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 unifying with 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 covered is bounded to the north by the grounds of the parish church of St Mary and Woolwich Church Street (Ill. 280). It extends as far south as the west end of Wellington Street, to the east across John Wilson Street and to the west, straddling Frances Street, 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 (see page 7). 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. 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 in order 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 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 the associated publicity made this a portentous development. Land between the St Mary’s Estate and Morris Walk Estate 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 8 to 10.

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
CHAPTER SIX ST MARY’S AND MORRIS WALK AREAS

The Tavern (formerly the White Lion and perhaps also these were the Canterbury From east to west in the good-sized gardens, and there were several public houses. by the yard artisans no doubt led the way in building, leasing and occupying houses. By the shipwrights and other dock-

umented building probably anticipated a group of four houses of the early 1750s that lay beyond. Around 1810 there was rebuilding and refacing. By the 1840s Richard Pudcock, 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. A few of Church Hill’s late-

ns of two storeys, often with garrets, of timber as well as of brick, and arranged in ones, twos and threes, pinnacled 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 wid-

en in 1785–6. To the west there was a coherent early eighteenth-century development of eight units (Nos 232–240), with taller gabled or pedimented ends projecting forward in a Palladian form. The east end of this terrace survived into the 1930s, 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 1946 (ill. 75). On the pavement near this site there is now a stone pipe or sewer ventilation chimney, made by Adams Hydraulics, possibly in 1857, and a horseshoe of similar date. To the far west in the 1740s, near where Frances Street now debouches, was ‘doubles Carribbee’s’ (ill. 73), mysterious, but perhaps another small poor quarter like the Caribbee Isles (see above).6

Warwick Street (given the preface Lord in 1943) 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, 1780s as Coleman Street, a name of unknown origin, the present name arises from a merger with King Street in 1949. 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 1930s. 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 Sawn Mills, not replaced with houses until 1850.7

Another 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 1839.8

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 (ill. 205). 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 (see pages 234 and 420). The Sun Alley building was taken by Independents in 1819 to become the Union Chapel, galleried with sittings for 500. Primitive Methodists took over in 1851, keeping a graveyard on the north side. After clearance in 1902 the whole site was made a children’s recreation ground, which it remains. Elsewhere the alley had been somewhat built up in 1847-8.

Orchard Street (renamed Greenlaw Street in 1914 after William Greenlaw, Rector of Woolwich from 1851 to 1885) was formed and lined with small houses in the early nineteenth century. To its west George Place followed in the 1800s, then插入内容

Around Bowling Green Row

Lands further west are marked as Sand Wharf on Rocque’s map (ill. 77), indicating the long-occupied 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 for 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 Marvon Wilson estate around Charlton House. Westwards expansion of the dockyard in the 1790s stimulated further development, made possible through Bowater’s Act of 1799. The outlying houses were joined by three more, including the first Navy Arms public house, in 1790-2. Day’s Passage (Bowling Green Row from about 1800) was formed with a row of six houses on its west side by 1796 (ill. 293). Further east, near the new dockyard gate at what came to be called Ship Tavern Corner, the Ship Inn was also up by the 1870s. This establishment had the bowling green after which Day’s Passage was renamed. It was rebuilt in 1888-90 as the Royal Ship Hotel, with John Oliver Cook as architect.9

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 (ill. 283). Later known as the Queen Street Chapel, this was a large galleryed hall with room for 600. Always prominently pedimented, its Doric portico was an addition, perhaps part of a ‘reconstruction’ of 1805-6. A schoolroom at the back had then already been twice rebuilt, in 1806 and 1842-3. All was demolished in 1960.10

Between the chapel and the Ship, and evidently of about the same date, there stood a surprisingly imposing but small pair of houses (ills 13, 284). Just one room behind

284. 8-10 Samuel Street, c.1780, from the south-east in 1951. Demolished

285. Queen Street Baptist Chapel, c.1786. From the north c.1845, showing Chapel (now Frances) Street (left) and Queen (now Samuel) Street (right). Demolished

St Mary’s and Morris Walk Areas

285. Church Hill’s east end from the north. Pen and ink drawing and watercolour of c.1868 by Frederick Wilson Litchfield Stockdale

286. Lord Warwick Street, part of a terrace of the late 1780s. View to the west c.1932. Demolished
A path to the east of the Queen Street Chapel was proba-
bly made into a short road in the late 1780s when new houses at the junction with Warren 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 Chapel Street, then Chapel Hill and since 1940 the south end of Frances Street), Queen Street and Henry Street (Ills 10, 293). These lands, also called Vinegar Hill (conceivably a radical gesture to the Irish uprising of 1798) were sparsely, erratically and poorly built up.

The north Kent railway arrived in 1835 from Southwark and later Eltham. Harrington was 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 1867–8 (see page 7). 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 ensemble was substantially developed in 1835–7 by Henry William Rowlstone, a surveyor, builder. It began as two footpaths heading west from Bowling Green Row. Courts of two-storey cottages were built here between 1843 and 1864, eventually forming three sides of a square that survived as a surprisingly amenable enclave into the 1960s. Bowling Green’s Row’s houses were wholly rebuilt in 1857–8, around which time there was also scattered redevelopment close by. Allston Hall was a small Christian Spontalist 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 Government Street in 1846.

Samuel Street

The curve of Samuel Street skirks what was Cally or Vinegar Hill. The route, not called Samuel Street until about 1843, 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 here between 1796 and 1801, eventually forming three sides of a square that survived as a surprisingly amenable enclave into the 1960s. Bowling Green’s Row’s houses were wholly rebuilt in 1857–8, around which time there was also scattered redevelopment close by. Allston Hall was a small Christian Spontalist 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 Government Street in 1846.

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 tri-angle, was a large presence from about 1803 to the 1830s. In 1833 the landlady, Elizabeth Brownlow, was murdered at the bar, by a man named Cpl. Patrick Carroll, RA. The British Museum public house stood opposite the Queen Street, and in cuttings to either side, with a station on what had been open land south of Warren 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 Bordage Road and Belson Road, after Lt. Gen. Albert Bordage (see page 135) and Lt. Gen. George John Belson, RA (c. 1788–1860), who was active in local govern-

The North Kent Railway arrived in 1849, in a tunnel under Queen Street and Chapel Street and in cuttings
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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 1849 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 Sherby’s Field after John Sherby, who had inherited it from his father-in-law Samuel Hardin, the farmer of many Woolwich fields. It housed a distinctive composition of eight houses close to where the pub’s successor now stands (Ill. 292). 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.

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 1844, 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. 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 engineers, 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 1896 brought a marked decline to the neighbourhood, from which it could not recover. Censuses record growing numbers of unmarried workers, though the slightly larger houses, which, though terraced, gave the impression of being semi-detached, could not be converted to houses for family occupations. ‘House farmers’, or slum landlords, moved in and in 1908 Booth’s investigator described the occupants of Morris Street as especially ‘poor, vicious and rough’.

The district was classed among the worst in Woolwich, rivalled only by the Dartford.

Kidd Street (part of Woodhill since 1935) was formed via leases from Henry Kidd (see pages 274-275). Twelve of these houses were built in 1824–25 (Ill. 10) and the Royal Albert public house was on the south-west corner with Prospect Row. In 1863, one Reynolds Gardin had closed; the road was extended south to link to Woodhill Street, 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.

WOOLWICH RECTORIAL ESTATE

Three fields south of the parish churchyard, an inverted L, just over nineteen acres, were glebe pertaining to Woolwich Rectory (III. 4). Rivalled only by the early nineteenth century, this land was opened up for development by an Act of Parliament of 1804 that involved 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 Pown estate.\textsuperscript{30}

About 180 houses were built following the granting of
sixty-nine leases, generally of 99-year duration, all but three
of them sealed by 1824, 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.\textsuperscript{31} He immedi-
ately sub-let 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 ambi-
tuous developers on this estate was Thomas Nevill Hopkins,
a Woolwich shipwright, who had built at least one house
on Pown 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 1814 and 1815. Both
Hopkins and Jolly lived on Rectory Place, which, though a
superior address, was just as irregularly built up through the
1820s, by John Mortis and Joseph Hudson, among others.
Heading up the hill to link with the earlier Maigrave
Place, this street had respectable occupancy in its odd mix
of houses (III. 294). 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 professionals did remain, notably Charles H.
Grindling, the Christian Socialist activist, here from 1889 to
1939. Rectory Place was still in 1934 said to be ‘the best part
of old Woolwich’.\textsuperscript{32}

The rectory (demolished). Fraser found the old river-
side rectory too small, dilapidated and badly situated (see page 50). Having gained his Act, he moved uphill
to the east side of Rectory Place, roughly where Charles
Grindling Walk now ends, into a new rectory, for which
John Huennarotti Papworth was the architect (III. 382).
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. Adelbert Anson added a single-
storey room in 1881–2 and the rectory was demolished in
1959.\textsuperscript{33} The present rectory at 43 Rectory Place, across
the road to the south, began as avicarage for Holy Trinity. It
was built in 1934–5 by Woodward & Co. to designs prob-
ably by Wright and Renny of Pown Street, the usual archi-
tects 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.\textsuperscript{34}

The South Eastern Railway line bisected the Rectory
estate in 1849 and some redevelopment followed on
King Street up to 1852 (III. 295). 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
plastered forms. Rectory (Escreet) Grove was laid out on
Osborne Estate land in 1890–2; Robert Jolly and Thomas
Smith, a timber merchant and builder of Upper Market
Street, built the road’s houses. On its west side, fac-
ing Kingsman Street, the RACS erected a large motor
293 Church Street to Parson’s Hill area, from the Ordnance Survey Ten Foot Plan of Woolwich, 1853.
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 1812 along the west flank of this landholding. At its north end it met Parson’s Hill and by 1821 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 1947 having been the Whitbread House Hotel for Working Boys. Among the early developers was John Burkitt, dismissed as the Board of Ordinance’s local foreman of bricklayers in 1805.

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Graveyard. A substantial building, it is the last of a locally distinctive type to survive in Woolwich (Ills 297, 298). 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. 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.

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. 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 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, unsuitable 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 nisbat sahib. Plans from the Greenwich Sikh Association for 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 nisbat sahib. Plans from the Greenwich Sikh Association for a distinctive type to survive in Woolwich (Ills 297, 298).

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then by arguments about the adequacy of the foundations and the use of concrete. It had been clear that there was not enough money to build the spire and the tower was sapped halfway up its third stage. A committee of inquiry was appointed. The site was cleared.

With the building of the Dockyard Chapel and St George’s Garrison Church in the 1830s, 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. Caroe, architect. The church was a casualty of bombarding raids and the site was cleared in 1945.

Rectory Place Congregational Church (demolished)

A group of Independents who had hived off from the Salem Chapel congregation (see page 278) in 1834 gathered a substantial subscription under the leadership of the Rev. William Gill, who had been a missionary at then the Royal Marine Infirmary, later the Red Barracks, looms – its west side and the high perimeter wall of what was then The sloping site ran north–south, with Eustace Place on Limerick, was consecrated priest at Exeter in the 1850s and, with 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. Caroe, architect. The church was a casualty of bombarding raids and the site was cleared in 1945.

In 1886–8 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. This permanent St Michael’s Schools came next, built to their north in 1890–1 (see below). Their designer was John William Walter, not a well-known architect. Apart from St Michael’s, his only surviving identified English building is a Battersea board school, Westminster (formerly Bolingbroke Road) School of 1874–6. The architect, 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.

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 a monumental cup surmounted the organ chamber. All this was to be carried out in brick with Bath stone dressings. The foundation stone was laid in 1873, but the first part built, consisting of the chancel, chancel aisle, organ chamber (forming the base of a proposed tower) and vestries, was undertaken by the builders. Kirk and Randall, who took over in 1876–7, 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 nave, by William Butterfield, followed in 1878–80. After Baker’s death internal embellishment took priority. One of a family from County Limerick, was consecrated priest at Exeter in the 1850s and, with 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. Caroe, architect. The church was a casualty of bombarding raids and the site was cleared in 1945.

Hog Ryres Baker (1822–94), who was working in the vicinity of St Mark’s, the Silverton, before taking charge in 1865 of this small 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 Eastace 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.

This sector of Woolwich was slum-ridden, and later testimonies speak of infant mortality and overcrowding in insanitary houses to make room for the buildings which it erected. The explosives expert Col. Vivian Majendie, R.A., wrote to Baker that the very poor and difficult district in which your labours lie...is exposed to evils of a very exceptional, and I fear extreme character, from its immediate proximity to a large, or we should say several large barracks...to see the site it stood...”

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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; 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 1925 by Cox & Buckle, to the designs of Ernest Geldart in Low Countries taste. Of marble, alabaster, blue Corsham stone and slate, it deploys angel statues (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 1928, 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 (III. 304). 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 group of altar, dos-sal 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.

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 the Deeper Life Bible Church, a Pentecostal group with American links, had been using the building for some years. There are, however, plans to declare the church closed and redundant. Redevelopment displaced the vicarage on Samuel Street. Its replacement, 21 Borgard Road, was built in 1960–1 by Woolwich Borough Council.

St Martin’s Mission Church (demolished)

This mission was built in 1879–80 on Back Lane (Belford Grove) in an initiative by the Rev. Adelbert 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.

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 (see page 201). This was succeeded by a new building on the Recreational estate, initially Woolwich National Schools, later known as St Mary’s, in 1840–1 (III. 303). It also took in girls who had previously been schooled on Ropeyard Rails.
CHAPTER SIX

ST MARY’S AND MORRIS WALK AREAS

302.
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304.
305. Woolwich National Schools, 1840–1
306. St John’s District School, 1872–3
307. Woodhill School, 1882–3, in 2010
308. Cardwell Cottages School, 1971–5, in 1975
310. St Mary Magdalene Church of England Primary School, 2009–11, in 2012
This school began as part of the Rev. H. R. Baker's Anglican mission at St Michael's (see above). The first temporary schoolrooms of 1860–6 were on the site of the church, and were used by the church and the school, which was not known, but it might be noted that the Rev. Adelbert St John's Schools stood immediately east of St John's District Schools (demolished) in 1880–81). In diapered brick, it was attractively ranged round a site in 1898, on which a new church school was added along Kingsman Street in 1911. This was built in 1911–13 to designs prepared in the GLC Architect's Department's Schools Division (Ill. 308). Initially called Cardwell Cottages School after a housing project of a few years earlier (see pages 390–3), this single-storey complex for 120 infants and 76 juniors spread north and east up to Frances Street, where houses had been cleared. It was a rambling scatter – a then fashionable ‘hen and chickens’ layout of cluster plan with lightly framed flat-roofed classroom blocks, either side of a north-lit assembly and dining hall and a top-lit spine corridor. The design was prepared by Kirk and Randall, whose 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 as Board architect. 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 and shed behind and lower than, that below for infants (Ill. 311). It was an early and notable fairly pure instance of a layout (the central-hall plan) that, from the late 1840s to the 1870s, only became altered to designs by Archite. A large narrow triple-decker, of red brick and quite plain, with twelve classrooms, three halls and a schoolmaster’s house to the north-east above cockery and laundry centres for girls and, to the north-west, a two-storey manual training school. From 1885, the school had been enlarged westwards in 1900–1, as always envisaged, and the capacity of what became a successful Technical School and Art School rose to more than 1,200. A report of 1912 noted that ‘a few children to a Board School’. They gained support from the Education Department, but the Board responded that the children of lower Woolwich would not pass down the river. This choice was supported in a petition from the GLC Architect’s Department’s first foray into prefabricated 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 sound pedestrian, for girls and infants, still stands.”

**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 school complexes, again designed by J. W. Walter, was built in 1872–73 (Ill. 306). In diaphragm, this was an elemental arrangement in the shape of a three-sided yard rather like Walter’s slightly earlier St Michael’s School, with flues de-luxe finish. Such touches posed, 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 school was on the blocky and flatter north school Board for London in 1888. Thereafter rapidly abandoned, they were briefly re-used as a church school from 1897 to 1906. Woolwich Borough Council compulsorily purchased the derelict bomb-damaged buildings and their site in 1944.

**Woodhill School**

Woodhill School is a fine example of board school architecture. It was built in 1883–84 after several years of dispassionate preparation. The site, which had been the west end of Reynolah Gardens, gained a road frontage when Wood Street and Kildare Street were linked in 1863, but, in a district thereafter struck by closure of the dockyard, it remained open. The School Board for London spotted it in 1879 and earmarked it for a large school for 900 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 Assistant Master at St John’s School from 1880 to 1890, fought off by 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 as Board architect. 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 and shed behind and lower than, that below for infants (Ill. 311). It was an early and notable fairly pure instance of a layout (the central-hall plan) that, from the late 1840s to the 1870s, only became altered to designs by Archite. A large narrow triple-decker, of red brick and quite plain, with twelve classrooms, three halls and a schoolmaster’s house to the north-east above cockery and laundry centres for girls and, to the north-west, a two-storey manual training school. From 1885, the school had been enlarged westwards in 1900–1, as always envisaged, and the capacity of what became a successful Technical School and Art School rose to more than 1,200. A report of 1912 noted that ‘a few children to a Board School’. They gained support from the Education Department, but the Board responded that the children of lower Woolwich would not pass down the river. This choice was supported in a petition from the GLC Architect’s Department’s first foray into prefabricated 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 sound pedestrian, for girls and infants, still stands.”

**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 (see above). The first temporary

The semi-open-plan interior was then reworked with the insertions of timber and glass partitions (which 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 end block was built in 1960 and occupied a curtilage or manual training above an office and stores for the Board’s District Clerk of Works. It was built by E. Nightingale of the Albert Embankment. To the south-east a girls’ drill hall was added in 1970 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, beyond an early nineteenth-century boundary wall, a low brown-brick nursery school was built in 1976 and extended in 1994.

**Malgrave School**

In 1894 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 Malgrave Place and Back Lane were cleared and, after a false start in 1891–2 (contract tenders had to be invited three times), Malgrave Place Schools were built in 1894–5 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 halls and a schoolmaster’s house to the north-east above cockery and laundry centres for girls and, to the north-west, a two-storey manual training school. From 1885, the school had been enlarged westwards in 1900–1, as always envisaged, and the capacity of what became a successful Technical School and Art School rose to more than 1,200. A report of 1912 noted that ‘a few children to a Board School’. They gained support from the Education Department, but the Board responded that the children of lower Woolwich would not pass down the river. This choice was supported in a petition from the GLC Architect’s Department’s first foray into prefabricated 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 sound pedestrian, for girls and infants, still stands.”

**St Mary’s and Morris Walk Areas**

The difficulties with smart neighbours to the south, the school site, which had been chosen, St John’s Schools near by having been found inadequate. Properties on Malgrave Place and Back Lane were cleared and, after a false start in 1891–2 (contract tenders had to be invited three times), Malgrave Place Schools were built in 1894–5 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 halls and a schoolmaster’s house to the north-east above cockery and laundry centres for girls and, to the north-west, a two-storey manual training school. From 1885, the school had been enlarged westwards in 1900–1, as always envisaged, and the capacity of what became a successful Technical School and Art School rose to more than 1,200. A report of 1912 noted that ‘a few children to a Board School’. They gained support from the Education Department, but the Board responded that the children of lower Woolwich would not pass down the river. This choice was supported in a petition from the GLC Architect’s Department’s first foray into prefabricated 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 sound pedestrian, for girls and infants, still stands.”

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ST MARY’S AND MORRIS WALK AREAS

Arson by a former pupil destroyed the junior school in 1949. After interim use of the remaining buildings as a pupil referral unit Greenwich Council decided to rede-velop the site to permit merger with the nearby Cyril Henry Nursery School (see below). In 2002 the project was taken on by Dannatt Johnson Architects, working with Colin and Moggridge, landscape architects, and William Verry, contractors. The new school, with 520 places, opened in 2005 (Ills 309, 345). It had been moved back from the road, behind a flat sports playground and cosomned 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 facades, 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.63

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 creche 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 schoolrooms opened in 1917.64

A recreation room, latterly a gymnasium, was added. A recreation room, latterly a gymnasium, was opened in 1920 and extension to the rear.65

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 1865–6. 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 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 rooms, with a flat above and outbuildings to the rear.66

The much more substantial MBW building that remains extant replaced this in 1866–7 (Ills 312, 313, 314). 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 “Few of Pearsall’s stations survive, but here his characteristic free-Gothic style still provides a striking profile, pinched buttsresses leading the eye to tall chimneys and the prominent fire tower round, watch-tower, 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 Downay. 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.”67

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 of Wandsworth Common were the builders. The red-brick addition, sympathetic but not entirely harmonious, was accompanied by the insertion of a half dormer in the first build. A recreation room, latterly a gymnastics, was provided on the ground floor, with considerable rebuilding and extension to the rear.68

Other public buildings

Woolwich Dockyard Station

This station, now on Belson Road, was built in 1849 for the South Eastern Railway Company’s North Kent Line, which opened that year (see pages 192–211). 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 sandpit. 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 remaining are some of the arches in the uncompleted arcades that were upstanding after mid-twentieth-century demolitions in the two-bay south-west office section, blocked-up lower eleva-tions 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.69

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The much more substantial MBW building that remains extant replaced this in 1866–7 (Ills 312, 313, 314). 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 “Few of Pearsall’s stations survive, but here his characteristic free-Gothic style still provides a striking profile, pinched buttsresses leading the eye to tall chimneys and the prominent fire tower round, watch-tower, 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 Downay. 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.”67

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 of Wandsworth Common were the builders. The red-brick addition, sympathetic but not entirely harmonious, was accompanied by the insertion of a half dormer in the first build. A recreation room, latterly a gymnastics, was provided on the ground floor, with considerable rebuilding and extension to the rear.68

Other public buildings

Woolwich Dockyard Station

This station, now on Belson Road, was built in 1849 for the South Eastern Railway Company’s North Kent Line, which opened that year (see pages 192–211). 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 sandpit. Originally there were twin
Dispensary (demolished)

The closure of the dockyard in 1869 struck these western parts of Woolwich hard, 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 1970.²⁸

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 1860s 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 1866 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 1871, 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 1889–1900 (III.312). H. H. Church was the architect, with Thomas & Edge as builders. The mortuary was extended to the north in 1942–8 and then demolished around 1970. The front block (30–303 Sunbury Street) continues in use as council housing.²⁹

British Hospital for Mothers and Babies (demolished)

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 (see page 379). 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 1906, 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 Lyning Hospital (founded in 1794 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 (III.320). 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 antenatal 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 annex 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 1980s. Closure, proposed in 1977, was averted and a northern block with two operating theatres was added in 1979–71. The hospital did close in 1984 and demolition followed.³⁰

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.
CHAPTER SIX ST MARY’S AND MORRIS WALK AREAS

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, five two-bedroom flats of 1933–4. More attractive are the short terraces of 1933–5 at the east end of the street, mostly two- and three-bedroom houses (Ill. 316). In 1938 there were plans for similar groups at Nos 28–66, suspended in 1946, though the site was soon after cleared.

The Commissioners’ work. 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 subsidized, but they were pressed into reducing their rents by twenty-five per cent, in part because the borough’s clearance plans depended on the Commissioners building 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 1936 bore fruit when the land was taken into the Comprehensive Development Area (CDA) in 1937; the sale went ahead in 1938. Setting up the Comprehensive Development Area

It is to Woolwich Borough Council that the story now turns. After the inter-war period, Woolwich, the only Labour stronghold in London that was not already largely built up, put over more than 4,000 homes across its southern parts in Eltham, essentially as cottage estates. The council and its large Direct Labour Organisation (DLO), established in 1923, gained a reputation as efficient and productive housebuilders. The cottage-estate ideal was standard in housing authorities in the 1930s, but Woolwich appears especially to have deployed 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 Limbury’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 eleven small areas together as the Warwick Street slum-clearance plan. This covered almost 4 acres, everything between Francis Street and Kingman Street, from Woolwich Church Street south to Borgard Road, railway land excepted, and took in 38 dwellings. A further three acres and fifty-three houses east of Kingman Street were also earmarked for purchase with a view to displacing 1,168 people in all, for redevelopment in fourteen four-storey and eight two-storey buildings to provide 486 dwellings for 706 people. The LCC, which had been forced since 1934 to back away from Labour’s commitment to cottage estates, responded that elsewhere five stores was normal 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.

Despite the pre-war difficulties, 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 (see page 265) and its heavy-hitting connections – not just Herbert Morrison, but also Ernest Bevin, briefly MP for Woolwich East in 1945–6. Woolwich also had an unusually high proportion of highly skilled and educated working-class political representatives, though determinedly independent, could be relied on to get on with things. Further, post-war housing 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 ‘at the finest advertisement the Woolwich Labour Council could ever hope to have’. 47 Adherence to cottage ideals held; though scarcity of land did oblige the insertion of a seven-storey point block in 1951–5. When the planning of 1,800 dwellings on the Coldharbour Estate had begun straight after the war, the council had on its books 6,739 families in need of housing. It was already then evident that ‘it was henceforth necessary to knock down before putting up’.

The council’s Medical Officer of Health, Thomas Standing, was keen on a clean sweep, advocating wholesale sales of the borough’s older homes. David Jenkins, Town Clerk from 1943 to 1952, 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 official was Wallace H. Gimson (1894–1974), Borough Engineer from 1939 to 1960. Gimson was responsible for 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. 46

The project was carried forward through Cluttons, the Commissioners’ agents, who worked with local architects, Wright and Renny, based in Pwos Street. They began with a scheme for ‘tenement houses’ on Kingman 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 1935 the first fourteen flats were built, each with its own kitchen and bathroom, in Preston House and Pwos House, facing Rectory Grove, which was renamed Escreet Grove in 1935 after the Rev. Charles Escreet (Ill. 317). 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 eighteen families, were begun in 1935, 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.

Renewal by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, 1938

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 1909 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-rent recursions in 1931–2 the Commissioners began to plan the replacement of the estate’s ‘worn out’ 311


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had been largely rejected by problematic. The plans that had been prepared in late 1953, all but one of two and three storeys, began in April 1954, with another small greenward laid out between the street and the close. The austerity of design was learned 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 1955. The Kingiman Paraide scheme was worked up in 1953 to include the Greencound public house and the first range of shops below maisonettes. This was all that was built in 1954–6; 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 Lambourn-like, if still unadventurous (ILL. 318). 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.

These held-ups were compounded by the practical difficulties of decanting, compulsory purchases and the relocation of buildings. The sites were to be reduced to four or five. Despite all this, building work began in July 1954. Progress across the area was on an ad hoc basis, jumping here and there; ‘contracts’ sequenced as on St Mary Street, but with projecting porches and window architraves that seem to derive from buildings much permanent housing. Gimson prepared layout plans for the south side of Church Hill and west side of Greenlaw Street and proposing a low quadrangular complex behind, with an enlarged recreation ground beyond. Trustees oversee the building of the almshouses in 1953, four over, four to designs by Eley and Rickcodd, local architects, in the CDA’s plans block of eighteen flats on the west side of Greenlaw Street were set exactly to enable occupants to see out while seated. Open fireplaces were designed to burn smokeless fuel – an innovation. Trustees oversaw the building of the almshouses in 1953, four over, four to designs by Eley and Rickcodd, local architects, in the CDA’s plans block of eighteen flats on the west side of Greenlaw Street were set exactly to enable occupants to see out while seated. Open fireplaces were designed to burn smokeless fuel – an innovation. Gimson prepared layout plans for the south side of Church Hill and west side of Greenlaw Street and proposing a low quadrangular complex behind, with an enlarged recreation ground beyond. Trustees oversee the building of the almshouses in 1953, four over, four to designs by Eley and Rickcodd, local architects, in the CDA’s plans block of eighteen flats on the west side of Greenlaw Street were set exactly to enable occupants to see out while seated. Open fireplaces were designed to burn smokeless fuel – an innovation. Gimson prepared layout plans for the south side of Church Hill and west side of Greenlaw Street and proposing a low quadrangular complex behind, with an enlarged recreation ground beyond. Trustees oversee the building of the almshouses in 1953, four over, four to designs by Eley and Rickcodd, local architects, in the CDA’s plans block of eighteen flats on the west side of Greenlaw Street were set exactly to enable occupants to see out while seated. Open fireplaces were designed to burn smokeless fuel – an innovation. Gimson prepared layout plans for the south side of Church Hill and west side of Greenlaw Street and proposing a low quadrangular complex behind, with an enlarged recreation ground beyond. Trustees oversee the building of the almshouses in 1953, four over, four to designs by Eley and Rickcodd, local architects, in the CDA’s plans block of eighteen flats on the west side of Greenlaw Street were set exactly to enable occupants to see out while seated. Open fireplaces were designed to burn smokeless fuel – an innovation. Gimson prepared layout plans for the south side of Church Hill and west side of Greenlaw Street and proposing a low quadrangular complex behind, with an enlarged recreation ground beyond. Trustees oversee the building of the almshouses in 1953, four over, four to designs by Eley and Rickcodd, local architects, in the CDA’s plans block of eighteen flats on the west side of Greenlaw Street were set exactly to enable occupants to see out while seated. Open fireplaces were designed to burn smokeless fuel – an innovation.

The amended plans also replaced rows of two-storey maisonettes in seven blocks, still fairly plain, 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 (ILL. 316). 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 this and other early St Mary’s buildings, the walls were always of load-bearing brick, with hollow-tile reinforced-concrete floors. The conservation 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.
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. It was 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 surgeries 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 1956, 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 Maj. W. H. P. Burwayt, was able to resist compulsory purchase until 1961. The dual-carrigeway 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 1972.

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 1962 in the light of the novel methods used on the LCC’s Morris Walk Estate (see below). Output had always mattered in Woolwich, but now a new labour-saving approach to mass production was adopted in 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.

CHAPTER SIX ST MARY’S AND MORRIS WALK AREAS

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. Their butterfly-plan form, to maximize light (living rooms have ‘picture frame’ windows), ventilation and privacy, followed the lead of Denys Lasdun’s cluster blocks in Bethnal Green (III. 14x). But these towers were novel and impressive, the only part of the Woolwich CDA project to be widely written up in the professional press.**

From 1961 the DLLO, still a workforce of about 1,300, was obliged to submit competitive tenders for new contracts, that for a block at 196–194 Frances Street came in some fifteen per cent cheaper than those of other contractors and so the DLLO continued its work. Garages became more numerous, eighty-nine being provided with 119 dwellings that were built in 1961–2 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 Charles Grindling Walk. The George IV public house was moved across Rectory Place to a building of 1966–7 put up by Courage Ltd.**

Uncertainty over ownership and road-building had delayed work in the eastern parts of the CDA. The Ogilby Estate had been allowed in 1953 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.
Two eight-storey blocks providing eighty-eight flats were completed in 1968 with Howard Fairrow Ltd as Concrete Laiders of Greenwich (Ill. 280). Austere and grey, they were not about appearances.  

322. Design perspective for one of Greenwich Council's seven tower blocks of 1967–71 (see Elliston House, Hastings House and Nightingale Heights)
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 (Ills 323, 327).

Small slum clearances around Kidd Street were intended in the 1930s, and in 1950 the joint LCC and Woolwich Borough Council 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 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.

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."

Under similar pressures elsewhere and with 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, Conger and Schell 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 fashion.’

Industrialization of the building process would, it was believed, bypass shortages and another 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 floor; the minimum space necessary for the fixed services; the method of controlling; the method of cost control; the cost of construction sites; the cost of the structural units; the cost of the structural units; the cost of the structural units; and the cost of the structural units. While some of these issues were simple: ‘almost everything is against this’ said that ‘almost everything is against this’. In particular, the unevenness of the site meant that heavy ground work would be required before a single floor 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 a start of the technological breakthrough.

The pace of the project was aided by expertise from Copenhagen, where Richardson made regular visits, not simply to take advantage of local expertise but also to acquire a thorough understanding of the system. This was vital for the architects’ vision of industrial building, which aimed for an aesthetic that flowed directly from the industrial techniques used to construct the buildings. Morris Walk was built based on the premise that ‘Designs for industrial production should begin by rejection of the conventional method of construction and put in its place the very few simple concepts which are valid for industrial methods and nothing else.’ Monomathy had already been observed in industrial-housing schemes on the Continent, but modernist ideologies that tended to confute productivity and aesthetics sustained the view that design specifics for the particular system, deriving forms directly from most efficient uses, would arrive at aesthetic success.

To fulfill 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 Anglian, where Anglian Building Products had been based, via the river and a rail link to Charlton where specially adapted lorries would carry the panels past the half mile (0.8km) to the site (Ill. 325). In each block, therefore, two flats form every floor (Ill. 14). 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 space and geometry, in accordance with a then fashionable theory of ‘served and servant’ zones.

Post-clearance construction work began in April 1964. The site was scheduled to take eighteen months to build and cost about 5.5 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, technical as well as the joints meant that although the first tenements were housed in December 1964, the estate was not completely finished until the autumn of 1966, it also went considerably over budget.

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, mostly given a facing of brick (‘Hadrian’s Wall’ in honour of the system’s origins, thus Viking, Frederick, Zeeland, Ebenezer, Lolland, Denmark, Jutland and Tivoli Gardens), Hadden, Aldon and Glendevon perpetuate earlier local names. Variation in floor area occurs only because of the presence of corridors or storage spaces, where smaller corner kitchens were formed in beds for the elderly by extending the corridors and adding larger spaces. The only major flexibility was the location of the party wall between the units, enabling the flats to vary in size from bed to four-bedroom, and dormer windows and dormer windows and dormer windows to accommodate other bed sizes. 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 block. Part of the desire for ‘almost everything is against this’ was to ensure that the buildings would be 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.

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’ 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 fringes the neighbouring parkland has distinct echoes of the slab blocks on the LCC’s Altton 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 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 built 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 in London, as for example Woolwich (see pages 317–18). Identical point towers were put up in Fulham, and Whiteknights, Birmingharn and Birmingham were actually completed first.

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 a 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 condemnation led to suggestions that the workmanship and design of the estate were faulty. Such allegations were firmly rebutted, but expensive and inefficient heating systems, coupled with problems with condensation (common to nearly all tower developments of the time), and the collapse of Ronan Point raised fears that were addressed through the collapse of Ronan Point in 1968 demonstrated possible weaknesses in a different version of the Larsen-Nielsen large-panel system.
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 refused, but a land swap agreed in 1959 made the former St John’s School site available to the estate. In 1960–6 a three-storey building, which seems puzzling here on the land – site of the hospital in the early 1870s, was redeveloped for disabled occupancy. It was built for the London and Co-operative Wholesale Housing Society. The site of the hospital in the early 1870s, was redeveloped for disabled occupancy. It was built for the London and Co-operative Wholesale Housing Society.

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Across the railway line was ground that had been sidings for the dockyard estate’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 1906 designed by Eley and Rickcord.

Parish Wharf, off Woolwich, is of the same period, but it is something different. The self-build method espoused by Walter Segal was followed here in 1992–93. A steel-framed building with a black-brick upper storeys. Samuel Close was the approach to the site of the hospital in 1960–4 when Rydon Construction built twenty-eight houses and twelve flats in a narrower block pattern. The site of Unity Place, the twenty-five house terrace fought over and cleared in the 1890s, was redeveloped as 60–108 Samuel Street. Twenty-six terraced houses laid out as a row of seven terraced houses under hipped attics, with smaller houses paired in lower link blocks articulated with black-brick upper storeys. Samuel Close was the 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 site until 1995–8 when it was replaced for the Hexagon Housing Association, again by Rydon Construction.

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