

THE METROPOLITAN BUILDINGS, SAINT PANCRAS: AN EARLY EXPERIMENT IN WORKING CLASS HOUSING

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INTRODUCTION

The early decades of the nineteenth century were marked by an unprecedented demographic and urban expansion which produced a number of acute social problems, notably those concerned with housing, public health and sanitation and their effects upon the physical and moral welfare of the 'labouring poor'. A great body of evidence about urban conditions was gathered by official bodies following the cholera epidemics of the 1830s and 1840s. The Select Committee appointed in 1840 'to inquire into the circumstances affecting the health of the inhabitants of large towns, with a view to improved sanitary arrangements for their benefit . . .' began to reveal the extent of the problem. Shortly afterwards the Poor Law Board produced its voluminous 'Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population and on the means of its Improvement', which owed much to the energies of Edwin Chadwick and the diligent researches of Dr Thomas Southwood Smith. However, until the passing of the defective and inadequate Public Health Act of 1848 little government action was taken, thus provoking the condemnation of the landlord and capitalist 'with all the wealthy and influential classes' who stood accused 'in that apathetic and selfish indifference to the wants and happiness of their dependents, which is the besetting sin of this Utilitarian Age'.¹

THE PROBLEM OF WORKING CLASS HOUSING

The mounting problems of housing and sanitation were commented upon by numerous authorities, and the parish of Saint Pancras was frequently cited as an example of poor and deteriorating conditions. The first and obvious fact was that the acute shortage of rented properties forced up rent levels thereby contributing to the poverty of the occupants. Charles Pearson, Solicitor to the City of London explained that overcrowding and high rents were caused by the necessity for workers to live near to their place of work, for 'a poor man is chained to the spot, he has not leisure to walk, and he has not the money to ride to a distance from his work, in consequence of which he must stay there, with an accumulating population'. Pearson was particularly well informed about the situation in central London and stated that rents on slum properties were so high that a house he had recently built—'a gilded mansion in St. James's Park'—brought less rent per square foot than a rotting hovel in Saffron Hill.²

The desperate shortage of housing which produced such rents was exacerbated by the massive growth of the urban population and as the Metropolitan Sanitary Association said, the worker had no choice but must take what room was available: 'He finds a house—and all too often a grave—for himself or some of his

family'. The great disparity between demand and supply in this area of the housing market was sufficient to confirm the rule that 'the worse the property, the higher comparatively are the rents'.³

At the same time that rising population was increasing the demand for housing, the supply in many central and inner London areas was being reduced by the clearance of slums to make way for more remunerative forms of land use and 'The substitution of offices and warehouses for dwellings, the creation of wider thoroughfares, the penetration of railways into thickly populated districts, have co-operated to maintain and intensify the mischiefs of overcrowding'.⁴

These developments were all to be seen in Saint Pancras, where the building of the New Road (now Euston Road) by the Metropolitan Board of Works, the wholesale demolition of Agar Town and parts of Somers Town by the Midland Railway Company and other improvements and developments led to the displacing of thousands of poor inhabitants. The pressure of demand upon the surrounding districts was simply increased and it was little wonder that the middle classes moved out, their 'habitations abandoned to the poor . . .'.⁵

The inadequacy of the arrangements for the rehousing of the poor was pointed out by the Reverend William Denton, who said that while these 'improvements' were dressed up and presented to the public as a good thing, 'The poor are indeed displaced, but they are not removed. They are shovelled out of one side of a parish, only to render more overcrowded the stifling apartments in another part'.⁶

Such claims have been corroborated by subsequent research and as A. S. Wohl has written, out of fifty improvement schemes carried out by the Metropolitan Board of Works, only thirteen included

any provision for the rehousing of displaced people.⁷ The inevitable conclusion which was drawn from these circumstances was that the continuing increase in the population, especially in the burgeoning industrial towns, was attended by 'a fearful diminution in the material comforts of the people, and a corresponding amount of suffering, sickness and death'.⁸

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE METROPOLITAN ASSOCIATION

In the absence of resolute action by the State to bring about reform and improvement in urban conditions, a large number of societies and associations were formed with this intent. The Society for Improving the Conditions of the Labouring Classes was formed in 1844, supported by Lord Ashley and Dr Southwood Smith, and was primarily charitable in nature.

A different approach to the problem of housing had been initiated in 1841 with the formation of the Metropolitan Association for the Improvement of the Dwellings of the Industrious Classes. This was done as a direct response to the great body of evidence produced before the Parliamentary Committee on the Health of Towns, which revealed a situation 'fearful to contemplate, and urgently calling for a remedy'.⁹ The Rector of Spitalfields, the Reverend Henry Taylor, convened a meeting in September 1841 at which it was resolved that 'an association be formed for the purpose of providing the labouring man with an increase of the comforts and conveniences of life, with full compensation to the capitalist', and 'the first object of the association be to erect, rent or purchase suitable buildings, to be let in compartments, at a moderate weekly rent'.¹⁰

The Association determined to show by example that the interests of the capitalist could be reconciled with those of

the tenant—even of the working class—and hoped that their example would lead to an increase in the supply of rented housing through higher investment. Investors were invited to take up shares of £25 denomination, upon which a maximum return of 5% would be paid. J. N. Tarn has commented that the dividend ‘was hardly a commercial proposition in those days’ and it is true that the take up of shares was slow, but not for this reason. Share subscriptions progressed as follows:

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Shares taken out</i> | <i>Total</i> ¹¹ |
|-------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1841 | — | — |
| 1842 | 4 | 4 |
| 1843 | 23 | 27 |
| 1844 | 252 | 279 |
| 1845 | 469 | 748 |
| 1846 | 407 | 1,155 |

Given the moral purpose of the venture it seems unlikely that potential investors were discouraged by the rate of return upon their capital, particularly as the average share holding was quite small and many of the investors quite wealthy. This view is supported by later appraisals of this and other schemes. In 1874 Kay Shuttleworth and Waterlow asked ‘Whether the erection of these buildings is so profitable an investment to tempt builders to step in’. They believed so and in the previous year it was stated that the Metropolitan Association had demonstrated ‘the profitable character of industrial dwellings . . .’¹² The Improved Dwellings Company, which operated under similar financial conditions ‘found that this return attracts as much capital as can be employed’.¹³

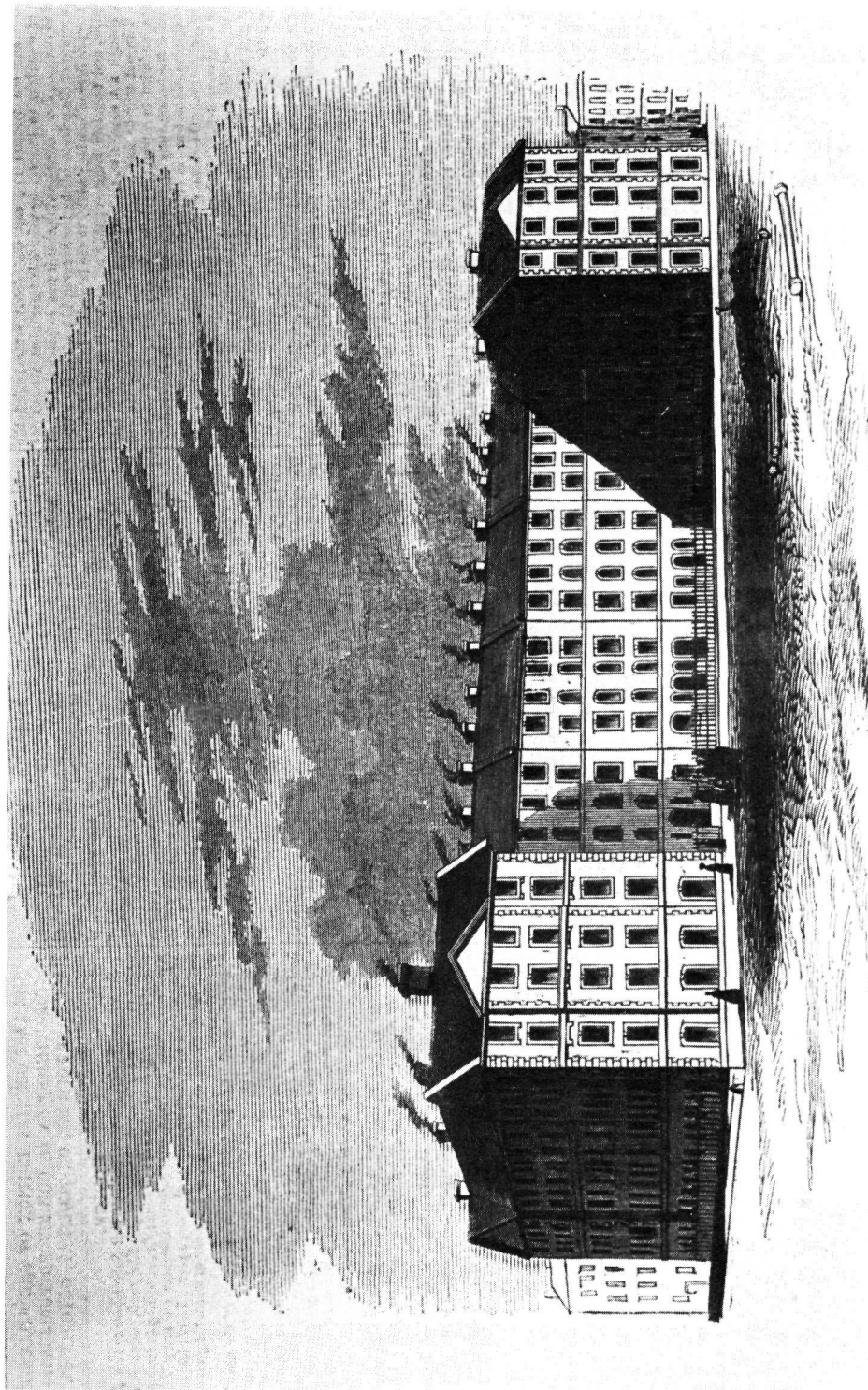
It was perhaps overly optimistic to expect that the acceptable rate of return to shareholders would induce private builders to follow the example. Their investment decisions were based upon the principle of profit maximisation and the

alternative commercial and industrial uses of inner London land yielded a higher rate of return. Similarly, the developers and builders who were so active at this time in such areas as Kentish Town and Camden Town would hardly have concerned themselves with this area of the housing market beset as it was with the problems of poverty, irregular employment and criminality. It was for these reasons that Charles Gatliff, Secretary to the Metropolitan Association, urged that the government should provide money, in the form of loans at 3½% from the Public Works Loan Board for the purposes of building artisans dwellings.¹⁴

The take up of shares was hindered by the legal status of the Association, since investors were, under the terms and laws of partnership held personally liable to the full extent of the Association’s debts. This was a common obstruction to the raising of capital for industry and the only means of securing limited liability were to promote a private parliamentary bill, as the railway companies had done in large numbers, or to secure a Charter of Incorporation from the Crown.

The Directors decided upon the latter course of action and approached Robert Peel the Prime Minister, and Lord Lincoln, the First Commissioner of Woods, who ‘expressed their entire approbation of it, thought it likely to accomplish much good, and advised the granting of the Charter by the Crown’.¹⁵ The costs of securing the Charter were high, and whilst of certain benefit in the long term, it strained the Association’s finances and depressed dividends.

The Charter fixed the capital of the Association at £100,000, confirmed the maximum dividend at 5%, allowed limited liability and gave the directors powers to make calls upon subscribers. One quarter of the capital had to be raised before the commencement of operations



THE NEW METROPOLITAN MODEL BUILDINGS, ST. PANCRAS-ROAD.

NEW METROPOLITAN MODEL BUILDINGS, ST. PANCRAS-ROAD. planned for one room to each inmate (chiefly females), others for two, and others again for three rooms for each family. Roof certain rules are laid down by which the inn order among so large a number of persons assembled.

Plate 1. Metropolitan Buildings at St. Pancras.

and any trading surplus remaining after the payment of dividends was to be used to extend the scheme.¹⁶ Share subscriptions certainly gathered pace after 1845—the year of the Charter—and by 1846 more than £28,000 had been raised, rising to £65,150 in 1853.¹⁷

From the outset it was stressed that the Association was a commercial undertaking and not a charity. Indeed, Dr Southwood Smith held that charity was undesirable and even counterproductive for ‘however it may sometimes “bless” the giver, it rarely benefits the recipients, but on the contrary tends to injure and corrupt them, by lessening their self reliance and destroying their self respect’.¹⁸

THE METROPOLITAN BUILDINGS (Pl. 1)

By 1846 sufficient funds had been subscribed to allow the Association to commence operations without delay. In 1848 a plot of land in Old Saint Pancras Road (now called Pancras Road) was purchased from the Brewers Company on a ninety-nine year lease at a ground rent of £90 per annum, and here the Metropolitan Buildings were erected and the completion was marked by a ceremony attended by the Prince Consort on 4 July 1848.¹⁹

The choice of this site was particularly apt, for it was in ‘a crowded neighbourhood occupied almost entirely by the working classes’.²⁰ The district suffered from both material and moral deprivation of precisely that kind that the Metropolitan Association was determined to alleviate. The Buildings stood directly opposite Old Saint Pancras Church and next to this was the Saint Pancras Workhouse, a notorious institution which was the subject of repeated complaints and investigations over the ill treatment of the poor. The workhouse grounds contained

cess pits, rubbish heaps, open sewers and pig styes—‘a thorough bog of the blackest filth imaginable’.²¹

To the east and south of the Church stood Agar Town, a slum built quickly as a speculative venture by William Talbot Agar and his family. It was described as ‘the most appalling spectacle of temporal and spiritual destitution which was to be found in the diocese of London’—a pointed observation since the freehold of the property was owned by the Church of England.²² The houses, or rather hovels, of Agar Town ‘were built of old rubbish on a twenty-one year lease’. Generally the houses were of one or two floors and,

‘. . . the interiors represent the lowest condition of poverty and filth . . . In most of these squat places, families of 5, 6, ten, twelve were found leading a swinish life in one room . . .’²³

In these dwellings lived many ‘human rats’ who had been displaced by the clearing of the Rookeries of central London. No thought was given to the provision of drains and sewers or to the disposal of refuse. One resident told of the privies and cess pits which overflowed the paths and of ‘the sundry carcasses of cats and dogs remaining on top thereof. We have besides a pigsty on the left of us . . . which has become the receptacle of costermongers refuse in the shape of entrails of fish, oyster shells etc that lay there rotting and as the weather has been warm it is almost enough to throw a person on a sick bed that has occasion to pass’.²⁴

Further to the east stood the yards of the Great Northern Railway and the inappropriately named area of Belle Isle ‘a pestilential settlement . . . composed of Knackers boiling down Lucifer Chemical, manure, and other loathsome, putrid establishments. The affluvia and stench that is wafted over to us . . . is unbearable

and must prove a fearful antagonist to health²⁵

To the west and south of the new Buildings stood Somers Town, a district then in the process of decay and decline brought about by gross overcrowding and the neglect of the basic decencies of life. The London City Mission published the results of a visitation there in 1850. Small houses were occupied by one family per room and given 'the promiscuous character of the persons and families inhabiting the same house . . . who can be surprised at the number and magnitude of the evils which ensue . . .'²⁶

The lack of drainage meant that houses were always damp, and in the ground floor rooms 'if a stick were put down between the chinks of the boards, and were moved about, the splashing of the water would be heard and a very offensive smell would rise up'.²⁷

John Hollingshead visited Somers Town in 1861 and commented upon the gin palaces 'built in the true Seven Dials style' and upon the number of cheap china and haberdashers' shops and the butchers' premises which contrived 'to look like a cats meat warehouse Its side streets have a smoky, worn out appearance; gas lamps project jauntily from the walls . . . no house is without patched windows and every passage is full of children'.²⁸ These southern areas of Saint Pancras attracted the attention of several philanthropic agencies and it was amongst these distressed and deprived people that the beneficial results of their work could be seen most graphically.

The Association retained the services of the architect, Mr. Moffat, and a scheme was approved consisting of 110 flats in a five storey block. Ninety flats had 3 rooms and twenty had 2 rooms. Some details of the scheme were recorded by Charles Gatliff some years later:²⁹

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| Built 1846 | Leasehold |
| Superficial area of land Sq. Ft. | 25,920 |
| Superficial area covered. Sq. Ft. | 11,852 |
| Recreation land. Sq. Ft. | 14,068 |
| Population, families | 110 |
| Average total population for one year | 648 |
| Rent of 4 rooms | 6s-7s 9d |
| Rent of 3 rooms | 4s 3d-5s 9d |
| Ground Rent | £90 |
| Ground rent per family per week | 3¼d |
| Cost per room | £43 03 04d |
| Gross cost | £18,306 01 00d |
| Gross rents | £1,778 16 00d |
| Expenses | £674 09 11d |

The architectural plan and the type of building underlined the serious problem involved in attaining the financial objective of charging a 'moderate weekly rent' while affording 'full compensation to the capitalist'. The standard of housing was intended to be much better than that of the nearby slums and lodging houses which were much more densely occupied. This of necessity dictated the intensive rather than extensive use of land in order to achieve economies and raise rent revenues per acre of land.

Many of the slum properties built during the 1840s and 1850s in the same area of Saint Pancras were houses of 2 to 4 rooms. Each room could be let, although information about rents is very difficult to assess since it was seldom clear how many occupants shared a tenancy and there was no such thing as a standard unit of accommodation against which rents could be judged. However, to provide decent, sanitary family flats in new buildings at a rent which made no greater financial demands upon the tenant than slums and hovels which were grossly

overcrowded was an ambitious and difficult goal. Clearly it could not be achieved by buildings of the cottage or terrace kind.

Somewhat later the logic of this early high density experiment was elucidated by Charles Gatliff when he wrote: 'It is certain that by systematic distribution, by economy of space, and greater elevation in the structures, one half more people might be lodged in a comfortable and wholesome manner, where the present occupants are huddled together in dirt, discomfort and disease'.³⁰ The example was followed in the construction of many other blocks, some with extraordinarily high densities which were nevertheless thought consistent with the maintenance of acceptable physical and hygienic standards. For example, a block of artisans flats at Farringdon Road achieved a density of 1,625 persons per acre, while the most populated parts of London—such as Westminster—had 235 per acre. These very high figures were regarded with equanimity by Gatliff, since it was still possible to raise standards of accommodation. As he wrote, the buildings housed four times as many people to the acre than in other highly populated areas and 'we have an irresistible argument in favour of the increase and extension of this class of buildings'.³¹

The Metropolitan Buildings were intended for family occupation with basic amenities which were usually totally lacking or grossly deficient in the overcrowded lodging houses of districts such as Somers Town. As Southwood Smith said, the physical condition of the labouring poor 'is mainly dependent upon the state of their dwellings' and as has been noted, there was a growing body of evidence to emphasise the heavy social cost of deprivation.³²

The dimensions of the rooms (Pl. 2) varied between 14' × 10' 6" and 13' × 8'.

The sculleries were fitted with sinks and piped water 'at the rate of 40 gallons per day'.³³ This standard of provision was excellent for the time. In 1847 researches by the Health of Towns and of London Associations indicated that out of 270,000 houses counted, no less than 70,000 had no water supply. These findings were confirmed in 1850 by the Metropolitan Sanitary Association which found 80,000 dwellings housing 640,000 people without piped water.³⁴ The problem was graphically illustrated at Agar Town where water was drawn from holes in the ground which was itself sodden with rainwater, sewage and other 'impure matter'. One resident who later moved to the Buildings recalled the 'foul water' there and 'on one occasion they found a dead cat in one of the butts'.³⁵ It was little wonder that the inadequacies of the water supply regularly led to quarrels and violence between neighbours.³⁶

The flats were also equipped with 'the means of carrying off ashes and other solid refuse through a shaft accessible from the scullery'.³⁷ This was particularly important in an area where, as the Medical Officer of Health commented, the disposal of rubbish was 'systematically neglected' and there were constant complaints that dustmen refused to remove it from the houses of the poor 'unless they are paid for their trouble'.³⁸

The living rooms were furnished with a cooking range, a boiler and oven which provided hot water and encouraged the economical baking of bread. Again this was a conspicuous improvement upon prevailing standards since many houses were not equipped with cooking facilities and at Agar Town soup kitchens enjoyed an active trade.³⁹ In addition to the hot water supply, the Buildings contained a communal wash house on the ground floor.⁴⁰

In the impoverished and overcrowded

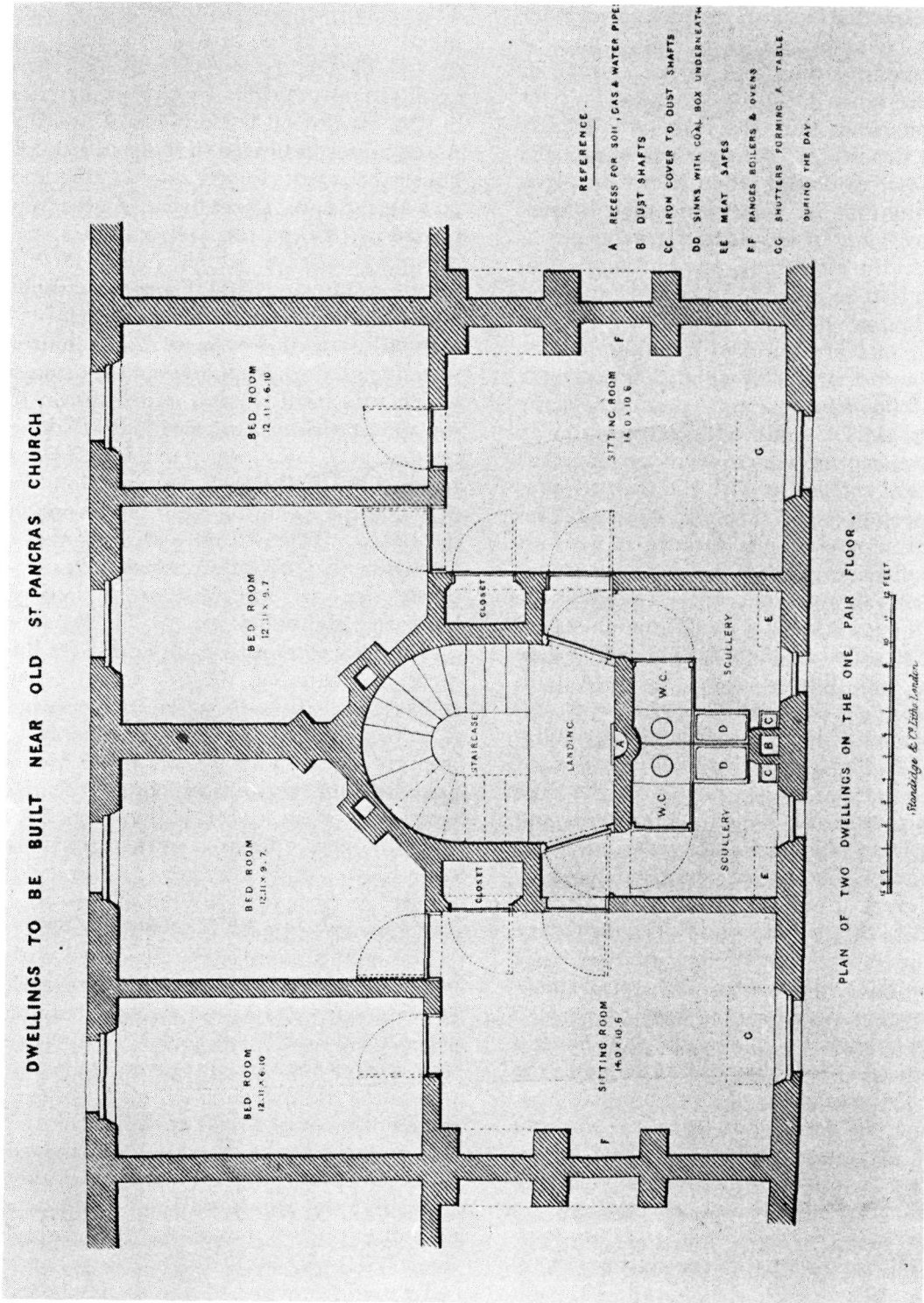


Plate 2. Metropolitan Buildings: floor plan.

areas of London the lack of drains and sewers presented perhaps the most serious threat to health. This problem generated a vast literature of criticism and protest. The Metropolitan Buildings were fitted with lavatories and 'There is no cess pool on the premises. The water-closet, substituted for the privy, is situated in the scullery, the door of the closet being so hung as, when open, to shut off access to the scullery'.⁴¹ The entire block was provided with sub-soil drainage and this was a notable feature at a time when many houses had only cess pools, open sewers or ditches for this purpose. One resident compared these arrangements with her previous abode in Old Saint Pancras Road, where there was one privy for nine houses and 'it was in a very foul state and very unpleasant for females'.⁴²

The rents charged for flats varied with their size and in the early years were as follows:⁴³

- 2 rooms and scullery 3s 6d–5s per week
- 3 rooms and scullery 4s 9d–6s 3d per week

By 1861 the rents were said to range between 3s 6d and 7s.⁴⁴ These rents compared favourably with other properties in the same district. In 1851 single rooms in Agar Town fetched between 3s and 4s 6d and two roomed houses fetched 4s per week.

However, the quality and condition of these habitations left much to be desired being 'situated between two burial grounds, no back yard or windows behind, one water butt, one wash house, one closet for nine houses. The parlours are damp, nearly two feet up the walls, caused by the graves being so much higher than the floors of the houses'. Similarly, at Somers Town two rooms in a 'very delapidated' house were let for 5s 6d p.w.⁴⁵

Better quality houses containing two rooms at the northern end of Agar Town fetched 7s–8s per week and four roomed dwellings £28 per annum.⁴⁶

The Association claimed an active demand for its flats and it was reported in *The Times* that 192 applications had been received for the Metropolitan Buildings and that there were 275 applications for the 253 flats at Farringdon Road, long before they were completed.⁴⁷ It was said that the turnover of flats was low and that the 'empties' remained vacant only for a week.⁴⁸

It was expected that the provision of decent housing would serve to enhance and preserve family life and stimulate moral improvement. Southwood Smith noted that families were the Association's most appreciative tenants.⁴⁹ Decent housing was clearly intended to impose a discipline upon the occupants and the paternalistic zeal of the age was well illustrated by Henry Roberts when he wrote that the Buildings 'appear to act as silent monitors, reproofing disorder and encouraging cleanliness and propriety'. He reported with satisfaction that amongst the tenants 'The intemperate have become sober, and the disorderly well conducted, since their residence in these healthful and peaceful abodes'. The police, it was said, were infrequent visitors to the Buildings.⁵⁰

The alleged moral improvement might well have owed something to the selection of tenants and the regime of estate management. References were required from prospective tenants and this ensured an acceptable standard of behaviour.⁵¹ The 'inmates'—as Grainger rather oddly described them—were 'Well ordered mechanics, such as carpenters, painters, jewellers, composers, printers etc . . .' The adult population was said to be so well ordered that few cases of misconduct were reported and these were of drunkenness.⁵²

Good conduct and order were further encouraged by the installation of 'superintendents' on the estate, whose function was 'to collect rents, supervise, and make himself generally useful'. Labourers were employed to carry out repairs and maintenance work, while the superintendents kept watch on the tenants and 'soon detect any drunkards, brawlers, prostitutes, receivers of stolen goods, or other bad characters, who occasionally resort to improved dwellings to evade suspicion'. Such people were simply 'sent away'.⁵³

It is obviously very difficult to gauge consumer reaction to the provision of this kind of housing under these circumstances. The Association was itself prompted to stress that it did not intrude upon the privacy of its tenants but there was clearly some resistance to the 'stringent rules' imposed upon them and enforced by the superintendents. These rules included the 'registering coming in at night' which certainly caused resentment.⁵⁴ Kay Shuttleworth was moved to deny that this kind of housing was unpopular with tenants and this must have been in response to some criticism.⁵⁵ The Association was not inclined to dwell upon the shortcomings of their experiment and such reports as there were of consumer reaction tended to be favourable. One tenant in the Metropolitan Buildings was reported to have expressed the view that 'this set of rooms is quite sufficient for any gentleman'.⁵⁶

HOUSING, HEALTH AND WELFARE

The building of model dwellings was expected to bring about an improvement in both the moral and physical welfare of the poor. The problems of the grossly inadequate provision of public health facilities and their debilitating effects upon the health and life expectancy of the

poor began to attract serious attention during the 1830s. Thereafter a mounting body of evidence indicated plainly the urgent necessity of reform which extended far beyond the competence of most parochial authorities.

Detailed investigations of social conditions in distressed areas such as Agar Town and Somers Town revealed the full extent of the dangers confronting their inhabitants. The Metropolitan Association was closely linked with such investigative bodies as the Metropolitan Sanitary Association, the Health of Towns and of London Associations and the Charity Organisation Society. Drawing upon the work and findings of these and other bodies the Metropolitan Association set out to demonstrate that improved dwellings could be some curb to disease and early death. A proper appraisal of the quality and accuracy of this great volume of work is beyond the scope of this note, but the claims of improvement by the Association do demand attention.

An early survey of social and sanitary conditions in both town and country was that carried out by Hector Gavin MD, FRCSE, a member of the Health of Towns Association, and fortunately one of the urban districts he surveyed was Saint Pancras. Death rates in England in the years 1838-1842 were computed to be 2.209% per annum, a figure that accords well with later researches. The ratio of deaths to population was 1:45 per annum nationally. However, the study showed a rural death ratio of 1:54.91 and a significantly higher urban ratio of 1:38.16.⁵⁷

The geographical distribution of mortality rates further emphasised the problem for in the 'worst' urban areas death rates were up to 66% higher than in the better districts. This clearly meant higher death rates and lower life expectancy amongst the urban working class and this

was demonstrated by Gavin's figures for the parish of Saint Pancras:

Saint Pancras: Average Age at Death, 1839.⁵⁸

| | |
|-----------|----|
| Gentry | 45 |
| Tradesmen | 27 |
| Artisans | 22 |

Average Age at Death of Those Who Achieved 21 Years.

| | |
|-----------|----|
| Gentry | 61 |
| Tradesmen | 50 |
| Artisans | 47 |

There were clearly problems of definition and of the size and distribution of samples used by Gavin. However, these findings were confirmed by other investigators. The evidence relating to very high levels of infant mortality was now overwhelming and as Gavin concluded, 'It is a lamentable fact, that one quarter of the children born in England die before they reach the fifth year of their age'.⁵⁹ In the crowded urban areas the figures were even worse and Dr Thomas Hillier, the first Medical Officer of Health for Saint Pancras stated that in 1859 23% of deaths from all causes were amongst children under one year of age, and 43% amongst the under fives.⁶⁰

Gavin, like so many other social reformers protested at the apathy and indifference of the upper classes to the hideous condition of so many people and this continuing and 'frightful devastation of human life'.⁶¹ This indifference, he later wrote, 'cannot be considered but as an ignorant or criminal violation of the laws of life'.⁶²

When R. D. Grainger visited the Metropolitan Buildings in 1851 he noted the absence of cholera and while there was some illness and fever he pronounced that 'The inmates are very healthy'.⁶³ In the early 1850s the population of the Buildings was counted and revealed an apparent improvement in health:

| Year | Population of Metropolitan Buildings | | Deaths Per 1000 | |
|------|--------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|----|
| | No. of Buildings | No. of Deaths | | |
| 1850 | 560 | 7 | | 12 |
| 1851 | 600 | 9 | | 15 |
| 1852 | 680 | 9 | | 13 |

The average was 13.6 deaths per 1,000 and this compared with the London average of 22 per 1,000. However, this improvement would have depended to a great extent upon the age structure of the inhabitants and Southwood Smith claimed that deaths amongst the under 10s were drastically reduced. The London average was 46 per 1,000, while at the Buildings the figure was 10 per 1,000. Similarly, death from infectious diseases were half the London figure at 8 and 16 per 1,000 respectively.⁶⁴

There was said to be a conspicuous decline in the incidence of typhus—not one case being reported in the early years and the sanitary arrangements must certainly have assisted in this, for 'Its true source is not want, but filth'.⁶⁵ On the basis of Southwood Smith's figures, it was argued that if London had been as healthy as the Metropolitan Buildings, then 23,000 people a year would have been saved from an early death.⁶⁶

During the 1860s and 1870s further and wider studies were carried out into rates of mortality in 'Model Lodging Houses' in London. The results of one such survey were presented before the Statistical Society of London by Charles Gatliff and were as follows:

Death Rates per 1,000 from all causes.⁶⁷

| | 1867 | 1868 | 1869 | 1870 | 1871 |
|------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Metropolitan Buildings | 18 | 15 | 18 | 16 | 17 |
| London | 23 | 24 | 25 | 24 | 25 |

This count included other buildings and estates erected by the Association. The averages for the five years were 16.8 and 24.2 deaths per 1,000 for the Model Lodging Houses and for London. The survey also revealed that the under 10 years population of the estates of the Association was higher than that of London as a whole whilst mortality in this vulnerable age group was apparently much lower.

| | <i>Population Under 10 yrs Per 1,000</i> | <i>Deaths Under 10 yrs Per 1,000</i> |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Model Lodging Houses | 330 | 24 |
| London | 237 | 48 |

These figures suggested both that the population of the Model Lodging Houses under the age of 10 years was higher than for the whole of London and that the death rate was lower. The problem of the reliability of Gatliff's sources and methods remains, although he himself said that his figures could easily be verified by the Registrars for the Districts examined.⁶⁸

Gatliff's figures were not received without comment and criticism and were denounced by Mr. Francis Saunders, who claimed that since many tenants of the new buildings died in hospital, the statistics for mortality were 'entirely fallacious'.⁶⁹ Whether or not this criticism is valid can only be determined by further enquiry into the question of the relationship between housing conditions and mortality in these areas.

CONCLUSION

In 1850 it was said that the Metropolitan Association 'have set a noble example of what can be achieved by philanthropic and enlightened self interest'.⁷⁰ By 1874 the Association had spent £189,028 and housed 1,060 families consisting of 5,206 people. Similarly, the

Improved Industrial Dwellings Company had spent £274,773 and housed 1,432 families consisting of 7,260 people. Other societies and organisations had expended a further £1,209,359 providing 6,838 dwellings and housing 32,435 people.⁷¹

The Association continued to build tenement blocks and in the 1860s began to construct cottage style housing in outer London, such as 166 dwellings in Beckenham and 165 cottages at Penge. These housed workers who travelled to London to work and this was indicative of the suburban expansion which was facilitated by the greater availability of railway and other forms of transport. The suburban dwellings were more commodious—having gardens and a much lower density of occupation and were also far cheaper to build. It was estimated that in London tenement buildings cost £46 per room to erect, compared with £34 per room in the outer regions.⁷²

However, this work was quite incapable of leading to any general raising of housing standards and in this sense the experiment, although widely imitated, failed. The population of London increased by 45,000 per annum during the 1860s and the 'housing problem' remained acute. In the parish of Saint Pancras the density of occupation continued to rise until 1911 by which time 30% of the inhabitants lived in one or two roomed tenements.⁷³

As early as 1850 it was argued that the example set by the Metropolitan Association at Old Saint Pancras Road could not be followed and imitated in sufficient number to change the desperate problem of housing London's poor, and it was prophetically said that—

'The Public, therefore, for many years—perhaps for a century—cannot look for a sufficiency of healthy dwellings'. In such circumstances 'it is the bounden duty of Government to step in and afford

to the public that security, which is utterly out of their power, by any knowledge, ability, or forethought of their own, to obtain for themselves'.⁷⁴

NOTES

1. J. Simon *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the City of London* (1853), 4.
2. Royal Commission on Railway Termini (1846) British Parliamentary Papers Question 2355, 195.
3. Metropolitan Sanitary Association *First Annual Report* (1850), 94.
4. Charity Organisation Society *The Dwellings of the Poor* Special Committee on Metropolitan Dwellings (1873), 2.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Rev. W. Denton *Observations on the Displacement of the Poor by Metropolitan Railways and Other Public Improvements* (1861), 10.
7. A. S. Wohl 'The Housing of the Working Classes in London 1815–1914' in S. D. Chapman (Ed.) *The History of the Working Class Housing* (Newton Abbot 1971), 19.
8. Simon *op. cit.*, 4.
9. Metropolitan Association for the Improvement of the Dwellings of the Industrious Classes *Second Report of the Directors* (1846), 5.
10. C. Gatliff *On Improved Dwellings and Their Beneficial Effect upon Health and Morals* (1875), 1.
11. J. N. Tarn *Working Class Housing in Nineteenth Century Britain*, (London 1971) 6. Also, Metropolitan Association (1846), 13.
12. U. J. Kay Shuttleworth and Sir Sydney Waterlow *The Dwellings of the Working Classes in London* (1874), 20.
13. Charity Organisation Society *op. cit.*, 5.
14. Gatliff *op. cit.*, 13.
15. Dr. T. Southwood Smith *The Results of Sanitary Improvement Illustrated by the Operation of the Metropolitan Association* (1854), 5.
16. Metropolitan Association *Charter of Incorporation* (1845) British Museum, Printed Books CT 185/15.
17. Metropolitan Association (1846), 7.
18. Southwood Smith *op. cit.*, 5.
19. London and Middlesex Record Office, Middlesex Land Registry 1848 7/880. Agreement between the Brewers Company and the Metropolitan Association.
20. Southwood Smith *op. cit.*, 6.
21. W. E. Brown *Saint Pancras Past and Present* (1874).
22. R. C. Morrell *The Story of Agar Town* (1935), 4.
23. John Hollingshead *Ragged London* (1861) 134–136.
24. Public Record Office, MH 12/261 7 October 1853.
25. P.R.O. MH 12/261 20 September 1853.
26. London City Mission *Saint Pancras Auxiliary, Third Annual Report* 9. British Museum, Printed Books 4192 b 30.
27. *Ibid.*, 10.
28. Hollingshead *op. cit.*, 142.
29. Gatliff *op. cit.*, 15.
30. Charity Organisation Society *op. cit.*, 11.
31. Gatliff *op. cit.*, 5.
32. Southwood Smith *op. cit.*, 1.
33. *Ibid.*, 6–7.
34. H. Gavin *The Unhealthiness of London* Report prepared for the Health of Towns and of London Associations (1847), 41. Also the Metropolitan Sanitary Association *First Report* (1850), 27. The Health of Towns Association had been set up to press for sanitary reform. The Public Health Act of 1848 appeared at first to meet this objective but the weakness of its permissive rather than mandatory powers prompted the establishment of the Metropolitan Sanitary Association which continued

to urge more forceful action by the State. Amongst the leading members of the Association were the Reverend Thomas Dale of Saint Pancras, Lord Ashley, Charles Dickens, R. D. Grainger and George Godwin. Dickens was to produce a particularly lurid account of conditions at Agar Town in his journal *Household Words* in the following year, 1851. R. D. Grainger's Report on the sanitary condition of Agar Town and other parts of London was also published in 1851. George Godwin was the Editor of *The Builder Magazine*, a journal which produced many articles concerning the dreadful living conditions of the working class—and this was in marked contrast to the indifference displayed by the Royal Institute of British Architects who apparently discovered their consciences only when the growth of local authority contracts promised fat rewards to this recently invented profession. Godwin published several denunciations of conditions at Agar Town, for example in *The Builder* 11 February 1860. Godwin stated his own opinion about such questions in his book *London's Shadows: The 'Homes' of Thousands* of 1854. What is remarkable is that so many commentators of outstanding ability and industry should have taken such a close interest in this particular area of London. It is hoped to make further comment about this in a larger forthcoming study of Agar Town.

35. R. D. Grainger *Report on the Present State of Certain Parts of the Metropolis* (1851), 50.
36. Gavin *op. cit.*, 45.
37. Southwood Smith *op. cit.*, 6.
38. Dr. T. Hillier (1856) *First Report of the Medical Officer of Health, Saint Pancras* British Museum, State Paper Room AR 741 (1).
39. Hollingshead *op. cit.*, 133.
40. Southwood Smith *op. cit.*, 6.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Grainger *op. cit.*, 50.
43. M. Gore *On the Dwellings of the Poor and the Means of Improving them* (1851), 12.
44. Hollingshead *op. cit.*, 201.
45. Gore *op. cit.*, 25.
46. G. Godwin (1854) *London's Shadows: The 'Homes' of Thousands* (1854), 9.
47. *The Times* 1 June 1848.
48. Southwood Smith *op. cit.*, 7.
49. *Ibid.*, 9.
50. H. Roberts *The Physical Condition of the Labouring Classes* (1866), 9.
51. Southwood Smith *op. cit.*, 7.
52. Grainger *op. cit.*, 50.
53. Gatliff *op. cit.*, 10.
54. Grainger *op. cit.*, 50.
55. Kay Shuttleworth and S. Waterlow *op. cit.*, 25.
56. Grainger *op. cit.*, 50.
57. Gavin *op. cit.*, 2–4.
58. *Ibid.*, 12.
59. *Ibid.*, 11.
60. T. Hillier *Fourth Report of the Medical Officer of Health, Saint Pancras* (1859), 13.
61. Gavin *op. cit.*, 19.
62. H. Gavin *The Habitations of the Industrial Classes* (1851), 21.
63. Grainger *op. cit.*, 50.
64. Southwood Smith *op. cit.*, 9–12.
65. *Ibid.*, 12.
66. Roberts *op. cit.*, 9.
67. Gatliff *op. cit.*, 6–7.
68. *Ibid.*, 3.
69. *Ibid.*, 27.
70. Metropolitan Sanitary Association *op. cit.*, 92.
71. Gatliff *op. cit.*, 2.
72. Charity Organisation Society *op. cit.*, 6. Gatliff *op. cit.*, 13–14.
73. A. S. Wohl *op. cit.*, 25.
74. Metropolitan Sanitary Association *op. cit.*, 93.