

**Housing the Workers**

**Early London County Council Housing  
1889-1914**

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**Part 3 - the schemes in detail**

**5 - Blackwall Tunnel clearance (south of the Thames)**



## **Blackwall Tunnel Scheme (south of Thames)**

### **Westview, Armitage, Collierston and Idenden Cottages, Aug 1894 Built as part of rehousing for the Blackwall Tunnel construction**

The previous section described the Council Buildings in Poplar which were built to house those displaced on the north side of the Thames by the Blackwall Tunnel construction. These would be joined by the Montreal and Toronto Buildings in 1901.

On the south side of the Thames it was decided to build cottages rather than blocks as the cost of the land made cottages more cost-effective. This approach of a preference for building cottages with gardens was generally only cost-effective in more outlying areas, such as Greenwich.

As with the sites on the north side of the Thames, the Council tried to sell the sites by auction but failed and so decided to build themselves. The Westview, Armitage and Collierston cottages were planned first and special foundations had to be laid because of the marshy conditions. Messrs Kirk and Randall successfully tendered for the contract at £2,236 in February 1893. Unlike the foundations for Council Buildings on the north shore, the final cost of the Greenwich foundations were nearly 30% over estimate at £2,851 10s 9d. The architect estimated the cottages would cost £22,108, but the actual cost of the cottages by the time they were completed in August 1894 was £28,729 1s 2d; a worrying overspend of approximately 30%.

The map in Fig. 2 below shows that the actual position of the cottages. The upper square shows the position of Idenden Cottages and the lower square the Westview, Armitage and Collierston Cottages (from left to right). The arrow at the very top points to the southern portal of the Blackwall Tunnel and, to help identify the location of the selected map, the modern O<sup>2</sup> Stadium is just beyond the top of the map at the very north of the Greenwich peninsula.

Pictures of any of the Cottages are hard to find but Fig. 1 is a fuzzy photograph of Westview Cottages taken in 1962, shortly before they were demolished.



Fig. 1: Westview Cottages, Blackwall Lane, Greenwich, 1962<sup>i</sup>

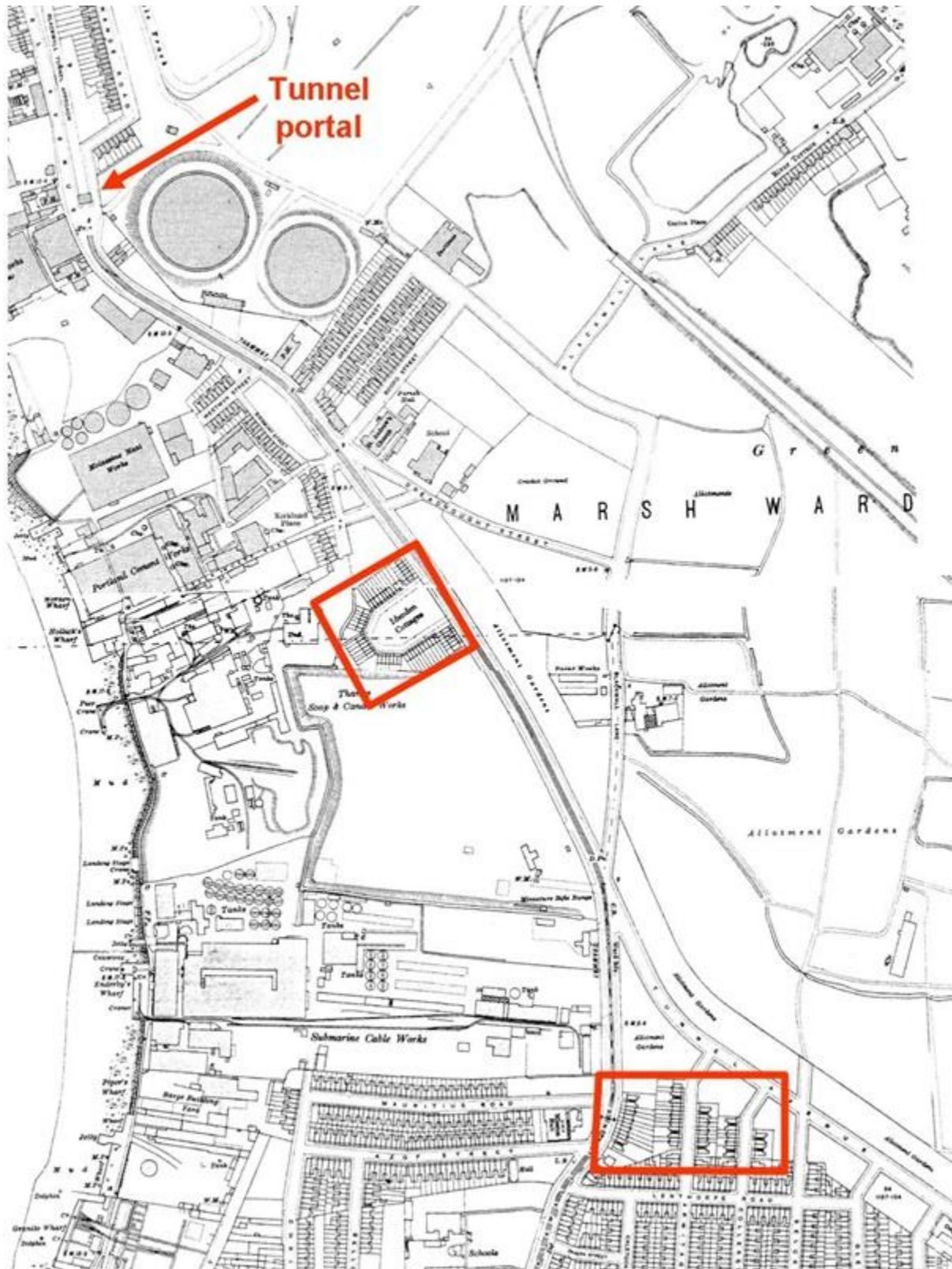


Fig. 2: Position of Idenden, Westview, Armitage and Colleston Cottages (OS Map, 1916)





Fig. 3: Westview, Armitage and Collerston Cottages, front elevation (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/002)

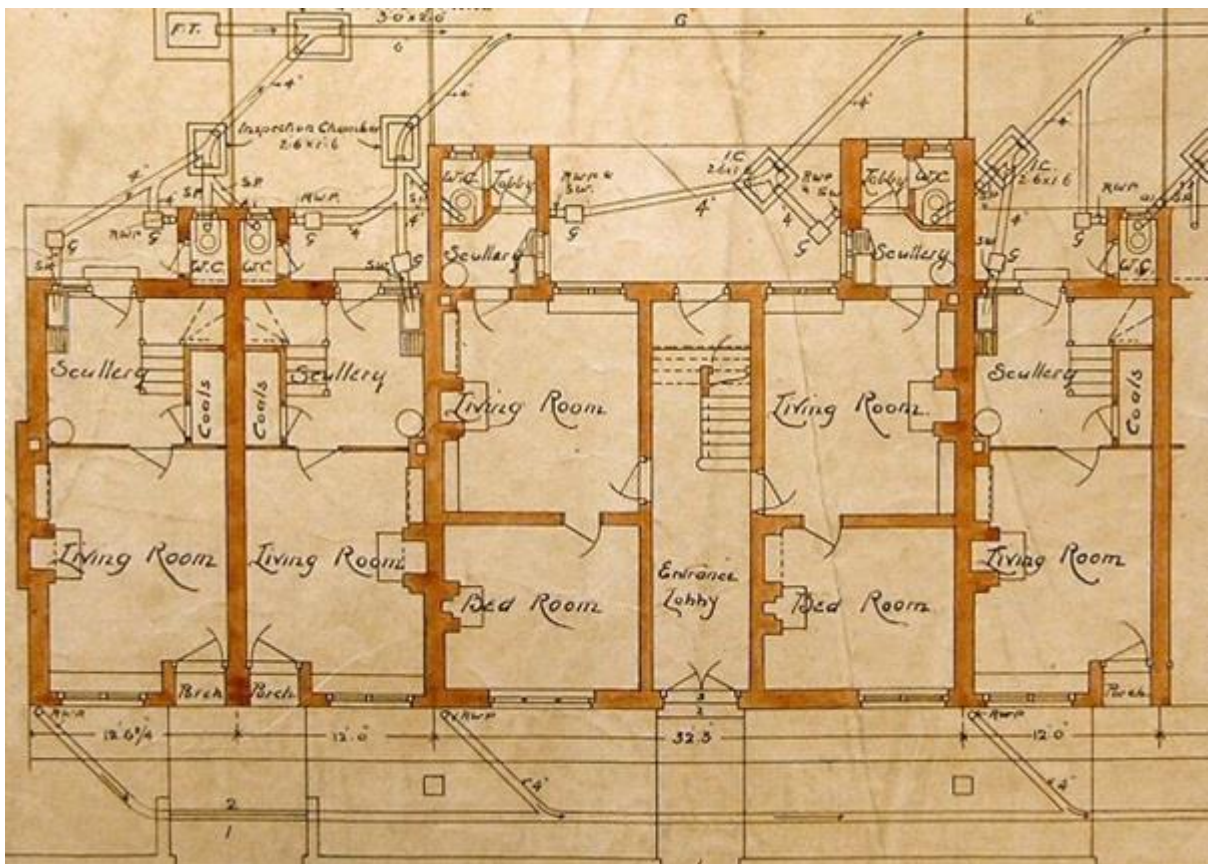


Fig. 4: Collerston Cottages, floor plan (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/002)

The resulting cottages provided accommodation for 464 persons in 78 cottages which were made up of 30 of two-rooms, 20 of three rooms and 28 of four rooms. The size of the rooms were noticeable larger than the minimum of 144/96 sq. ft. for living and bedrooms respectively. The signature on the plans suggests that A. M. Philips was the architect for the Westview and Idenden Cottages.

Construction of the Idenden Cottages followed the same pattern as for the other cottages. Special foundations were needed but this was carried out by the Council's own Works Department at a cost of £2,083 (7% below estimate). The building of the cottages was offered to the Works Department but they turned this down. Whether this was because they believed they could not do it within the estimate or that they were already overstretched with other projects is not recorded. Tenders were invited and one for £13,803 from Messrs. Holloway Brothers was accepted, being slightly less than the architect's estimate of £13,990. The cottages were completed in August 1896 at a cost of £13,872 (only £69 more than the estimate).

These cottages were more conventional than the earlier ones in that they were 2 storeys, each with 4 rooms (including a reasonably sized kitchen) and a good garden and provided accommodation for 400 persons. However, the room's sizes were much closer to the minimum of 144/96 sq. ft. The location of the cottages was a little unfortunate as industrial premises have always surrounded them on three sides. They have since been demolished and the site occupied by industrial premises.

As regards their cost-effectiveness, the 1913-14 accounts show the Westview, Armitage and Collerston Cottages running at an alarming loss of 35.8%, but Idenden Cottages almost breaking even with a 0.1% loss.

	Outgoings	Income	
Westview, Armitage and Collerston Cottages	£1,740	£1,281	£459 (35.8% loss)
Idenden Cottages	£1,116	£1,108	£8 (0.1% loss)

Table 1: Balance of accounts for the financial year 1913-14

The 1901 census for Armitage, Collerston and Westview Cottages shows that the bulk of the heads of household are labourers in the docks or in local industry, and were either local men or from Kent. Few households contained people from outside the southeast. There was little overcrowding with some cottages having 5 occupants in 2-rooms. All tenements were occupied. The total occupancy was 375 which equates to 81% occupation against the theoretical maximum of 464 people. The 1901 census for Idenden Cottages reflects its proximity to industrial premises, with all occupied by families of labourers, including many gas fitters. The occupancy of these cottages varied considerably with the majority having had 5 or 6 occupants, but 3 had a surprising 11 occupants and one with 10 occupants. This can be considered gross over-occupancy in 3-roomed property (the kitchen has been excluded). Such overcrowding suggests poor control by the Council area manager. The census returns for the other cottages show good occupancy but no blatant overcrowding of these larger dwellings.

The 1911 census for Collerston Cottages shows two vacant dwellings. One of the 4-roomed cottages had eleven occupants: a barge-builder husband from Sussex and his wife plus 9 children aged between 1 and 15. The occupations are those expected in that area and all manual labouring apart from a middle-aged nurse and two middle-aged female relatives, both cooks

and all local-born. The 1911 census for Armitage cottages is also showing typical occupations for the area with the local South Metropolitan Gas Company being a common employer. Three of the dwellings were vacant. Overcrowding seems to have been under control with just two dwellings, both 2-roomed, having 5 occupants one of which is a young baby. The Westview Cottages shows a very similar pattern from the census returns. All 18 dwellings were occupied. There was one 4-roomed cottage with 10 occupants although there may have been some tolerance on the part of the management as he was a sewerman working for Greenwich Borough Council. A 3-roomed tenement had 8 occupants but there is less excuse as one occupant is claimed to be the head's 43 year old brother-in-law. The census return for this household is notable for being written in a very neat hand. Of the 18 dwellings, 6 were occupied by families whose head of household works for a local or central government-run organisation. The total 1911 occupancy of Armitage, Collerston and Westview Cottages had dropped from the 375 at the time of the 1901 census to 314, which equates to a low 68% occupancy against the theoretical maximum. The 1911 census for Idenden Cottages shows a different story. Apart from three 4-roomed cottages showing 10, 9 and 9 occupants respectively (and the head of the household of the one with 10 occupants listing his occupation as a trade unionist for the carmen's union) the cottages were generally under-occupied, with very few local-born heads of household. Most occupants came from across the south and southeast of England. The occupations generally seem to be a step above the labourers who occupied most of the cottages in 1901, and included two Police Sergeants and one Constable. The total occupancy of 248 against the theoretical maximum of 400 indicates that the overcrowding present in 1901 is more under control.

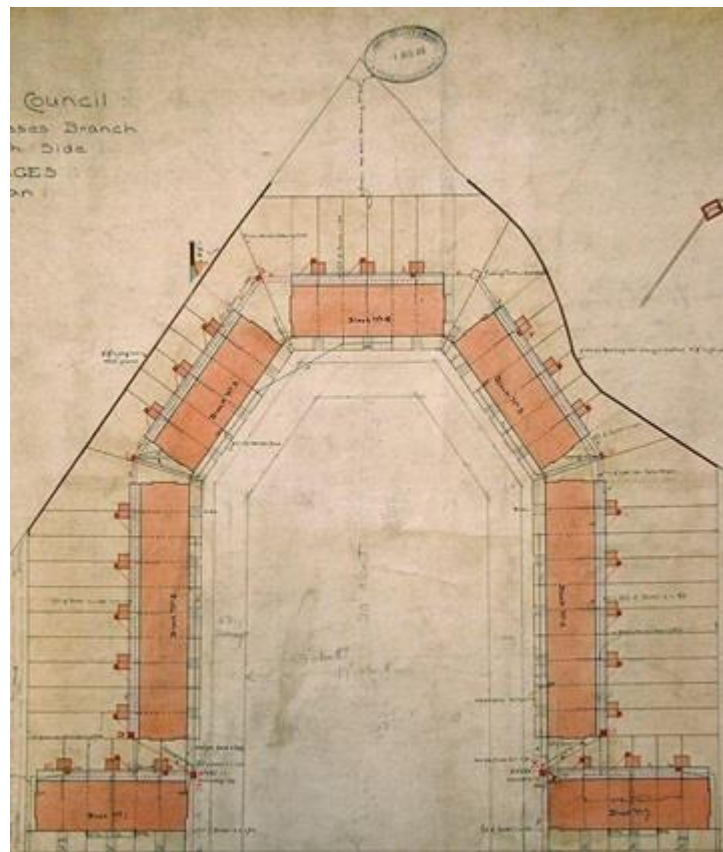


Fig. 5: Idenden Cottages plan (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/029)

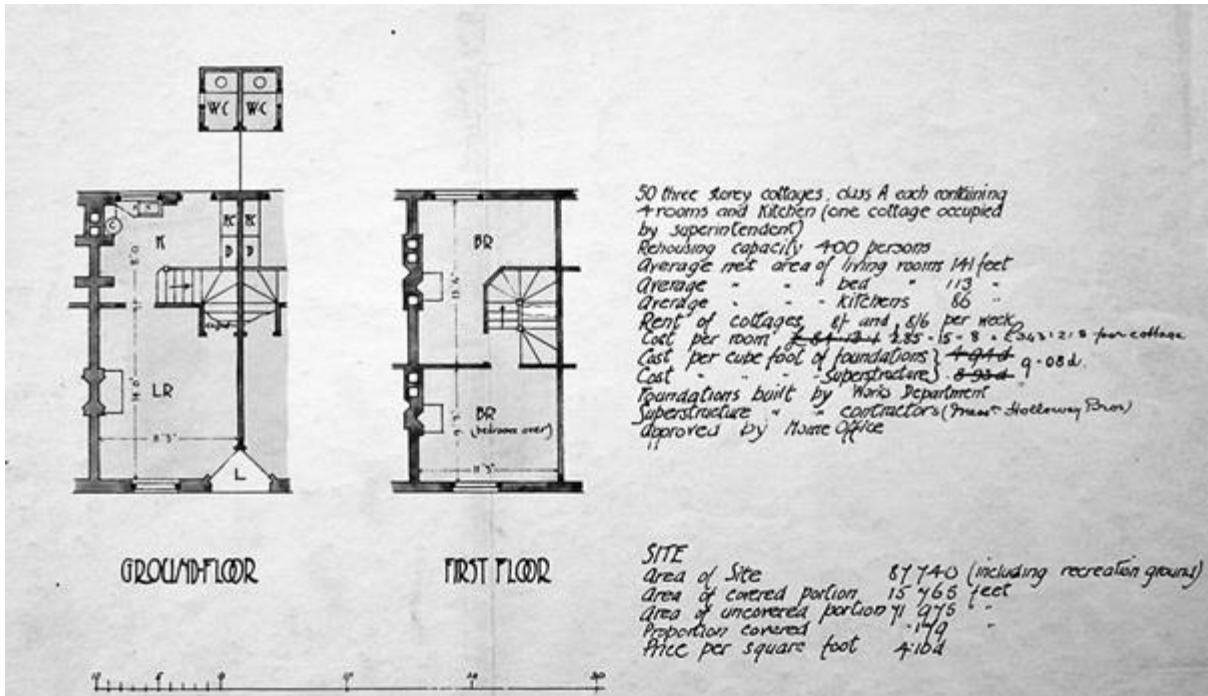


Fig. 6: Idenden Cottages floor plans (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/059)



## Footnotes

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.ideal-homes.org.uk/greenwich/greenwich-peninsula/westview-cottages-1962.htm>; viewed 10<sup>th</sup> May 2009