

Housing the Workers

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

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Part 3 - the schemes in detail

25 - Durham Buildings, Battersea

Durham Buildings, Battersea

Street Improvements, Battersea and Wandsworth, 1904

The next building in chronological sequence was not one that the Council was ever proud of. Durham Buildings were the result of a need to re-house 536 displaced by the widening of York Road in 1898, Battersea Rise in 1900, and Garratt Lane and Tooting High Street in 1901. The construction was started in October 1902 and completed in July 1904. Those displaced would have already found new accommodation by 1904 and the requirement would have been treated by the Council as something they had to do because of the legislation of the time.



Fig. 1: Durham Buildings from the 1916 OS map

The building itself seems to have been no different to many others built by the Council at the time. In fact, the photographs below from 1905 and 1969 show nothing that would suggest that it became a particularly un-loved building.



Fig. 2: Durham Buildings, 1905. (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0797)



Fig. 3: Durham Buildings, 1969. (LMA ref: SC/PHL/02/0153)

The floor plan in Fig. 4 below illustrates a typical block layout for the time although there is a definite feeling of everything being squeezed width-wise. All rooms, including WCs and sculleries, are narrow with bedrooms either 7' 6" or 7' 9" wide, and with living rooms between 10' 3" and 11' wide. All rooms on the stairway side of the building are 15' long and those on the other side, 15' 2". Nevertheless, all the rooms are larger than the minimum of 144 and 96sq. ft. for living and bedrooms respectively. A visible cost-cutting design feature is the lack of thick load-bearing walls between most of the tenements. The narrow tenements and likely noise from neighbours through those thin walls would have got this building off to a bad start.

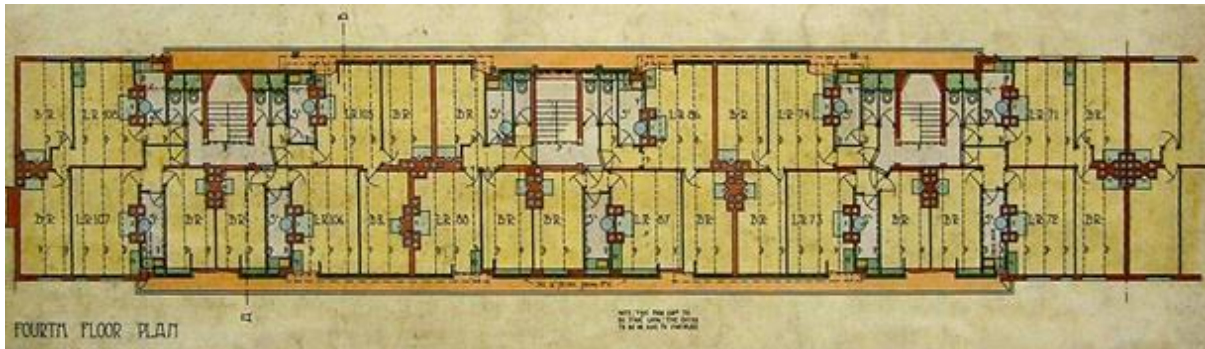


Fig. 4: Durham Buildings, fourth floor plan. (LMA ref: LCC/AR/HS/03/020)

Written on the rear of the photograph in Fig. 3 above is a telling comment, seen in Fig. 5. The scribe is unknown but whoever it was believed that the building was originally a workhouse, which it was definitely not. It was, however, a half-way house providing temporary accommodation in the 1960s. The "To be demolished" comment has a finality about it, and the building was emptied in 1970 and demolished shortly after. The site is now home to a DIY supermarket.

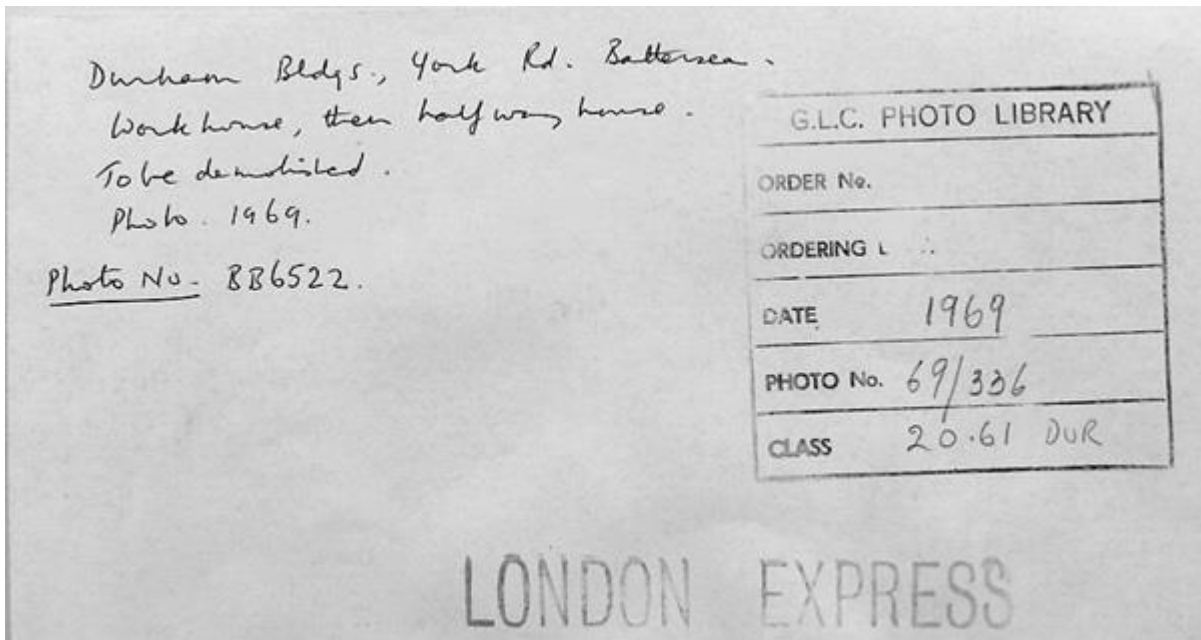


Fig. 5: Rear of 1969 photograph of Durham Buildings. Unknown scribe

The 1911 census returns show a complete contrast to the Totterdown Fields estate residents. In that estate can be seen to beginnings of the skilled worker commuter. However, Durham Buildings is in an area surrounded by potential employment with a sugar factory between it and the Thames and Price's candle factory adjacent. It would be expected that many residents would work locally and in labouring trades and the 1911 census shows this to be the case. Of the 108 tenements, only one is empty and the total occupancy is 80% against the maximum occupancy of 536 people. The tenancies are well occupied with a surprisingly high 17% overcrowded. Most overcrowding is by just one occupant; typically a young child. But three 3 roomed tenancies have 8 occupants (two with one grown-up "visitor") and one has 9 including 7 children between 2 and 16. The heads of household are almost all in labouring occupations or manual trades with just three in occupations we would now call white-collar. Many are also local-born and only 10 heads are from outside the southeast of England.

With the high occupancy it is surprising to read that the buildings made a heavy loss of 29.6% in the 1913-14 financial year. This can only be attributable to the rents available being lower than needed to cover the cost of construction and maintenance.