

Woolwich Town Centre

Historical assessment and character



Jonathan Clarke

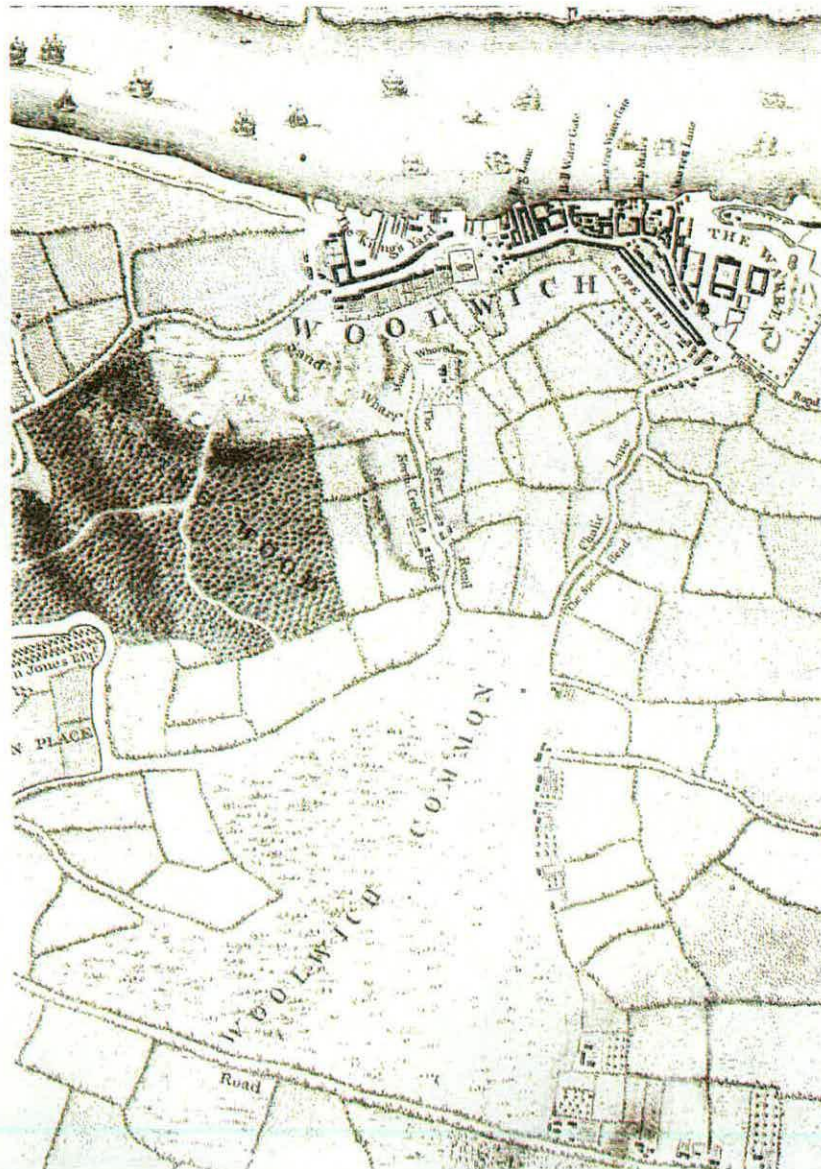
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Nature of Request

A request was received from Sarah Buckingham of English Heritage London Region for an assessment of the historical development of Woolwich. Woolwich town centre is targeted for a series of major redevelopments over the coming years, and this assessment is designed to feed into the Urban Design Framework that is being co-ordinated by London Region. The aim of this study is to provide an outline of the historical evolution of Woolwich, and an appraisal of the special character areas that collectively make up today's town centre. Developing between, and in large part because of, the growth of the Dockyard and the Arsenal, Woolwich Town is one of the more historically and archaeologically significant districts of Greater London, yet our understanding and appreciation of it is poor in comparison to the history of those great institutions. The story of Woolwich town is one of transformation and change; it has undergone periodic redevelopment for the last 200 years, and within the last few decades it has witnessed changes that have begun to fundamentally alter its defining characteristics. Yet despite losses to its historic built environment, there is something quite special and fragile in the character of what remains of this part of riparian London, and it is the intention of this study to offer a broad-brush exploration of this as an essential component of any strategy for managing future change.



Rocque's map of Woolwich, 1746

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1. Overview of historical development and character of Woolwich

Woolwich owes its identity and its remarkable historical importance to its riverside location, and to the great enterprises this attracted. Strategically situated on the south bank of the Thames downstream from Greenwich and London, it was an important crossing point during the medieval period (the forerunner of today's free ferry service) as well as being a local centre for salmon fishing, pottery and sand production. Its locational virtues were recognised by Henry VIII who established a Royal Dockyard in the early 16th century and for over 350 years Woolwich served as base for naval seapower, enjoying a special status shared only by Britain's five other towns with historic royal naval dockyards – Plymouth, Portsmouth, Deptford, Chatham and Sheerness. Overlapping this nautical history, for almost three centuries Woolwich was also a centre of arms storage and production and military training: during the 18th and 19th centuries Woolwich was a military-naval-industrial complex probably without equal in Britain. Throughout most of this period, the Dockyard and the Arsenal gave employment – directly and indirectly – to the great majority of Woolwich's working population. The main periods of growth of the Arsenal and the Dockyard were during or immediately after major conflicts, expansions that had knock-on effects with the town itself. Much of Woolwich's formative phases of expansion correlate with the American War of Independence (1775–1783), the Napoleonic Wars (1803–15) and the Crimean War (1854–1856): for example, Wellington Street was added in the early 19th century. Despite this, the townscape of modern Woolwich is overridingly Victorian / Edwardian and mid-to-late 20th century.

Taken on its own merits, modern Woolwich Town is a largely unprepossessing place. It has an untidy, shambolic and somewhat dog-eared maritime character; one commentator likened it to 'some antique army pensioner, wounded in the wars and cast upon a not noticeably sympathetic world'.¹ But another noted how 'it seems somehow to have collected the dust and held the spirit of many centuries'.² Whole swathes of its early townscape have been erased, but there are tangible reminders of how this developed, and how this related to the dockyard and the Arsenal. Indeed, it is its relationship to these two nationally (and internationally) significant establishments that give it an interest far beyond its seemingly ordinary appearance. Like comparable shipbuilding towns, such as Deptford and Sheerness, it was the piecemeal, accretive emergence of a dockworkers' settlement next to the dockyard that really began a process of urban enlargement. This was established in the post mediaeval period on the boggy, waterfront area east of the dockyard and north of Church Street-High Street and its spur, Warren Lane (originally called Ragged Row, then Cannon Row). By the 1670s the south side of the High Street had been continuously built up, and through the 18th century, this was a dense jumble of yards and alleys lined with timber-framed houses, inns and public houses that housed and served a burgeoning population of artisans, labourers and mariners. Most of this area - the historic core of the town – has been cleared, although a number of 18th-century vernacular houses do survive along the High Street, including Nos 111 and 112 Woolwich High Street and Nos 121-3 Woolwich High Street. The form and construction of these houses was very different to those of equivalent status in the non-riparian parts of London; they are part of a vernacular tradition encompassing the towns of the north and east Kent coasts, including Gravesend, Chatham, Deal and Dover. In the 19th century this area declined, becoming squalid and

¹ Norman Shrapnel, *A View of the Thames* (London, 1977)

² S. P. Myers, *London South Of The River* (London, 1949)

overcrowded and gaining local notoriety as 'The Dusthole'. Noisy, malodorous industries such as gasworks and engineering works were established, continuing the area's longstanding industrial associations, which included salt-glazed stoneware and glass production in the 17th century. Today, little remains to evoke the riverside area's industrial character; Glass Yard recalls the glass houses established by Huguenot artisans that stood on that site, and further east, the four-storeyed stock-brick 'gatehouse', erected in 1910 as a purpose-built extension to Furlongs furniture depository in nearby Nelson Street, bears witness to the former scale of industrial buildings and activity. In the growing climate of civic responsibility in the mid-19th century, the Woolwich Board of Commissioners erected a public baths in Nelson Street, with a lecture hall above. Both are long gone, replaced by the Waterfront Leisure Centre which at least maintains a degree of functional continuity, albeit within a garish, oversized exterior that fails to do justice to the riverside location.

With the exception of St Mary's Church and some surviving 18th century houses along the town's earliest thoroughfare (Woolwich High Street) and within Beresford Square - all of central Woolwich's built environment is the result of building and rebuilding activity in the last 200 years. But some of the earliest thoroughfares, which helped shape the town's morphology, do survive. Beresford Street (created in 1835) and Rope Yard Rails reproduce the linear (NW-SE) axis of the celebrated Elizabethan ropeworks, and as such constitute an important, tangible link to an early episode of the town's historical development. At its southern end was an irregular 'square', a triangular shaped area formed by the intersection of the ropery, Plumstead Road, and Cholic Lane (which became Woolwich New Road) (Fig 1). Situated opposite the gates to the Arsenal, this area would later be formalized as Beresford Square. Similarly, Frances Street, John Wilson Street (A205), and Woolwich New Road have origins much earlier than that indicated by the buildings that line them. Frances Street seems to have been put through in the early 18th century, for it is shown on Rocque's map of 1746, where it is named 'The New Road'. The forerunner of John Wilson Street is also depicted on this map, although at this date it was little more than a pathway. At this date, the most important road in existence besides the Church Street-High Street was Cholic Lane, an arterial route linking the common to Beresford Street/Plumstead Road. In 1790 it was straightened and rebuilt as Woolwich New Road.

Until the late-18th century, the two dominant forces governing the morphological development of Woolwich town were the dockyard and the Arsenal. From the 1780s onwards, Woolwich Common came to have an increasingly determining role in the town's evolution as the military, seeking more space than the Arsenal could provide, began moving there. First to move was the Royal Artillery, occupying new barracks erected on the east side of the common in 1775-82. Thereafter, as other divisions and departments relocated, including James Wyatt's Military Academy (1805), the military establishments on Woolwich Common came to act as a third 'magnet', drawing the town southwards onto hillier ground. Following the sale of estate lands in the late 18th-century, the area circumscribed by High Street / Beresford Street, Woolwich New Road and John Wilson Street was steadily developed as a prosperous commercial and residential centre that catered for both the local civilian and military populations, and that of surrounding districts (Fig 2). Smart new shopping streets such as Powis Street (1798) and Hare Street were put through by private developers, attracting local businesses, and later, merchants from London. Powis Street was rebuilt in 1898, and a new generation of properties were built or rebuilt in florid Edwardian Baroque style, including the imposing The Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS) headquarters. The late Victorian and Edwardian eras saw new buildings for local government, as the newly-formed Woolwich Metropolitan Borough (created in 1899 with the passing of the London Government Act) sought to

publicly assert its new-fangled status as a progressive administrative body directly elected by the ratepayers. The area south of Powis Street, bounded by Wellington Street, John Wilson Street, Calderwood Street and Thomas Street, quickly became a showpiece municipal quarter, boasting one of the finest Edwardian Town Halls in the country. This survives as a remarkably unified cluster, one that coheres with the early Polytechnic buildings, which also occupy this area. Contrasting with this ordered formality, Beresford Square retained its more heterogeneous, boisterous feel, bordered by an assortment of Victorian pubs, eateries and houses. Situated at the interface between military and civilian old Woolwich as a curious mixture of the planned and the unplanned, Beresford Square, according to one commentator is 'the essence of Woolwich...It is Woolwich bovrilised'.

The Dockyard closed in 1869. During the First World War, the Arsenal reached its peak in size (some 72,000 workers were employed then) and activity, but thereafter the importance of that great establishment steadily diminished. The Royal Ordnance Factory ceased production in 1967 and there followed a period of general economic decline, with the widespread closure and relocation of businesses in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. The Woolwich Building Society). Today, many buildings stand disused and derelict, although the downturn in Woolwich's fortunes was not absolute; MacDonald's opened its first UK outlet here in 1974, and the diverse range of small-scale, relatively cheap properties sustains a broad mix of small businesses that give the town the sense of vitality which has always been one of its most palpable traits.

2. Woolwich town centre: principal character areas

2.1 The High Street and the riverfront

Extent: Woolwich High Street east of the New Ferry Approach roundabout as far as the north part of Beresford Street, and the riverfront area to the north.

Character: Woolwich High Street, and the tract of land extending northwards to the river is the historic nub of Woolwich. From medieval origins as a small fishing village and crossing point across the Thames, the town evolved and enlarged in the 17th and 18th centuries as dockworkers and tradesmen and their families took root. Until well into the 19th century this area was a dense jumble of yards and alleys lined with timber-framed houses, inns and public houses that housed and served a burgeoning population of artisans, labourers and mariners (Figs 1-8). From the later part of the 19th century the character began changing as large-scale industry became increasingly prominent, and clearance of whole swathes of the 'Dusthole' (to make way for a ferry approach road, for example) began (Figs 9-12). The most far-reaching transformations have taken place in the last thirty years. One of the most major changes has been the replacement of the Victorian ferry terminus by a modern equivalent, sited upriver (west), and the construction of the extensive Waterfront Leisure Centre. Consequently, Hare Street, on the south side of Woolwich High Street has lost both its views to the river, and its role as a major axis linking Powis Street with the ferry terminal and riverfront. Such changes have impacted severely on the defining lineament of the place.

This lineament was – and to a degree still is – an aggregate of a number of tangible traits – narrow, sub-rectangular plots; small, densely-packed houses and inns, many with distinctive tiled gambrel or mansard roofs and central chimneystack plan forms; and a curving, relatively narrow high street that rises and falls, opening northwards onto a succession of alleys and lanes, several of which offered both glimpses and access to the river. Together these qualities produce a somewhat mottled, untidy, dog-eared character, unmistakably maritime, and one shared only by a few other suburbs on the south bank of the Thames with 18th century housing, notably Southwark, Deptford and Greenwich, and other water-side towns in Kent such as Gravesend and Chatham. Remnants and reminders of Woolwich's riparian vernacular past are still very much in evidence along the High Street, which because of its sinuosity and changing gradient, gradually unfolds as a series of subtle, tangential vistas rather than as a straight shot down its length (Figs 13-15). However, such is the density and speed of motorised traffic down this road, coupled with visually obstructing road barriers and a profusion of other street furniture, that appreciation of the riverside townscape is harshly compromised. Very few of the once numerous public access points to the river survive; Bell Water Gate, which still retains its water stairs, forms an important function *vis-à-vis* waterfront permeability (Fig 16). Other reminders of the riverside's working past are more obscure; Glass Yard remains in name only, although it is quite possible that remains of the conical glasshouses that once stood here lie buried underground. Viewed from the river, the relatively intimate scale and grain of the remains of pre-20th-century Woolwich stand in juxtaposition to the large-scale additions of the late 20th century; Figs 6, 9 and 18 offer useful comparisons and contrasts. Eastwards, the High Street swings round into Beresford Street, following the distinctive trajectory of the Elizabethan rope works, the foundations of which ostensibly still lie buried underground. Views of the river open out in this section, and an assortment of functionally disparate Victorian

High Street and Riverside

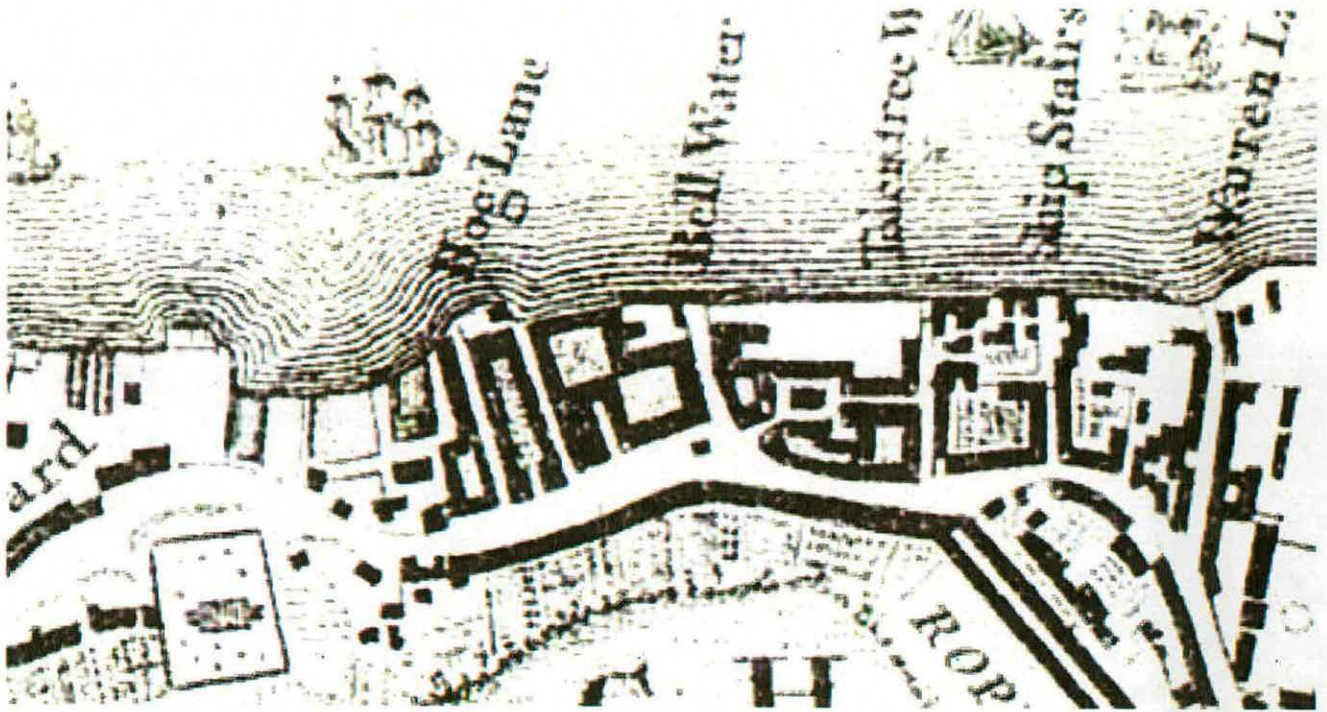


Figure 1 Extract from Rocque's map of 1746. By this date, both the south side of the meandering High Street and what would become Beresford Street – Rope Yard Rails - had been continuously built up.

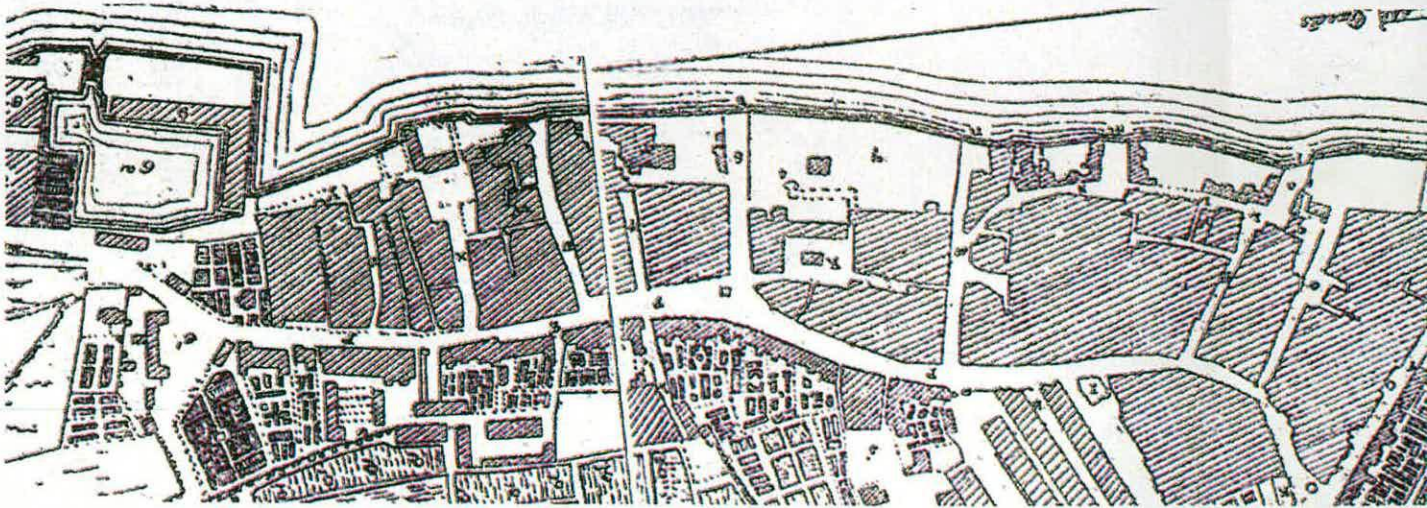


Figure 2 Extract from Barker's map of 1748, as redrawn by Vincent in the 1890s. This map clearly shows the market gardens, fields and associated structures south of the High Street that formed a lesser part of Woolwich's economy until the 19th century.

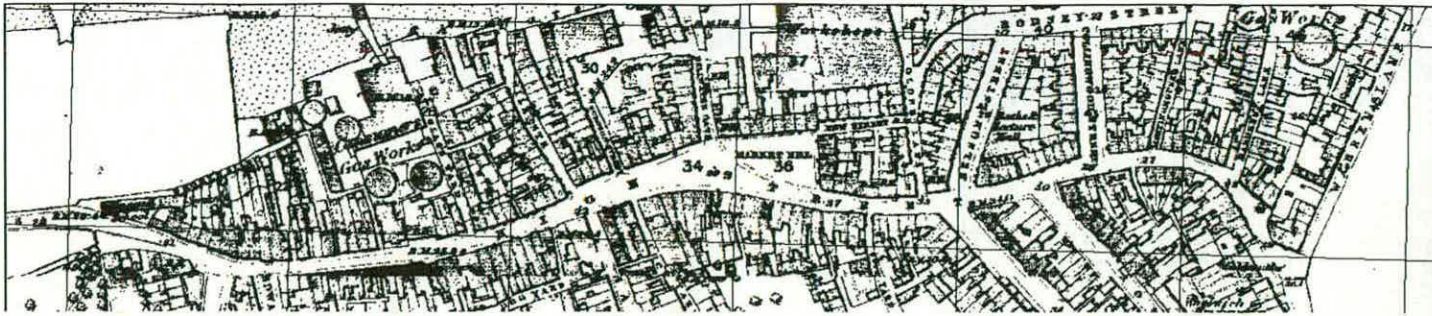


Figure 3 Extract from Ordnance Survey map of 1869: by this time Gas Works, workshops and other industrial activities were firmly established, and new streets and lanes, including Nelson Street and Collingwood Street had been laid within the 'Dustbowl'.

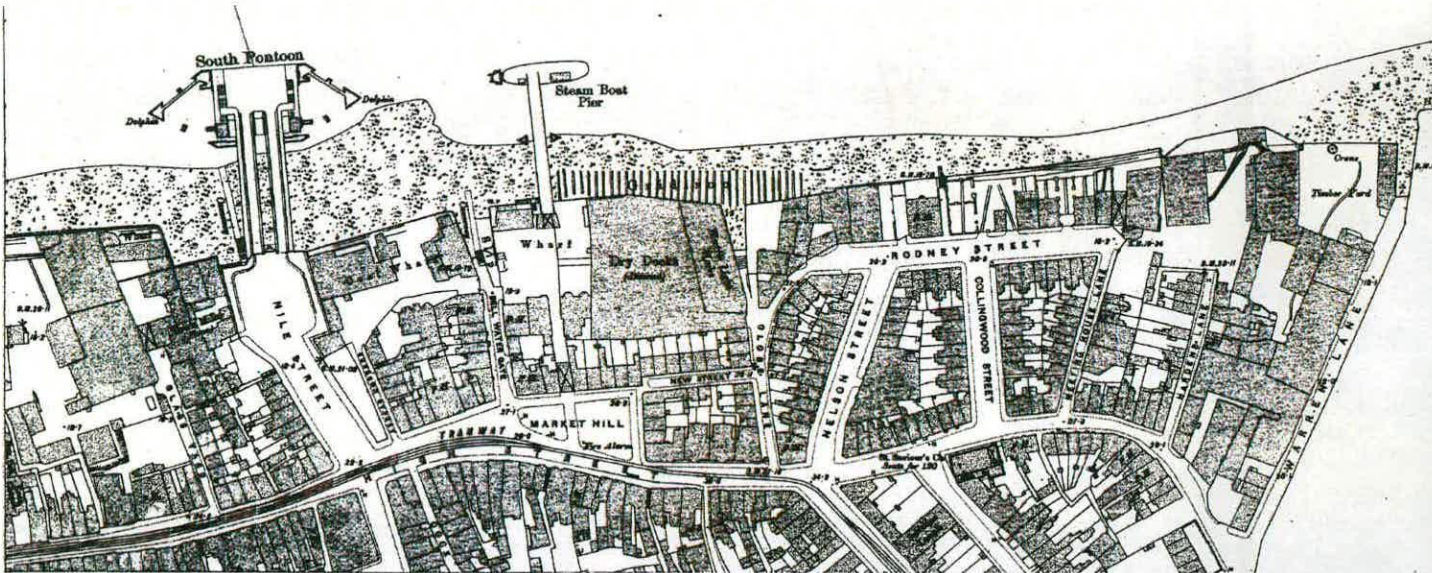


Figure 4 Extract from Ordnance Survey map of 1894-6. Although the gas holders had gone, industry still clung to the riverbank; flour mills, coal wharfs, dry docks, and electric light works and timber yards being the most prominent uses. But in terms of Woolwich's infrastructure, the most far-reaching changes were the construction of the South Pontoon (Ferry Terminal) by the LCC in 1889, and the provision of a tramway along the High Street and Beresford Street. Both spurred the commercial development of the town, and the former entailed the widening of Nile Street to become the ferry approach road, which, together with Hare Street, provided a corridor directly linking Powis Street with the waterfront.

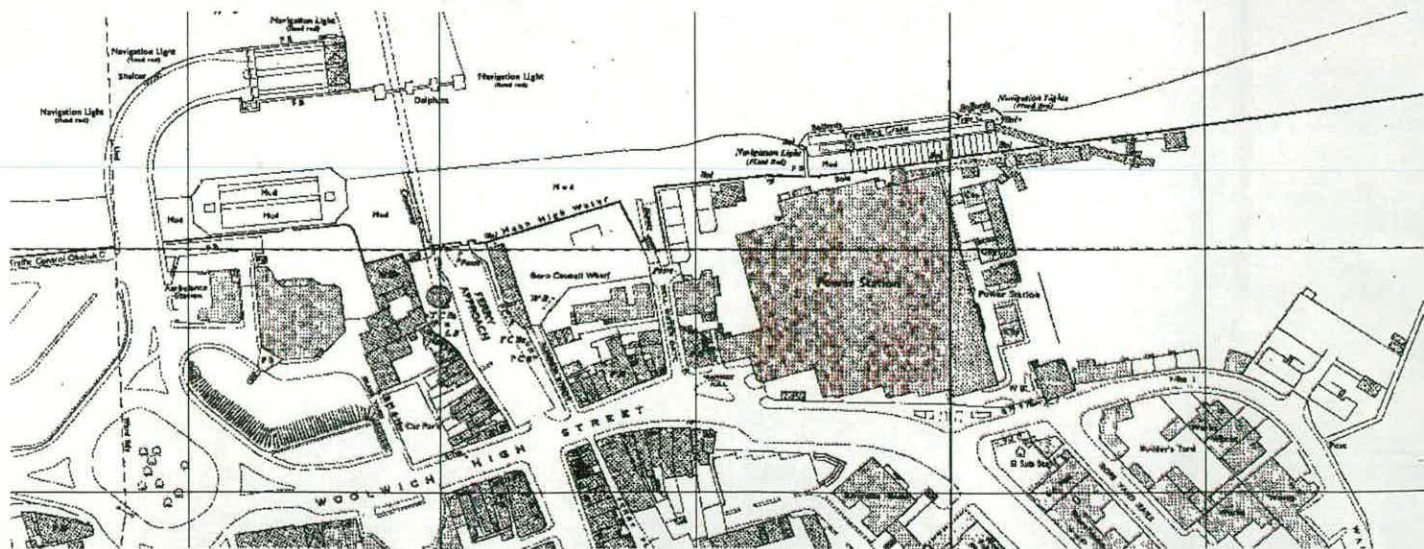


Figure 5 Extract from Ordnance Survey map composite of 1960-86. The principal change in the early 20th century was the construction of a coal-fired power station, and the clearance of much of the 'Dusthole' – all the streets, lanes and houses between Bell Water Gate and Warren Lane were removed. In the late 20th century, much of the remaining 18th and 19th built environment north of Woolwich High Street was cleared to make way for the present roundabout and approach road to the new ferry terminal. The Power Station was demolished in the late 1970s, and more recently, The Waterfront Leisure Centre has been built on the site of the old Ferry Approach/Borough Council Wharf.

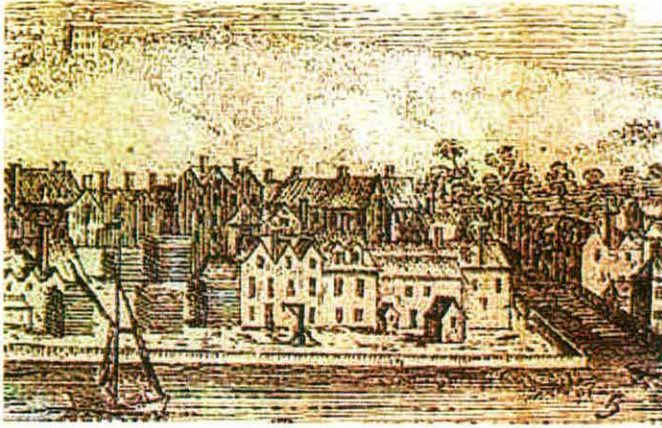


Figure 6 In the post-mediaeval period, the riverfront was quickly and densely built up. This engraving shows that some buildings reached three and four storeys in height; such was the pressure on available land.



Figure 7 Hog Lane in the 1880s before it was demolished in 1889 to form the ferry approach.



Figure 8 Nile Street as it looked in the 1880s, before it was widened and partially cleared to form the ferry approach. At this date many 17th and 18th-century houses survived, although the vernacular idiom was already rubbing shoulders with newer brick-fronted properties that were more consciously emulative of the polite housing of the metropolis.



Figure 9 Aerial view of a distinctly industrial-looking Woolwich, c. 1925, with the Ferry South Terminal in the foreground. The single largest riverside building of this period was the recently completed Woolwich Power Station, recognisable by its smoking chimneys.



Figure 10 Ferry Approach in c. 1925 (looking north), with the entrance to the foot tunnel on the left. Opened in October 1912, the 1,655ft-long Woolwich Footway Tunnel was designed by Sir Maurice Fitzmaurice (1861-1924), Chief engineer to London County Council.



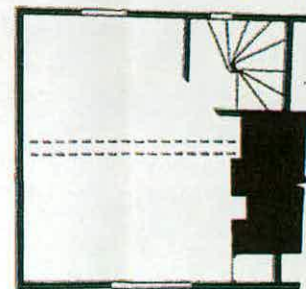
Figure 11 Foot tunnel entrance in 2005 (looking south), now engulfed by the Waterfront Leisure Centre. Until the construction of this complex, emerging pedestrians would have been able to look northwards through Hare Street and the retail heart of Woolwich.



Figure 12 1890s lantern slide of the riverfront, with the gasholders of the Consumers Gas Works in the foreground (demolished).



Figure 13 Two views of Woolwich High Street in the Edwardian era, captured c. 1905.



**111 HIGH STREET
WOOLWICH
FIRST FLOOR
early 18th century**

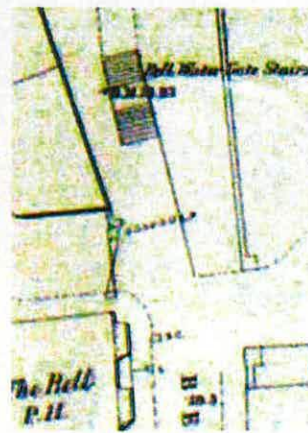
Figure 14 Surviving 18th and early-mid 19th century houses along the south side of Woolwich High Street, photographed from Bell Water Gate in February 2005. From L-R: Nos 108 & 109 (AD Skillman & Sons, a long-established DIY shop); No. 110, Indiano Pizza shop; Nos 111 (Readysnacks Café) & 112 (currently a sex shop). Nos 111 and 112 Woolwich High Street are a pair of three-room timber-framed houses, and originally faced the town's cage and stocks at the junction with Bell Water Gate when they were built in the early 1700s. There is some evidence to suggest that Tom Cribb (1781-1848), the English Champion Pugilist, may have lived and died at No. 111. In the mid 19th century, No 108 functioned as Woolwich's Post Office, and No. 110 as 'The Bank Tavern' Public House.



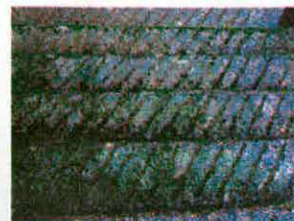
Figure 15 Nos 121-3 Woolwich High Street also survive as three of a group that was four houses, retaining the distinctive form of this 18th-century artisanal house-type, including M-shaped roofs and central-chimneystack layouts. Current uses of this characteristic grouping include an African-Caribbean restaurant (No. 121); an Off Licence (No. 122), and a Thai restaurant. The intimate scale of this survivor, and its eastward, 19th-century neighbours, is compromised both by the looming tower block in the distance and the dual carriageway in the foreground.



Figure 16 Bell Water Gate Stairs, one of the few surviving early water stairs in Woolwich traditionally used by Thames lighter men (the others formerly being Trinity Stairs Upper & Lower, Dockyard Stairs and Nile Street Stairs).



1853 Map extract, detailing Bell Water Gate Stairs.



Surviving tooled granite steps, possibly of post mediaeval date.



Figure 17 Today, little remains to evoke the riverside's former industrial/residential character; Glass Yard recalls in name only the glasshouses established by Huguenot artisans in the 17th century that stood on this site.



Figure 18 The modern Woolwich riverfront, viewed from the ferry. Until the late 20th century, the largest buildings on this stretch (between the former Dockyard and The Arsenal) were the warehouses, factories, gasholders and engineering sheds of the industries that clustered here, almost all of which were low-slung rather than high-rise. Today the skyline is dominated by large orthogonal office blocks that disregard the intricacy and scale of the earlier urban 'grain'. Overly large buildings sited too close to the riverfront block key views up the hill towards Woolwich Common and Shooters Hill.

Woolwich High Street (East End) – Beresford Street



Figure 19 Callis Yard Stables, Brunton Street, as seen from Woolwich High Street. Despite being Not Listed, this urban stables complex built c.1890 makes an important contribution to the riverside townscape, its stock brick elevations complementing neighbouring buildings, and its Italianate detailing adding stylistic richness to the locale. Built by Greenwich Council to house horses and dustcarts, it reflects the early stages of municipal provision in Woolwich and is an attractive surviving example of a once-numerous building type.



Figure 20 Gatehouse Building, Warren Lane. Erected in 1910 as a purpose-built extension to Furlongs furniture depository in nearby Nelson Street, this four-storeyed stock-brick building bears witness to the former scale of industrial buildings and activity on the riverside.



Figure 21 The former Salvation Army Mission Hall, Beresford Street. Erected in the late 19th century, this building testifies to the town's strong tradition of working class nonconformity. The original function of the adjoining Edwardian building is unclear, but its crenelated parapet is indicative of a respect for the architectural style of the earlier hall.



Figure 22 Woolwich Polytechnic Secondary School, opened in 1897 as Woolwich Polytechnic Boys Secondary School day school for boys. Executed in the distinctive style of other London Board Schools, it was the first secondary school in Woolwich.

and Edwardian buildings, unified in their use of stock brick, stand intermittently on either side of the busy dual carriageway (Figs 19-22).

2.2 Beresford Square

Extent: Beresford Square and the buildings within and on all sides of it.

Character: Situated at the interface between military and civilian old Woolwich as a curious mixture of the planned and the unplanned, the formal and informal, Beresford Square, according to one commentator is 'the essence of Woolwich...It is Woolwich bovrilised'³ The square's origins long predate the entrance to the Arsenal that defines its northern boundary; it seems to have emerged in the 17th or 18th centuries as an irregular 'square', a triangular shaped area formed by the intersection of the ropeyard, Plumstead Road, and Cholic Lane (which became Woolwich New Road in 1790). But it was in the early-mid 19th century, when a new main entrance to the Arsenal was created, that this important space became formalized as Beresford Square. Public Houses, eateries, shops and houses grew up piecemeal around its margins, and market traders, circuses, menageries and waxworks shows found impermanent homes within the square, exercising privileges to trade or perform. Although the Arsenal workers and soldiers have long gone, Beresford Square is still very much the essence of Woolwich Town. Today's vibrant street market gives it a sense of vitality and tradition that directly links back to the hustle and bustle of the mid-19th century (Figs 23-33).

Beresford Square preserves a great sense of openness and 'air space' above, despite its enclosure on many sides by tightly grouped buildings, some quite large. This is because its corners all open out on to streets, each with their own distinctive streetscape. Indeed it is one of the most important nodal quarters within the town, with Beresford Street/Plumstead Road, Powis Street, Greens End, Woolwich New Road and Spray Street all flowing into it. But whereas it used to give access to the Arsenal via the eye-catching Victorian gatehouse, it is now separated from that (revitalized) site by the dual carriageway (the widened Beresford Street/Plumstead Road). Pedestrian access to the Arsenal complex is both tricky and tortuous.

Despite much late 20th century redevelopment of the square, there is considerable architectural cohesion, especially in the southern and eastern sides where flamboyant late Victorian buildings survive. The Italianate, 1870s/80s island block incorporating The Ordnance Arms and backing onto Woolwich New Road is especially noteworthy, and has strong historical links to the Arsenal, both in terms of its public house and the other buildings which formerly supplied clothing and uniforms to the civilian and military population. On the south side of the square is the 18th century Elephant and Castle, plausibly built as an inn/pub from the outset with windows overlooking the square. An uncommon survival for Woolwich of an 18th-century artisanal house form, its distinctive roof shape lends interest to Beresford Square's varied roofscape (Fig 34). Perhaps the least successful aspects of this space are the large modern blocks enclosing the west side, which creates a vista of hard-edged orthogonal slabs running up Greens End (Fig 32), and the brick paving of the square itself, which gives it the feel of a supermarket car park. In the 19th century the surface was dignified by the use of granite setts.

³ Thomas Burke, *The Outer Circle: Rambles in remote London* (London, 1921)

Beresford Square

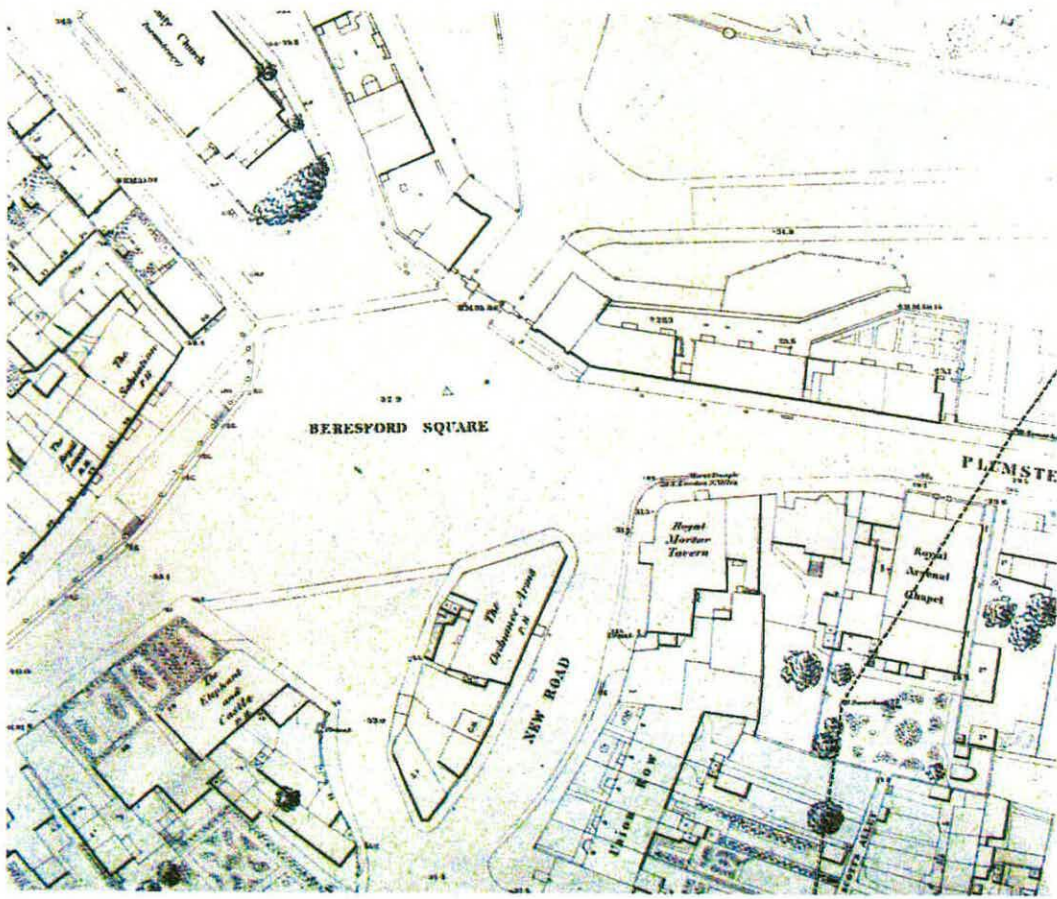


Figure 23 Extract from Gosset's detailed plan of 1853, drawn at the 10-foot (1:528) scale for the Local Board of Health.

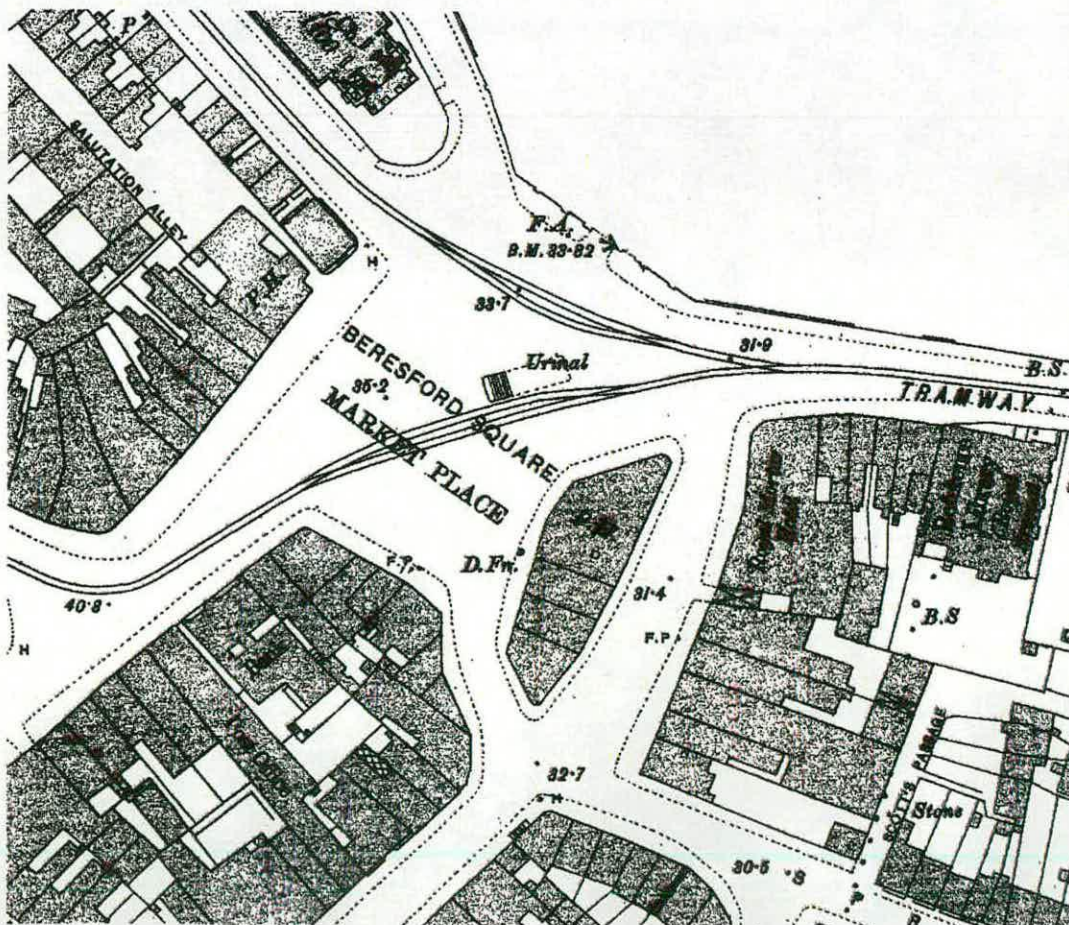


Figure 24 Extract from the 1907 Ordnance Survey map.



Figure 25 Beresford Square in the 1880s, with workers streaming out of the main entrance to the Royal Arsenal. Originally built in 1829 in yellow stock brick, the upper part of the present gatehouse dates from two further building campaigns in 1859 and 1891. The high walls adjoining the gatehouse and the houses just within it were demolished in the 1980s when Plumstead Road was widened to become a dual carriageway.



Figure 26 Victorian or Edwardian Postcard showing crowds of workers, market stalls and the enlarged main gatehouse to the Arsenal.



Figure 27 Beresford Square in the 1950s, viewed from Greens End.



Figure 28 Beresford Square viewed from Plumstead Road, with the Ordnance Arms in the centre.



Figure 29 The imposing red brick Gatehouse to the arsenal, with market stalls in the foreground.



Figure 30 The Ordnance Arms – an Italianate late 19th-century pub, rebuilt on the site of an earlier public house.



Figure 31 Southeast corner of the square, leading to Woolwich New Road.



Figure 32 West side of Beresford Square: bar the narrow, two-storeyed Victorian survivor in the centre, the large buildings on this side are all products of mid-to-late 20th-century redevelopment.



Figure 33 Officially, market stalls have been allowed in Beresford Square since 1888, but informally, market traders began colonising this defining space much earlier, having migrated eastwards from the old market behind the riverfront. The lively Victorian ensemble in the background occupies an island site that was formed when Woolwich New Road bifurcated at its approach to the square, probably in the early 19th century.

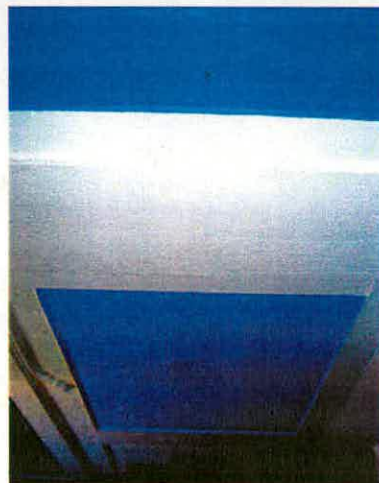
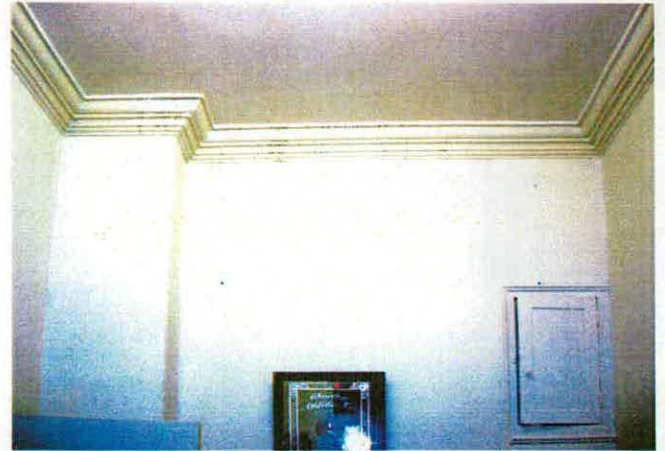


Figure 34 The Elephant and Castle Public House and J. Townsend, newsagents, Beresford Square. This pair of houses, unified under a distinctive gambrel roof, was built in the late-18th century and may always have incorporated a public house and/or a shop. The northern house retains a chimneystack rising through its centre; an equivalent stack has presumably been removed from the southern house. This central-chimneystack layout, giving fireplaces at the back of the front rooms and the front of the back rooms, was common in 18th-century suburbs along the south bank of the Thames, from Southwark eastwards through Deptford, Greenwich and Woolwich, and beyond to Gravesend, Chatham and other water-side towns in Kent. It had become rare elsewhere, being almost unknown in London north of the Thames after 1720. Compared to other surviving small houses The Elephant and Castle along the south bank of the Thames, The Elephant and Castle retains many original features, including exposed ceiling beams, fragments of early moulded joinery, a full height original staircase with twin newels, plain balusters and short lengths of moulded handrail, plain panelled partitions, opposed cupboards, at least one early two-panel door, and original door architraves. The timber-framed roof also appears to be original, albeit re-covered with 19th century tiles and slates. Listed Grade II under Greens End, No. 18 (Public House) & No. 19.

2.3 Plumstead Road

Extent: South side of Plumstead Road (A206) between Beresford Square and Burrage Road

Character: Plumstead Road is the historic highway connecting Woolwich with its eastward neighbour, the mediaeval agricultural settlement of Plumstead. Until the 19th century, it was essentially a country lane with just a few cottages along it, but following the creation of Woolwich New Road in 1790, and the new entrance to the Arsenal in Beresford Square in 1829, its importance grew. Throughout the 19th century, the south side was intensively developed to provide much-needed housing for Arsenal workers (Figs 35-38). Much of this survives, although in a generally poor condition, and having been adapted to accommodate retail functions (Fig 39). Some preserve architectural embellishments, but overall there is little architectural cohesion among the assortment of styles, sizes and facing materials in attendance. The present Covered Market, which replaced the 19th-century Royal Arsenal Chapel in the late 1930s, is an interesting structure in its own right, its wide-span roof structure an early surviving example of the 'Lamella' system. Its existence also testifies to the strong tradition of market trading within Woolwich, and perhaps an attempt by the municipal authorities to relocate this from Beresford Square. With the widening of Plumstead Road in the 1980s, the properties on the south side of the road have lost much of their visual unity with the Arsenal; historically, they stood virtually hard up against the high perimeter wall whereas today a busy and somewhat impassable main road creates a very different sort of barrier.

2.4 General Gordon Square

Extent: General Gordon Square and the buildings facing it along Greens End, Woolwich New Road and General Gordon Place.

Character: General Gordon Square evolved informally in the late 18th century as a discrete island formed by the confluence of a number of important roads, including Woolwich New Road which was put through in 1790. It was not until the early 20th century however that it started to acquire its present form and appearance, with the covering of the railway cutting on the north side and the erection of the imposing Equitable Building in the 1930s. Although a small area of landscaped greenery was present in the 19th century (see Fig 40), today's public space is a late 20th century creation, for until then the island was largely given over to Victorian and Edwardian residential and commercial buildings. This is undoubtedly of benefit to local people and visitors alike, offering the only green retreat within the town centre, although access is severely compromised by the sheer quantity of traffic encircling it (Figs 42). The square has a more neat and formal character to it than Beresford Square, partly due to the absence of the market, and partly because of the quality and sobriety of some of the architecture around it, including the (former) Tram Shed and Post Office, both Edwardian in date. Above all, the Equitable Building imparts an air of commercial authority comparable to some of the more distinguished squares in central London (Fig 41). Unfortunately this impression is compromised by some of the less accomplished buildings of more recent date, including the enormous Maritime House (formerly Churchill House) on the west side which has recently been re-clad with antiseptic-green glass panels.

Plumstead Road

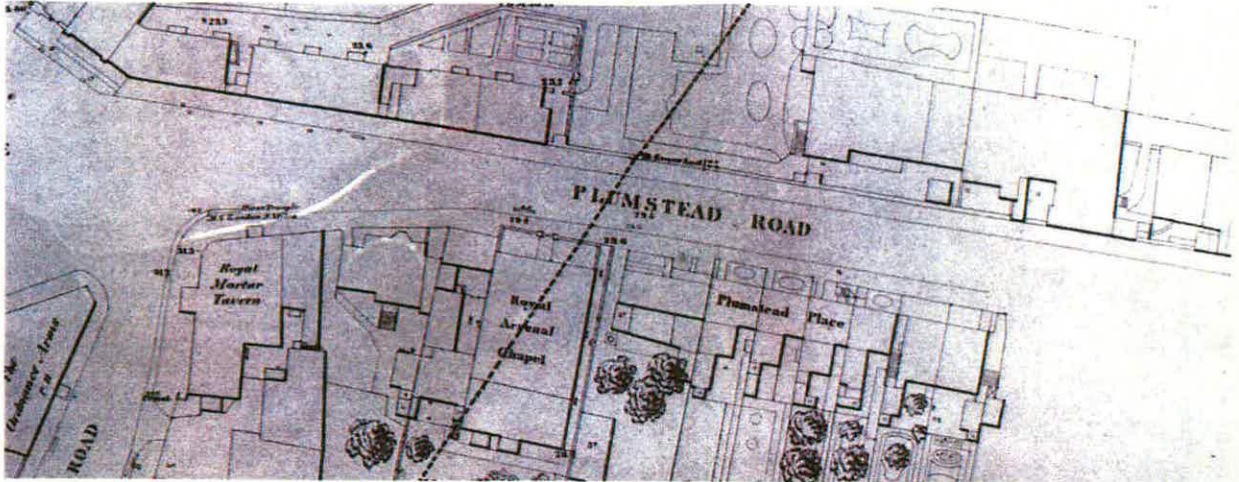


Figure 35 Extract from Gosset's plan of 1853. Unusually, this map, which was surveyed by Captain William Driscoll Gosset, R.E. (1793-1870), shows building outlines within the perimeter wall of the Arsenal.

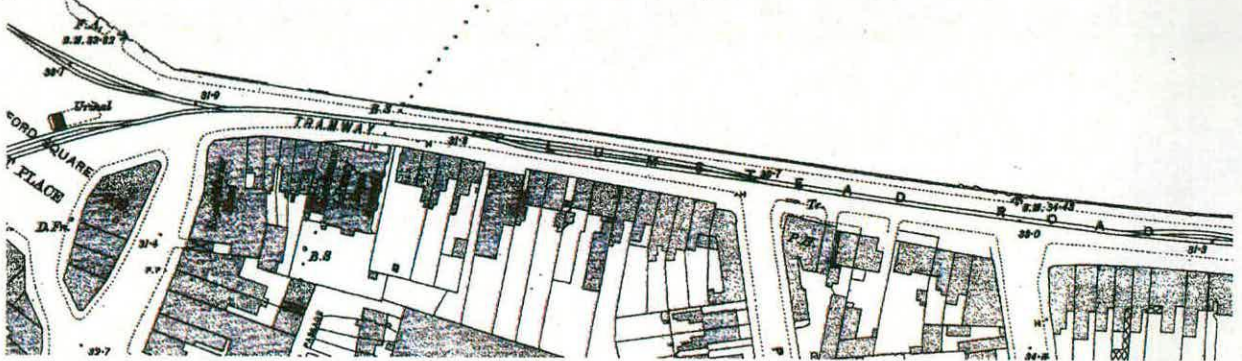


Figure 36 Extract from Ordnance Survey map of 1907.

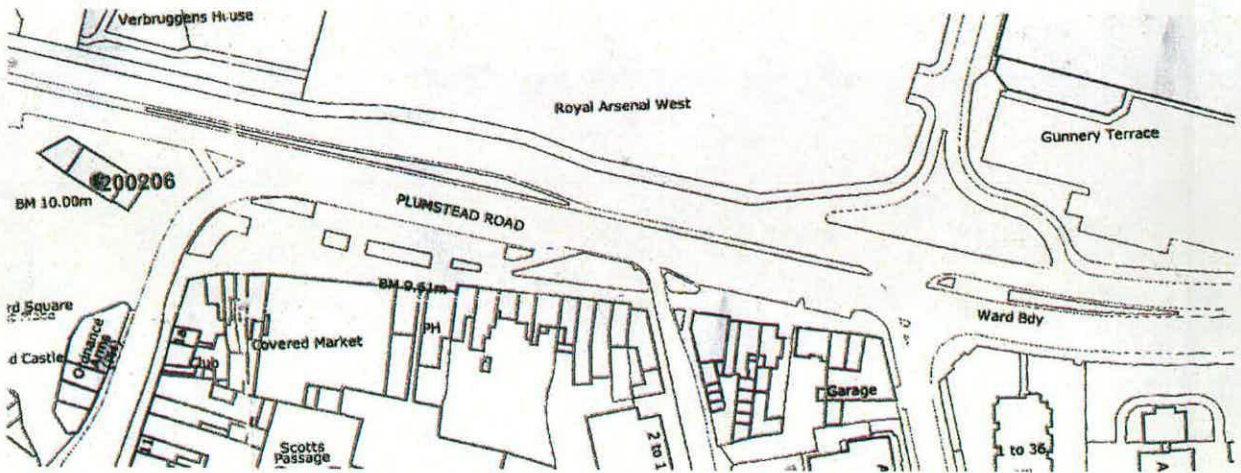


Figure 37 Extract from latest (2005) Ordnance Survey map.



Figure 38 Plumstead Road in 2005, looking east, with the curving roof of the Public Market in the foreground.



Figure 39 Until the 19th century, Plumstead Road was essentially a country lane connecting Woolwich with Plumstead, a long-established and prosperous agricultural village further east. The great expansion of the Arsenal from the mid 19th century saw the construction of properties along the south side to house both workers and military personnel. With frontages built hard up against the road, they stood directly opposite the high wall of the Arsenal. Survivors from this phase of intensive, ribbon development show that they catered for families across a relatively broad social spectrum, with some vaunting embellished façades, others far plainer. Despite recent shop conversions, and a generally run-down condition, much of this run of Victorian and Edwardian housing, shops and pubs survives. The Public Market, which replaced the Royal Arsenal Chapel (becoming the Royal Arsenal Reference Library) in the late 1930s (?) is of interest for its early 'Lamella' roof construction.



Figure 42 Although the Woolwich Equitable building was the first building to face General Gordon Square, a number of earlier buildings that lined the roads which would collectively define the square still survive, including Victorian houses and the Edwardian former tram shed on Woolwich New Road, and the Edwardian red-brick Post Office on Greens End. More recent arrivals include the new passenger concourse for the Woolwich Arsenal Station. It was not until the 1980s or 1990s that the island site took its present landscaped form; maps of the 1970s show this built up with a dense assortment of 19th century properties. Today the island functions as both a recreational space and a cut-through for pedestrians, although it is entirely circumscribed by busy roads.

2.5 Powis Street & Hare Street

Extent: Powis Street, extending from Greens End / Beresford Square westwards to John Wilson Street, and Hare Street.

Character: Formed in the late-18th century and widened and rebuilt in the late 19th century, Powis Street and Hare Street rapidly evolved as Woolwich's premier shopping district, attracting merchants from London as well as retailers from the surrounding hinterland. By the Edwardian era, if not earlier, both had assumed a character not unlike the type of fashionable parades seen in wealthier London suburbs such as Muswell Hill or Crouch End. Both bear witness to the rise of Woolwich as a prosperous, vigorous town, distinct but nevertheless intertwined with its industrial-military roots. Partly because of its length and age, Powis Street boasts a broad range in terms of style, fabric and scale of building - a rich palimpsest that documents one and a half centuries of commercial building and rebuilding. The eastern two-thirds, beyond Barnard Close and Hare Street, retains much of its earlier built history; modestly sized mid-to-late Victorian shops and offices with lively frontages impart real character, offering a welcome respite from some of the more monolithic facades of their 20th-century neighbours (Fig 43). The Shakespeare's Head, near to where the street opens out onto Beresford Square/Greens End, is a fine example of its genre, and forms an exciting finishing point to the eastwards vista. In the middle stretch of the street, at the junction with Macbean Street and occupying an entire block is 'Kent House', a gigantic proto-department store, built for Messrs Garrett & Co. Ltd in the 1870s. With the passing of other edifices such as the Furlongs furniture store, and the replacement of the first phase RACWS complex by the existing 20th-century buildings, this stands as the sole survivor of the once plentiful drapery stores and emporia that occupied the street in the late-Victorian period. Regrettably, the unity of its 300ft-long façade is blighted by the discordant array of modern shop fascias, and it is doubtful that many shoppers appreciate its overall composition. Near its western end, the character changes markedly as the streetscape opens out at the intersection with Hare Street, and modern buildings dominate the skyline (Fig 46). The mid-20th-century corner block at the junction with Hare Street coheres well with the RACWS extension of 1938 behind (Fig 47), and with The Granada Cinema behind that (Fig 50); collectively, this grouping, with its prominent towers forms a stirring close to the street, and one that forms a suitable foil to Frank Bethalls's highly-ornate Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society Headquarters Building of 1903 (Fig 48). The architectural cohesion continues at the western end, with the former Odeon (Coronet) cinema, John Wilson Street, standing defiantly opposite its rival, the Granada (Fig 49). Both cinemas opened in 1937, and today they are among the most eye-catching parts of the townscape visible to drivers speeding along John Wilson Street.

With the construction of Waterfront Leisure Centre, Hare Street has lost both its views to the riverfront, and its function as a thoroughfare connecting the commercial heart of Woolwich with the former (1889) ferry terminal. Consequently, perhaps, it has suffered economic decline, and the lower end, near Woolwich High Street is now occupied by smaller, independent enterprises such as café's and pawnbrokers. However, it is this end that still preserves the mid-19th-century stores that bear witness to the street's formative era as a retail centre (Fig 51). Like the Victorian shops along Powis Street, these suffer from an assortment of gaudy modern fascias, which give the street a dishevelled appearance. Because of its proximity to the more central and prosperous Powis Street, the north end of Hare Street has been extensively redeveloped, and presents a very different look to the south end (Fig 52).

Powis Street & Hare Street



Figure 43 Powis Street was put through in 1798, and Hare Street a few years later. Attracting both local businesses and merchants from London, they developed through the 19th-century to become Woolwich's smart commercial district. But it was in the Edwardian era that both streets took on the guise of the more fashionable shopping parades seen in the metropolis.

Powis Street



Figure 44 Powis Street's Victorian architecture: east of Hare Street and Barnard Close, Powis Street vaunts a number of purpose built shops, offices and pubs that survive from the second half of the nineteenth century. With their richly detailed façades, shifting shapes and styles, and various uses of stock brick, red brick and stucco, they lend the street a sense of intimacy and vivacity, despite the intrusion of much larger, more severe 20th-century blocks.

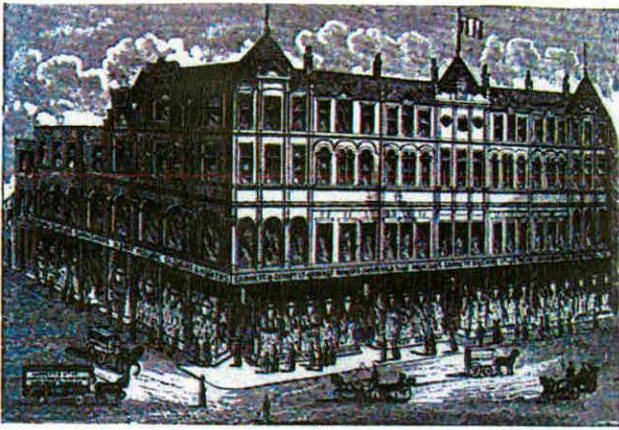


Figure 45 'Kent House', 68-85 Powis Street. Erected in the 1870s for Messrs Garrett & Co. Ltd, 'Drapers and Complete House Furnishers', this 'gigantic emporium' (closed 1957) was said to contain 'an amount of show-room, work-room, and other accommodation such as is seldom found, even in connection with the colossal retail markets of the largest centres of population'. The frontage to Powis Street is over 300ft long; that to Macbean Street (formerly Union Street) 225 ft. The ground and first floor contained some 20,000 square feet of showrooms; above that were workrooms for dress, costume, and mantle making and hat and bonnet trimming. The upper floors were given to a large dining hall, dormitories and other facilities for the use of the army of assistants engaged in the establishment'. A basement running the full length of the building housed departments for prints and calicoes, and hard-wood, bent-wood, and kitchen furniture.



Figure 46 View westwards along Powis Street, with the towers of the RACWS buildings and the Granada Cinema forming important elements of the skyline. Although comparatively little of the late Victorian/Edwardian commercial architecture that once lined this thoroughfare endure, eye-catching survivors still contribute richness to the modern streetscape (see below)



Figure 47 Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society Headquarters Building, Nos 125-153 Powis Street. Erected in 1903 to Italian Renaissance designs by Frank Bethall, this imposing building was a conscious imitation of Harrods of Knightsbridge. Listed Grade II.



Figure 48 Opposite the original red brick and terracotta Headquarters Building is the streamlined extension of 1938, finished in cream faience and glass. It was designed by S.W. Ackroyd, the company architect, and is currently under consideration for Listing.



Figure 49 The former Odeon (Coronet) cinema, John Wilson Street. Built in 1937 to designs by George Coles, this imposing art deco cinema stands opposite to both the (former) Granada Woolwich and the ferry approach road. The New Wine Church currently occupies it.



Figure 50 Touted as 'the most romantic theatre ever built' when opened in 1937, The Granada Woolwich survives as the most elaborate of the 19 purpose-built Granada cinemas apart from Tooting. Designed by C. Masey & R. H. Uren, it is the most 'modern' – and arguably most distinguished – of all the Granada cinemas. The thin advertising tower is reminiscent of Uren's contemporary work at Hornsey Town Hall. Listed II*



Figure 51 View of Hare Street from Woolwich High Street looking north towards Powis Street. Until c.1820, this was a short and narrow cul de sac, but following its merger with Richard Street, Hare Street became an important adjunct of the recently created Powis Street, Woolwich's emerging retail district. The north end of Hare street still preserves examples of the Mid-Victorian commercial buildings associated with its early development, characterised by smart brick or stuccoed fronts and neoclassical detailing such as modillion cornices



Figure 52 The north end of Hare Street, viewed from Powis Street. This end of the street has been redeveloped more extensively, and is home to second or third generation buildings largely erected in the inter-war or post-war years. The scale of these buildings is larger than those on the other end of the street, and modern materials such as concrete and aluminium impart a distinctly urban feel.

2.6 Wellington Street, Polytechnic Street, Market Street, Calderwood Street, Thomas Street

Extent: The area bounded by Market Street, Calderwood Street, Thomas Street and Wellington Street.

Character: The area south of Powis Street, bounded by Wellington Street, Market Street, Calderwood Street and Thomas Street is Woolwich's municipal-educational quarter, boasting one of the finest Edwardian town halls in the country, and an assortment of important edifices that collectively document the town's emerging civic status and pride (Fig 53). Few other English towns or cities can boast such a remarkably unified, concentrated cluster of civic and technical educational buildings spanning the Victorian, Edwardian and inter-war periods.

Wellington Street dates to c.1815-20, when the military widened and straightened an existing thoroughfare linking the Common and Greens End. Although the 18th-century houses that once straddled its precursor are now gone (see Fig 55), the street still preserves fragments of the Victorian and Edwardian streetscape that signaled the town's growing commercial prosperity (Figs 54 - 56). The most important component of this, the town hall, still functions as a magisterial landmark, its Baroque tower a helpful orienting point on the skyline.

The south side of Calderwood Street (formerly William Street) provides one of the richest and most architecturally diverse streetscapes within the town (Fig 57). Ranged along it is the former Town Hall, the Public Library, the Magistrates Court and the former Polytechnic Buildings (now University of Greenwich), their varied massing, styles and use of facing materials giving the street considerable vitality and distinction (Fig 58-60). The north side is, by contrast, largely mediocre, dominated by concrete office blocks and multistorey car parks that fail to match the interest of the architecture across the road.

Market Street was created in 1808, its name signifying a failed attempt by the Woolwich Board of Commissioners to relocate the market near the riverfront onto 'uncongenial soil'. Until the Edwardian period it seems to have been used largely for housing (a terrace of workers housing, Listed Grade II, survives on the west side), but with the construction of the Town Hall on the corner of Wellington Street / Market Street, the civic possibilities of this site were quickly exploited. Today it vaunts two fine examples of the work of the Metropolitan Police architect John Dixon Butler: the Queen Anne Revival style Police Station (Fig 61), and the Free Classic Magistrates' Court, both executed in red brick and Portland stone (Fig 62). Taken together with the Town Hall, they give a splendidly Edwardian municipal feel to this quiet street.

The turn-of-the-century ambience is even more pronounced along Bathway, which, with the exception of the 1930s or 1950s cream-coloured tiles facing the Baths, and the modern street furniture, seems to be almost a street from another era (Figs 63-5). Such a relatively unchanged Late Victorian/Edwardian municipal panorama is a rarity within London, and one worthy of protection.

2.7 Miscellaneous Buildings

A number of buildings fall outside of, or between, the character areas delineated, but are significant candidates for inclusion on the Local or statutory Lists. Historically,

public houses are a building type that enjoyed immense popularity in Woolwich, a town that had a far larger male workforce than others of equivalent size. The Shakespeare's Head, Powis Street (Fig 44) the Earl of Chatham, Thomas Street, and The Pullman, Woolwich New Road (Fig 66), are all fine examples, each making lively contributions to their locale.

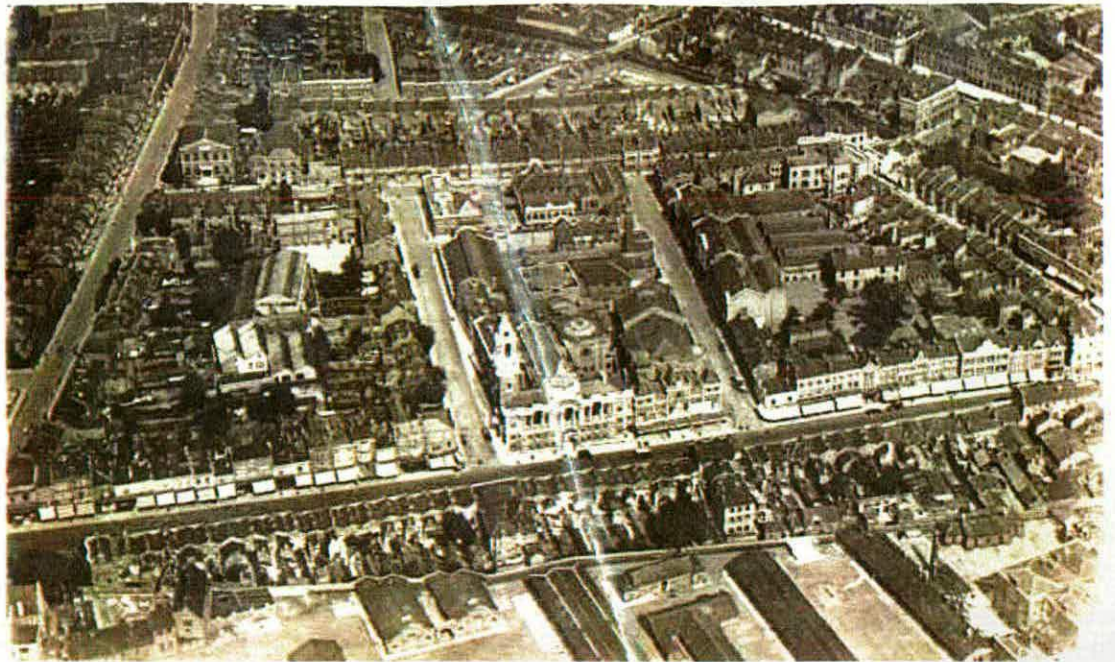


Figure 53 Mid-20th-century aerial view of Wellington Street, looking northwest with the Town Hall and cinema in the centre foreground. At this date the street was lined predominantly with shops and stores. Powis street runs diagonally in the top right of the picture and John Wilson Street is on the far left.



Figure 54 Wellington Street in the Edwardian era was a smart and respectable thoroughfare, distinguished by two and three-storey shops and offices with well-dressed harmonising brick frontages.



Figure 55 1950s postcard, taken looking downhill towards the Town Hall and town centre. Note the 18th century houses that still survived in this decade.



Figure 56 Postcard of c. 1910 showing Wellington Street, with Belcher's Town Hall on the right.



Figure 57 Architectural diversity along Calderwood Street: the historic buildings lining the south side of this important street differ in materials, massing and style, but collectively express Woolwich's emergence as a municipal centre and a locus of technical education from the mid 19th century.

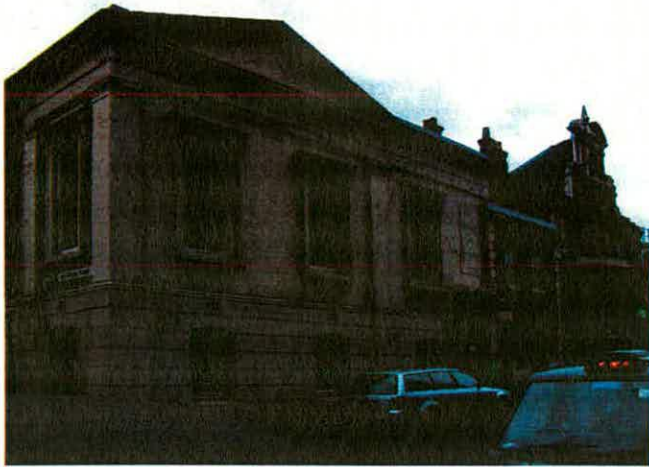


Figure 58 Comprising of a public hall and board room in a piano nobile over an apartment and offices (extended 1878), this building in Calderwood Street survives as one of the oldest vestry halls in Greater London (listed). It was erected in 1841-2, soon after an earlier attempt to give Woolwich a purpose-built town hall failed (that building, erected in 1840 to designs by a Mr Kinton was immediately sold to the Government for use as a Police Station).



Figure 59 Public Library, 48 Calderwood Street, 1901 by Church, Quick & Whincop. (unlisted).



Figure 60 Woolwich Polytechnic, Wellington Road. Shown in the foreground is the new entrance block added in 1916-17 by Figgis and Mumby; beyond is the gymnasium block of 1890 by H H Church.



Figure 61 Police Station, 29-33 Market Street (unlisted). Erected in 1910, this Queen Anne style building was designed by John Dixon Butler, architect and surveyor to the police 1895-1920. During this period, Butler designed over 200 police stations and courts for the metropolis.



Figure 62 Magistrates' Court, 50 Market Street (unlisted). In the wake of a report produced in 1900 by a House of Commons Committee, which criticised courthouse provision and conditions, an ambitious programme of Edwardian building ensued. John Dixon Butler (1861-1921) developed a distinctive style for these new metropolitan police buildings, 'a crisp, austere version of the prevalent Free Classic or Anglo-Classic – the civic style doffing its regalia and donning a uniform' [Gray (1985), p. 132]. Erected in 1912, Woolwich Magistrates' Court is a fine example of his oeuvre: assured, eye-catching and redolent of Butler's admiration for the work of R. Norman Shaw and Philip Webb, with whom he had formerly collaborated.



Figure 63 Designed by local architect H. H. Church, Woolwich Public Baths were claimed to be the most modern of all public baths when formally opened in June 1894. A distinctive element in an exuberant, richly detailed municipal complex.



Figure 64 View southwards along Polytechnic Street, showing (L-R), the boiler house range and chimney at the rear of the public baths, the 1878 town hall extension, and the 1840-1 town hall.



Figure 65 View westwards along Bathway with the Public Baths on the left, the Town Hall extension (1878), the Public Library and the Magistrates Court on the right. The Police Station on Market Street closes this Victorian/Edwardian vista.



Figure 66 Woolwich Town Centre abounds in Public Houses, which found plentiful business from the Arsenal workers. Two particularly good late Victorian examples are the Earl of Chatham, 15 Thomas Street, and the Pullman, 27 Woolwich New Road. Both were executed in the Free Renaissance style popular in the 1880s and 1890s, and both are distinguished by curved plate-glass windows, glazed tiles and rich detailing.

3. Historical Development of Woolwich

3.1 Introduction

Woolwich is best known for its extensive ordnance works, its shipbuilding and as the birthplace of Woolwich arsenal football club. Historians have mostly concentrated on the Royal Dockyard and the Royal Arsenal, and consequently the historical evolution of the town, and its surviving historical fabric, has been largely overlooked. But from the 17th century, and especially from the early 19th century, Woolwich was also a market town, an important centre of industry, and even a place of resort. It gave rise to co-operative stores, smart shopping streets, and an educational and municipal infrastructure that is both architecturally and historically significant. Much of its built fabric has been erased – nothing, for example remains of the notoriously wretched area of riverside housing called ‘the Dusthole’ – but enough survives to bear witness to Woolwich Town’s many phases of historical development, especially that of the last two centuries. Today we are left with a town of remarkable contrasts and contradictions, of the planned and unplanned, the remarkable and the mundane, a town where diversity in scale, fabric and vista are evident almost at every turn.

3.2 Origins

The earliest beginnings of Woolwich are obscure, but at least date to the Romano-British era. The Roman Watling Street crossed Shooters Hill to the south, and numerous Roman urns and fragments of Roman pottery have been discovered in the neighbourhood over the years. In 1853 a Roman cemetery was unearthed on the site of the Royal Arsenal, evidence that a riverside community was in existence by the later period of Roman occupation. Historical records from the Saxon period testify to the settlement’s growing importance. In 918 Vuluvic (the Saxon name for Woolwich) was part of a gift by Aelstrudis, the daughter of King Alfred, to the Abbey of St Peter in Ghent, and in 964 Wulewich (the Anglo-Saxon name, meaning ‘the Village in the Bay’) was mentioned in a grant of land by King Edward to the same abbey. By the time of the Domesday Survey, the manor of Hulviz (Woolwich) is recorded as consisting of 63 acres of land, and the 11th-century Textus Roffensis records a church at Vulewic (Woolwich).

3.3 Mediaeval and 17th-Century Development: The Royal Dockyard and Riparian Industry

Until the beginning of the 16th century, Woolwich was essentially a small fishing village, albeit with some nascent small-scale industrial activity. As early as the 11th century, Woolwich was noted as a thriving fishing place with a valuable salmon fishery, and in 1393-4, the inhabitants of Woolwich and Plumstead complained to King Richard II of being prevented from exercising their seasonal rights to fish the Thames for the ‘supply of the adjacent country and the City of London’.¹ Excavations at the Royal Arsenal site in the late 1990s have revealed foundations, ditches, pits and a medieval, double-flued, tile-built, pottery kiln. By 1380, a ferry service between Woolwich and the north bank of the Thames was operating – a forerunner of the present free ferry service established by the London County Council in 1889. But it was in the Tudor period, when Woolwich rose into prominence as a dockyard and naval station, that this North Kent village saw the first of its remarkable periods of growth that would ultimately transform it into a bustling urban centre. There is evidence that ships were built at Woolwich in the reign of Henry VII, but more significantly, in 1512-13, Henry VIII established a Royal Dockyard to build the *Henri Grâce-à-Dieu* (The Great Harry), one of the great warships of the age. Woolwich, like

Deptford, was strategically placed on the Thames, within easy reach of the Tower of London – the home to the Royal Armoury. Its gently sloping foreshore was also ideal ground for the construction of generous slipways. Over the course of the 16th century, the Royal Dockyard grew in extent and its facilities improved; soon there were four slips at the waters edge, and in 1572-6 a huge ropewalk and ropewalk was erected to designs by Thomas Allen, Queen's Merchant; this supplied the fleet with cordage until 1835 when it demolished to make way for Beresford Street. Until the advent of steamships, Woolwich dockyard was the most important in the kingdom. Celebrated in the works of writers and artists, it saw many royal visits, including Elizabeth I for the launch of her ship, the Elizabeth Jonas, in July 1559. It was the favoured departure point for many voyages of exploration (Raleigh, Frobisher, Franklin and Cook all set out from here), and in April 1581 Elizabeth paid another visit to welcome Sir Francis Drake after his circumnavigation of the world. But apart from the canon fire, fireworks and festivities that accompanied these ceremonial occasions, the Dockyard also attracted industries to the riverbank that broadened the town's economy. Stoneware was one: England's first salt-glazed stoneware kiln, which still survives in the Royal Arsenal, was built near to the present ferry, in the early 17th century. Soon after, glassworks were established on an adjacent site. The use of sand from Woolwich for glass making was mentioned in 1662, and a glass house was then undoubtedly in operation because it was supplying glass to the Royal Society. By the 1690s two glasshouses were working on or near the site of the present-day Glass Yard, one making Flint and Ordinary glass and the other window glass. Established by Huguenot glass-blowers, this was a comparatively short-lived venture, for one was said to have closed in about 1696 as a result of the tax on glass, and in 1701 'At Woolwich in Kent, is a good wharf, Crane, Glass-house, warehouse, Cole-yard, and several Out-houses thereto belonging, all in good Repair, to be let'.² However the Huguenot population of Woolwich survived, diversified and prospered over the next century an longer, many intermarrying with the local population.

3.4 Early-to-Mid-18th-Century Development: The Warren

Woolwich Warren (so named due to the abundance of rabbits that occupied the site) at the eastern margins of the town had been used for the manufacture and testing of guns and shot from the 16th-century, and in 1694 the Royal Laboratory was built on adjacent land, laying the foundations of what would be the largest establishment of its kind in Britain. In 1715-17, following a devastating explosion, the main government foundry removed from Moorfields, near Finsbury Square, to a site in the Warren that was named Tower Place. Within the space of a few years the Warren became a sprawling military-industrial complex, combining college, barracks, factory and fortifications. Grand architectural set pieces arose within its high walls, many attributed to Sir John Vanbrugh, including the Brass Foundry of 1717, the original Royal Military Academy building of 1719, and part of Dial Square. With a growing martial presence from the early 18th-century, Woolwich became 'a semi-governmental military-industrial outpost... overwhelmingly populated by artisans, labourers and mariners, highly dependent on wage labour, and far larger and more densely built up than any other London 'suburbs' that had not been wholly absorbed into the metropolis'.³ In 1744, when the estimated population of Woolwich stood less than 4,000,⁴ some 400 (a tenth of the population) were employed as rope-makers. Through the eighteenth century, the naval dockyard and the ropery together employed from about 500 to about 1,400 men,⁵ and by 1777 the Woolwich Arsenal occupied 104 acres and engaged 500 people in work.⁶ The burgeoning population of artisans, labourers and mariners housed themselves in the available land between and behind The Kings Yard (the naval dockyard) and The Arsenal, their houses sited either side of the streets that connected the two areas: the long east-west

thoroughfare (Church Street-High Street) and its spur, Warren Lane (originally called Ragged Row, then Cannon Row). Already by the 1670s the south side of the High Street had been continuously built up, and through the 18th century the central riverside area to the north was filled up with a dense jumble of yards and alleys. Close to the river, this land was boggy and marshy, and the area later became overcrowded and squalid, gaining notoriety as 'The Dusthole'. South of Church Street-High Street the land was largely agricultural, with market gardens and orchards widespread. The principal exceptions were two great sandpits within the Bowater Estate and the Pattison Estate; these would later be used as the sites for, respectively, Woolwich Dockyard and Woolwich Arsenal stations.

Very little survives in the way of workers' housing of the 18th century, but recent research has shown that in Woolwich, as in riparian east London, Southwark, and Deptford, traditional timber-framed house construction remained the norm until about 1760, when brick-built houses began to prevail. In Woolwich, these small houses were typically of one-room plan, comprising three rooms in two storeys and a garret. They were built singly, in pairs (side-by-side or front/back), threes, or long rows. A pair of three-room timber-framed houses survives at Nos 111 and 112 Woolwich High Street, where they originally faced the town's cage and stocks at the junction with Bell Water Gate. Nearby, Nos 121-3 Woolwich High Street also survive as three of a group that was four, retaining the distinctive form of this 18th-century artisanal house-type, including central-chimneystack layouts and M-shaped roofs. Central-chimneystack plan forms at this time were deeply unfashionable in London, but formed an enduring and distinguishing feature of vernacular houses along and near the south bank of the Thames: 'the vernacular housebuilding traditions of the London riverside, from Bermondsey downstream, retained stronger affinities with those of the towns of the north and east Kent coasts, from Gravesend and Chatham round to Deal and Dover, than they did with non-riparian parts of London'.⁷

Outside the dockyard and the arsenal, not all buildings were small houses. In 1727-39 the parish church of St Mary Magdalene was rebuilt on the high ground to the south-east of the dockyard. This was one of the churches re-erected with money from the Fifty New Churches Act of 1711, and its builder was the Deptford bricklayer Matthew Spray. Set back from the high street, to the east of Bell Water Gate, was the marketplace, a quadrangle enclosed by buildings with narrow entrances from High Street and New Street. In the centre of this square was a rectangular market house and the buildings round were probably butchers' shambles and shops.⁸ This market square was perhaps the first gesture towards civic improvement; an 18th-century gazette reported that as early as 1750 the town had 'recently been much improved and beautified', and, according to one 19th-century historian, this probably referred to the newly-erected market buildings.⁹ This was the second market place; the first, dating to 1619 when James I granted an official charter,¹⁰ stood at the north end of the Ropewalk, at the intersection with the High Street. Further eastwards, notable buildings included Goldsmith's Almshouses opposite Warren Lane (erected in 1560 by Sir Martin Bowes, goldsmith, Lord Mayor of London and Woolwich resident), the Woolwich Workhouse in Ropeyard Rails (1731, demolished 1842) and a Meeting House. To the west of Bell Water Gate, by the river, was a private shot and shell foundry, and further west, between Parson's Hill and the river was an imposing parsonage.

3.5 Late 18th-century to early 19th-century development: The Common

Until the late-18th-century, the two dominant forces governing the morphological development of Woolwich town were the dockyard and the arsenal. From the 1780s

onwards, Woolwich Common to the south came to have an increasingly determining role in the town's evolution as the military, seeking more space than the arsenal could provide, began moving there. First to move was the Royal Artillery, occupying new barracks erected on the east side of the common in 1775-82. A second wing was completed in 1802, making The Royal Artillery Barracks the longest-fronted building in Britain, with a façade that was 1000ft long. Thereafter, as other divisions and departments relocated, including James Wyatt's Military Academy (1805), the military establishments on Woolwich Common came to act as a third 'magnet', drawing the town southwards onto hillier ground. In 1790 Woolwich New Road was cut through between Plumstead Road and Cholic Lane (now Mill Lane), providing a direct access road to the common. There, a well ordered layout of new roads was built to connect the barracks, hospitals, and attendant buildings that sprang up during the early 19th-century. Cross Street (now General Gordon Place) was also constructed in 1790 to connect Greens End with Woolwich New Road; ultimately this would form the northern side of the present square called Peakes Place. Woolwich town saw a burst of building activity at this time, boosted by the sale of the Bowater estate, which once embraced nearly the whole of Woolwich. In the 1790s, Captain Powis, the head of a family of brewers at Greenwich and a volunteer cavalry officer, acquired part of the estate, and quickly set about developing it. Powis Street was put through in 1798, and soon became the most central and important thoroughfare of Woolwich. Powis also put through many of the streets branching off this, including Thomas Street, William Street (becoming today's Calderwood Street), Richard Street (subsequently renamed Hare Street) and Charles Street (becoming ?), all named after members of his family. Further east, Spray Street was laid out in c.1800 by a Mr. Spray, and north of Woolwich High Street, part of the 'The Dustbowl' was redeveloped along more orderly lines in c.1805 with the laying out of Nelson Street, Collingwood Street, and Rodney Street (all long demolished), each named after the admirals of the Nile, Copenhagen, and Trafalgar battles. In 1809 the Board of Ordnance consolidated its holdings, purchasing a block of 27 small houses formerly occupying the space that is now Beresford Square, as well as an assortment of other properties in around Greens End and a number of 'ancient cottages' standing on Woolwich Common.¹¹ Soon after, in c.1815-20, Wellington Street was put through, providing another thoroughfare linking the Common and the town.

By the 1820s, with the enlargement and improvement of the town's infrastructure by Governmental and private enterprise, Woolwich began to acquire the character of a large and prosperous provincial town. Its population had almost doubled in the first decade of the 19th-century; the first Census recorded 9,826 inhabitants in 1801, a figure that had risen to 17,054 in 1811. There was a corresponding increase in housebuilding: the number of houses in Woolwich in 1795 was 1,200; in 1801, 1,362; and in 1810, 1,800.¹² Much of this growth stemmed from the great numbers of workmen required by the Government establishments during the Napoleonic wars (1803-15). After the hostilities, the population stabilised, hovering around 17,000 until the early 1830s. The closure of the Ropeyard in 1835 presented further opportunity for housebuilding; the site was purchased by a local developer called George Smith and before 1843 houses had been built on both sides of Beresford Street as well as the church and schools of Holy Trinity. The material's used in Allen's ropewalk and ropewalk were re-used in the construction of these buildings, although the foundation walls were left undisturbed, running the whole length of the southern side of Beresford Street.

During this period, Woolwich town began developing a civic identity that was both distinct and interlaced with the Governmental establishments at its margins. Powis Street, although lined predominantly with houses, became the hub of an emerging retail district, with shops and businesses springing up that catered for both the local

civilian and military populations, and that of surrounding districts. Banks arrived early – the first, the Woolwich and Plumstead Savings Bank, set up in Powis Street in 1816 – as did cabinet makers, upholsterers and estate agents, with Messrs. Furlong and Son establishing itself along the same street as early as 1812.¹³ Powis Street even gained a theatre in 1815, but proving unsuccessful, it was converted into a schoolhouse in 1820 by the British and Foreign School Society (demolished). By this stage in the town's development, the market had relocated to a site on Woolwich High Street called market head, adjacent to the former one. Its proximity to the increasingly smart Hare Street (which connected the High Street with Powis Street) may have been a source of embarrassment to the civic authorities, for under an Act of Parliament of 1808 the Town Commissioners attempted to relocate it 'out of the town', to a site on William Street. The people staunchly opposed the move, and the site would later be used for the second town hall, erected in 1840-2.¹⁴

One other significant change in the late Georgian period was the creation of Beresford Square. Though cleared many years previously of the old houses that occupied the site, it was not until 1828-30, when the Royal Arsenal was given a new main entrance, that the Government actually used the land it had purchased in 1809. The purpose of the resulting Beresford Square (so named because the Marquis of Beresford was then Master-General) seems to have been more practical than symbolic: a semi-formal, irregular space that facilitated movement of the swarms of workers entering and leaving the establishment rather than a grand statement of military authority. From the outset it seems that pubs and inns bordered it, and before long market traders, circuses, menageries and waxworks shows found impermanent homes there, exercising privileges to trade or perform.

By all accounts, late Georgian Woolwich was a town of many faces and contradictions; formal and informal, vernacular and polite, civil and military and rich and poor. During the Georgian period, there was even topographic incongruity, real and perceived: Woolwich was both a sprawling military-industrial outpost, and a rural-romantic idyll. From the 18th-century, and probably earlier, Woolwich caught the attention of numerous artists, the principal subject matter being the dockyard as seen from the river. But alongside this, from the latter part of the century, views of Woolwich from the hills behind the town began appearing, signaling a growing idealization of the picturesque, rural qualities of this north Kent market town. In 1798, the *Kent Itinerant* published an engraving by a T. Girtin entitled 'Pleasant Little Woolwich', along with a description that began 'This pleasant little town is most delightfully situated on the southern bank of the Thames'.¹⁵ Over the next forty or so years, as London grew and its wealthier inhabitants sought refuge and retreat in more scenic environs, the portrayal of Woolwich as a suitably bucolic haven gained momentum. In 1836 it enjoyed exposure as a place of resort in *The Watering Places of Great Britain and Fashionable Directory*, and the following year *Cock's Guide* noted how 'The short distance from the Metropolis, the facilities afforded by steamboat conveyance, &c., together with the salubriousness and gentility of the higher parts of the town, form a powerful incitement for some of the London merchants to make Woolwich their place of abode'. Piggott's guide joined the chorus espousing its charms, the 1840 edition noting

In holiday excursions Woolwich is one of the numerous places round the metropolis to which the Londoner is attracted; on Whit Monday 1839 upwards of two thousand persons subscribed their names in the books at the gate of the royal arsenal and seven thousand in those at the dockyard... The neighbourhood is embellished with rich woodland scenery, finely diversified by the windings of the noble Thames; and the upper part of the town, towards the Common and the Charlton road is elevated and agreeable.

However, as the 19th-century wore on, and Woolwich sprawled beyond its Georgian bounds, this romanticized image soon tarnished, revealing a grittier, more overtly industrial and commercial town that was increasingly perceived as a London suburb rather than as a provincial Kentish town.

3.6 Victorian and Edwardian Expansion and improvement

At the start of the Victorian era, Woolwich's standing as a market town was on the rise. In December 1840 the *Woolwich Advertiser* could declare that

*Woolwich is the emporium for all the surrounding towns and villages. The inhabitants of Eltham, Chislehurst, the Crays, Welling, even Dartford and Bexley and the fast-rising town of Bexleyheath regularly resort to Woolwich to replenish their stores.*¹⁶

Powis Street could boast a great variety of shops and trades, including bakers, butchers, booksellers and stationers, hat makers, tailors, and a predominance of boot & shoe makers, cabinet makers & upholsterers, dress makers & milliners, and furniture brokers.¹⁷ Still, the historian W.T. Vincent could note that 'the private houses in Powis Street greatly outnumbered the shops, even at the busier end, next the Royal Arsenal';¹⁸ suggesting that much work was still done from home rather than from purpose-built premises. Neighboring streets had a similar make-up of trades and occupations, and a comparable mixture of private houses and business premises. According to Vincent, trade began to move southward along Green's End in 1841, and it was there that the principal post-office – which also served as a 'lounge' for military offices – was sited. It was along these streets, set back from the riverfront and The Dustbowl that the professional classes and higher-ranking officers clustered. Even parts of Woolwich High Street, on the boundary between The Dustbowl and the increasingly fashionable town centre, were quite respectable, if one eminent resident can be taken as representative. The architect George Aitchison (1792-1861) was a Woolwich resident, and lived and/or worked in a (unspecified) house in Woolwich High Street during the mid-19th-century. As well as serving as deputy-alderman for the City of London, he was district surveyor for Woolwich for many years before being succeeded by his son, (Professor) George Aitchison (1825-1910).¹⁹ Another notable inhabitant in this era was the engineer and mathematician Professor Peter Barlow (1776 - 1862) who lived in Rushgrove Street (south of the Dockyard) and taught at the Royal Military Academy. His sons Peter W. Barlow (1809-1885) and William Henry Barlow (1812-1902) became distinguished civil engineers, the former designing the first Lambeth Bridge, the latter the St Pancras train shed (1864-68)(with R.M. Ordish).

Mid-19th-century Woolwich saw the emergence of literary institutions and building societies, and, to cater for the rising population – much of it with nonconformist beliefs – an increase in the number of places of worship. In 1838 a Literary, Scientific, and Practical Institution was established, later becoming the Woolwich Literary and Scientific and Mechanics Institution). In 1848 the Moral and Intellectual Improvement Company had offices at 48 High Street (demolished?), and in that year the Woolwich Mutual Improvement Society began, meeting at the Infant Schoolroom in Brewer Street. In 1847 the Woolwich Equitable Building Society began on permanent lines, having originated in 1842 as a small co-partnership with offices in the Castle Inn, Powis Street. This was the first building society in the metropolis, soon growing to become one of the Britain's largest. Other, less renowned, ventures followed, including the Woolwich Mutual Building Society and the Woolwich, Plumstead, and Charlton (later Kent and Surrey) Building Society.

For all its broadening economic and social structure, new-fangled streets and buildings and new educational and religious institutions, Woolwich's sanitary conditions were wretched. Richard Ruegg's *Summer Evening Rambles round Woolwich* (1847) was scathing of the town itself, stating

*The town is in a state of unparalleled prosperity, but is perhaps the dirtiest, filthiest, and most thoroughly mismanaged town of its size in the kingdom. No town presents greater facilities for cleanliness, nearly all the streets being elevated; but there is hardly a public sewer in the parish, and the channels are allowed to become the receptacles of all kinds of filth.*²⁰

A growing civic responsibility can be traced to The Improvement Acts of 1807-8, which appointed a board of commissioners to carry out necessary public works. But it was not until the 1830s, 'when a new generation [of commissioners] arose and re-established the governing body of the town on a fresh basis'²¹ that obvious change began. In 1840 Woolwich got its first purpose-built town hall,²² on a site originally earmarked for the market. Designed by a Mr Kinton, it was however immediately sold to the Government for use as a Police Station (demolished?). In 1841-2 a second and larger town hall was erected on an adjacent site in Calderwood Street (formerly William Street). Comprising of a public hall and board room in a *piano nobile* over an apartment and offices (extended 1878), it survives as one of the oldest vestry halls in Greater London.²³ In 1849-50, the Board erected a public baths in Nelson Street, with a lecture hall above (demolished), and from 1852, when the Woolwich Local Board of Health was formed (replacing The Woolwich Board of Commissioners), a system of drainage was begun under the direction of an elected surveyor named John Barnett. The Woolwich drainage system was completed in 1861, soon connecting with Bazalgette's Great Outfall Sewer (completed 1862), which discharged at Crossness Pumping Station in Thamesmead. Having completed its drainage relatively early, Woolwich was specially exempted from many of the responsibilities imposed upon other metropolitan parishes by the Metropolis Local Management Act of 1856. In 1863, Woolwich was finally paved throughout, with a course of York stone four feet wide (until then, the only paved part of Woolwich was a footpath leading towards the Barracks along New Road, called 'The Pavement').

Victorian advances in transport engineering brought Woolwich firmly within London's orbit, transforming the town into an outer metropolitan suburb. Despite fierce opposition, the inevitable arrival of the railways was soon welcomed for the convenience it brought to commuters. In 1847 the North Woolwich branch of the Eastern Counties (later the Great Eastern) Company Railway was opened, connecting North Woolwich with Fenchurch Street and Liverpool Street stations. More importantly, in 1849 the South Eastern Railway Company's North Kent line was opened, with stations at Woolwich Dockyard and Woolwich Arsenal that connected with London Bridge, and later Charing Cross and Cannon Street. The railway stations were built in the great hollows formed by earlier sand extraction, but being so close to the riverside the line cut through much earlier housing, and in Green's End a number of shops were cleared away. New residential streets sprang up alongside the railway, following its east-west axis e.g. North Kent Terrace, next to Woolwich Arsenal Station. Improvements in river transport also strengthened trading links with London. In the previous decade steam-powered boats had begun to replace the barges and tilt boats as a means of sailing direct to London; the Woolwich Steam-Packet Company, established in 1834, offered two services daily to Hungerford Market, and was soon followed by a rival concern called the Watermen's Steam-Packet Company which embarked from the stairs at Bell Watergate.

From the 1850s, the Arsenal played an increasingly important part in Woolwich's development. During the Crimean war, and in the years after, the Arsenal massively

expanded, accounting for a disproportionately high share of the workforce. In contrast, the Dockyard saw decline and eventual closure at this time. Despite being extended in 1833 and 1842-6, and having modern docks built in 1841 and 1848, the yard finally closed in 1869, causing great hardship to the labourers and artisans engaged there, and ending centuries of maritime traditions and associations. The ground was handed over to the War Department, and it became an outpost of the Arsenal. Stimulated largely by the growth of the Arsenal, Woolwich's population doubled between 1831 (17,661) and 1881 (35,557). During this period there was a corresponding increase in housebuilding for the workers: in 1831 there were some 2,600 inhabited houses; in 1871 the figure was well over 5,000. Much of this Victorian expansion was at the more elevated, south-eastern fringes of the town where new streets lined with small terraced houses were laid out. The Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS), an enterprise begun in 1868 by Arsenal workers to make food and other essentials available at affordable prices, was responsible for much of this housing. Later, in 1902, Charles Booth remarked that 'It [Woolwich] is one of the few districts in London where the workman has made the side and crests of the steep hills his own'.²⁴ From its profits, the RACS built educational establishments and libraries, such as the Royal Arsenal Reference Library and Lecture Hall on Plumstead Road, east of Beresford Square (demolished, replaced by a mid-20th century covered market). The RACS was one of a number of paternalistic and socialist bodies to emerge from inside the Arsenal; for example the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, the Gasworkers Union and the Labour Protection League were all strong by the 1890s. Radicalism and Socialism were strong and persistent undercurrents within Arsenal society, beliefs values that permeated into the town and contributed to a strong sense of community.

Throughout the 19th-century, commercial industries concentrated along the riverside between the (former) Dockyard and the Arsenal, many with their own dedicated wharfs and piers. Gas Works, Coal Stores, furniture repositories were among the industrial concerns that jostled for space alongside the steam packet company's piers and works. Among the largest were the works of Kirk & Randall, Iron and Steelwork fabricators and contractors, a historically significant firm that manufactured prefabricated buildings for export as well as bridges for Britain (e.g. a cast- and wrought-iron bridge over the Regent's Canal at Gloucester Gate, 1878). This company had strong links with the Arsenal, undertaking orders for the Government e.g. the Victoria military hospital, Suez, shipped and erected in 1868. All trace of their extensive works, build hard up alongside the Arsenal on Warren Lane, has disappeared, although (light) industry does continue on the site.

The final transformations to the built environment of Woolwich Town in the 19th-century were the result of commercial, institutional and municipal endeavour, changes that resulted in a rich and distinctive architectural legacy that today greatly contribute to the town's diverse character. Powis Street was rebuilt in 1898 as a broad, modern thoroughfare, and many of the shops and stores were subsequently rebuilt in grander and more imposing form. In effect it became Woolwich's own equivalent of London's Oxford Street, and some of the neighbouring or interconnecting streets such as Hare Street acquired a similar gloss of fashionability. One commentator of this period noted that

Modern Woolwich is a handsome, well-built town, with fine wide thoroughfares lined with prosperous shops and business establishments, and well provided with public institutions, churches, chapels, schools, private residences, and all the comforts and conveniences of a modern town. Powis Street, Church End, Wellington Street, Vicarage Place, and other public thoroughfares are equal to any in the most advanced suburbs...²⁵

The RACS premises, which had developed accretively from 1872 at the west end of Powis Street, were entirely rebuilt in 1903 to the rich, Italian Renaissance designs of the society's architect, *Frank Bethell*. Executed in red brick with lashings of terracotta ornament, and given a commanding central dome, this was Woolwich's answer to London's Harrod's department store. It has a statue of the society's treasurer Alexander McLeod in a central niche, and above that, at second storey height, a raised circle with lettering round it and the RACS motto in the centre: 'EACH FOR ALL AND ALL FOR EACH'. By 1889 the Society was the twenty-first largest out of the 1,500 plus Co-operative groups then in existence, and had around 7,000 members. In the 20th century it grew to be the second largest society in the country. The building closed in the 1980s and Woolwich now has no RACS presence.

Despite the appearance of larger stores and emporia in the Edwardian period, Powis Street retained its quasi-residential aspect, with some of the 19th-century houses rebuilt in more contemporary guise (e.g. the house next to the former Granada Cinema (now Gala Bingo) at the west end of the street. Pubs, with which Woolwich seemingly always abounded, were also built or rebuilt in this era with characteristically florid Baroque details. Woolwich played a key role in the emerging polytechnic movement, and Edwardian Baroque was employed in an increasingly bold manner in a series of buildings that grew to occupy an entire block between Calderwood Street, Thomas Street, Wellington Street, and Polytechnic Street. The cornerstone of this educational complex was the Woolwich Polytechnic Young Men's Christian Institute, a quirky Baroque composition erected on Calderwood Street in 1892-3 to designs by the Woolwich architect Henry Hudson Church (1827-1914). This was the second Polytechnic in the country to be opened after Regent Street Polytechnic, and owed its genesis to Francis (Frank) Dibben, a former student at Regent Street who moved to Woolwich in 1884 to become a fitter at the Royal Arsenal. In its first years, Woolwich Polytechnic was partly funded by both the City Parochial Foundation (CPF) and Technical Education Board (TEB) of the London County Council, but from September 1894 the latter body took over the management of the institute. The Polytechnic was given a new charter in 1895, stating that 'the object of this institution is the promotion of the industrial skill, general knowledge, health and well-being of young men and women belonging to the poorer classes'. During the 1894-5 session 518 men and 199 women attended classes in science, technical and commercial subjects and in the Art department. Short of space, the Polytechnic expanded along the newly christened Polytechnic Street, with new chemical and physical laboratories, an engineering laboratory, art room and two large classrooms built by 1898 to designs by Church. Part of the Polytechnic's ethos was fostering links with the Arsenal (engineering was a specialty), and from 1904 'trade lads' from the Arsenal were sent to the Polytechnic for an afternoon a week, as well as evenings. This scheme was the first 'day release' system in the country, and by 1912 the apprentices spent a day a week at Woolwich Polytechnic. Between 1914 and 1917 older buildings were demolished, and in their place were erected rooms and workshops for, among others, the Engineering Department, School of Art, and Physics Department, doubling the available floor area. This bold Baroque ensemble, including a new main entrance on the corner of Calderwood Street and Thomas Street, was executed to designs by Thomas Phillips Figgis (1858-1948) and Geoffrey Hubert Mumby (fl. 1914).

The best examples of Edwardian Baroque in Woolwich however owed their genesis to an outpouring of Civic pride in the early 1900s, as the newly-formed Woolwich Metropolitan Borough (created in 1899 with the passing of the London Government Act) sought to publicly assert its new-fangled status as a progressive administrative

body directly elected by the ratepayers. Public health and housing were issues that had occupied the former Woolwich Local Board during the 1890s, and the more progressive elements within it had pushed for the construction of new public baths near Calderwood Street (now University of Greenwich Students' Union). Designed by H. H. Church, and erected beside the aptly-named Bathway, they were claimed to be the most modern of all public baths when formally opened in June 1894. Indeed, one innovatory feature was the use of spray jets on the water surface, which kept the water in a state of constant circulation and aeration. There followed Woolwich Public Library, in Calderwood Street, designed by Church, Quick & Whincop (1901) and enlivened by a central bow-window below a Dutch gable, but the building which really declared Woolwich's civic standing was the superlative, full-blooded Edwardian Baroque town hall in Wellington Street. Erected in 1903-6 to the designs of a nationally acclaimed architect, (Sir) Alfred Brumwell Thomas (1868-1948), this was the crowning glory of Woolwich's Edwardian municipal/institutional/educational complex, an ensemble with a scale, range and coherence perhaps unparalleled anywhere else in Greater London. Reinforcing the unanimity of the complex are the Police Station (1910), and the Magistrates Court (1912) in the (rashly-named) Market Street.

3.7 Mid-to-late 20th century

The inter-war period saw the erection of a number of large institutional and commercial buildings that augmented Woolwich's varied townscape. Architecturally, many display a reticence to move away from the sobriety and safety of Edwardian Classicism (e.g. Equitable House, the Woolwich Building Society Headquarters, General Gordon Square (1934) and the Woolwich Telephone Exchange, Spray Street (1936). But others entered bolder territory; amongst the most striking is the Dudok-inspired Granada Cinema on Powis Street by C. Masey & R. H. Uren (1937), which has some affinities with Uren's earlier, award-winning Hornsey Town Hall, and the neighbouring Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society extension by S.W. Ackroyd, the company architect (1938). Another thirties building conspicuous because of its modernist allusions is the boxlike Regal Cinema, Wellington Street, enlivened by a shallow projecting pylon-like main elevation and plain stucco parapets.

In the later 20th century, Woolwich saw the appearance of new buildings on an unprecedented scale, many of which are insensitive to their surroundings. Peggy Middleton House, the first phase of new council offices erected in 1973-7 by Borough Architect J. M. Moore presents an interesting counterpart to the Edwardian municipal set piece on the other side of Wellington Street, but towering office blocks, such as the University of Greenwich's Riverside House seem wholly inappropriate – unworthy even – of their commanding sites

Appendix: A local man's view of Woolwich past and present

This (anonymous) poem was discovered tucked inside a book by a man living in Australia; he sent it home to his relatives in England.

The pie stall in Beresford Square, soldiers in blue shirts everywhere.
Ferry boats with engines on view, Cuffs and Garrets and Furlongs too.
The Co-op with their Divi checks. West Ham speedway, stock car wrecks.
Gardeners and the Scotch Wool Shop. Long queues at each tram stop.
The 696 and 698, trolley buses were never late.
Up to town on the tram. Cakes from Hemmings filled with jam.
The Co-op baker, horse and cart, always make an early start.
Lemonade outside the 'Who-Dy', Borough Sports Day - Punch and Judy, Police Patrols,
Wolseleys, Humbers, old policemen with low numbers.
PC Brandon, a radio star. Powis Street, and hardly a car.
School football on Bostall gun site, Jock Offord - teaching us all right.
Day trips out to Danson Park, walking home safely in the dark.
The Royal Arsenal, Siemens, Dockyards all.
Bloomfield Road and Shooters Hill.
Boys in blazers - ring-worm caps,
Poly Hall, decent chaps.
Learn to dance at Vincent Road. Beasleys drays with heavy load.
Saturday morning pictures - always fun. To Odeon and Granada people flock:
Organ music, not all this rock.
Strong man performs outside the Sally. Wish I could buy a Rayleigh.
Shakespeare jazz for your pleasure. Greenburg suits - made to measure.
Maybloom, Engineers and Co-op clubs, Lyons Tea shops and Beasley pubs.
Manze's Eels, still alive. Town Hall dances (mustn't jive).
Ferry boat, North Woolwich beach. Sydney Ross - toys out of reach.
Barnard's Theatre in Beresford Street. Auntie's opposite, where we all meet.
Amongst us the Sally Army pass. A seaman home drinks a glass.
Where is Woolwich that I knew? The Woolwich in which I grew.
A victim now of developers' taste. A historic town laid to waste.

References

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- ¹ W. T. Vincent, *The Records of the Woolwich District* Vol. 1 (London, n.d., c.1890), p. 30.
- ² Quoted in <http://www.interalpha.net/customer/cbrain/peopsz.htm>
- ³ Peter Guillery, *The Small House in Eighteenth-Century London* (London, 2004), p. 24.
- ⁴ Vincent, using the registers of baptisms and burials, estimates the population of 1730 to be 3,792 and that of 1750 to be 3,912. W. T. Vincent, *The Records of the Woolwich District* Vol. 1 (London, n.d., c.1890), p. 133.
- ⁵ Peter Guillery, *The Small House in Eighteenth-Century London* (London, 2004), p. 196.
- ⁶ www.portcities.org.uk/london
- ⁷ Peter Guillery, *The Small House in Eighteenth-Century London* (London, 2004), p. 222.
- ⁸ W. T. Vincent, *The Records of the Woolwich District* Vol. 1 (London, n.d., c.1890), p. 48. According to Vincent (p.) in 1807, when an Act of Parliament was passed to supersede this marketplace with another, the buildings attached to it included the Crown and Cushion public-house (John Kibble), the Waterman's Arms (John Bull), the wharf house and market (John Strother), the King's Head public-house (John Prebble), four shops and fourteen private houses, the whole belonging, to Lady Wilson.
- ⁹ *ibid*, p. 55.
- ¹⁰ *ibid*, p. 50.
- ¹¹ *ibid*, p. 63.
- ¹² *ibid*, p. 133.
- ¹³ J.S. Rochard, *Woolwich and Plumstead Illustrated, Historical and Commercial, Being a Concise and Comprehensive Account of this Interesting & Historic Neighbourhood* (Gravesend, 1894), p. 38.
- ¹⁴ W. T. Vincent, *The Records of the Woolwich District* Vol. 1 (London, n.d., c.1890), p. 49.
- ¹⁵ W. T. Vincent, *The Records of the Woolwich District* Vol. 1 (London, n.d., c.1890), p. 53.
- ¹⁶ Quoted in E. F. E. Jefferson, *The Woolwich Story 1890-1965* (The Woolwich & District Antiquarian Society, 1970), p. 2.
- ¹⁷ Piggott's 1840.
- ¹⁸ W. T. Vincent, *The Records of the Woolwich District* Vol. 1 (London, n.d., c.1890), p. 79.
- ¹⁹ W. T. Vincent, *The Records of the Woolwich District* Vol. 1 (London, n.d., c.1890), p. 79.
- ²⁰ Quoted in W. T. Vincent, *The Records of the Woolwich District* Vol. 1 (London, n.d., c.1890), pp. 79-80.
- ²¹ Vincent, p. 68.
- ²² Until 1841, all public gatherings and meetings were held either in the open air, in schoolrooms, or in taverns.
- ²³ *London's Town Halls: The architecture of local government from 1840 to the present* (RCHME/EH, 1999), p. 45.
- ²⁴ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London* (London, 1902)
- ²⁵ J.S. Rochard, *Woolwich and Plumstead Illustrated, Historical and Commercial, Being a Concise and Comprehensive Account of this Interesting & Historic Neighbourhood* (Gravesend, 1894), p. 15.