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5 'Where Shall She Live?': Housing the New Working Woman in Late Victorian and Edwardian London

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> 'The streets were full of young women just going to business. In the free life of to-day, when so many women earn their own living, often away from their homes, how slight an accident may shipwreck a life! We make charts of our coasts, we know each shoal, we bell-buoy our sand-banks, we build warning lighthouses, and we make safe harbours. But probably the lives lost on our coasts are not a tithe of the lives – the souls – lost on our streets'. [1]
>
> 'Are the streets of our great cities as safe as our shores?' [2]

Turning lighthouses into hostels – this maritime metaphor was the rallying cry of the tireless social reformer and campaigner for working women's housing, Mary Higgs. Initially concerned with destitute women, the Oldham-based Higgs began her social investigations in northern cities, staying undercover in a number of common lodging houses, workhouse tramp wards and municipal lodgings. In 1910 she published her landmark work, *Where Shall She Live? The Homelessness of the Woman Worker* for the National Association for Women's Lodging-Homes (NAWLH). This polemic marked a shift: it discussed all housing options for women, but concentrated on that which Higgs and many others thought was most needed: accommodation for the growing number of women in the lower-earning professions and clerical jobs. Higgs and the NAWLH argued that sound and numerous hostels ('lighthouses'), were needed to save the new working woman from lodging houses of dubious repute amidst the tumultuous waves of urban life.

WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

The advancement of women as workers outside the home was a major social and economic development of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. About one quarter of Edwardian women were engaged in work – which was not much higher than the statistic from half a century before – but the *kinds* of work they were doing were changing considerably (**Fig. 1**).

Between 1861 and 1911, the number of women clerical workers increased dramatically from 279 to 124,000.[3] In 1901 still only 1.6 per cent of women were employed in office work but by 1921 this had risen to 15.1 per cent – a sevenfold increase in twenty years.[4] As they came to work as clerks, nurses, shop assistants and typists, they were drawn to urban centres and away from traditional home arrangements.

Such later-nineteenth-century inventions as the telephone and the typewriter resulted in new commercial and communication buildings, which were staffed by a new influx of working women. By 1902, when the first large telephone exchange opened in London, 31 per cent of women were engaged in industrial and domestic employment, nearly four per cent employed as stenographers, typists, secretaries, book-keepers and cashiers.[5] This burgeoning community of working women had a considerable presence in Edwardian London, which created a major spatial and moral challenge. The big question for the single working woman was: where shall she live?

INSTITUTIONS EMERGE TO HOUSE WORKING WOMEN AND GIRLS

The matter was clearly of great concern and many groups had their own solutions and campaigns. The work of assisting women and girls in urban areas was taken up by a number of effective Christian organisations founded in the nineteenth century. These included the Church Army, the Salvation Army, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the Girls' Friendly Society (GFS), all initially focussed on working-class women. The earliest project for poorer women was an imaginative conversion of a London town house to accommodate 57 women by the Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes (SICLC). Bedrooms and parlours were turned into corridors with cubicles, all within the existing structure of the house. A generation later, this work was promoted by the Homes for Working

Fig. 1 A typical scene of Edwardian women in clerical work in the Enquiry Department at the International Correspondence School, London 1909. [English Heritage/NMR].

Girls (HWG) in London, established in 1878 by John Shrimpton. The HWG's Smithfield branch adopted an eighteenth-century house and converted it around 1880 to house 35 women in cubicle lodgings much in the way that the SICLC house had done.

The Soho Club, founded by Maude Stanley in 1884 on Greek Street, housed 30 working women, most of whom were described as 'comfortable', and therefore it was not a rescue home except for in a few cases. However, the campaigning literature played to late-Victorian sensibilities and reported that 'a great many girls were known to have been preserved from danger whilst in London by living in the home, a great many have had excellent places found for them, either in business or in service ... But there must be, we grieve to say, the other side of the picture. Some have chosen and followed pleasure along, and have yielded to temptation, and we know not where they are.'[6]

All of these housing options were often quite small, and the membership requirements, religious undertones and class distinctions meant they were not considered suitable for all. Moreover, there were simply not enough. An 1883 pamphlet of the Homes for Working Girls estimated that 800,000 women in England supported themselves through paid work, and that about 320,000 of these were in London. This vast number of women needed reasonable options in which to live.

LATE-NINETEENTH-CENTURY MIDDLE CLASS LADIES' DWELLINGS

A model was established by residential schemes for middle class women of the 1880s and 1890s when a flurry of essays highlighted the emerging need. Women campaigned in their journals for a 'Castle in the Air', described in *Work and Leisure* (1888) as 'a happy and safe dwelling for some hundred of more ladies who are proud to know and style themselves 'Working Bees' in this great busy hive of London'.[7] This ideal dwelling house was to have a variety of room options (from cubicles to apartments), a restaurant, common rooms and various services, because the need for 'wholesome and cheap lodging is so greatly felt by unprotected women of all ranks'.[8] These developments were encouraged by new limited dividend companies whose businesslike approach to developing lodgings attracted women investors and residents alike. Although these schemes had a sound social principle, any perception of charity would have counteracted the spirit of independence that women associated with their new building type. It was this savvy financial rigour that appealed to late Victorian and Edwardian women who took pride in gaining their financial independence.

An early project was Sloane Gardens House, built for the Ladies' Associated Dwellings Company and opened in 1888 at 52 Lower Sloane Street (**Fig. 2**).

Fig. 2 Sloane Gardens House opened in 1888 to house 150 single women in an elegant and richly-ornamented building that aligned it architecturally with wealthy mansion blocks in the area. [Geoff Brandwood].

It accommodated about 150 women mostly in single bed-sitting rooms (an arrangement where the bedroom could be screened off from a living room in essentially one space) but also in cubicles on the upper floors. The shops along the ground floor sold goods from 'millinery to farm or garden produce'. Some of the goods were made by the women residents, and the serviced building included a library, music room and communal dining room. Contemporary comment recorded that 'while retaining their entire independence, the ladies may live with greater comfort and economy than in lodging houses of the ordinary type'.[9] Its claims to 'economy' were overrated, however, as the building was criticised in *Work and Leisure* the year after opening as being 'a handsome, airy and well-appointed establishment ...[but] it does not afford what was at first proposed – board and lodging within the means of working gentlewomen with no fixed income.'[10]

A similar project was opened the following year, 1889, in Bloomsbury: the Chenies Street Chambers built for the Ladies' Residential Chambers Company Ltd. It was designed by J.M. Brydon, an architect who favoured the Queen Anne style for his buildings for women, such as the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital on the Euston Road. This was a satisfactory style for these large-scale residential buildings and the gables, sash windows and red brick walls and dormers (sadly the roofline was much altered after wartime bombing), all suggested a comforting domestic environment. These chambers

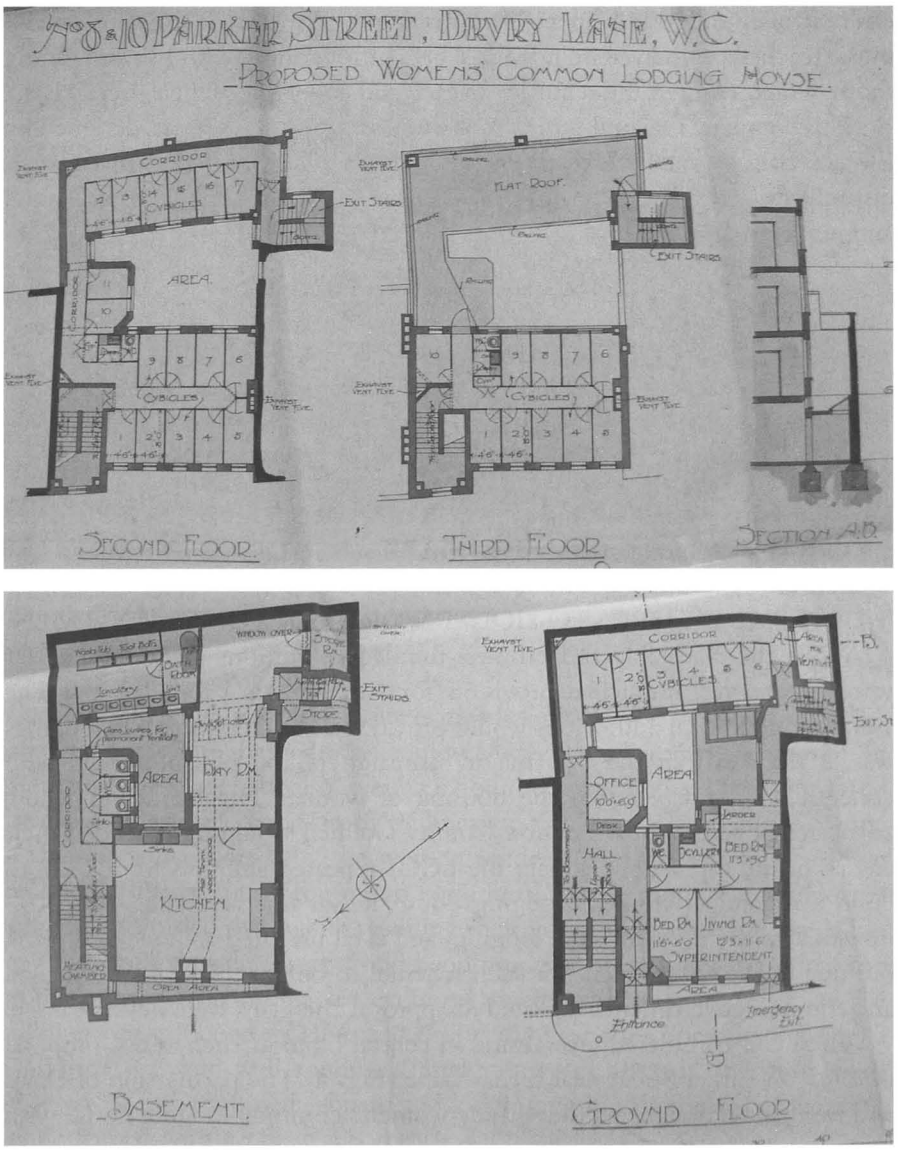
catered for middle- and upper-class women working as doctors, artists and music teachers, who lived in individual bed-sitting rooms, with a shared dining room, which ensured the requisite privacy and decorum of their social class.

This company's second project was the York Street Chambers, designed by Eustace Balfour and Thackeray Turner in 1892. This was not, at first glance, dissimilar to other mansion blocks in Marylebone although a stone plaque announced it as being exclusively for ladies. The 50 residents had a choice of flats (bedrooms with separate sitting rooms) or bed-sitting rooms, which were both relatively commodious arrangements. The basement had both private and large communal dining rooms as well as servants' rooms ostensibly providing housing for another less visible class of working women. These layouts suited an emerging class of professional women with a genteel balance of private accommodation that allowed for respectability and independence also with some communal spaces that fostered networking, support and camaraderie. Indeed the first women members of the RIBA, sisters Ethel and Bessie Charles, ran their architectural practice from here.[11]

MUNICIPAL EFFORTS TO HOUSE WORKING WOMEN AND MEN

While the charitable and business-minded institutions mentioned so far were progressive, municipal provision for women was painfully slow. The aspiration that local authorities would provide safe and comfortable lodgings was at the heart of the first major campaign of the philanthropists who concerned themselves with the housing of women. Higgs and her fellow advocates hoped that the London County Council would have heeded their advice in the capital, but despite the LCC's repeated attempts from 1897 to build a municipal women's lodging house, it was not successful. The LCC investigated the need for such lodgings and even prepared architectural plans, but due to the requirement for such schemes to be financially self-sufficient, and through government's repeated disapproval, the plans were never realised.

The LCC considered several sites in central London, such as this proposal of 1905 on Parker Street near Drury Lane (**Fig. 3**). The partnership of Davis and Emmanuel designed a four-storey women's common lodging house with accommodation for 50 women in a series of cubicles squeezed into every corner of the plan. Unlike the contemporary and non-municipal hostels that we will examine next, this plan gave very little space to communal areas suggesting that it was for hard-working working-class women who would simply lodge here between long days working at London's factories and laundries. Ever conscious of class distinctions, the LCC's housing manager concluded in 1901 that, considering the two classes of employment for women (clerks, typists, bookbinders; and laundresses, tailoresses and those employed in factories), 'it appears to me desirable that both these classes should, if possible,



Figs. 3a-b Proposed LCC Women's Common Lodging House, Parker Street, dated 31 October 1905. There was unusually no common sitting room, but a large kitchen and a small day-room in the basement as well as 50 cubicles.
[London Metropolitan Archives, GLC/AR/BR/22/027856].

have provision made for them in a lodging house. But I am of the opinion that this could not be done in one and the same house unless it was so constructed as to be entirely divided and entered from separate streets.'[12]

Despite the thoughtfully worked-out plans, it was deemed impossible to build a house of the necessary size and type that would be economically self-supporting. Men's projects had the same government requirement of self-sufficiency, but given their much greater scale and higher men's wages, this was easier to meet.

In 1910, the LCC's Medical Officer re-visited the failed aspiration for a municipal lodging house. He identified over 2,000 beds across London in authorised common lodging houses for women and revealed that the real need was amongst educated, low-wage earning women, not women of 'irregular and often immoral life' or factory girls.[13] However, factory workers were too poor to afford and sustain a municipal housing project, and conversely, poor middle-class women did not fit into the LCC's aims of housing the destitute. Consequently, the LCC's efforts were frozen and both classes of working women were left out.

This contrasted dramatically with the provision for men, for whom three monumental LCC lodging houses were built between 1892 and 1906. The first, also on Parker Street, was designed in 1892 by Gibson and Russell. As built, Parker Street House was a much-diminished design, but the main door survives with the iron name in the fanlight. 320 men were housed in four highly-ventilated classes of accommodation from single beds to the 'Glasgow method' where one bed was stacked on top of another with entry from cubicles on opposite sites. The LCC's next project was the architecturally superior Carrington House, designed in 1903 by the skilful in-house architectural team. The six-storey Carrington House had a stripped down Arts and Crafts styling with spare detailing and distinctive end pavilions. This lodging house accommodated over 800 men and featured a large smoking room, a well-lit reading room with three fireplaces, a feet-washing room, boot-brushing room, a tailor and a boot-maker's shop. The LCC was encouraging men into work and helping them to remain, or become, presentable for employment.

The LCC's three lodging houses for men were supplemented by the six Rowton Houses built between 1892 and 1905 by the mighty philanthropist Lord Rowton. Altogether these lodging houses, or 'working men's hotels', provided over 7,000 beds for the capital's labouring men. The Rowton Houses are well known as a building type, due to their colossal presence with tiny windows in vast red brick walls with spare, landmark corner towers, most designed by the Edwardian architect of Tube stations and institutions, Harry M. Measures. The last Rowton House to be built, in Camden Town, accommodated over 1,000 men (**Fig. 4**). While entirely secular, these establishments encouraged redemptive, improving activity with large reading rooms and further employment-inducing services.

In contrast to this major municipal and philanthropic provision for men,

Fig. 4 Camden Town Rowton House, Arlington Street opened in 1905. George Orwell, on his tramps through London recorded in *Down and Out in Paris and London* of 1933, p. 133, commented that 'the Rowton Houses really are magnificent ... splendid buildings.' [M.J. Shaw].

emerging women's needs were met through alternative philanthropic and entrepreneurial measures: the Edwardian hostels that developed from 1900 as a hybrid of ladies' chambers and the working men's hotels. Many British towns and cities managed to fulfil their duty for municipal housing for women long before London did. Glasgow's first municipal women's lodging house was built in 1872 with room for 125 cheaply-let beds and Cardiff provided a women's hostel from 1911. England's municipal exemplar, however, was Manchester, which opened the first purpose-built model lodging house for women along modern lines in 1910. Ashton House, designed by the City Architect, H.R.Price, catered for 222 women, with beds in a series of dormitories with cubicles (**Fig. 5**).The paired narrow sash windows and the plain upper and side elevations hinted at the building's function, and its scale and name suggested an institutional use, but this was a building of quality in its design and materials and Manchester was clearly proud of its civic duty.

THE LITERARY HEROINE AND HER ACCOMMODATION

Before the women's hostel developed as a building type, the most common arrangement for the new working woman in the city was in lodgings, such as the home of a former family servant, a professional landlady, or a family home.

Mary Erle and Jenny Ingram, two characters from novels, typified middle class young women working in London and the different housing options available to them.The heroine of Ella Hepworth Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman*, first published in 1894, began her life in a 'tall London house' in Harley Street, but after the death of her father, Mary Erle shifted her pursuits from art to journalism and moved to furnished rooms in Bulstrode Street.

The description of her accommodation paints a characteristic picture of a lodging woman's existence in the late-Victorian period: she ascended 'from the narrow passage ... of which the varnished marble paper, as well as the grained staircase and stiff patterned oil-cloth were worn and stained with age ... to her own domain, which consisted of two rooms. In the little bed-room, giving onto a grimy back yard, there was a small iron bed with starved-looking pillows, a washing apparatus ... two chairs and a chest of drawers in imitation grained wood, with white china handles'.[14] While a number of nineteenth-century ladies' chambers were built by this date, the substantive hostels where Mary could have lodged in basic but comfortable accommodation with other journalists and clerks had not yet emerged.

A decade later, the determined protagonist of *The Ambitions of Jenny Ingram*, published in 1907, arrived in London from rural Wales to pursue a career in journalism. Jenny also initially lodged with a family, in Bloomsbury, but two years later, the professionally-rejected young woman was: 'living in one room in a large barrack-like building that was let out to many women who were mostly engaged, as she was, in trying to earn an existence.'[15] Exhausted and downtrodden, Jenny ventured into the heart of London's East End desperate to finish her piece on the Whitechapel settlement, but she collapsed on the steps of a philanthropic women's home. The nuns who ran this charitable haven found anonymous Jenny and were clear 'that she was no East End factory girl'; even though she was poor from lack of work, her apparent social class and respectability meant Jenny belonged in the reputable – if barrack-like – hostels of the West End and out of the refuges of the East End. While the author

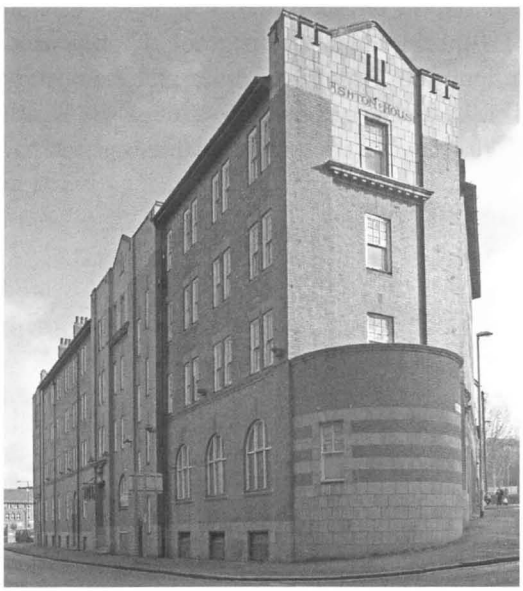


Fig. 5 Ashton House, Corporation Street, Manchester, opened in 1910 as England's first municipal lodging house for women. A sober yet well-articulated Arts and Crafts Grade II-listed building with subtle castellation and the name picked out in stylish lettering. [Mark Watson].

Fig. 6 Brabazon House in Westminster, opened in 1902. R.S. Ayling concentrated the detail on the façade whereas the architectural effect of the densely-packed rooms and cubicles behind was fairly institutional. [Author].

was disparaging about the modern hostels, this melodrama illustrates the new housing options for single working women in Edwardian London.

EDWARDIAN WORKING WOMEN'S HOSTELS

As had been the case with the residential chambers for middle-class women in the 1880s and 1890s, many of the new hostels favoured limited dividend companies for their businesslike, rather than overtly charitable, approach. These companies did deploy emotive language, and the opportunity to save women from peril was an argument of their capital campaigns; however they were sensible investment opportunities, not philanthropy, and those hostels that achieved self-sufficiency with a 4 per cent return for investors were much lauded.

One of the first was Brabazon House on the Vauxhall Bridge Road in Pimlico (**Fig. 6**). It opened in 1902 under the patronage of the Brabazon House Company Ltd and was designed by R.Stephen Ayling. The company was a philanthropic endeavour of Lady Brabazon, the countess of Meath and an esteemed group of trustees. The company appealed for investors by promising a 'suitable' return on capital invested, but also 'great satisfaction in the knowledge that thereby help is given to a number of gentlewomen working in London in difficult and sometimes dangerous conditions.'[16]

This was the first of five hostels that Ayling designed between 1902 and 1914, which provided 438 beds for single working women and earned him membership of the Southern Committee of the NAWLH. Ayling's RIBA obituary pointed out that he specialised in two building types: the rather odd juxtaposition of abattoirs and housing for 'better-class working girls.'[17] His architectural challenge in designing these hostels was to economically house around 100 women in a homely building that also nodded to the grandeur of the patrons, and was generous in its communal rooms while keeping private quarters to a minimum. *The Builder* featured the hostel with a full-page

illustration of Ayling's considered composition, however, behind the grand description and title ('Lady Brabazon's Home for Gentlewomen') that might have likened it to the York Street Chambers, this hostel was clearly intended for less well-off women; half the accommodation was in cubicles instead of the roomier bed-sitting rooms of the earlier chambers. Furthermore, Brabazon House had ample shared social rooms: two ground-floor sitting rooms with fireplaces, cornices and large windows and a basement dining room; by comparison, the only shared facility at York Street ladies' chambers was the dining room (**Fig. 7**). When it opened, Brabazon House was celebrated as the first building of its kind in London, a claim that referred to it catering for a large number of lower-middle-class women while being of quality design, appearance and associations.

The second project of the Brabazon House Company was the much larger Hopkinson House, built on the other side of Vauxhall Bridge Road in 1905 to accommodate 120 women in cubicles and bedrooms. Also designed by Ayling, it was illustrated in the *Building News* as 'Hopkinson House, Residence for Ladies'. This hostel was half as big again as Brabazon House and it held a more prominent position on the Pimlico thoroughfare, marked by a corner tower with lead-domed roof, and running back to the leafy Vincent Square behind.

Lessons learned from Brabazon House led to internal improvements at Hopkinson House, such as the enlargement of the main sitting room and the provision of two further sitting rooms on the first floor. The basement housed the dining room, the servants' bedrooms, a small photographic room and the bicycle store, possibly the earliest provision of this useful feature in a women's hostel. On the upper floors were the cubicles and bedrooms, and nurse's and sick rooms for 'sudden or infectious illness', which must have been a very grave concern in this high density housing.[18] All modern conveniences were provided: there were three baths, lavatories and a water closet on each of the upper floors, electricity throughout, and bedrooms were fitted with

Fig. 7 Brabazon House, women dining in the basement dining room. An illustration of 'A London Home for Lady-Clerks' in *The Girl's Own Paper* (n.d., 1902).

metered gas fires, which could boil a kettle, to enable a degree of catering independence.

Similar projects were promoted by the YWCA which had 25 homes and hostels in London by the end of the nineteenth century. Its first major purpose-built hostel was Ames House and Restaurant at 44 Mortimer Street, opened in 1904. The eminent architect Beresford Pite designed the stylish corner building with his characteristic Arts-and-Crafts-infused Mannerism. Pite helped to define the plan of the new building type: it housed 97 women in cubicles and bedrooms (the same sized footprint differentiated by the thickness of the partitions) and featured a small shared sitting room, a large 'public room', a residents' dining room (each of these with fireplaces) and an office for tending to fees and other matters (**Fig. 8**). The ground floor plan was largely given over to other uses such as four shops, which helped to fund the enterprise, and the Welbeck Restaurant. This was distinct from the residents' dining room on the first floor, and served working women who were not residents. The YWCA had opened its first restaurant in 1884, nearby on Mortimer Street, and restaurants for working women flourished in this period, often near hostels and providing a safe and respectable place for women to stay nourished while working in the city. Ames House provided a model for later YWCA projects, with a diversity of accommodation and service facilities under one roof.

The Edwardian hostels featured either small bedrooms or cubicles, each with a single bed and limited furniture such as a washstand, wardrobe and wooden chair. Rooms or cubicles could be rented by the night but they were more normally rented by the week and on a long-term basis. The accommodation options suited different budgets: a cubicle at Brabazon House in 1915 cost 5s. 6d. per week, while single bedrooms cost between 7s. 6d. and 14s. a week; cubicles at Ada Lewis House were much less cost: between 3s. and 4s. per week. In line with the improving and protective spirit in which they were established, hostels were closely managed, usually with a matron, and sometimes with turnstiles for entry (as in the Rowton houses). Larger houses even had a nurse and servants. Requirements for entry were generally proof of employment but most hostels maintained a moral commitment to house women safely without income conditions.

Residents did, however, complain of regulations and the author of *The Bachelor Girl's Guide to Everything* (1917) set out the advantages of hostel living as lots of companionship, while the drawbacks were little privacy and 'irksome rules' about behaviour, curfews and guests (presumably men!).[19] Meals were shared communally in comfortable dining rooms which, in contrast to the necessarily spare cubicles and bedrooms, were the most architecturally ornamented rooms in the building, as seen at Brabazon House with its

colonnaded alcove (**Fig. 7**). For an additional cost of around 10 shillings per week, residents were entitled to full board, thereby only having to seek out workday lunches on their own.

The 1911 census revealed that the average age of residents in Brabazon House was 30 and the most popular occupations were those of secretary, clerk, student and typist. The YWCA at Mortimer Street had a younger demographic with women averaging 25 years of age and mostly employed as dressmakers, milliners and teachers. A large percentage of the women were also servants in the house and, in the case of the YWCA, waitresses in the restaurant. The census roll provides a fascinating insight into the conversations the women

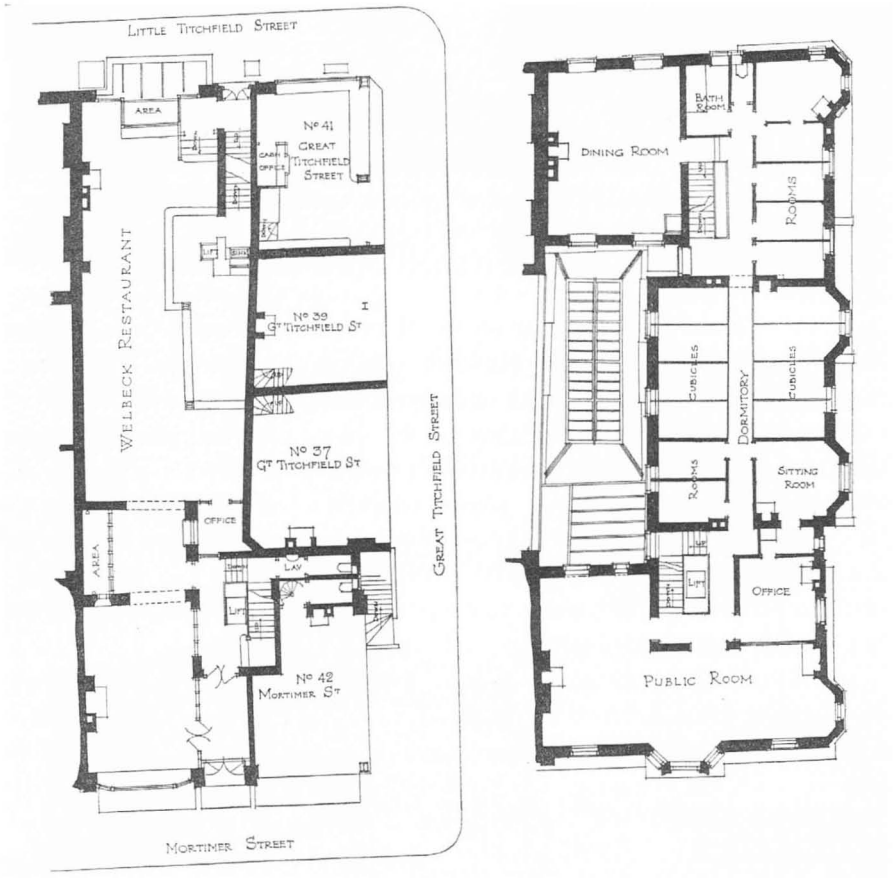


Fig. 8 Ames House, Mortimer Street, YWCA lodging house. 'Every little cubicle and bedroom has its own window and electric light – there is a wash-room, and a work-room containing provision for heating irons for the use of the boarders; the drawing room is kept for reading and music', noted an early twentieth-century resident, quoted in Kay Jenkinson's *Housing Women: A Celebration of YWCA Housing since 1855* (YWCA of Great Britain, 2000). Listed Grade II. [*The Builder,* 89 (1905) p. 396].

Fig. 9 Girls' Friendly Society, 29 Francis Street, Westminster. The prominent corner doorcase featured stone carving by H.C. Fehr and Ayling's trademark door plates with Art Nouveau flourishes. Listed Grade II. [Derek Kendall © English Heritage].

might have shared in the dining rooms of Brabazon House (where perhaps Violet Donaldson-Selby, a 26-year-old typist in the Colonial Office, and Emily Gribble, a 30-year-old stenographer for Remington typewriters slept on the same floor) and Ames House (where Daisy Frances Field, a 23-year-old assistant draper at Bourne and Hollingsworth and Evelina Maud Cox, a 25-year-old teacher at a LCC school might have eaten together). Despite the subtle distinctions between the accommodation and residents in different hostels, the buildings were united by a similarity of efficient and community-fostering plans, as well as handsome designs by architects and patrons who did their best to disguise the buildings' fairly institutional use.

In 1900 the GFS, founded in 1875 to offer support for young women who were new to urban life, had seven hostels with cubicles across west London. A decade later, this stalwart Victorian institution realised that it needed to keep up with the changing urban realm for young women, and planned a larger hostel near Victoria Station. It was also designed by Ayling – by then seemingly proficient with the building type which he had helped to develop – and it opened in 1914 at 29 Francis Street (**Fig. 9**). The bold Wrennaissance style hostel accommodated about 80 young women and featured well-dressed elevations with vibrant rubbed red brick and Portland stone quoins that nodded to the polychromy of nearby Westminster Cathedral. Inside, the upper-ground-floor rooms had simple fireplaces and the accommodation was in bedrooms rather than cubicles, indicating it was for middle-class 'respectable

working women and girls' albeit those on a small budget. There was a stained glass window in one of the second floor communal rooms, which urged the young women to 'KEEP INNOCENCY', as displayed in a scroll beneath a dove. The hostel featured a separate exterior door for outside members to patronise it as a restaurant, as in the YWCA, and a waiting room where girls who came into town as new passengers on the early morning workmen's trains could wait in safety and comfort for their working day to begin.

In the suburbs, women's lodgings largely blossomed after the First World War but the Edwardian Waterlow Court, Baillie Scott's remarkable project for the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company, is worth mentioning here. Built in 1907-9, this sophisticated courtyard development was fully infused with the Arts and Crafts architectural spirit with attention to detail from door furniture and historicist staircases, through to overall planning of the open, arcaded cloister. The women residents were housed in three- to five-room flats, which was considerably more space and luxury than the inner-London hostels of the same date. Even the bicycles had more room and the purpose-built bicycle shed charmingly exhibited the architectural treatment of this other new building type used by the residents of Waterlow Court who exemplified the modern Edwardian way.

ADA LEWIS WOMEN'S LODGING HOUSE

The National Association of Women's Lodging Houses and its campaigners finally achieved the building they had sought for at least a decade in 1913 – the Ada Lewis Women's Lodging House (**Fig. 10**). Municipal funding for a women's lodging house had been long-sought, but the money ultimately

Fig. 10 Ada Lewis Women's Lodging House, exterior. Joseph & Smithem's design referred to its seventeenth-century sources through red-brick walls with stone dressings and tall round-arched windows under keystones. Listed Grade II. [Author].

Fig. 11 Ada Lewis Women's Lodging House, *Daily Mirror* photograph of sitting room *c.*1913. The portrait of the patron, Ada Lewis, was hung on the glazed tiled walls. This room has integral fireplaces which help create a grand and comfortable space amongst the other, practical common rooms.

came from the private source of Ada Lewis, a wealthy Jewish philanthropist who shared her peers' concerns about the lack of decent housing for single, low-waged working women.

On 28 January 1913, the Ada Lewis Women's Lodging House, a 'Hotel for Working Women and Girls' was opened by HRH Princess Louise.[20] This building marked a significant shift in the provision of housing for low-waged working women in London. It finally made available accommodation on the same relative scale as in the legendary Rowton Houses for men. This hostel, designed by the architects Joseph and Smithem and located near the Elephant and Castle, catered for 220, which made it the largest lodging house for women in London at that time. Ada Lewis House was special for offering modest yet architecturally-proud accommodation to twice the number of women at about half the price as was available previously. Its construction represented a dramatic response to a pressing need and it belongs to an important chapter in the provision of living space in the capital at a time of major social changes and opportunities for women.

The architects designed an imposing Baroque building of six storeys and a 'U'-plan. The seemingly generous upper-floor windows belied the paired

tiny cubicles behind and the external effect was one of grandeur, noted in the pedimented main entrance reached by semi-circular steps. This historicist style conferred a sense of authority that fitted its semi-institutional use, yet the rich detailing produced a proud building to suit the women it housed. Joseph and Smithem employed the fireproof Mouchel-Hennebique ferro-concrete, then a relatively new material, which was visually apparent in the columns, beams and stairway partitions. To soften this robustness, the many communal rooms were lined with glazed tiles incorporating swags, pilasters, arched niches, and decorative tiled fireplaces (**Fig. 11**). Through the turnstile entrance was a stair with elaborate iron balustrade that continued the height of the building and lent it an air of ostentation.

Ada Lewis House provided a wide range of cost-saving and improving facilities including a sewing room, clothes-brushing room, foot baths, laundry and drying rooms that were celebrated for drying a resident's clothes within minutes of her coming in from the rain. The sleeping accommodation was on the first four floors, arranged efficiently and austerely along both sides of the U-plan corridor with bathrooms at the end of the wings (**Fig. 12**). When built, there were 214 single cubicles, twenty double bedrooms and six slightly larger 'special' rooms.

Within the first year, the trustees realised that the special bedrooms were

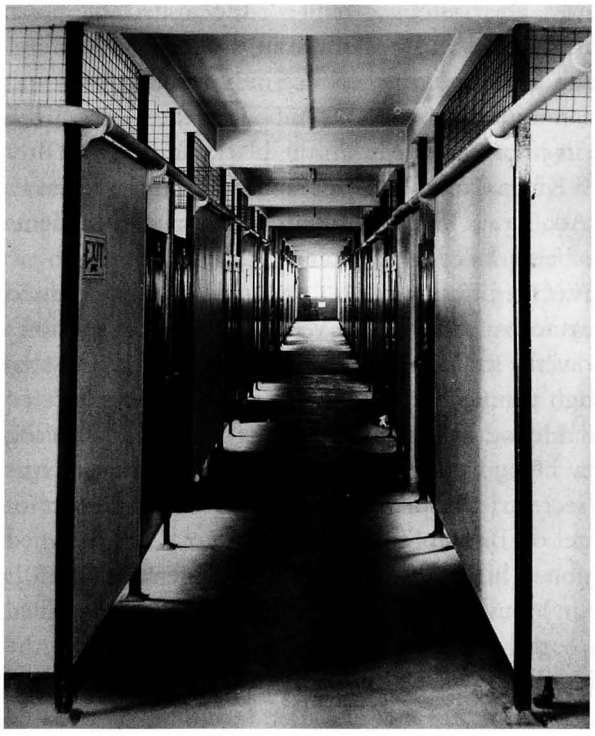


Fig. 12 Ada Lewis Lodging House, New Kent Road. Corridor with cubicles *c.*1913. The partitions in the cubicles were constructed with a gap at the bottom and a metal grille at the top to further air circulation through the densely populated accommodation wings. [London Metropolitan Archives, LMA/4318/B/03/006].

constantly let, but the cubicles less so. The very low-waged girls and women that the hostel had hoped to attract were not using Ada Lewis House. The trustees commented that the hostel was not being 'patronised by the poorest women so much as by those in rather more comfortable circumstances ... teachers, typists, telephone clerks, and nurses there were plenty, but singularly few of the workers who chiefly need cheap, as well as respectable, sleeping accommodation'.[21] It was not long before the issue of gaps in the partitions was raised, and four months after opening the trustees commissioned Joseph and Smithem, to fill the lower opening. The poorest working women were soon designed out of the building.

The interior of Ada Lewis House was clearly modelled on the men's Rowton Houses which were also much evoked in the opening literature. Ada Lewis House was more inviting and 'feminine' in some of its decorative schemes, for example the mauve tiles with Art Nouveau flourishes, but the glazed tile dados, seemingly endless corridors of identical cubicles and even the bedspreads with circular logos were eerily similar. Earlier buildings had been hailed as the first 'women's Rowton', but Ada Lewis House was the first to carry it out.

A few months after Ada Lewis House opened, another hostel with aristocratic associations and royal connections – the Mary Curzon Home for Women – was introduced in Kings Cross. The hostel was built for the 'respectable poor' in memory of Lady Curzon of Kedleston, the American aristocrat and wife of Lord Curzon.[22] Queen Alexandra opened the building in November 1913 and the Curzon patronage was announced in the prominent frieze beneath the dormers (traces of 'women' is just legible beneath the black paint). This fairly institutional building at 170 Kings Cross Road accommodated 55 women in 40 cubicles: however, as at Ada Lewis House, a later second wave of residents demanded that the cubicles be enclosed for greater privacy.

During the First World War, the housing needs for women greatly increased as they moved to urban areas to engage with the war effort. The Association's report of 1915 described how 'the strain of the war has rendered (their hostels) abundantly useful.'[23] Although planned before the war, a home for 'educated women workers', Nutford House, opened in 1916, citing 'the increasing number of occupations now being thrown open to educated women such as schoolmistresses, students, secretaries, shorthand typists and manageresses of small businesses'.[24] The hostel on Brown Street in Lisson Grove was designed by Victor Wilkins who exhibited his design at the Royal Academy in 1915. It was an impressive building in a busy Wrennaissance style with deep dentilled cornice and stone quoins – the quality particularly noteworthy given the wartime conditions in which it opened. Private bedrooms accommodated around 100 women and one matron, but all other facilities were shared

Fig. 13 Furnival House, Cholmeley Avenue, Highgate. Listed Grade II. [Geoff Brandwood].

including a large social room with a beamed ceiling and fireplace, lounge, library and dining room that together took up most of the ground floor and basement. Another feature was the vast range of bicycle stores under the pavement – fourteeen individual vaults, seven feet by ten feet wide, surely enough for each of the hundred residents to store a bicycle.

The following year a suburban development illustrated the continued foresight of the Prudential Assurance Company, which had been the first to employ ladies as clerks in 1871. On the leafy slopes of Highgate Hill in 1916, the company founded a hostel for the domestic workers at its Holborn Bars headquarters. Called Furnival House (**Fig. 13**), the Prudential motto and crest were featured in the lavishly plastered entrance hall of this Baroque-style hostel designed by Joseph Henry Pitt. Initially intended for the women who prepared the meals and stoked the fires at one of the country's foremost companies instead of the lady clerks who punched the cards, this grand building presented the residents with a bucolic alternative to the bustle of contemporary commercial life.

CONCLUSION

All of these women's lodgings essentially took the model of the middle class Victorian home and inflated it to cater to a larger community, but the hostels had formal architectural differences that identified them with different classes of working women. The late nineteenth-century chambers for middle class

women had limited communal spaces, usually only shared dining rooms and bigger bedrooms arranged as bed-sitting rooms or even flats. These women gained a valuable sense of community from the limited shared facilities, but they maintained private respectability in their generous private quarters.

The working-class and lower-middle-class hostels for women that followed mostly housed women in cubicles, and the bedroom options were necessarily very small, which meant there were more shared common rooms for a variety of improving activities. Ada Lewis House had the greatest number of communal rooms – for sewing, reading, writing and sitting, as well as dining – and it was the first hostel on anything like the scale or plan of the working-class men's lodging houses, which had large amounts space given over to smoking and reading as well as dining. Regardless of the class of their residents, the ladies' chambers and the women's hostels generally shared several things: good architectural pedigree, and wealthy patrons that possessed strong business plans, a well-intentioned motive of protecting young women, but with a positive side effect of encouraging independence.

As Mary Higgs wrote in 1910, the women forced to the streets through lack of decent housing presented a dire scene: 'How far away from this the happy, pure home, an Englishwoman's heritage!' But the hostels that she and others promoted after the turn of the century were more than 'lighthouses' to prevent such wrecks of womanhood. Their tiny bedrooms and generous living rooms offered an empowering sanctuary of camaraderie in an exciting – but sometimes menacing – new modern world. The architects and patrons of these new buildings provided sound, attractive and comfortable lodgings that allowed a new generation of working women to satisfactorily answer Mary Higgs' question, 'where shall she live?'

Notes

1. Mary Higgs, *Glimpses into the Abyss,* London, 1906, pp. 194-5.
2. Mary Higgs and Edward E. Hayward, *Where Shall She Live? The Homelessness of the Woman Worker,* London, 1910, p. 180.
3. Sarah Kemp, Charlotte Mitchell & David Trotter, *Edwardian Fiction: An Oxford Companion,* Oxford, 1997, pp. xiii-xiv.
4. Duncan Crow, *The Edwardian Woman,* 1978, p. 142 footnote.
5. Higgs & Hayward, *Where Shall She Live?*, p. 3; Duncan Crow, *The Edwardian Woman,* 1978, p. 143.
6. Maude Stanley, *Clubs for Working Girls,* London, 1904, p. 208.
7. 'A Castle in the Air', *Work and Leisure: The Englishwoman's Advertiser, Reporter and* Gazette, 12:9, 1888, p. 235.
8. Ibid.
9. 'The Ladies' Dwellings Company, Limited', *Englishwoman's Review*, 15 March 1889, p. 141.

10. 'Sloane Gardens House', *Work and Leisure: The Englishwoman's Advertiser, Reporter & Gazette*, 14:11, 1889, p. 287.
11. Lynne Walker, 'The Entry of Women into the Architectural Profession in Britain', *Woman's Art Journal*, 7:1, 1986, pp. 13-18; Lynne Walker reports that the Chambers' drawings held in the RIBA Drawings Collection record York Street Chambers as their professional address.
12. Notes of Joint Sub-Committee on Lodging Houses for Women no. 2 in LCC Housing Department report (5 May 1901), LCC/MIN/7382.
13. LCC Housing of the Working Classes Committee Papers. LCC Public Health Department report (9 February 1910), LCC/MIN/7428.
14. Ella Hepworth Dixon, *The Story of a Modern Woman*, London, 1894, pp. 84-5.
15. Flora Klickmann, *The Ambitions of Jenny Ingram: A True Story of Modern London Life*, London, 1907, p. 285.
16. 'Brabazon-House (Limited)', *The Times*, 27 July 1903.
17. 'Obituary R. Stephen Ayling, FRIBA', *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 39, 1932, pp. 859-60.
18. *Building News*, 89, 1905, p. 865.
19. Agnes M. Miall, *The Bachelor Girl's Guide to Everything or The Girl on Her Own*, London, 1916.
20. 'Homes for Working Women', *Morning Post*, 29 January 1913.
21. London Metropolitan Archives, LMA/4318/B/02/003, 'A Visit to the Ada Lewis House' by Cicely Ford, seemingly in the *Millgate Monthly* but undated journal extract tucked inside 'Scheme for the Administration and Management of the Ada Lewis Women's Lodging Houses'.
22. 'Queen Alexandra and a Women's Hostel', *The Times*, 24 November 1913, p. 5.
23. Mary Higgs & Edward E. Hayward, *The Housing of the Woman Worker*, London, 1915, p.11.
24. 'Educated Women Workers', *The Times*, 15 March 1913, p. 10.

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