, faces Herbert Road (for Nos 195–197, Wise, Walters and Bondfield Houses) and Red Lion Lane (for Nos 9–17) with two new culs-de-sac, Matchless Drive and Garrison Close (for 1–7 Matchless Drive and Horsley, Robson, Newman and Pankhurst Houses).