

NINETY YEARS OF THE SURVEY OF LONDON

by

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To make nobler and more humanly enjoyable the Life of the Great City . . .

The *Survey of London*, which found a new home in April with the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, celebrates ninety years of publishing this year. This change of ownership gives an opportunity to look at its history and to identify the motives which have kept it going into the 1980s.

The publications of the Survey of London began as campaigning documents. The series was started by a committee of enthusiasts under the architect C.R. Ashbee, concerned by the destruction of historic buildings in London, and though it has developed into an internationally respected work of urban history, to understand its development and indeed its modern motivation, it is necessary to go back and look at its campaigning roots.

The 1880s and 1890s were a period not so much of change as of assessment and of consolidation, and it is against this background that the concern for what we might today call 'the national heritage' must be seen. England came later than some other European states to official concern over the environment, and as late as 1899, Lord Salisbury was asking British ambassadors to report on the practices in their host countries. The Papacy had had some degree of control, chiefly for religious reasons, from the beginning of the century, France, a Comité Special des Arts et Monuments since 1837, individual German states like Hesse also had some protection for significant buildings. In England it was a matter for private initiative, very often indeed a matter for fiercely fought battles against vested interests. It was not till seventy years after the formation of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings that listing legislation for buildings appeared, and for the first fifty years much of the fight was carried on by individuals banded together in societies and pressure groups like the Metropolitan Gardens Association, the National Trust, the London Topographical Society, and the London Society. The Committee for Surveying the Memorials of Greater London, to give the Survey Committee its original name, belongs to this proud tradition.

The late nineteenth century was a period when the historic fabric of London was under great pressure; the increasing complexity of commercial life had led to the redevelopment of the City itself, and even of the tumbledown fringes like Cloth Fair and the back streets of Southwark. In more suburban areas, from

Chelsea to Bromley-by-Bow, the traditional village patterns were being overwhelmed by house-building.

This increasing concern about the disappearance of London landmarks and even major monuments was reflected in publications as well as in the work of the various pressure groups. In 1875 the Society for Photographing Relics of Old London had warned that magnificent coaching inns like the Oxford Arms, in Warwick Lane, or mansions like Sir Paul Pindar's House in Bishopgate were under threat, and had embarked on a campaign to record them before they were redeveloped. The splendid series of watercolours commissioned by Sir Charles Chadwyck-Healey from John Crowther in the 1880s and 1890s, and such publications as Roland Paul's *Vanishing London* of 1893, Philip Norman's *London Vanished and Vanishing* of 1905, and T.R. Way's contemporary lithographs tell the same story.

Concern was national as well as metropolitan and Sir John Lubbock (1834-1913), a talented banker and Liberal M.P., finally managed to get the Ancient Monuments Act on the statute book in 1882. He later became a prominent member of the L.C.C. and this contributed in no small way to the ultimate success of the Survey Committee.

There were a number of specific threats to certain groups of buildings. In the 1880s, there were still echoes of the Bishop of London's campaign to pull down a third of Wren's City churches, while both Crowther's and Norman's watercolours record the threats to London's diminishing number of older timber-framed buildings. The particular disaster which led the architect C.R. Ashbee (1863-1942) to form this committee was a *bêtise* on the part of the London School Board which demolished a fine Jacobean hunting lodge in Bromley-by-Bow to provide a site for a Board School. As he wrote bitterly later:

'We now have on the site of King James' Palace a well-built Board School . . . sanitary, solid, grey, grim, and commonplace. What we might have had with a little thought and no extra expense would have been an ideal Board School with a record of every period of English history from the time of Henry VIII, as a daily object lesson for the little citizens of Bromley . . .'¹

The Survey Committee met first on 25 June 1894, at Essex House, Ashbee's home and office in the East End. In addition to Ashbee himself and Ernest Godman, an assistant in his office, who became the first Secretary, ten other members were present, all but one classed as 'active' members, that is they would be expected to carry out the work of the Committee. Sir Frederick Leighton was persuaded to become President, the architect E.W. Mountford Vice-President, and Walter Besant, the London historian, promised his support.²

The subjects discussed and the conservationist approach at that first meeting have a familiar ring. In addition to the main work of compiling a 'Register' of important buildings, the committee was to compile an 'emergency list' of buildings in danger, which were to be recorded as a matter of urgency, but also to be campaigned for; later on the members showed a concern over heavy-handed or destructive restoration.

The idea of monographs on 'particularly interesting buildings which it might be difficult to do full justice to in the Register' was raised at this first meeting. The last included a number of studies ultimately published, including those on the Old Palace, Bromley-by-Bow, the Trinity Hospital, and Eastbury House, Barking.³

Considerable emphasis was placed on the voluntary nature of the work, though the Committee were well aware of the need for professional expertise. In advice to other local groups who wanted to embark on such a project, it was stressed that the 'superintendence of the work' should be in the hands of an architect, or 'a man versed in antiquarian work, who is within reach of expert architectural advice'.⁴

The amateur nature of the early work is underlined by the need to invite the Architectural Association Camera Club to visit Eastbury Hall and Parsloes Hall in Essex, in order to obtain photographs. The first meeting opened with some £59 in hand, but the members were to club together to buy a hand lithographic press, at a cost of £40 to £50, on which to print the monographs.

The members gathered the next year for a 'convivial supper at Essex House', partly 'to get to know each other better'. The second year they asked Sir Robert Hunter and Canon Rawnsley of the National Trust, Thackeray Turner of the S.P.A.B. and G.L. Gomme of the London County Council.⁵

For the parish volumes, London east of Aldgate and stretching into Essex was divided into twenty-six districts, and each was allocated to one or more recorders. One such district, allocated to Ernest Godman and W.S. Sedgwick, north of the East India Dock Road, and bounded by the Blackwall Tunnel, the river Lea, and Bow Road, became the subject of the first parish volume. The current volume of the *Survey of London*, on the parish of All Saints' Poplar, will cover an adjacent district, stretching south from the East India Dock Road and covering the Isle of Dogs. One or two notes covering Poplar High Street have survived.⁶

A printed sheet was provided for the researchers, listing the information to be gathered by a 'Watch Committee'. This included the identity of the ground landlord; the name of the leaseholder and the length of lease; local public bodies, date of the works,

different under different headings; condition of repair; historical notes; bibliography, references to books; and 'other notes for the Watch Committee (not necessarily for publication)'. These were appendages to the real matter of the register, the photographs and drawings, many of which dealt with decorative details as well as plans and sections.

The first year of the Committee's existence was largely taken up with a campaign to save the Trinity Hospital in the Mile End Road, built for pensioners of the Trinity House, which the trustees wished to sell for re-development (Fig. 1). The hospital was saved, and became the subject of the Committee's first publication (1896), a monograph written by Ashbee himself and published by the Guild of Handicraft at Essex House.

At a meeting held in November of that year, Ashbee was able to report to his Watch Committee on their successful campaigns, and on correspondence he had had with Laurence Gomme, then Statistical Officer of the County Council. The interest of the L.C.C. in the listing of buildings was due to an initiative taken by Sir John



Fig. 1

Frontispiece to *The Trinity Hospital in the Mile End Road* (1896)

Lubbock, who had been Chairman of the L.C.C. in 1890-92. Early in 1896, he suggested that the General Purposes Committee should be asked to make it its business to advise the Council on the right course of action 'in the case of the contemplated destruction of any building of historic or architectural interest'. This was followed at the end of the year by a conference of learned societies, to which the Survey Committee sent Ashbee as its representative. He reported that probably all the learned societies would appoint representatives to 'form with the L.C.C. a central Committee which would do what one might call the classifying . . . work but that our Committee would continue to do the active work in Surveying, visiting and illustrating'.⁷

No meetings of the Committee were held over the next three years, but when it reassembled in April 1900, Ashbee was able to point to the completion of the first volume of the Register, on the parish of Bromley-by-Bow, paid for by the L.C.C., and a number of successful battles. He apologized for the lack of meetings, but reported that 'matters were taken out of my hand, the Council being like the mills of God that grind exceeding slow'.⁸

The preface to the volume gave Ashbee a chance to set out the objects of the Register, best summarized in his belief that the existence of such a register 'would go far towards preventing that destruction of the historic and beautiful landmarks of the great city'. To avoid any complacency he included a list of buildings throughout London destroyed in the six years since the founding of the Committee. This catholic list included City churches, the last part of the Blackfriars monastery, seventeenth-century merchant's houses, two galleried inns, work by Adam in the Adelphi and in Stratford Place, together with detached suburban mansions, and he even mentioned the refronting of Georgian squares by insensitive ground landlords.⁹

He proposed that the Committee, having covered a lot of buildings in Essex and the East End, should turn to Chelsea. The support of the L.C.C. had meant confining work to the County of London, fixing its attention on the parishes 'nearer home—those, be it said, that are necessarily less interesting to the amateur, whose best work is done on Saturday afternoons and summer holidays'.¹⁰

The Council paid for the printing of Volume I, and the Committee's finances were further strengthened by 'honorary' members who paid a guinea a year, receiving a copy of the current publication in return. A number of M.P.s and L.C.C. members are listed, as well as the architects and conservationists who had been amongst the first adherents. L.C.C. members included W.H. Dickinson and Lord Monkswell, there were architects and artists

like Alfred Waterhouse, Walter Crane and George Frampton, many of them fellow-members with Ashbee of the Art Workers' Guild. The formidable Miss Octavia Hill, an expert on housing, was a member, as was the publisher B. T. Batsford, and William Morris, antiquaries like Philip Norman and Sir Walter Besant, and interested politicians like the M.P. Leonard Courtney.

Ashbee, indeed, shared a very broad vision of the task before his generation. He saw the preservation of historic buildings as a part of the task of making London more agreeable for her citizens, to be pursued together with improvements to housing, the extension of parks and open spaces, and the provision of:

a 'system of municipal museums, or storehouses or history and local life'. 'We plead', he concluded, 'that the object of the work we have before us, is to make nobler and more humanly enjoyable the life of the great city whose existing record we seek to mark down; to preserve of it for her children and those yet to come whatever is best in her past or fairest in her present; to induce her municipalities to take the lead and to stimulate amongst her citizens that historic and social conscience which to all great communities is their most sacred possession.'¹¹

It is unlikely that the Survey would have attracted so much support from the L.C.C. had its objectives been solely antiquarian. The Council had obtained power to acquire both open spaces for parks and historic buildings for preservation out of the rates, but there was a powerful lobby which did not see the preservation of historic buildings as a proper use for Council money. Ashbee recalled how one member, who 'belonged to the tribe of the Emporia or Universal Providers' had called the volumes a waste of ratepayers' money.¹²

Changes took place in the attitude and personnel of the active Committee, due to Ashbee's move from the East End to Chipping Camden, and to changes brought about by cooperation with the Council and its more formal procedures. There was a gradual shift from amateur to professional status, from enthusiast to urban historian. Lord Leighton was succeeded as President in 1909 by Lord Curzon, one of the greatest fighters for historic buildings of his period, both in England and abroad. After his death in 1925, he was followed by Lord Crawford and Balcarres, then in 1944, by Lord (Montagu) Norman, the first modern Governor of the Bank of England, with strong links with the Survey Committee through his uncle Philip.

Though Ashbee is the commanding figure whose vision and drive started the *Survey of London* on its way, it is unlikely that he alone would have kept it going. Ashbee's biographer, Alan Crawford, sees Ernest Godman, the first Secretary, as an important, if not essential, early colleague, but he died of consumption in 1906.

With Ashbee's move and Godman's death, the architect Percy Lovell (1875-1950) became Secretary, and Philip Norman Editor. Lovell was Secretary of the Committee until his removal to Leicester in 1939, with the exception of the war years, when W.H. Godfrey deputized. He was also Secretary of the London Society, a conservationist body of considerable 'clout' until 1939. He wrote several Survey publications, and it is perhaps significant that after his death the Survey Committee was finally wound up.

Philip Norman (1842-1931), was the son of a Governor of the Bank of England. Originally intended for the sherry trade, he returned to England to the Slade School, and thereafter dedicated his life to the study of old buildings, particularly in London. As a watercolourist and topographer he recorded much of the rapidly changing London of the 1890s. His *London Vanished and Vanishing* appeared in 1905, with seventy-five of his own watercolours, sixty of them of demolished buildings. He was Chairman and Editor of the Survey Committee from 1907 until his death, contributing the text to two monographs, a member of the Society of Antiquaries, of the London Topographical Society, of S.P.A.B., and of the Art Workers' Guild. An obituarist remembered him as a man with 'a gracious figure and a very gracious mind, his manner had a touch of aristocratic aloofness, which . . . rather enhanced the courtesy and kindness which lay behind.'¹³

The third in this triumvirate was the youngest, Walter Hinde Godfrey (1881-1961), another conservationist for whom work for the Survey was only part of a wider campaign. He, too, was an architect, trained in George Devey's former office, much of whose work was done on older buildings. He worked at Sudeley and Herstmonceux Castles, at the Temple Church and was architect to Beverley Minster, and Chelsea Old Church, which he rebuilt after the Second World War. His list of publications is impressive, and reveals the breadth of his interests. He started with a life of Devey, and continued largely on London subjects, often on *Survey of London* publications, putting his knowledge of individual buildings to good use as in his *History of Architecture in London* (1911). He founded the National Buildings Record in 1941, one of the greatest initiatives to have come out of the war, now also part of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, becoming its first Director from 1941 until 1958.

In many ways, he was the archetypal literary architect, also trained in the understanding and repair of old buildings, who had such an influence on the development of the Survey. In 1944, he published *Our Building Inheritance*, on the post-war threats to historic buildings. His intention was:

'to prove that good building, apart from its claim on our regard as a work of art, is never incapable of adaptation to the right sphere of usefulness in perpetuity, and that it is sheer waste to pull down a fine structure on the pretext that a change of purpose has rendered it obsolete'.¹⁴

After the publication of the first volume, the Watch Committee found it difficult to tackle the sheer amount of research required by the register, and Volume II on the parish of Chelsea did not follow for nine years. A number of monographs did, however, appear. That on the Trinity Hospital was followed in 1900 by one on the church of St. Mary, Stratford, restored after a threat of demolition. The following year, the volume on the demolished palace of Bromley-by-Bow, was published by Ashbee's Essex Press, the last to be so produced before the departure of the Guild of Handicraft to Chipping Campden. The fourth monograph was an unavailing plea for the Great House, Leyton, written by Edwin Gunn. Ashbee contributed 'An introductory note on the public duty of preserving the Great House' suggesting:

'that there is nothing left in Leyton that comes up to the Great House for beauty. I know that it is a worthy and fitting repository of local history, that it still has some little scrap of its grand old gardens, that it is admirably placed opposite the County Cricket Ground for a house of public recreation, and that to save it from destruction and preserve it for public purposes would be a genuinely democratic thing to do . . .'¹⁵

Brooke House, Hackney, was the subject of the next monograph, and ironically survived to be the subject of a more detailed *Survey of London* volume (No. XXVIII: Hackney Part I), published in 1960. These two volumes provide a vivid illustration of the way in which the attitudes to the archaeology of buildings has altered in the intervening fifty years.

The volume on St. Dunstan's Stepney celebrated the successful restoration of the church after a disastrous fire in 1902. A comminatory introduction was again contributed by Ashbee, this time on the need to keep records carefully, preferably in a fire-proof safe, and to preserve churchyard monuments for their contribution to local genealogy. It was written by the Hon. Walter Pepys and Ernest Godman. The 'tipped-in' frontispiece, an etching by Godman's wife, Jessie Harrison, underlines the almost domestic nature of these early works, written researched and drawn by a band of friends. 'I have explored my district thoroughly I think', wrote one member of the Watch Committee to Ashbee, 'pressing Parson, Postman and Policeman into service'.¹⁶ Other monographs followed—Sandford Manor, Fulham, a threatened house in the occupation of the Gas, Light and Coke Company, 'interesting with valuable connections'—whose future is still causing concern in 1986; East Acton Manor House, prepared in 1907, but

not published till 1920; and one on Crosby Hall, removed from Bishopsgate, but re-erected on Chelsea Embankment. Philip Norman and W.D. Caröe, (1857-1938), architect to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, wrote the monograph *Crosby Place*, and the work of reconstruction was carried out by W.H. Godfrey.

The Committee's scope in later years was restricted by a condition written into an agreement with the L.C.C., that monographs should not appear on individual buildings until the parish register for the whole area had been published. This explains the inclusion in the monograph series of buildings like Swakeleys, Ickenham, outside the County of London. The Queen's House, Greenwich, was written up by George Chettle, the Director of the National Maritime Museum, after a radical restoration in the 1930s. Godfrey himself prepared a volume on St. Bride's Fleet Street in 1944, to celebrate fifty years of the Survey Committee. It also served perhaps to remind the authorities, as Godfrey suggested in his introduction, that it had 'needed the more dramatic onslaught of an airborne enemy to make people conscious of what they were losing'.¹⁷ It also emphasized the value of recording—with the church burnt out and its records safely in storage for the duration, Godfrey worked from a narrative prepared by Walter Bell, and transcripts made for Bell. Measured drawings and photographs made before the Blitz illustrated the volume.

The series of monographs is impressive and indeed useful, since they so often highlight a particular problem of conservation. Recently the monograph series was re-started under the G.L.C. and work on two new monographs authorized, one on the County Hall itself, and the other on the Mansion House, to be a joint production with the City.

However impressive and indeed useful the monographs may be, it has always been recognized that the really important work of the Survey lies in the parish volumes. In the difficult years between the publication of the first and second volumes, Godfrey, as a member of the Committee, turned to the leading periodical of the day, the *Architectural Review*, for help, and in 1908 published a series of articles on the Survey Committee. These reveal the very ambitious work of the 'Survey work proper—that is the systematic record of all old work in given parishes'. In addition to that on Chelsea (Fig. 2), volumes were in preparation on St. Helen Bishopsgate, and Hampstead and Highgate. Optimistically, he referred also to photographs of Smith's Square, Westminster, as needing only the addition of drawings to be ready for publication. He also appealed for members, who would receive the publications in return for their subscriptions. The Survey Committee had members responsible for the various districts, and the current

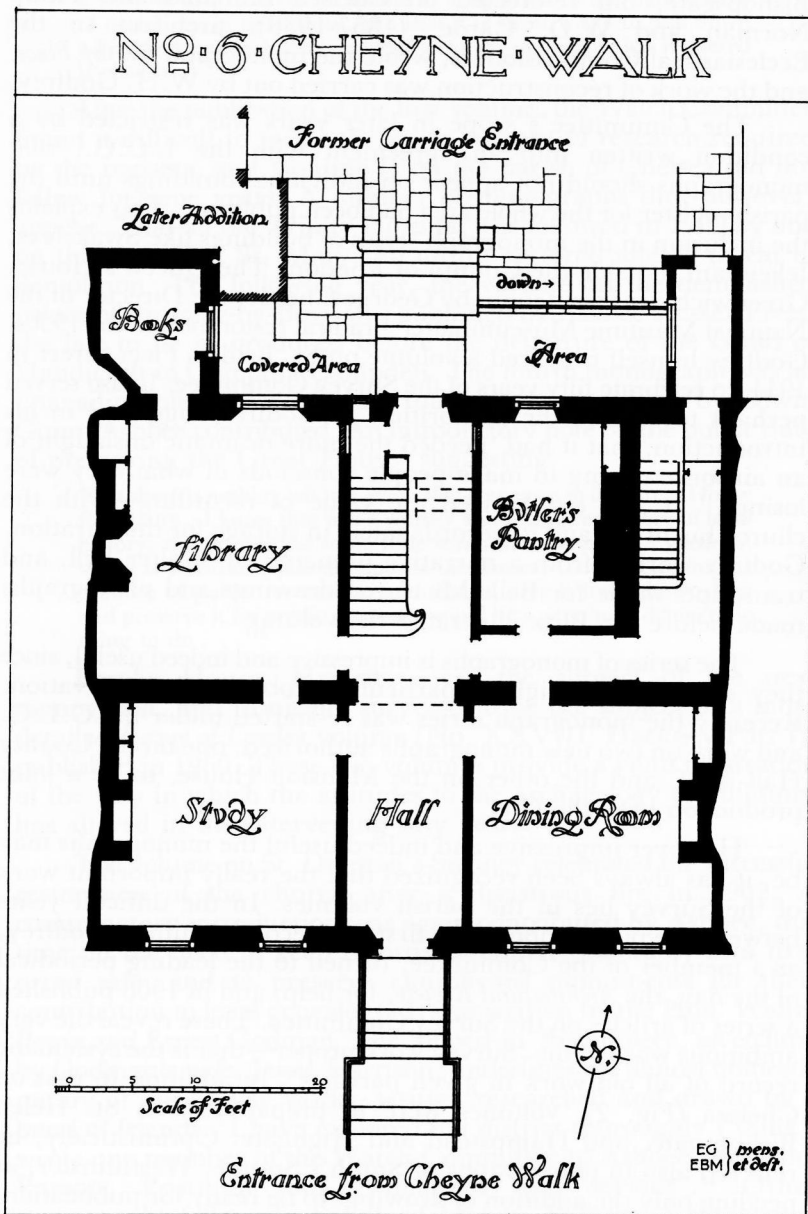


Fig. 2

Plan of No. 6 Cheyne Walk, from *Survey of London* Volume II (1909), Plate 47

proposal, was to encourage work on a local basis. The districts included for the City, St. Helen's Bishopsgate; for the L.C.C. area—Shoreditch and Bethnal Green, Hackney, Stoke Newington and Tottenham, Clerkenwell and Islington, Hampstead and Highgate, Camberwell, Chelsea, Westminster, Greenwich, Blackheath and Lewisham, while in 'Greater London' there were two representatives—for Cricklewood and Croydon. Godfrey dealt with other aspects in other articles—with the cataloguing of lead cisterns, only too dangerously fashionable, and a scheme for the provision of works and artefacts to turn Lloyd's Park, Walthamstow, into a suitable memorial to William Morris.¹⁸

Though the L.C.C. had printed the first volume in 1900, and though Ashbee's minutes indicate a close relationship with Laurence Gomme, no formal link with the Council was set up until 1910, and communication depended largely on that between Gomme and the Survey Committee.

Laurence Gomme (1858-1916), too, in the words of *The Times*, was 'a great Londoner', who did more than most to make 'London known to its people'.¹⁹ He went to the L.C.C. from the Metropolitan Board of Works, and became Clerk in 1900. He retired owing to ill-health, and on his retirement the Council appointed a sub-committee to report on how his load of parliamentary, administrative, museums and asylums work could best be spread among several officers.²⁰ Characteristically, in his letter of resignation he referred to the 'more than merely official interest in the important duties which have fallen to me to fulfil under the Council' and to his ambition that 'the Council's organization should become the most perfect example of municipal administration in the kingdom'.²¹ Even after his resignation he was approached to become the Council's adviser on antiquarian matters. With his influence and interest Gomme was uniquely placed to forge links between the L.C.C. and the voluntary Survey Committee and it seems unlikely that anyone else could have achieved this. In his diary for 1915, Ashbee gives a vivid picture of Gomme, to whom he had gone with a scheme to employ architects out of work because of the war on the Survey.

'Gomme of course saw the point, but gave me little hope. "I can get it through my Committee", he said, "but when it comes before the Council they'll wreck it. You see they don't understand what are the good and sound things to aim at: the things that make for a great civic life".'²²

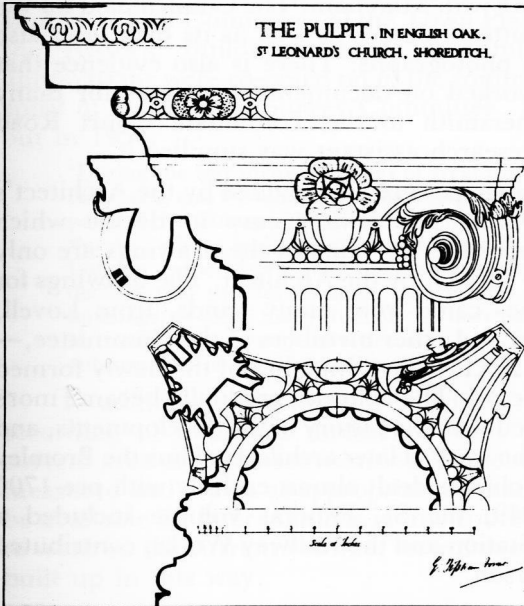
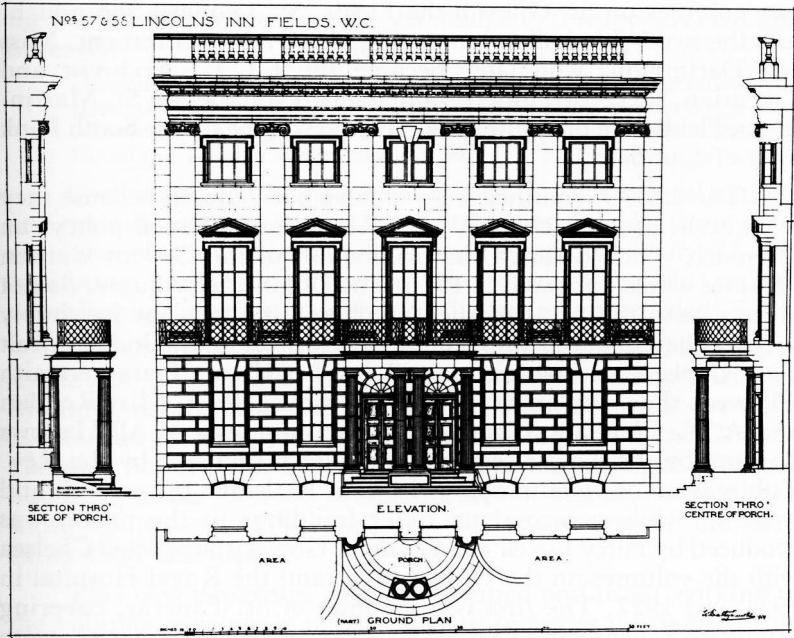
The Council Architect, W.E. Riley, was also interested in the project, and drew up a programme for the Historical Records Committee in 1903, in order to 'continue the Survey of London' begun by the Survey Committee. He suggested some fifty-eight districts, not all of which he thought would yield information for

a whole volume, suggesting that while the committee was considering the matter that he should allocate two assistants 'both of whom have had special training for this work to make necessary surveys when it is notified that buildings are to be demolished'.²³ Cooperation between Council and Survey Committee was not always wholehearted during the period, for when the latter wrote to ask for advance warning when the L.C.C. 'were about to destroy an interesting old building' this curious request was refused.

However, in February 1909, Gomme invited Lovell to attend a meeting with himself and the Architect to discuss the question of publication. Negotiations dragged on into the autumn past the publication date of the Chelsea volume, but in the end the agreement was signed in July 1910. The Council recited its powers 'in connection with the purchase preserving maintenance and management of buildings and places of historical or architectural interest and works of art' and referred to work being done simultaneously on the 'compiling of a register', and the need to avoid duplication. The terms imposed by the Council were far from indulgent—all the original material, with the exception of that belonging to private owners—was to be deposited with the Council for reference, and the Council would have a majority on the Publishing Committee responsible for production. The Council would pay for publication, marketing the volume except for a maximum of 250 volumes reserved for subscribers.²⁴ Relations were improved by some overlap on the Committee and the Council in the person of Ernest Meinertzhagen, an L.C.C. member resident in Chelsea, who became Honorary Treasurer of the Survey Committee.

Soon afterwards, the L.C.C. embarked on its own first volume, putting Council officers to work on the 'interesting old buildings' it was about to destroy in Lincoln's Inn Fields and the maze of old streets behind. In fact, the making of Kingsway and Aldwych, a name supplied by Gomme himself, was less disastrous to the historic fabric of London than it might have been, not only because of pressure from the R.I.B.A. and other bodies, but also because of the interest of the L.C.C. itself, whose researches led to the saving of several houses (Fig. 3). The first L.C.C. volume appeared in 1912, under the joint names of the Clerk and the Architect to the Council.

Thereafter volumes appeared alternately from the L.C.C. and the Committee. The main work on the St. Giles's volumes was done by W.W. Braines of the Clerk's Department, 'whose skill and genius for research' were to have such an influence on future volumes of the Survey.²⁵ He was responsible for all the volumes produced by the Council until his retirement in 1935, that is the



Above: Fig. 3
Nos 57 and 58,
Lincoln's Inn Fields,
Survey of London,
Volume III (1912),
Plate 74

Left: Fig. 4
Drawing of the
Pulpit, St. Leonard's
Church, Shoreditch,
Survey of London,
Volume VIII (1922),
Plate 74

two volumes on St. Giles-in-the-Fields, St. Leonard Shoreditch, and the two Whitehall volumes (Fig. 4). On his retirement, Miss Ida Darlington, who later became the L.C.C. Archivist and Librarian, succeeded him, producing two volumes on St. Martin-in-the-Fields, two on Southwark, and the volume on the South Bank area of Lambeth.

The L.C.C. volumes seem to have been chosen because they were areas of great change, often because of Council policy, an approach which dictated the production of the Covent Garden volumes which appeared in 1970. The Committee volumes do not always seem to have had such a coherent policy, nor inevitably such a coherent authorship. In the first two volumes, Godfrey dealt with Chelsea, a volume started by Lovell on Hammersmith followed, then one on St. Helen's Bishopsgate by Miss Reddan and A.W. Clapham. That on the parish church of All Hallows Barking-by-the-Tower seems to have been financed by the Rev. Tubby Clayton, who employed Lilian Redstone to research and write it, while a second on other buildings in the parish was produced by Percy Lovell and Godfrey. Godfrey completed Chelsea with the volumes on the Old Church, and the Royal Hospital in 1921 and 1927. The first two volumes of St. Pancras, covering Highgate Village, and Old St. Pancras and Kentish Town, were prepared by Lovell working with W. McB. Marcham, and the parish was completed after Lovell's retirement to Leicester, by Godfrey himself working with Marcham. The Council paid for the printing of the Committee volumes as well as its own, and also provided many of the photographs. There is also evidence that Council researchers worked on documentary sources for many volumes from Hammersmith to the Tottenham Court Road volume, for which a research assistant was supplied.²⁶

The Council's drawings were all provided by the Architect's Department, though it is not always easy to decide which draughtsman was responsible, as many of the drawings are only signed officially for the L.C.C. by the Architect. The drawings for the Committee volumes came from many hands, from Lovell, Godfrey, Edwin Gunn, and other members of the Committee,— in the case of Volume XXI, from a member of the newly formed National Buildings Record. The volumes gradually became more detailed, more concerned with the history of the developments, and more ready to include the work of later architects. Thus the Bromley by Bow and Chelsea volumes dealt almost entirely with pre-1700 buildings, but by 1949, the St. Pancras volume included a description of Euston Station and the Railway Works, contributed by (Sir) John Summerson.

After the publication of the last volume on St. Pancras in 1952,

the Survey Committee found itself unable to continue. As Godfrey observed:

'Recruits for the heavy unpaid work which an earlier generation undertook with enthusiasm are no longer forthcoming, but our efforts will not have been in vain, if . . . the great governing body of the County of London continues the work . . .'

Godfrey could also take comfort that by 1954 several national and regional institutions had been established, usually through the same sort of voluntary work which had brought the *Survey of London* into being, 'all helping to remove the reproach that this country was allowing its cultural riches to disappear unrecorded'.²⁷

Certain functions of the *Survey* as originally planned had indeed already been taken over by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, the National Monuments Record, and above all by the statutory listing system established by the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. This was to produce the catalogue of historic buildings in the London area, and also of course, to give them statutory protection beyond the wildest dreams of the early Edwardian enthusiasts.

This new departure gave the Council and those working on the volumes a valuable opportunity to re-assess the *Survey's* role. The Joint Publishing Committee was dissolved, and the Council's interest in the matter was transferred from the Establishment Committee to the recently formed Architectural and Historical Buildings Sub-Committee of the Town Planning Committee, later the Historic Buildings Panel. A number of historians and antiquarians were co-opted on to the committee, thus retaining the spirit of the original Survey Committee. The new policy was set out in 1956:

'During the war many buildings of great interest were damaged or destroyed, and the rebuilding schemes which are proceeding in many parts of the Country threaten many more. The completion of the Survey, whose main purpose is to record the ancient fabric of London, is therefore a matter of great urgency . . . the Council had decided that the Survey must take serious note of 19th century buildings, to which many students . . . have paid increasing attention in recent years; and this decision had meant a considerable enlargement of the scope of the Survey'.²⁸

In addition, the Council reaffirmed the need for emergency recording of buildings threatened with demolition outside the current area of the *Survey* volumes. These would be photographed, measured and drawn as appropriate so that this information would be available for later volumes in due course. In addition therefore to work on the current volume, an archive of material is regularly built up in this way.

The Council took over the series in 1954 and a small full-time

staff, under Dr Francis Sheppard as general editor, was appointed. Two departments of the Council contributed to the work, a system not always without friction. For some time indeed the distinction was maintained between the history of the buildings and the site contributed by writers and researchers working in the Clerk's department, and the architectural description which was written by a member of the Architect's Department who was also responsible for overseeing the production of measured drawings and photographs. With the gradual emergence of a tradition of urban and architectural history, this distinction has disappeared as far as the text of the volume is concerned. The *Survey of London* has always been fortunate in its architectural contributors, who have included since 1954, Walter Ison, James Stevens Curl, and Andrew Saint, all authors of distinction in their own right. The Athlone Press, then the official publishing house of the University of London, took on the production of the volumes, which assumed the familiar double-column layout for the text, interspersed with drawings in the text. Under Dr. Sheppard's editorship, from 1954-1982, the *Survey* gained a very high reputation amongst scholars worldwide for its meticulous accuracy and its interpretation of the urban fabric. Of the score of volumes produced under his editorship, many broke new ground in the interpretation of urban and architectural history.

The four volumes on St. James's Piccadilly published in the 1960s established the *Survey's* reputation as a work of urban history in the mode pioneered by Summerson's *Georgian London* and J.H. Dyos's work on Camberwell, building up a picture of the relations between the ground landlords, the developers and the individual builders. The detailed study of this rich part of the West End rolled back layer after layer of building to show the sixteenth-century landholdings and the seventeenth-century developments beneath the nineteenth-century clubs and palaces. In 1973 with the publication of Volume XXXVII on Northern Kensington, the *Survey* team demonstrated that an area developed in the Victorian period could be as fascinating as any medieval quarter. The subsequent volume on the Museums area provided a masterly analysis of the workings of the Royal Commission for the 1851 Exhibition, the ground landlord for the area. It also gave a very detailed account of the construction of the various public buildings in the area. The South Kensington Museum was particularly concerned with up-to date building methods, and this provided records of major monuments like the Albert Memorial or the Royal Albert Hall under construction (Fig. 5).

The volumes on Mayfair and Southern Kensington increased knowledge of the methods used by nineteenth-century developers, and also gave a lot more information about the nature of the people

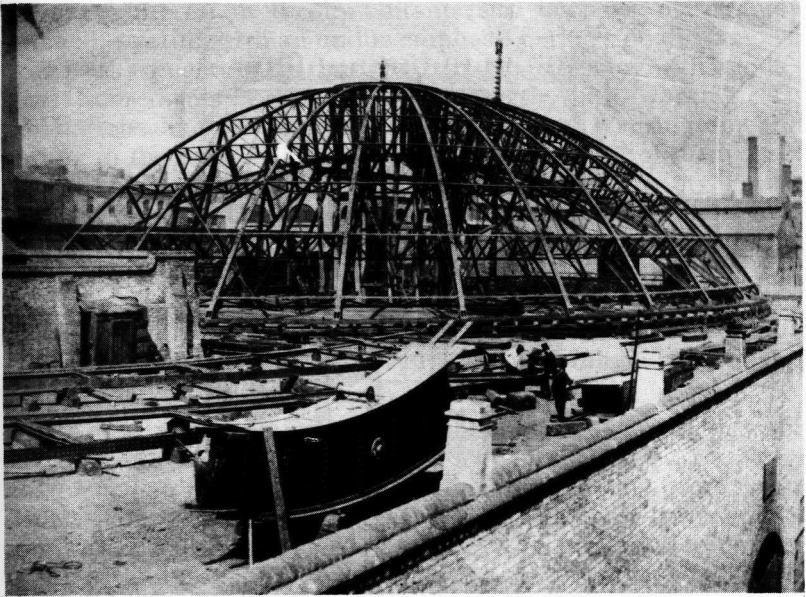


Fig. 5

Photograph of Royal Albert Hall under construction, testing the ironwork, *Survey of London*, Volume XXVIII (1975), Plate 51c

involved in development (Fig. 6). We have a much clearer idea of the characters of the solicitors, the speculative builders and the tradesmen involved in the building of the Cromwell Road than we have for, for instance, the Kingsland Road in Shoreditch, or even the streets in Chelsea covered in the early years of the century.

With the compulsion to record only for 'listing' purposes removed the *Survey of London* team has been able to explore the history of the buildings in greater detail, and to build up a picture of the overall development of the area, and some of the economic and human pressures which motivated the developers. It now brings the history of buildings up to the present day, for two reasons,—one is that without study of the complete development of a building it is often easy to miss a drastic refurbishment, and misdate 'earlier' work. The second is the feeling that a series which does not as yet undertake revision should mention all important works of architecture in the area—the selective early volumes on Chelsea are so irritating that it seems better to err on the side of generosity towards modern architects than the reverse.

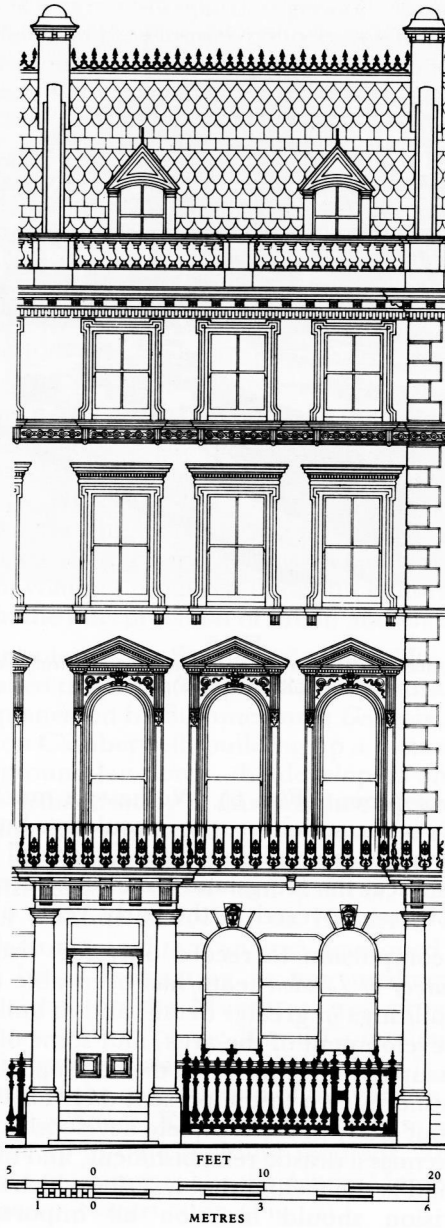


Fig. 6
 Façade of a house in Prince of Wales Terrace, Kensington. *Survey of London*,
 Volume XLII (1986), Fig. 40

The interest in the inhabitants also becomes increasingly detailed, starting with an undue emphasis perhaps on the famous, or at least armigerous, in the early years, then dealing with middle-class homeowners, then at some length with working-class populations like the laundresses of Northern Kensington, and ending in the most recent volume with an account of the lives of the workhouse inmates. The current volume on All Saints' Poplar presents some interesting problems, for though the dockers' lives at the end of the nineteenth century were well documented by Charles Booth and his researchers, much of that life has vanished with the docks themselves—how much is now relevant? Even more—how much does the *Survey of London* now concern itself with the lives of the less distinctive 'yuppies' who inhabit so many of the new buildings going up on the Isle of Dogs?

As the coverage of the volumes has become broader in scope and the recording of buildings far more comprehensive, the *Survey* has turned to new sources of information, and now draws very widely indeed on all sorts of records. These include conventional sources like census returns, local authority ratebooks and committee minutes, and also bank ledgers and the contents of solicitors' tin boxes, and the records of court proceedings, often those for bankruptcy. The details of the financing and development of housing are revealed through the close scrutiny of estate records, building agreements and leases and such source documents as the Middlesex Deeds Registry. The architectural records of the R.I.B.A. are of course, invaluable where they exist, but so are the humbler drawings stored in the District Surveyors' offices, and those deposited with the various authorities concerned with drainage and building regulations like the Commissions of Sewers and the Metropolitan Board of Works.

Often individual families have been involved in the same area for over a hundred years, and oral history can also supplement family heirlooms and photographs. Collections of topographical drawings and prints throw a great deal of light on the development of an area, as do collections of photographs, both in local history libraries and from private collections.

Formerly, researchers working on the *Survey of London*, being Council officers, have had access to the records of various authorities gathered under the wing of the L.C.C. One of the current worries for *Survey of London* staff is how much Abolition, and the splitting off of former G.L.C. bodies will limit their access to local government records.

The drawings serve several different purposes in the *Survey's* work. First of all, they provide very attractive and easily understood illustrations of the volumes (Fig. 7). More significant, however,



Fig. 7
 Section through House, No. 1 Greek Street, Soho, 1746.
Survey of London, Vol XXXIII (1966) Fig. 19

is the way in which the research done by the draughtsmen measuring the buildings can be used by the historian working on the building to explain its original construction, any later alterations, and perhaps certain technical requirements of the original occupiers. Where a building is to be restored to its original condition, or—mercifully more rarely—totally rebuilt after complete destruction, as in the case of Chelsea Old Church, then the drawings provide invaluable information for the architect in charge of the work. The methods used have changed over the century or so of the Survey's existence, and today computer-aided drafting is used to provide drawings for the volumes. This is particularly valuable where a classical building or one with considerable element of repetition is involved, as once a complicated detail is stored in the computer memory it can be repeated at will. Freehand drawing is still however, used where appropriate. The photographs taken for the *Survey of London* through the years are an important record of the district covered. Those for earlier volumes are in the former G.L.C. Archive, henceforth they will be part of the National Monuments Record.

One of the interesting aspects of the *Survey of London* is the broad range of people and professions for whom the volumes are of interest. Obviously, these include conservationists and enthusiastic London historians, the descendants of Ashbee and his Committee, local authority architects and town planners, but private architects, developers and estate agents are amongst the more avid purchasers. The knowledge about historic buildings in Kensington for instance, is of great practical interest to many during a period of rising house prices. There are also the members of local amenity societies and local pressure groups for whom the *Survey of London* provides indispensable ammunition in a campaign. Their interest is indicated by the number of groups who ask researchers from the *Survey* to come and speak.

The year 1986 brought a number of changes to the *Survey of London*, of which the most important was the transfer from the Greater London Council to the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, a body with which the earlier Survey Committee had close links.

The rest stem from the decision to follow the Kensington volumes with a study of the parish of All Saints, Poplar, part of Docklands, now being re-developed (Cover Photo and Fig. 8). This is an area which presents the urban historian with a real challenge. The *Survey* has arrived on a scene both of demolition and of construction—the docks are being replaced by Canary Wharf and smaller commercial developments, and the traditional riverside wharves by blocks of housing. These changes are not only

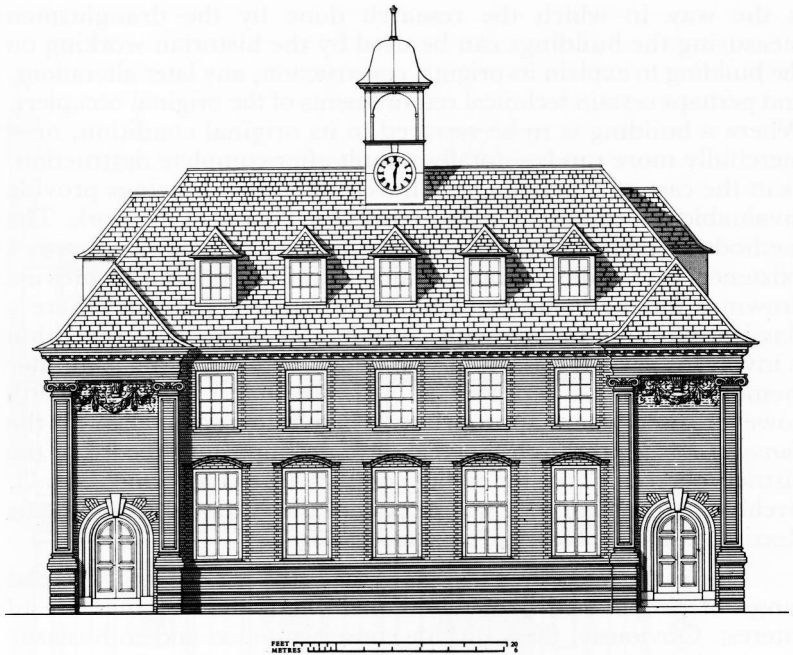


Fig. 8
Greig House, Garford Street, Poplar, originally the mission to Scandinavian seamen,
designed by
Niven and Wigglesworth in 1902

profound—they are contentious politically, and their effect, like that of the making of Regent Street or of the post-war redevelopments, is not easy to assess immediately. The *Survey* is going to have a record the changes, to describe the architecture, always more difficult when dealing with living architects, and to leave the value judgements to the reader.

It will, however, provide information as useful to modern town planners as to architectural historians, and a successful response to the challenge provided by this area will be another contribution by the *Survey* to the history of London's fabric. It will not be the last innovative volume—the next area is likely to be Clerkenwell, an area close to the City with a fabric dating back to the seventeenth century, and in parts to the Middle Ages: then, perhaps, a revision of Chelsea, covered by Ashbee himself with his colleagues in the early years of the century, but full of Edwardian and even twentieth-century homes, ignored in the original volumes.

With the slight increase in staff numbers provided by the Royal Commission, the *Survey* may manage to publish more frequently, but it is unlikely to run out of material. Ashbee thought it might be possible to provide a 'register' within ten years for the whole of London; the centenary of the *Survey of London* is unlikely to see even half the former L.C.C. area covered. Nonetheless the *Survey's* approach to London buildings has done a great deal to alter public attitudes to the urban fabric even in areas yet untouched, in the same way as the campaigning initiative taken by Ashbee and his Watch Committee encouraged the public to fight to preserve buildings all over London.

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