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CHAPTER 5 – WELLINGTON STREET AREA

Municipal and educational buildings have shaped the character of the area covered in this chapter. From early nineteenth-century origins on Calderwood (originally William) Street, civic purposes spread to Wellington Street and Thomas Street, and then, in the 1970s, as far south as Grand Depot Road.

A pair of houses of the 1760s still stands on Thomas Street, facing General Gordon Square, but concerted development of the area did not begin until soon after 1800. First building in these war years was to the south of Love Lane and military in nature, barracks for the Royal Military Artificers and an artillery park, or Grand Depot. Further north, streets were speculatively laid out as part of the Powis estate, and the town's new Commissioners built a market on William Street. This was the seed for municipal provision in the area, but it was a failure, and is remembered only in the name of Market Street. The streets were built up with houses, quickly at first, but tailing off after 1815 as peace reduced demand. Of the humble housing that filled the frontages up to about 1840, a remnant survives on Market Street. Wellington Street gradually became an important, if secondary, commercial street.

The municipal presence took root in a modest way in the 1840s, in the shape of a police court and a town hall, then a police station, on William Street. But civic expansion did not bloom until the 1890s; by 1912 there were public baths and a library, and the town hall, police station and court had all been succeeded by bigger buildings. In addition, the earliest parts of Woolwich Polytechnic had joined the cluster. This was an accretive rather than consciously planned ensemble, yet it constitutes one of the most concentrated civic complexes in London. The municipal precinct continued to expand,

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but stayed compact, until new council and government offices and a students' hall of residence were built in the former Grand Depot area in the 1970s. A second redevelopment of that and more land began in 2007. Greenwich Council's Woolwich Centre on Wellington Street opened in 2011 and a supermarket with overhead residential blocks is being built at the time of writing.

The present chapter is arranged on broadly chronological lines. The later history of some sites is brought forward, the municipal precinct is separated from the Polytechnic, and more recent developments are grouped as commercial and public.

Early development

Throughout the eighteenth century the lands covered in this chapter were open fields in the manorial ownership of the Bowater family. By the 1740s they were bisected by Love Lane, a track from Green's End that led towards Bowater's Farm, near what is now the north end of Frances Street. The origins of the path's name may be innocent enough, but the place did, much later, acquire a reputation for 'immoral proceedings'.¹

There were good-sized houses flanking the lane's east end when land to its south as far as Cholic Lane (Woolwich New Road) was sold to the Board of Ordnance in 1773 in connection with the relocation of the Royal Artillery Barracks. It was not until 1803–6 that the Board built on the triangle south of Love Lane. Fields to the north were part of the much larger estate leased to the Powis brothers in 1799, and speculative development here followed beginnings established on and around Powis Street. Thomas Street had been laid out by 1805, and William Street by 1807, taking their names from two of the brothers. Plots were leased for small-scale and piecemeal building, an exception being a long frontage on the south side of William Street that was

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acquired for the new market. To either side Upper Market Street and Lower Market (later Polytechnic) Street followed by 1810. The Board of Ordnance formed Wellington Street in 1811–12 to improve road links to and from the Royal Arsenal. The Powis leasehold property covered in this chapter was part of the land purchased freehold by Robert Ogilby in 1812.²

1–5 Thomas Street

This pair of houses, just north of Love Lane, was built in 1760–1. It has been serially enlarged and much altered since, and has an engagingly diverse history of occupancy. The houses were substantial for eighteenth-century Woolwich, with big gardens, long to the rear and small to the front. Situated on the town's margins, they were away from other settlement and looked across open space (Green's End) – as, since the 1980s, they do again.

Alienated from Bowater ownership when built or soon after, the houses appear to have been a private joint venture by their first two occupants, Edward Burford (to the south) and John English (to the north), both carpenters. English was the assistant to the Board of Ordnance's Clerk of the Works in the Warren, where he was also the overseer of carpenters and wheelers. The Board seems not to have had any proprietary interest, but artillery officers and other Ordnance appointees were in occupation for the rest of the century, and, in the southern house, intermittently into the 1840s. By then the whole freehold, the earlier history of which is unknown, was held by John Taverson, of New Charlton.

By 1767 English had died, leaving his widow in occupation. Burford gave way to Lt. Samuel Tovey, the recently married scion of a family of gunners. In 1769 the northern house was taken and enlarged to the rear by or for Paul Sandby, the eminent artist, who had just been appointed Drawing Master at the Royal Military Academy in the

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Warren. He taught at Woolwich two days a week, and paid the rates on this property until 1772 when he moved to Bayswater, thereafter using lodgings in Charlton. Among Sandby's many views of Woolwich there is one of the 1790s from the front of this house.

Tovey moved on in 1780, when promoted Captain and Chief Firemaster at the Royal Laboratory in the Warren. He was succeeded by Capt. Richard Chapman, first clerk to the Academy's gentlemen cadets, to whom the first enlargement to the rear of the southern house, probably in the mid-1780s, is likely due. Occupants of the northern house in the 1780s included Capt. Thomas Sutton, Assistant Firemaster at the Royal Laboratory, and the Rev. William Green, the Academy's master for classics, writing and arithmetic. From 1788 Capt. James Murray Hadden lived in the southern house. He was made one of the first commanding officers of the Royal Horse Artillery in 1793 and moved on around 1804 when he became Surveyor-General to the Board of Ordnance, giving the house up to John Henderson, Paymaster at the Arsenal.

A shift in the nature of occupancy came around 1800 when William Powis, the landowning brewer, took the northern house; his widow continued here after his death in 1806. After 1815 more artillery officers had short tenancies of the southern house, and there were also other well-to-do widows. An additional southern bay was added around 1839 for Maj. (later Gen.) Philip Sandilands of the Royal Horse Artillery, a veteran of Waterloo. George Bryant Campion, a watercolourist and instructor of drawing at the Royal Military Academy from 1841, succeeded Sandilands for the next decade.³

The surrounding area had been transformed and around 1854 the whole property was refurbished by William Richardson, of Charlton, Taverson's surviving executor (the freehold later passed to Richardson's daughter, Maria). It was probably at this time that the

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upper storey was raised and the front given its present appearance. This marked a shift to commercial and professional use – John Hodgson, a military tailor and outfitter, took the southern house, and Augustus Prater, a doctor, the other. The front gardens were lost in the early 1860s for road widening. In 1870 William Harris Butler, another doctor, succeeded Prater, and by 1882 the Kent Reliance Permanent Benefit Building Society was using an inner part of the southern property as offices, alongside Hodgson. As Hodgson & Morgan the outfitting firm undertook alterations and further enlargement to the rear, including a workshop wing, in 1905 through J. B. Sanford and Co., with further work in 1919.⁴

Triple occupancy had continued, with new seventy-five year leases from 1893. John J. Messent, an undertaker, then took the northern house. He inserted a shopfront, with console brackets that survive, extended the outer shop bay to the rear, possibly for a chapel of rest, and altered the upper storeys for his own occupation. He also built a ten-stall stable, workshop and office block behind a cobbled yard that was given a metal-trussed roof on cast-iron columns made by R. Ginman and Son, of Plumstead, to cover cars and coaches, in effect a garage – outbuildings that survive. Through Francis Chappell & Sons, a south-east London firm and a subsidiary of Dignity Caring Funeral Services, these premises continue to house undertakers. What had become the Kent Reliance Building Company was responsible in 1936 for the wood-framed shopfront on the inner bay of the southern house; it was made by Pearce Bros of Bromley. This property has since housed a number of offices, for solicitors, dentists and insurers. In the mid-twentieth century the site also accommodated an LCC Children's Care Office and, in the rear workshop, the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals of the Poor. The large plate-glass shopfront to No. 1 is a late twentieth-century insertion.⁵

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The brick-built houses were originally a semi-detached pair, symmetrical on the axis of the party wall, with a 60ft (19m) frontage. Each house was double-fronted with a central entrance, but with unevenly spaced window bays. The present Italianate appearance of the unified façade, of stucco incised as ashlar with door pediments and window architraves, and heightened for a cornice and parapet, arises from the mid-nineteenth-century refurbishment. The houses were at first only a single room (about 16ft/5.1m) deep, and rose through two storeys and attics under steeply pitched roofs. There were also area-lit basements, but the fall of the ground meant that only in the southern house was there adequate head height for more than storage; a kitchen was situated under the larger inner room. The late eighteenth-century rear additions gave each house an L plan and an additional big room on three levels under a hipped roof. The larger block to the north, of 1769 for Sandby, probably included a low kitchen under a mezzanine-level room of noble height and fine aspect. That room endures, but the interiors have been otherwise much refitted. The original northern twin-newel closed-string staircase survives in part, and in both houses upper-storey front rooms contain original moulded fireplace surrounds and mantel shelves, cyma cornices and sections of plain panelling with cupboards. There are also bead-moulded binding beams, and a plain stone surround to the southern house's kitchen fireplace alongside remnants of a bread oven. Sandiland's extra southern bay allowed the formation of a large ground-floor room, with garden-side French windows, the splayed embrasures and reeded architraves of which survive. The staircase in this house was replaced in 1905, and the front door realigned.

Grand Depot Barracks (demolished)

The Board of Ordnance's property south of Love Lane was first laid out as the Royal Artillery's regimental garden, enclosed in 1781. Short sections of stock-brick boundary wall along Love Lane may still present some fabric from this time, but here and along Woolwich New

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Road there was rebuilding in 1803–4, when other development began. It was then that the north-east section of the garden nearest the town was given up to provide a site for barracks for one of the first of six companies of Royal Military Artificers. These had been created in 1787 to provide for the fortification of dockyards, an initiative by Charles Lennox, the 3rd Duke of Richmond, then Master-General of the Ordnance, based on the model of a corps formed in Gibraltar in 1772. Each company of artificers comprised 100 men, mostly carpenters, masons, bricklayers and labourers, marshalled under officers of the Corps of Royal Engineers. In 1795 Woolwich was made the headquarters of the Corps of Royal Military Artificers.⁶

The local detachment of artificers was given its own barracks in 1803 in a project overseen by Capt. George Hayter, CRE, with designs from the Board's Architect, James Wyatt. These barracks, a plain three-storey house-like block with flanking two-storey pavilions for officers, were sited well away from those of the Royal Artillery, all but in the bosom of the town, and closer to the major building works of the Warren.⁷ Exceptionally, the artisan soldiers were allowed to remain Woolwich men, not subject to redeployment. However, after wartime expansion and under reforms initiated by Lt. (later Gen. Sir) Charles Pasley, RA, the artificers, regarded as too settled, were in 1812 made mobile and renamed the Royal Sappers and Miners. Two years later the main barrack block in Woolwich was substantially enlarged to the rear. By the 1830s and 1840s Woolwich housed three companies (273 men), and a Royal Engineers' library had been formed in a building alongside the New Road. Among those housed in these barracks were Sgt. Joseph Woodhead, mason, responsible up to 1807 for the building of the wharf at the Arsenal, and Sgt. Alexander Doull, from 1825 to 1838 when he resigned to make tithe maps.⁸

In post-Crimean War military reforms of 1856 the Royal Sappers and Miners were amalgamated with their officers into the Corps of Royal

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Engineers and moved from Woolwich to Chatham, to some local regret. Their barracks were converted for cadets of the Royal Military Academy, pending the enlargement of that institution, despite concerns that placing the young gentlemen in the centre of the town would bring ‘to their very door all the temptations which the vice of the vicious can get together’.⁹ In the 1860s the barracks reverted to use by both Royal Engineers and the Royal Artillery.¹⁰

Much of the rest of the Royal Artillery’s regimental garden, west of the artificers’ barracks, had been given up in 1804 to be an artillery depot, for the storage of field guns, carriages and stores. Five low ‘workshop’ sheds were built in 1805–6, again under Hayter, to drawings prepared by Lewis Wyatt. Up to 312ft (95m) long, these were timber-built, except the midmost, which was brick and of two storeys with an administrative block at its south end. First known as the Grand Park of Artillery, the complex became simply the Grand Depot by the 1830s. Further west there were two gunpowder magazines, and, beyond, a much-reduced garden. There Arif Bey, a Turkish protégé of Sultan Mahmud II and an officer cadet at the Royal Military Academy, was buried after his death in Woolwich in 1836, aged 20, the churchyard being inappropriate for a Muslim.¹¹

The magazines went, and in 1856 most of the garden was taken for the Royal Army Clothing Factory, an initiative by Sidney Herbert in response to difficulties with the contracted supply of uniforms during the Crimean War. David Murray was the architect of a complex that comprised a big four-storey front block, for offices and stores, with an array of one- and two-storey workshops. It employed large numbers of women and girls, but in the early 1860s the work moved to Pimlico, to the site of Dolphin Square. The main Woolwich building stood until the 1950s.¹²

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The Grand Depot was adapted to use as stables in the 1870s and 1880s, with clearance and rebuilding in brick behind a large central yard left open for the parking of artillery. There was adaptation for overflow barracking of soldiers before the whole complex became surplus to requirements in the 1950s. In the early 1960s the site was sold to Woolwich Borough Council and much was cleared, including Arif Bey's tomb. The former artificers' barracks and the central workshop range were listed, but demolished in the early 1970s.¹³

Powis Estate

The Powis Estate divided and leased off the west side of **Thomas Street** in twenty-three small plots in 1804–7. They were quickly built up. The Powis brothers, brewers, retained the largest plot for a public house, the Earl of Chatham's Arms, named after the Master-General of the Ordnance at the time. The Earl of Chatham public house (15 Thomas Street) was rebuilt in 1898 for Alfred David Capon, with J. B. Sanford & Co. as builders. Its architect was probably Henry Hudson Church, responsible for so much central Woolwich rebuilding at this time. The Earl of Chatham retains ornamental ground-floor elevations, with decorative tile-work by A. T. S. Carter Ltd of Brockley extending along both sides of a passage, as well as curved and etched glass and a gold-lettered plinth set back behind square-section cast-iron columns.¹⁴

On **William Street** house-building had started by 1807, at the east end. First comers included a large detached house on the south side of the street, on a lease of 1808 to John Hudson, father of George Hudson and grandfather of H. H. Church. This, much enlarged and altered, survives in part, embedded within the first Woolwich Polytechnic building. Smaller houses went up to either side through the 1810s, and the Duke of Wellington public house was established on the eastern Lower Market Street corner by the late 1820s. William Street's last empty plots were not filled until the 1830s.

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Market House (*demolished*). The Act of 1807 that created Town Commissioners for Woolwich, empowered the new body to purchase and rebuild the under-accommodated and under-regulated market on the north side of Woolwich High Street. But this would have been costly. An amending Act a year later freed the Commissioners to build an entirely new market in a different place. A site with a 182ft (56m) frontage on the south side of William Street was taken from the Powis Estate on a lease that ran from December 1807; the freehold was acquired from John Bowater in 1809. The plot came to be flanked by roads named after the market, and on its south side by East Street (later Market Street then, from 1935, Bathway). The Commissioners laid out a quadrangle, emulating the form of the old market near the High Street, with sheds ranged around an open yard and enclosed by a stone-coped brick wall; there was a ‘handsome Turret’ (presumably over the William Street entrance).¹⁵ An associated house and yard adjoined to the west. Traders resisted the new market, then on the town’s periphery, and the relocation failed to take hold. By 1824, when the Commissioners (unsuccessfully) put the premises up for sale, the market was being used as a sacking factory.

Wellington Street was part of a wider programme of military road-building during the Napoleonic Wars, the east end (with Green’s End) of a route that linked Greenwich to the Royal Arsenal. Its line through Powis lands was under discussion in 1808, and empowered by an Act of 1809. Capt. Hayter sketched the route and Lt. Gen. Robert Morse, Inspector-General of Fortifications, made amendments. The road was built in 1811–12, under the supervision of Lt. Col. Robert Pilkington, CRE. The triangular strip between the south side of the street and Love Lane remained Powis property, though used as a parade ground for the Royal Sappers and Miners into the 1820s.

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In 1812–15 a modest eleven-house terrace was built on the north side of Wellington Street, west of Upper Market Street, but only another fourteen houses had been added by 1829. Many frontages on this and adjoining streets remained open until the 1830s, as the prosperity and population growth of Woolwich during wartime dissipated amid Arsenal cutbacks. Development of remaining plots on the Powis estate proceeded slowly into the 1840s.¹⁶

Ordnance officers were anyway keen to prevent development on the south side of Wellington Street, to keep a cordon sanitaire for the Grand Depot. But when Richard Powis was set to offer building leases in 1827 the Board was unwilling to pay the asking price for what Powis had come to see as an eligible commercial frontage. The deepest plots to the east remained open in 1832, but still no deal could be struck. Piecemeal building ensued, and by 1843 shopfronts were beginning to be inserted and Wellington Street was fully built up with two-storey houses stepping up the hill. A few survive. No. 11 is of 1832–3, and Nos 17–19 are a pair of 1837–8 from the east end of what was called Victoria Terrace; Nos 21–23 were demolished in 2008. These simply Italianate stucco-fronted shop-houses were probably built by George Grief, a bricklayer and builder, the first owner of Nos 19–21 and the first occupant of No. 21. Joseph David Binks, an auctioneer, cabinetmaker and upholsterer, owned and occupied No. 11 and its long back range from the outset to about 1863, when Isaac Barnett, another cabinetmaker, added a projecting shopfront, designed by Church and Rickwood and now removed. By the 1880s the property had become Josiah Henry Roberts's pianoforte, organ and music stores. Stephen Roughton, a hairdresser, first owned and occupied No. 17. His son, Thomas Alfred, continued here into the 1870s and this remained the smartest hairdresser's in Woolwich into the twentieth century. In No. 19 a Royal Artillery sergeant was succeeded in the 1840s by Ludwig Siedle, a German watch- and clockmaker. By 1860 Siedle was sharing the premises with Emilian

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Fehrenbach, a 'photographist', a profession also represented further along the street by George Boyer Davies, William May and, thereafter, several others. By the 1880s Herman Adolphus Reinhold & Co. had No. 21 for the making of sewing machines.¹⁷

A large plot further up the south side of Wellington Street was part built on in 1839 for Henry Whitely, a smith, and George Miller Whitely, a stationer and engraver. They did not last and their building was enlarged across the whole frontage in 1844–5 to form a five-bay inn, the Director General (55 Wellington Street), built for Edward Lambert, a brewer of Greenwich South Street, by Jolly and Burgess, Woolwich builders, and first tenanted by John Ward. It too was demolished in 2007. The military title 'Director-General' was bestowed on more than one Board of Ordnance officer at different times, but it is probably most relevant that the Grand Depot that lay behind Wellington Street was, as the Field Train Department of the Royal Artillery, controlled by the Director-General of Artillery, who, from 1844 to 1848, was Maj.-Gen. James Webber Smith, an elderly veteran of the Peninsular War and Waterloo. The pub was altered and extended to the rear in 1895 for George Church, and, with a new forty-year lease from 1898, there were further alterations in 1902 for Thomas Norfolk & Sons, Deptford brewers. The ground-floor front, with embossed tiles, and the interior of this period survived until 2007. The back room had been used for music-hall performances.¹⁸

The roads around the Commissioners' market acquired their first few houses between 1810 and 1815, but as elsewhere near by they took time to fill out. **Upper Market Street**'s west side was open until about 1830, when some semi-detached pairs were built towards the south end. A terrace of nine houses followed in 1832–3, from which 24–28 Market Street still stand, a last reminder of the area's early nineteenth-century domestic scale. The developer may have been Benjamin Davies, who by the 1840s held the land on lease and was

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set up as a surveyor on William Street; he went on to become surveyor to the Burrage Estate.¹⁹

Outwardly uniform, plain but essentially unaltered, these four-room houses vary in their internal layouts. There are standard rear-staircase plans to Nos 24–26, with simply moulded passage arches, stick-baluster staircases and wash-house and privy outshuts. Nos 27–28 are similar, but with cross-wise stairs. First occupants included William North (at No. 25), possibly a straw hat maker. Artisan families were predominant. The census of 1851 lists twenty-nine people in the five houses still extant: No. 24 had nine – William Bush, an Arsenal blacksmith, his wife and four children, a lodger, Anna Bury, who was a ‘pauper char woman’, and Elizabeth Ormond, a young widow shoe binder with her four-year old son; No. 25 had just two, Austin Tyer, another Arsenal smith and his wife; No. 26 was divided into three for John Randell, a police constable and his family, Thomas Weeks, another Arsenal smith, and Ann Miles, a widow laundress lodger; No. 27 had John Lamerton, a shipwright, his wife and two lodgers, Thomas Marshall, another shipwright, and Hetty Jeffery, a widow; and No. 28 had two households, those of George Moccock, a gunsmith, and of Edward Amos, a painters’ foreman, their wives, respectively a milliner and a dressmaker, plus Ann Valentine, a nineteen-year old servant.²⁰

The east side of Upper Market Street was built up by the early 1840s and a Zion Chapel was squeezed in near its south end in 1853. Nearly all the street’s houses came down for public buildings, but at the north end of the west side an early pair was replaced in 1898–9 with three houses (Nos 35–37) built by J. B Sanford & Co. for H. H. Church on an Ogilby Estate lease. These survive in radically altered form, in use as offices.²¹

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Municipal precinct

Since 1840 the administration and public facilities of local government have been the principal force behind the reshaping of the district covered in this chapter. The Woolwich Town Commissioners' responsibilities passed to the Woolwich Local Board of Health in 1852, on to the Metropolitan Borough of Woolwich in 1900, and then to the London Borough of Greenwich in 1965. Other major and related institutional presences in the area have been the Metropolitan Police, here since 1840, and Woolwich Polytechnic, which established itself on William Street in 1891 and grew massively.

The Town Commissioners built a small town hall on a plot to the west of the failed market in 1840. This they then promptly sold to the Metropolitan Police, for use as a police court, and built themselves a replacement on the east side of the market plot. A police station was soon inserted between and other intervening land became a municipal works yard that was frequently contemplated as a site for a replacement town hall. Instead it was eventually used for a public library that opened in 1901. The first significant civic expansion beyond the original market ground had by this time occurred with the erection to the south of public baths in 1893–4. This was particularly welcomed by Woolwich Polytechnic, which stood to the east and was enlarged up to 1905 with a science and art school opposite the baths. The baths, library and polytechnic buildings were all designed by H. H. Church, whose preference for ornate gables and Renaissance decoration gave the enclave a certain stylistic affinity.

The limitations of the old town hall made its replacement urgent after 1900 – administratively Woolwich was now a much larger area. The opportunity was grasped with alacrity, even extravagance, and the new town hall on Wellington Street of 1903–6 gave Woolwich Borough Council a stronger and civic focus further south. The contrast between the grandiose Edwardian Baroque offices and public hall and

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their modestly classical early-Victorian predecessor illustrates well the changing status of local government as it does the more self-conscious civic pride of a town that had become substantially more prosperous.

The public-building enclave was incrementally extended. First it crossed Market Street in 1910 in the shape of a new police station that permitted replacement of its predecessor with a magistrates' court in 1912, both with elevations by John Dixon Butler that added more loosely classical architectural grandeur. There was further civic spread in the 1930s when a block of municipal offices went up across Wellington Street from the town hall and the Council's progressive commitment to public-health provision was cemented with the construction of a central health centre on Market Street. Here the emphasis was on the facilities within the building rather than on external architectural display. More office accommodation was built on Wellington Street in 1958–9, reflecting the growing needs of a council that was orchestrating an ambitious post-war housing programme.

The London Borough of Greenwich, a yet larger administrative unit, decided to centralize its administration in Woolwich. The Grand Depot Barracks site had become available, permitting further expansion of the municipal precinct. The first phase of a big project for council offices, Peggy Middleton House, was built in 1973–7. A plan to close Wellington Street in front of the Town Hall, to unify the greater municipal precinct, remained unrealized, but this unifying vision was somewhat revived when the mid-twentieth-century offices on Wellington Street and Peggy Middleton House were replaced by the Woolwich Centre on Wellington Street, built in 2009–11.

Woolwich Old Town Hall

The town hall of 1841–2 at the corner of Calderwood Street and Polytechnic Street is the oldest surviving municipal building in

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Woolwich. Few other local-government buildings of the 1840s survive in London; the former vestry halls on Kensington High Street and Kennington Road, Lambeth, are perhaps the most comparable. Of this select group, the Woolwich building is the best preserved and most evocative survivor. Though modest in appearance, the Old Town Hall is both the foundation stone of Woolwich's distinctive complex of public buildings and a link between early municipal endeavour and modern local government. Yet it was, in fact, the second town hall built.

From their establishment in 1807 the Commissioners for the Improvement of the Town and Parish of Woolwich lacked purpose-built accommodation, and made do with the vestry room of the parish church. Attempts to maintain the independence of Woolwich in the face of what was regarded as intrusive Poor Law and Metropolitan Police legislation rendered parish affairs more complex in the late 1830s. The Commissioners decided to sell some land to raise funds to build their own meeting room, an initiative the Vestry vigorously opposed, insisting that rooms in or adjoining the poor house or the soup house were adequate. But something with greater dignity was felt to be necessary. The failed market site on William Street was both in hand and an appropriate location for a new edifice, central in a network of newly developed residential and commercial streets where several board members lived and worked. An advertisement sought designs for a single-room town hall and at the beginning of 1840 a submission from Thomas Kinton, a foreman of works in the Engineers' Department at the Arsenal, was adopted. This provided four rooms, so its acceptance prompted complaint from the architect John Douglas Hopkins, whose single-room design had been rejected. Kinton was posted to Canada in March and his design was erected under the supervision of Robert Jolly, a board member and builder-surveyor.²² This first town hall was a simple single-storey classical structure of two by four bays. Between pilasters and a pediment, a frieze adorned

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with wreaths had a panel above guttae into which 'Town Hall' was to have been inscribed. Beside the main block there was a smaller board room, set back from the street behind the main entrance.

The inscription was not made because, in circumstances described below, the completed building was abruptly and in the face of dissent, sold to the Metropolitan Police in September 1840. The offer was more than double what the building had cost. With this money the Commissioners knew 'full well that they could build themselves another Town Hall'.²³

So, Kinton's design was more or less mirrored at the other end of the market block for the second building. George Hall Graham, another board member and builder-surveyor, prepared designs in early 1841 and the edifice was up by early 1842 with Robert Jolly again supervising. The builders were William and John Cann, of Jackson's Lane, Woolwich Common. Other local builders, James Jolly, and George Grief and Son, also received payments. Furlongs and George Hudson completed the fitting out of the interior in 1843. Ampler accommodation was possible at this second attempt because the fall of the land permitted a substantial 'basement', in effect a whole lower storey. This compelled entrance via a longer flight of stairs, displaced sideways and curved.

The building has a rendered or 'compo' façade. Its return admits exposed brick between a rusticated lower storey, pilasters and an entablature. There were once railings. An original scrolled-iron gas-lamp bracket survives, reset over the Calderwood Street entrance. The lower storey housed offices and an apartment, the upper the board room and the 'large room' or hall, a simply treated space adorned only with pilasters and decorative ceiling vents. It had a fixed stage at its inner end. When 'Town Hall' and '1842' were inscribed under the pediment in 1843, it served not only to advertise the building's

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function but to differentiate it from the Police Court, with which confusion might easily have arisen.²⁴ Between these two temple-like pavilions of public order the former market area was used as the Commissioners' works yard, but the insertion of a police station in the mid-1840s broke the symmetry along William Street.

From 1852 until 1900 the town hall was a headquarters for the Woolwich Local Board of Health. It was incrementally enlarged and internally modified to cope with changing requirements. By 1865 the Board of Health was pressed for office space and, by public demand, for a larger town hall. A petition signed by more than 500 ratepayers prompted discussion but only small actions. A two-storey brick-faced office extension went up beside the entrance bay in 1868, to designs by the Board's surveyor John Barnett. 'Bringing out' the entrance bay and rebuilding the stairs was also then proposed, but this was deferred until 1873 when the William Street elevation took on its present form.²⁵

The main room had come to be used as a County court in the 1840s. The board room, also used as a Coroner's court, was remade in 1876. This work, devised by Herbert O. Thomas, Barnett's successor, comprised enlargement to the west under a raised roof with a central lantern, and, in wholly new fenestration, a canted bay window. The enlarged room, in which an austere classical marble chimneypiece survives, was fully tested in September 1878 after the *Princess Alice* disaster at Gallions Reach – the Coroner requisitioned the room for the inquests into the sinking of this pleasure cruiser which caused the loss of an estimated 600 lives.²⁶

Demands for a new public hall persisted, but were diverted to private initiative with the construction of the New Road Assembly Rooms in 1880–1. Pressure on the town hall diminished, all the more after it was refused a license for music and dancing in 1889. The

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appointment of a Medical Officer of Health in the same year caused the ground-floor residence, then occupied by the Board's Surveyor, to be converted to offices. Further demand for space led to the construction of a two-storey south extension for the County court on Lower Market Street in 1892, on what had been a walled garden for the residence. This addition, designed by H. H. Church for the Board, and built by H. L. Holloway of Deptford, was rented to the Office of Works, perhaps as an adjunct to the nearby police court.²⁷ It reflects the older building in its ground-floor rustication, but its stone and terracotta-dressed red brick, jaunty gable and decorative sill aprons are typical of Church, and a foretaste of his nearby baths and library.

Local-government reorganization made the Town Hall inescapably inadequate for its purpose. In 1900 the board room underwent 'hurried improvisations with paint, curtains, mayoral chair with canopy and the installation of some semblance of a public gallery'²⁸ to create a council chamber for the newly formed Metropolitan Borough of Woolwich. The building remained the authority's administrative centre until 1906 when it was superseded by the much larger town hall on Wellington Street. Thereafter the ground floor was returned to residential use, and in 1914 toilet facilities and a robing room were formed on the upper floor on the William Street side for the County court, which continued here until the 1930s. In 1927 the entire ground floor was converted for a maternity and child welfare centre incorporating toddlers' and ultra-violet light clinics, public-health programmes for which Woolwich gained renown. Divided occupation and variable usage through the twentieth century led inevitably to minor alterations, such as the reworking of doors and windows on the Polytechnic Street elevation, yet the former hall and board room remain little changed. In recent years the building has generally been used as overflow accommodation for the local authority and organizations it supports.²⁹

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Former Woolwich Public Baths

The public baths complex that spans the south side of Bathway was erected in 1892–4 for the Woolwich Local Board of Health to designs by the Board's architect of choice, H. H. Church.

The public baths of 1850 on Nelson Street, privately run and small, had probably fallen out of use some time before their conversion to a furniture store in 1888, but it was only in 1889 that the Board of Health decided to provide a more substantial and up-to-date replacement. The Board selected a site behind its town hall for the baths in 1890, and acquired the property from the Ogilby Estate along with an outstanding lease-end interest from the Powis Estate, which Church managed. Ratepayer concerns and indecision within the Board slowed progress; the question of omitting wash houses from the scheme was debated several times. The builders, H. L. Holloway of Deptford, commenced work in late 1892. A formal opening by the Duke of Westminster in the summer of 1894 included a short display of 'ornamental swimming'.³⁰ The newly established Woolwich Polytechnic on the other side of Lower Market Street welcomed the baths, and, lacking funds to provide a comparable facility on its own premises, included a photograph of them in its prospectus.³¹

With two large recreational swimming pools, fifty-two slipper or private baths, a wash house and a laundry, water supply was a concern. While the building was under construction the Board decided to sink an artesian well on the site to supplement provision from the Kent Water Company. This well, with an associated steam engine and additional slipper baths, was not complete until 1896.³²

Impressive in scale, the building has a long, low and somewhat ungainly red-brick façade, lavishly dressed in Portland stone with three gables rising above a central two-storey block in a kind of Northern Renaissance style. Flanking this are single-storey elements,

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a gable-fronted and more sparingly ornamented range to the west, and plainer annexes to the east where there is a basement. There were five entrances, for the superintendent, first-class men, ladies, a ticket office and, off to the west, second-class men. Behind offices were the men's slipper baths, ten first- and thirty second-class. For women there were just twelve baths (all of one class) on the first floor, which also accommodated the superintendent's living spaces. The first-class swimming pool is a single-storey range across the back of the site. The second-class pool stands at right angles to the west. The east end housed the laundry, wash house and extra slipper baths, with the steam engine and a basement boiler house. Three boilers supplied steam power and hot water not just to the baths, but subsequently also to the Public Library. An 82ft(25m)-tall tapering square chimney survives.³³

Church's layout was the complicated consequence of having to observe social proprieties – separation of men and women, and two classes, in both private and swimming baths. The first-class pool, at 100ft by 40ft (31m by 12m), was notably large for its date. Changing cubicles stood under a spectators' gallery that continued round all four sides behind a bowed and latticed iron front. Iron roof trusses supported a hipped roof with a lantern at its ridge. The second-class pool was only slightly smaller, but lacked a gallery until one was inserted in 1931–2 to carry filtration plant. The eastern additions of 1896 had metal-arched trusses with ornamental spandrels and lantern roofs.³⁴

The public baths were modernized several times, most extensively in 1959–60 under W. H. Gimson, the Borough Engineer. The exterior was significantly modified, its ground floor faced in tiles with a recessed, canopied and more egalitarian single entrance, adorned with etched glass panels depicting diving figures in a charming if then rather dated style. The entrance hall was radically reworked, with a

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new staircase on its east side. Internal alterations round the main pool included removal of the cubicles and the addition of two similarly old-fashioned tiled panels of divers on the upper part of the east wall. The laundry room and wash house were converted to slipper baths; demand for this public service remained strong in 1960.³⁵

The Public Baths closed in 1982 when Greenwich Council was planning what became the Waterfront Leisure Centre. The facility was adapted as a recreation centre in 1983–4, with the second-class pool filled in to permit the formation of a community centre with raked seating. A decade later the building was sold to the University of Greenwich and, through plans by Trevor Dannatt and Partners, architects, converted to a students' union with the main pool floored over to create a hall and discotheque with a bar. But other parts of the university soon departed from Woolwich and the building has latterly served as administrative offices and a rehearsal facility for drama students. The eastern annexes were cleared of baths for use first as offices and latterly as rehearsal spaces. The second-class pool, once lined with white tiling and amply lit, has become a blacked-out performance space. The larger pool, suspended ceilings notwithstanding, still retains much original fabric.³⁶

Former Woolwich Public Library

Woolwich was slow to provide a free library for its population, though this was not for lack of effort on the part of enlightened elements of its polity. The building on Calderwood Street adjoining the Old Town Hall, with a rear elevation on Bathway, opened in 1901. The Board of Health initiated its construction in 1897; the Metropolitan Borough of Woolwich completed the project. The architect, once again, was Church, who had by this time formed the firm of Church, Quick and Whincop. This was his last significant contribution to the municipal enclave.

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The Nelson Street baths of 1850 had included a library, and there were several other private and military libraries and reading rooms in Victorian Woolwich. The first Public Libraries Acts of the 1850s and 1860s could only be implemented with the explicit consent of local ratepayers. The possibility of a public library in Woolwich was not seriously advanced until 1876 when the Board of Health established a committee to secure adoption of the Libraries Acts, with George Whale as Secretary. Ratepayer opposition defeated this initiative, as it did others in subsequent polls of 1887 and 1888. Legislation in 1891–3 that made it possible for the Board to borrow and eased the requirement for ratepayer support removed obstacles. Following representations from a coalition of interested bodies, including the Woolwich and Plumstead Independent Labour Party, the Woolwich and District Trades and Labour Council, and the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, the Board at last voted in 1896 to apply the Public Libraries Acts.³⁷

A limited survey of metropolitan forerunners was made and Camberwell's Nunhead Public Library (1896) was selected as a model for the Woolwich building. Church drew up plans in 1897, seemingly adopting little more than a tripartite central-gabled form from Nunhead. The chosen site on William Street, held freehold, was the Board's works' yard, which moved to Callis Yard in 1897–9. The Metropolitan Police delayed the project, requiring alterations to the design to prevent a loss of light into their adjoining premises; there were also problems with the building tender. Work began in 1900 with Thomas & Edge as builders; they were also responsible for fittings. The library was formally opened by Lord Avebury in 1901, a triumphant Whale in attendance.³⁸

The principal feature of the library's busy free-Baroque façade, in red brick with Portland stone dressings, is the great central bow window, which swells out from the raised ground floor. Its polished Aberdeen-

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granite podium or deep plinth is engraved with the names of Board members, the architect and builder. The Board, in one of its last acts, ordered this commemoration in June 1900. There is another show elevation to the rear, immediately across from the public baths. This is more staid, if not quite neo-classical.

The library originally had a newspaper room in front of a large top-lit hall with a lending-library counter and a grand Jacobean-style staircase. The walls were light green, to contrast with the dark brown of the polished walnut woodwork, and there were domical lanterns. The counter has gone, but this interior is otherwise little changed. A magazine room lay beyond, and the remainder of the ground floor was taken up by offices for the librarian, whose living accommodation was on the first floor, to the front and with its own street entrance. The reference library was on the first floor at the back, at the top of the main staircase, and under ornamental roof trusses.³⁹

In 1913–14, just before war brought jobs to Woolwich, the Council replaced a stable east of the library's rear block with a soup kitchen, with Edward Proctor, now of Plumstead, as its builder. This plain single-storey brick block was converted in 1979 to be an additional reading room. The newspaper room at the front had been opened out to be a part of the lending library in a general reorganization begun in 1927. The library closed in 2011 and the building was put to use for other council services.⁴⁰

Woolwich Town Hall

Woolwich Town Hall is the most distinguished non-military building in Woolwich. A rich essay in the Edwardian Baroque, it was built in 1903–5 to designs by (Sir) Alfred Brumwell Thomas for the Metropolitan Borough of Woolwich. Encompassing offices, meeting rooms, a council chamber and a public hall, its grandeur reflected the enhanced status of the enlarged municipal authority brought into

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being by the London Government Act of 1899, as well as local prosperity and ambition. The building was retained for use as the headquarters of the successor authority, the London Borough of Greenwich, and remains the civic focus and pride of Woolwich.

The Borough of Woolwich was formed in 1900 from ten smaller authorities, notably Woolwich Local Board of Health and Plumstead Vestry but also smaller bodies such as Eltham Vestry and Lee District Board of Works. The new Council inherited the old Woolwich town hall on William Street and the vestry offices on Maxey Road, Plumstead, but neither was adequate in size or civic gravitas. The provision of new accommodation was therefore an early order of business. In 1899 one of the amalgamated bodies, the Plumstead Commissioners for Public Libraries, had held a competition for new municipal offices, a public hall and library, won by Alfred Brumwell Thomas. Despite the impending local-government reforms, the Commissioners persevered with the scheme to the end, no doubt hoping that Plumstead and their proposed building would be chosen as the headquarters of the new borough. But the incoming Council opted for a site in central Woolwich. It looked at a number of locations before selecting this L-shaped plot facing Wellington Street, bordered by the Grand Theatre and the Public Baths. The site had indeed been proposed as suitable for a town hall previously, in 1894. Its freehold mostly belonged to the Ogilby Estate, which to the Council's surprise proved amenable to a voluntary sale, obviating the need for compulsory purchase. The sale went through early in 1902, though some of the leasehold interests took longer to buy up, and an Act of Parliament was needed to obtain the small remainder of the site.⁴¹

The appointment of Brumwell Thomas, seemingly no relation to H. O. Thomas, arose from his earlier association with the Plumstead competition; he offered to forego £500, half the balance due to him on Plumstead, if given the job and, as the Council acknowledged, 'great

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expense would be incurred in having a fresh competition and much time lost thereby'.⁴² It may be that Thomas's Plumstead scheme (never published), which also mixed Portland stone and brick and included a clock tower, in part informed his design for Woolwich. Thomas, born and named plain Alfred in 1868 – the Brumwell was adopted after he started his own practice in 1894 – was the son of Edward Thomas, surveyor to Rotherhithe Vestry. His reputation was made by winning the high-profile competition for Belfast City Hall in 1897, for which he was knighted in 1906 at the early age of 38. Thomas's massive Belfast job, and from 1904 a third big town hall project at Stockport, were running concurrently while the Woolwich building, the smallest of the three, was under construction.⁴³

In Spring 1902 Brumwell Thomas produced alternative schemes for Woolwich Town Hall.⁴⁴ One, with front offices and a public hall parallel to the Grand Theatre and entrances to both from Wellington Street, was rejected in favour of the other, which placed the public hall behind with a separate entrance from Market Street, allowing the option of a phased development. Thomas's matured designs went to tender in the late summer of 1902, the thirteen bidders being asked to submit estimates with and without the hall. J. E. Johnson & Son of Leicester won the contract in September, without the hall. Work started in February 1903. Afterwards the hall too received the go-ahead, which meant that it ran behind the municipal portion throughout the construction period. Because of this greater expenditure, Thomas undertook reductions to the design in the summer of 1903, well after building had begun. This mainly entailed economizing on the amount of stone used on the Market Street front.⁴⁵

Construction of the town hall coincided with a period of Labour control of the borough for three years from November 1903. The Municipal Buildings Committee which presided over the process therefore included a strong Labour representation. Throughout, the

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Committee showed complete trust in Thomas, whose attention was assiduous despite the calls of Belfast and Stockport. On the whole the job went well. Some delays were caused by persistent late deliveries of Portland stonework, causing the contractors, for instance, to install stone-cutting machinery for the blocks destined for the public hall, instead of taking them fully finished. Johnsons also showed a tendency to subcontract items to their Leicester cronies, sometimes without asking.⁴⁶ At this stage the Council had no direct-labour department, so all the official subcontracts went to private firms except for the electrical work, which the Borough's own Electricity Department carried out.

There were disputes about the quality of the brickwork and, at greater length, the internal plasterwork, entertained in part because Labour councillors lent a sympathetic ear to the grievances of working men, not least dismissed building workers. Johnsons were generally vindicated, but in the case of the plasterwork not until after Thomas presided over an enquiry which after sifting claim, counter-claim and technical analysis determined that though in two places Keene's cement had been contaminated by plaster of Paris, the consequences were negligible. As completion approached late in 1905, Thomas expressed the view that given the postponement of the public hall and other complexities, two and a half years as against the two allowed for by the contract was not a bad record.⁴⁷ On quality, the chairman of the committee, George Bishop, declared at the time of the opening that 'everything of the best had been procured, and there was nothing shoddy', nor had sweated labour been allowed.⁴⁸

Despite the imposing reminder of F. W. Pomeroy's Queen Victoria statue in the entrance hall, paid for by a separate voluntary committee and unveiled by the Duke of Connaught in December 1905, just before the building's formal completion,⁴⁹ the Council resisted suggestions that the town hall itself should be opened by royalty. The

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task was performed instead by Will Crooks, Labour MP for Woolwich, on 13 January 1906, in the presence of military, political and religious worthies and with the Royal Artillery Band and Woolwich Choral Society in attendance. Crooks expressed the sentiment that ‘clean and elevating surroundings inspired people to good work, and under the inspiration of that building he looked forward to better work on the part of those legislating for the people of Woolwich, and to greater tolerance towards one another’.⁵⁰

Like its counterparts at Belfast and Stockport, Woolwich Town Hall was designed in a largely English version of the Edwardian Baroque style, derived from the architecture of Wren, Gibbs and others. This idiom appealed partly because ‘its buildings were of a splendour that seemed appropriate for the centre of a great empire.’⁵¹ More specifically, the composition of the front, with its giant colonnade, broken pediments and lofty tower at one end owes a clear debt to John Belcher’s Colchester Town Hall (1897–1902), an influential if more exotic specimen of the style in another garrison town. As at Colchester, the basic external language is the orange-red brick with Portland stone dressings of Wren’s additions at Hampton Court. This is then liberally enriched with an Ionic order (unfluted and with Scamozzian capitals), a surprisingly irenic choice for Woolwich but one which Brumwell Thomas applied throughout at Belfast. The Doric order is reserved for the Market Street elevation, where the entrance to the public hall has military and naval insignia surmounting three arches with inset columns.

The substantial office range, of two storeys with basements, takes up two thirds of the site. The principal front faces Wellington Street, where the symmetrical elevation is so florid that there appears to be more stonework than red-brick walling. A tripartite screen of columns, shielding the high windows of the three main committee rooms on the first floor, steals the show. Above each of these windows rise broken

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segmental pediments, while in the central or entrance bay the screen breaks forward and the broken pediment is topped by an upper triangular pediment, over which again comes a lead-covered dome set back behind a balustrade. (The frontispiece at Stockport is composed on similar lines, but crowned by a tower, not a dome.) At ground-floor level the entrance porch protrudes centrally. Its face is adorned by mop-haired cherubs in high relief holding the new coat of arms of the borough, depicting three cannon with lions' heads. On the west flank of the front range rises a 130ft(40m) clock tower. Its main stage is in plain brick, but from clock level upwards it is of stone, with fine aedicules carried by Ionic columns on each face at the belfry storey. In fact the tower houses only a modest clock without chimes, supplied by John Smith & Sons of Derby, and not even a water tank. The stone carving beneath the corbelled-out mayor's balcony facing Market Street is particularly handsome, depicting winged cherubs once again supporting a cartouche with the Woolwich arms. The long return elevation along this street continues as a toned-down office range, pepped up by three modest Venetian windows, before stone embellishment is resumed around the public-hall entrance, crowned at roof level by a further full pediment.

Inside, the building is neither so capacious nor so rich as first appears. The main floor of the office range is sixteen steps up from street level. It is dominated by a double-height, triple-domed entrance hall, almost basilican in quality, and of unprecedented size and grandeur for a London town hall of this date. It is lit by lunettes within the side arches and paved throughout with black-and-white marble squares laid in diamonds. Balustraded screens shield the corridors and subsidiary stairs on both sides from the central space. At the south end of the hall an imperial staircase leads to a continuous first-floor gallery below barrel vaults. At the head of the stair the over-life-sized Carrara marble statue of Queen Victoria by Pomeroy has been relocated from its original position in the centre of

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the hall. The statue was a replica of a bronze figure for the City of Chester and was paid for by public subscription as a memorial to the monarch.⁵² On account of this statue the hall has sometimes been called the Victoria Hall. Apart from a set of ornate bronze electroliers by J. W. Singer & Son of Frome, it is not richly embellished. There is none of the rich marblwork which a larger budget allowed Thomas to deploy at Belfast. The painted balustrades, for instance, appear to be of hard plaster rather than timber, which material is indeed minimized throughout the building. The roofs are all of steel (supplied by Dorman Long), the domes of brick and concrete, and the floors and lintels likewise of fire-resisting materials, as Thomas assured his committee.⁵³

Joinery came into its own in the handsome doors, most three-panelled with ears and central voussoir blocks to the frames, and in the ceremonial rooms. The best-preserved of these rooms is the council chamber, located on the upper level north-east of the entrance hall, away from the noise of the street. It is an intimate square chamber, plaster-vaulted and domed, with ventilation grilles prominent in the spandrels. At ground level, the light oak panelling, fixed seating and mayoral chair were all made by H. H. Martyn of Cheltenham from Thomas's design. After committee visits to recently built council chambers, including Colchester and Oxford, it was decided to adopt the radiating rather than the square plan, in other words a horseshoe arrangement of fixed seating in blocks of two, with a continuous public gallery at the back. There were forty-two councillors, but accommodation was provided for fifty-six in case of increase.⁵⁴

In the linked suite of three committee rooms along the front, the original handsome decoration has not been preserved, following a regrettable renovation of the early 1960s. As built, the rooms were united by a high oak dado running throughout and double screens of Ionic columns, here fluted, between which asbestos partitions covered

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with felt could be rolled out to divide the spaces. Parquet flooring, Turkey carpets, furniture and electroliers completed the ensemble. At one end of this suite was the mayor's reception room, and under the tower at the other his private room with external balcony. The working offices were fitted around the generous public dispositions, mainly on the ground floor and in the basements.

At the back of the complex is the public hall, entered from Market Street through a vestibule divided in two by a screen. It has no outside face. Its square plan, cut into at the corners for stairs and service spaces and so forming a Greek cross, was probably chosen in part because of site constraints, but the shape was talked up as allowing an audience of up to 750 people 'an equal opportunity of hearing and seeing the performance'.⁵⁵ Though it has the dome and rich plasterwork found elsewhere in the building, it appears gloomy today, perhaps because the windows in the dome have been covered. Three of the side spaces contain galleries, while the stage occupies the fourth. Despite the domical ceiling, the acoustics are good. At the back of the stage there was formerly an organ, installed around 1911, whose baroque-style case included a bust of Edward VII, but this has been removed.

The lavish embellishment of the town hall, though orthodox in style and taste, gives evidence of the high craftsmanship of Edwardian decorative firms. Singers, suppliers of the electroliers, have been mentioned, also H. H. Martyn, who besides the furniture of the council suite contributed all the excellent stone carving. The fibrous plaster decoration was made by Tanners of Liverpool, but from modelling by the Bromsgrove Guild. A feature of the stonework and plasterwork throughout are the copious and lively putti heads, whose locks consistently betray touches of Edwardian hairstyling.

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Special mention must be made of the stained glass distributed throughout the public and ceremonial spaces of the building. Devised in late 1904, this was designed by Geoffrey Webb, and probably marked his debut as an independent artist. Webb worked with Thomas and the local antiquarian W. T. Vincent, who was largely responsible for the iconographic scheme. The subjects are derived from the historical and royal associations of the locality, its eminent men and notable events. So manorial heraldry adorns the lunettes of the entrance hall, Elizabeth I and Henry VIII grace the council chamber, while Richard Lovelace, Henry Maudslay and Gen. Gordon look down on the public hall. These three last were suggested by the building committee. A working men's note was to have been struck in the central committee room, where the building committee asked for a scene showing either the interior of the Arsenal shell foundry or, more contentiously, the emigration to Canada of those discharged from Woolwich Dockyard in 1869. Webb and Vincent managed to parlay these ideas into the comparatively anodyne scene of Edward III receiving the captive King John of France at Eltham Palace.⁵⁶

The town hall has been comparatively little altered over the years and is maintained in a good state. Enclosing development gave little opportunity for enlargement but in 1929–30 a small extension was built on Polytechnic Street. Designed by the Borough Engineer, John Sutcliffe, to provide a refreshment area for the public hall, and subsequently much modernized, this addition was known as the Town Hall Annex.⁵⁷

Woolwich Magistrates' Court and Police Station

The origins of the court and police station where Calderwood Street meets Market Street have been partly described in the account of the Old Town Hall because the first building on the east side of this junction, facing William Street, was built as a town hall in early 1840 only to be sold to the Metropolitan Police Commissioners and opened

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as a police court that October. The background to this transaction was enlargement of the Metropolitan Police District. The Woolwich Town Commissioners had in 1830 and 1838 sought to include Woolwich in any such extension. The Metropolitan Police Act of 1839 met this desire, and the police division that covered Deptford and Greenwich was enlarged to include Woolwich. Typically at odds with the Town Commissioners, the parish Vestry opposed the demise of its constables and watchmen.⁵⁸

Through the Metropolitan Police Court Act of 1839 a number of the London area's local magistrates' courts were reconstituted as police courts. In consequence, John Wray, the Receiver to the Metropolitan Police, acquired the newly built town hall on William Street for use as a small police court, and the petty sessions for Woolwich, previously held at the Castle Inn on Parson's Hill, were transferred into it. The main hall was divided into two chambers and the lesser space behind the entrance became a magistrates' room, later also divided. The premises further incorporated a house to the rear that had been built as part of the market the Town Commissioners had failed to establish.

Wray had also and as was usual taken over the parish watch-house to serve as a police station. Charles Reeves was appointed the first Surveyor to the Metropolitan Police in 1842 and thereafter the provision of purpose-built police stations was pushed forward. At an early stage of this programme, in 1845–6, the Woolwich court was supplemented to its east by a police station, to provide offices, probably including a charge room, below living accommodation. An early building of its kind, this station, designed by Reeves, followed its William Street predecessors in its simple four-square classicism. A cell block beside a rear yard was enlarged in 1856. A rear range that incorporated a library in the 1850s was later a section house.⁵⁹

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The number of cases heard by London's magistrates more than doubled through the second half of the nineteenth century, putting pressure on such cramped facilities as that at Woolwich. After a period under the Commissioners of Works and Public Buildings, responsibility for police courts returned to the Metropolitan Police in 1897. A London-wide programme of renewal ensued after a House of Commons Committee report of 1900 recommended secondary courtrooms and all-round better provision.⁶⁰

The rebuilding of the Woolwich complex was mooted in 1903 and a year later the Metropolitan Police acquired a six-house site on the west side of Market Street from the Ogilby Estate, opening the way to ampler accommodation for both the station and the court. A new police station was built first in 1909–10, on the Market Street plot. It was designed by the Police Architect and Surveyor, John Dixon Butler, who for more than a decade prior to this had turned out a number of comparable red-brick and Portland stone buildings. John Grover and Son of Islington were the builders. This is a strong example of Dixon Butler's work and a subtly elegant expression of authority. The front range, of sixteen bays and two storeys with basements and attics, has attractive area railings and a blue police lamp on a shaped stone plinth. Within the main north entrance were offices, including one for a criminal-investigation department, and a charge room. There was also a ground-floor mess room, a basement parade room, and, on the steel-framed first floor, a recreation room with a billiard table, and a library. Upper-storey wood-panelled dormitory boxes (most 9ft by 6ft/2.7m by 1.8m) accommodated twenty-five policemen, and there was one set of married quarters as well as an inspector's apartment to the south with its own street entrance. A custody wing, discreetly attached on the north side of a rear yard, had six cells for men, five for women (most 10ft by 6ft8in./3.1m by 2m), all lit by high-level small-pane iron windows. Across the yard was a garage for an ambulance.

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The interior was modernized in the late twentieth century, less so in the custody wing, which is thus an unusual survival.⁶¹

The opening of the police station made clearance on the other side of the road possible; plans in 1910 intended a connecting tunnel. The erection of a new court building followed in 1911–12. Also designed by Dixon Butler, this is again of red brick, with rubbed-brick quoins, and Portland stone dressings. A cornice continues as the projecting sides of a pediment in an otherwise recessed and channelled-stone entrance bay. The symmetrical and dignified classical façade combines a respectful nod to the police station opposite with elements from Dixon Butler's earlier police courts, notably at Tower Bridge, a grander building which also provided a model layout. The Woolwich court is relatively small, though in all respects – space, light, air, hygiene, better appointed than its predecessor. In the public entrance foyer the initials 'MP' feature in the terrazzo and mosaic floor, probably laid by Diespeker, who supplied a similar floor for the Greenwich Police Court in 1909. Beyond, at the centre back, is the little-altered main courtroom, panelled and, for privacy, top-lit. The lantern has coloured glass, possibly by William Morris and Sons, who supplied Greenwich. The bench is in a curved recess under Royal Arms and there is a central dock. A second and smaller court on the first floor has been modernized. Single-storey ranges flank the courtroom and there are basement cells. Under the care of Her Majesty's Courts Service, the building continues as one of the last of London's police courts still in judicial use.⁶²

Woolwich Central Health Centre

Opposite the Town Hall on Market Street is what was built to be and continues as a central health centre for Woolwich. This clinic was a project handled entirely within Woolwich Borough Council. It was planned in 1937 when Dr John Macmillan was the Council's Medical Officer of Health, designed by the Borough Engineer, H. W. Tee, and

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built by the Council's Direct Labour Organisation in 1938–9. Lord Horder, an eminent physician, opened the centre.

Its two storeys are modestly faced in plum-coloured brick, with sandstone dressings concentrated around an amply fenestrated entrance bay topped by the borough arms. The internal structure is of reinforced concrete with hollow-tiled floors. In style, the clinic belongs with the majority of such buildings erected in the 1930s, incorporating just a few *moderne* touches rather than adopting the radical modernism of the Peckham or Finsbury health centres. But Woolwich was no less devoted to pioneering public-health provision. The borough had a proudly progressive record. It had established a municipal milk depot in 1906, an infant welfare centre at the town hall, run alongside an ante-natal clinic from 1915 with help from the British Hospital for Mothers and Babies, and London's first combined maternity and schools health centre in Eltham in 1931 – infant mortality had been dramatically reduced. The Woolwich Health Centre was another 'combined centre' that incorporated both a maternity and child-welfare clinic and facilities for the LCC's school medical service, including a solarium or sunlight treatment room, for children suffering rickets or tuberculosis. This was top-lit with cubicles for orthopaedic treatment, massage, electro-therapy and chiropody. A central courtyard had an ornamental pond. Upstairs there were dental surgeries and above the waiting hall was a flat roof that could be used as an outdoor solarium. Car-parking space stood above air-raid shelters that were linked to pram shelters.⁶³

Woolwich Borough Council spread its premises onto the south side of Wellington Street in the 1930s. The first 'overflow Town Hall', or Municipal Offices (45–53 Wellington Street), was built in two phases in 1934–7 to designs by H. W. Tee, Borough Engineer, to house his department and that of the Borough Treasurer. This was a substantial

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concrete-framed three-storey office block. Its fifteen-bay red-brick and channelled-stone façade was in a half-hearted Baroque manner, in stylistic affinity with the Town Hall that it faced. The building was demolished in 2007 to make way for the Woolwich Centre.⁶⁴

A nearby site, 29–37 Wellington Street, was cleared after bomb damage in the Second World War. Temporary offices of 1946–7 were replaced with a more permanent building in 1958–9 to accommodate the Council's Housing and Public Health departments. W. H. Gimson, Borough Engineer, now eschewed historicism. The grid of the four-storey, nine-bay concrete frame, for flexible planning, was expressed via prominent cast-stone mullions and grey-slate apron panels. Above a blade-like cornice an upper storey faced in red brick struck a milder note. These offices were also demolished in 2007.⁶⁵

A further office block, at Nelson House, 50 Wellington Street, adjacent to the Market Street health centre, was built for Greenwich Council's Social Services Department in 1983 to designs by Walter F. Parker and Associates, architects. Of four brick-faced storeys with a slate-hung mansard roof, it is otherwise nondescript.⁶⁶

Woolwich Polytechnic (Island Business Centre)

Most of the buildings on the island block bounded by Calderwood Street, Thomas Street, Polytechnic Street and Wellington Street have their origins as parts of Woolwich Polytechnic. This educational establishment opened in 1891 as the Woolwich Polytechnic Young Men's Christian Institute. The polytechnic, an initiative that mixed education and philanthropy, was only the second institution of its kind in London. Emphasis was as much on physical and spiritual as on educational improvement, but this began to change when the polytechnic came under the auspices of the London County Council in 1894. Between 1898 and 1965 the institution was gradually and massively enlarged. Amid this growth, two of the bounding streets

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were renamed – Lower Market Street as Polytechnic Street in 1935, and William Street as Calderwood Street in 1938, in honour of a local industrialist, councillor and chairman of the Polytechnic governing body, William Calderwood.

Woolwich Polytechnic provided wide-ranging practical instruction for local children and adults, but it had a strong bias towards training in engineering and science, a reflection of the area's industrial needs, strengths and traditions, not least those of the Royal Arsenal and Royal Military Academy. This was typical of the localized character of London's technical education system in the early twentieth century.

Establishment

Woolwich Polytechnic had its origins in the technical education movement, a cause taken up in the 1880s that aimed both to create a better-trained workforce and to increase educational opportunities for the poorer classes. Woolwich was fertile ground for such intentions, with a large population of skilled workers and limited opportunities for further education. The prime mover was Francis George (Frank) Didden, a fitter at the Royal Arsenal and a former student at Quintin Hogg's Youths' Christian Institute, the forerunner of the pioneering and influential Regent Street Polytechnic, which Hogg opened in 1882. Didden, who had worked for the Young Men's Christian Association, aimed to follow this example and, in doing so, to harness his religious mission to scientific education and self-improvement. Hogg, a well-connected tea and sugar merchant and a philanthropist, gave support, though not money. Together they mobilized a group of promoters and approached the War Office with a view to acquiring a site for a polytechnic institution in Woolwich. In 1886 Hogg identified the minimum requirements as 'a gymnasium, a few class rooms, a reading room and a coffee bar, beside some small hall where meetings could be held'.⁶⁷

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Disappointments followed. An ambitious scheme of 1888, designed by W. Gillbee Scott for a site at the corner of the New Road and Mill Lane, failed to gain War Office support. In 1889 the Charity Commissioners, then in the process of establishing the City Parochial Foundation to direct charitable monies into technical education, declined to provide funding for such a large project. The fledgling polytechnic had to settle in 1890 for a handful of houses on the Powis estate. It took possession of a frontage on William Street that included a good-sized house, built for John Hudson around 1808, with a substantial rear garden and another frontage at 17–18 Lower Market Street. Hudson's house had passed to his grandson, Henry Hudson Church, by 1860 around when it was substantially extended to the rear. It was Church's home until 1882 when it was sub-let to Samuel Barnes, a Powis Street cabinet maker, who, having met Didden, sold up in March 1890, as, it seems, did Church. Using what funds had been raised, the site was largely redeveloped in 1891, Didden moved in and the Polytechnic formally opened in November. It enrolled 504 male and female evening-class students, and 121 others gained use of the premises as fee-paying members. The architect for the project was, of course, Church, whose offices were just across William Street; the builder was Edward Proctor, also local.⁶⁸

The main building on William Street was a ten-bay range with an oddly eclectic brick-and-terracotta façade, the principal Baroque flourishes of which have been lost. It was diminished in 1936 by the loss of a west bay and a domical tower over the main entrance. There a plaque reads 'Woolwich Polytechnic Young Men's Christian Institute' – misleading in that there were always female students. A turret has also gone from the other end, as have railings to each window bay. The back part of the old house was retained, and has survived numerous proposals for rebuilding to endure 'like a small nut in a large lump of toffee'.⁶⁹

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The Polytechnic also started out with a single-storey gymnasium-cum-hall, freestanding to the south and completed in 1892. This is a large and lofty brick-walled shed, lit by clerestory windows and from the apex of its ornate and open wooden-trussed roof. There was a shallow stage at the east end. A dressing-room range was added in 1914–17 and the gymnasium was converted to use as a lecture theatre in 1989, to designs by Trevor Dannatt and Partners.⁷⁰

The enlargement of Woolwich Polytechnic began in 1893, when laboratories, designed by Church, replaced a house on William Street that adjoined to the west.⁷¹ By this time the City Parochial Foundation was providing some funding and, when additional workshops were proposed, a grant was offered by the LCC's Technical Education Board, formed in 1893 to advance and co-ordinate applied higher education in London. Despite this progress, the financing of the Polytechnic was inadequate. It was forced to close in July 1894. Temporary control passed to the Technical Education Board until a new governing body, chaired by Hogg, was established and a sounder financial arrangement set in place. Henceforth funding came from the LCC, the City Parochial Foundation, Woolwich Local Board of Health (subsequently Woolwich Borough Council) and the War Office. With this reorganization in 1895 there came a subtle shift in emphasis, from the social side to educational provision, prompting local fears that the Polytechnic would turn into 'a mere Science School'.⁷²

Polytechnic Street block and engineering workshops

From 1895 plans for a significant expansion of the Polytechnic concentrated on the provision of engineering workshops in the former garden and an art and science school on the site of 13–25 Lower Market Street. The latter was to be constructed in phases, as permitted by funding and the acquisition of leases, which, across the wider area, reverted from the Powis Estate to the Ogilby Estate in 1898. The ageing Church began work on the project and the first

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phase of the Lower Market Street building was erected by James Chapman, of Islington, in 1897–8. These things stood until 1901 when H. P. Monckton, surveyor to the Ogilby Estate, was appointed architect, seemingly with a view to a smoother working relationship with the landowners – a ‘misguided hope’.⁷³ The LCC had made funding secure, but progress was complicated by the death of Maj. R. A. Ogilby in 1902. Monckton could not push through the completion of Church’s designs until 1904–5, when Turtle and Appleton were the contractors for the school’s middle section, and John Appleby and Sons, of Deptford, for its southern portion. With such significant growth, the Polytechnic extended its scope beyond evening classes to daytime use. It had already made use of its premises to open the first secondary school in Woolwich in 1897. A reorganization by William Gannon, appointed principal in 1903, increased secondary-level provision with new trade schools and established day-release courses for Arsenal apprentices. During 1906–7 student numbers reached 1,878, of whom 340 were school pupils.⁷⁴

The art and science school was a substantial enlargement that considerably improved the polytechnic’s teaching facilities. Its long classically detailed front deploys Portland stone against red brick to give a strong central accent, a tall pedimented former entrance bay flanked by oriel windows, with anchoring segmental-headed pediments on the end bays. Sculptural enrichment in the pediment has a bust of Athena, representing wisdom or the useful arts, flanked by attributes of music and architecture. Intervening sections have large windows between brick piers to maximize light in the classrooms. Only the differing character of the materials used for the carved cartouches in the window apron panels hints at the phased development. The school’s circulation spaces were finished with tiling, to dado level in an axial corridor and on two staircases, and more expansively and decoratively in the entrance hall. The lower storeys had chemistry and physics laboratories and classrooms, with

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workshops in the basement of all but the first phase. A boardroom for the governing body and a lecture theatre were at the southern end. The art department, established in 1895, was placed on the top floor, with open-roofed and sky-lit rooms.

The single-storey engineering workshops to the rear were formed piecemeal across the former garden of the William Street house. The earliest section, designed by Church and built in 1898, comprised three bays with a tall chimney on the triangular east side of the garden. Monckton oversaw extensions in 1902 that included a detached lecture-room block to the south. The original workshops were greatly enlarged to the west in 1914–16, as part of a larger programme of works designed by T. Phillips Figgis and Alan Edward Munby. The resulting assemblage, now linked to the gymnasium and the art and science school, had the rambling and utilitarian character of an industrial complex. There was further enlargement in 1930–1 when a light machine shop was added to the east.⁷⁵

Entrance block

The second main phase of the Polytechnic's enlargement was developed from 1912 under a new principal, A. F. Hogg. Figgis and Munby were chosen from a shortlist of three architects' firms because of their relevant experience. Munby, who had a scientific background, was a specialist in laboratory design and, with Figgis, had just completed the Radium Institute near the Middlesex Hospital in Marylebone. First ambitions were for a replacement of the William Street range extending eastwards. The LCC refused to fund this, so the scheme was reduced to a new block at the corner of Thomas Street and William Street, large enough to anticipate future growth, remodelling of the existing premises and enlargement of the engineering workshops. Progress was delayed while the Polytechnic pursued acquisition of the freehold of its site, achieved in 1914 with a loan from the City Parochial Fund. Thomas & Edge built the corner

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building in 1915–16 and it was ceremonially opened in June 1917 when the whole scheme had been seen through. All this was carried out during difficult wartime conditions when labour was scarce. It was sanctioned because the Polytechnic was contributing to munitions production and the training of military staff.⁷⁶

The three-storey corner block was conceived as the main entrance to the Polytechnic, and treated with a sophisticated metropolitan architectural grandeur that earlier blocks lacked. The Baroque exterior, faced in Portland stone and enriched by carved decoration, has a diagonally set projecting entrance bay at the corner, a giant order of Ionic pilasters and large window-to-wall ratios, presumably made possible by steel framing. A tall parapet screens a flat roof that was used as a playground by the day-school girls. On the Thomas Street side a ramped incline behind the geometric area railings allowed bicycles to be brought into the basement. Inside, the building's centrepiece is a full-height circular hall or 'rotunda', lit by a domical lantern and floored with a mosaic incorporating the entwined initials 'WP'. Offices for the institution's senior administrators were placed off this space on the ground floor. Above there were facilities for the school of domestic science, converted to classrooms for the girls' technical school in 1921, and a library.⁷⁷

Additions of the 1930s

In 1928 the Polytechnic presented the LCC with another proposal for the rebuilding of the original block, this time to go with further extension along Thomas Street. Once again, extension gained approval, but not rebuilding. The office of Figgis and Munby, where both partners were then approaching the end of their careers, designed the new block and Thomas & Edge built it in 1931. Externally it was treated as a continuation of the entrance block in a simpler form, with polychromatic brick largely replacing stone. Electrical engineering laboratories occupied the ground floor, drawing

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offices and classrooms for the girls' trade school the upper storeys, and the roof-top playground was enlarged.⁷⁸

A new principal, Edward Mallett, initiated a more ambitious scheme for major expansion of the Polytechnic in 1933, but once again the LCC blocked, favouring a phased approach. The main completed elements, all designed by James H. Anderson, an insider who from 1934 combined the roles of architect to the Polytechnic and head of its Building Department, were: first, a hall to the north-west, on the corner site that had been occupied by the Duke of Wellington public house and the 1893 extension; second, enlargement of the Thomas Street range; and, third, an off-street block south of the engineering workshops. After this, war curtailed the programme.

The hall relieved pressure on the gymnasium. Anderson pre-emptively offered to design this, his first building for the Polytechnic, in 1934, but concern over the possible impact of relocation of the Arsenal delayed its construction, by Dove Brothers, until 1935–6. The austere and rather characterless building is a steel-framed block faced in brick and Bath stone, the latter mainly restricted to the entrance façade on Calderwood Street. The amply lit hall, originally panelled in mahogany, had a stage and a sprung floor for dancing. With a gallery, it had seating for 850. There was a basement refectory and an upper storey provided space for the chemistry department.⁷⁹

Enlargement along Thomas Street followed. Thomas & Edge built another three-storey block in 1937, omitting even the modest ornament of its northern neighbour, the facilities of which were extended with more laboratories, classrooms and roof-top playground. There was also a basement, with workshops for the building department.

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The final completed phase of Mallett's scheme was a workshops and classrooms building that replaced and doubled the length of the engineering block of 1902, facing south towards Wellington Street, from which there had been a gated passage since 1900. Built in 1939 by Nox Ltd, this was another of Anderson's plain brick-faced and steel-framed boxes, of four storeys with a projecting porch. Stone dressings were omitted to save money. A bomb hit the front of this new building in January 1941. It was restored in 1949 and became a library in 1963–4, with access formed at first-floor level.⁸⁰

Post-war expansion

Despite the new block's misfortune, the Polytechnic escaped serious wartime damage. Once classes resumed and student numbers increased, there was, with little rebuilding to do, inevitable pressure to expand yet further. Outline development proposals of 1942 had already envisaged growth across the entire island block, so the Polytechnic campaigned to have the whole area zoned for educational purposes during the preparation of the County of London Development Plan in 1950. This failed, and less ambitious plans were developed in 1952–3 by Waterhouse and Ripley, architects. This time the Ministry of Education determined that there was no pressing need. Another tack was tried, but discussions bogged down in negotiations between the Polytechnic, the LCC and the Ogilby Estate. The landowners had offered to build a block on Wellington Street, designed by Montagu Evans and Sons, and to rent space to the Polytechnic, but in 1958 the LCC deemed this uneconomic.⁸¹

Government plans to expand technical education, presented in a White Paper of 1956, further complicated the saga. Hopes were raised, then disappointed, as Woolwich failed to attain status as a College of Advanced Technology. In response, between 1956 and 1965 the Polytechnic reluctantly shed its 'lower level' work – the trade schools, evening and part-time courses – to concentrate on a higher-level full-

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time syllabus. During the same period Woolwich's industrial decline led to a reduction in vocational training to serve local purposes. Emphasis shifted to higher education and regional provision.

The designing of extensions for the changing polytechnic recommenced in 1958, this time through the Schools Division of the LCC Architect's Department. The project now comprised an L-shaped building on Wellington Street and Polytechnic Street and a further extension of the Thomas Street range. Two separate blocks were necessary because 2–14 Wellington Street and the Earl of Chatham public house could not be included in the development site. During 1959 a design group led by George Trevett and including Ron Herron, F. Kinder, B. R. Reynolds, T. P. Holmes and Robert Skilling, worked up the scheme. The first phase, the Wellington Street and Polytechnic Street block, was built in 1962–3, and the Thomas Street building followed in 1963–4. The contractor was Thomas & Edge. Another part of the wider scheme was modernization of the Polytechnic's pre-existing buildings, undertaken through Sydney F. Everson, of Everson and Searles, architects.

The brief for the enlargement was complex. In 1953 the Metropolitan Water Board had fought for and gained permission to build new offices on the corner of Wellington Street and Polytechnic Street, so these had to be accommodated, as did nine commercial units for the Ogilby Estate. This compromised the ground floors in both blocks, so circulation was raised to first-floor level. The additions and existing buildings were thus linked by external walkways and bridges reflecting a contemporary fashion for above-ground circulation. These links were partially demolished in 1991. Designed at the peak of LCC experimentation with a Corbusian or Brutalist aesthetic, the extensions were fashionable in other ways. They were constructed with *in situ* reinforced-concrete frames, board-marked finishes left visible, and an external infill of brick.

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The L-shaped block accommodated a new entrance, refectory, office accommodation, classrooms, boiler house and caretaker's flat. In keeping with a design philosophy of the day, no attempt was made to give a unified exterior to the different functional elements. As a result the Wellington Street elevation is a picturesque assemblage of 'stacked boxes'. The Thomas Street building, more monolithic, is a classrooms block with a lecture theatre poised at its south end. This cantilevered fair-faced concrete box floats above a glazed foyer containing an elegant pair of free-standing staircases. It was designed during one of the most creative and influential periods of LCC architecture, and a leading role seems to have been taken by Ron Herron, who subsequently joined the team working on the South Bank Centre before achieving international recognition with the experimental group, Archigram.

At the formal reopening of Woolwich Polytechnic on 27 April 1965 the Secretary of State for Education and Science, Anthony Crosland, made what became known as his 'Woolwich speech', describing the Labour Government's plans for a transformation of the nation's higher-education system. For Woolwich Polytechnic, the impact of these and subsequent reforms meant expansion beyond the island site and, eventually, its abandonment.⁸²

In 1970 Woolwich Polytechnic merged with Hammersmith College of Art and Building to become Thames Polytechnic. Further mergers followed until the Woolwich complex had become one of seven sites, all renamed the University of Greenwich in 1993. In a rationalization of its dispersed premises the University decided to vacate the Woolwich campus in 2001. The site was sold in 2003 to Powis Street Estates Ltd through whom its buildings have become the Island Business Centre, let for mixed commercial and educational use.

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Other redevelopment since the 1880s

Commercial buildings around Wellington Street

Through much of the twentieth century houses and shops remained a major presence on and between William Street and Wellington Street. The Powis leasehold estate reverted to the Ogilby Estate in 1898. There was some lease-end rebuilding in the late 1880s in the shape of terraced houses on William Street and Thomas Street. Much more piecemeal redevelopment followed, particularly in 1897–1900 through Maj. R. A. Ogilby. H. H. Church, who had been the Powis Estate's surveyor, was heavily involved. William Street and Thomas Street were comprehensively rebuilt and a number of larger three-storey commercial premises took shape on the north side of Wellington Street and the west side of Thomas Street, where in 1899 the YMCA built a house with a rear hall. Here there was still a concentration of photographers, six in 1896, with several printers in an otherwise broad mix of shops. Wellington Street's south side was not much altered at this time. An exception was a pair (Nos 41–43) of 1902 that survived up to 2007. Here was George Neves's printing works, where the *Kentish Independent* newspaper was produced.⁸³

2–14 Wellington Street. An early element of this rebuilding phase was a large corner bank where Wellington Street meets Thomas Street (2–4 Wellington Street and 13 Thomas Street), a replacement in 1891–2 of earlier premises for the London and Provincial Bank. Church was the architect and Edward Proctor the builder of this substantial and classically ornate three-storey block, polished granite below stucco, with a diagonally set corner entrance and an octagonal cupola. At the same time there was infill of what had been adjacent gardens along Wellington Street, Nos 6–10 going up via Church as a speculation for W. Lloyd & Son, self-declared 'people's' ironmongers, who had been based across the road at No. 21 since 1852. The builder here was James Chapman, who had just completed buildings of a similar scale at Beresford Square. Lloyds moved into the middle of the three tall

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gable-fronted units; No. 6 was let to Day's Southern Drug Co. Ltd, No. 10 to R. H. Sutton for a mantle, costume and millinery warehouse. Finally, Nos 12–14 were redeveloped in 1898–9, again for Lloyd & Son, with J. B. Sanford & Co., builders, as a big and probably metal-framed shop with well-lit upper-storey showrooms for what was evidently a thriving business. These buildings went through a period of use by the Polytechnic; Nos 6–10 are empty and boarded up in 2012, the former bank has a bookmaker's shop, and Nos 12–14 have been adapted for the Anglian College London, for international students.⁸⁴

Grand Theatre and Regal Cinema. The most ambitious private development in this part of central Woolwich at this period was the Grand Theatre, which replaced houses on Wellington Street and along the west side of Lower Market Street. It was built in 1899–1900 for Clarence Sounes, a theatre proprietor and manager, who lived in Blackheath and also ran theatres in Aldershot, Birmingham and Newport. He brought in a leading West End theatre architect, Bertie Crewe, and Sir Henry Irving gave the place a high-class celebrity opening, praising Sounes as a man 'who walks through a town and suddenly exclaims, "Hallo! Here's a nice bit of ground, let's build a theatre"'.⁸⁵ For this 'West End theatre in the suburbs', the aim was to draw audiences from all across south-east London and beyond, and, with a capacity of 1,680, it was claimed as the country's largest suburban theatre. It was outwardly red brick with Bath-stone dressings. There were triple turrets and the façade bore theatrical busts; an intended portico had to be abandoned at the insistence of the LCC. Inside there was a three-level auditorium, with galleries cantilevered, concrete on steel, so that columns did not impede views. Crewe's decoration was in a 'First Empire' style, with gold mouldings and ruby plush upholstery and hangings.⁸⁶

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In 1908 the establishment became the Woolwich Hippodrome, for London Theatres of Varieties Ltd. Frank Matcham made alterations for music-hall use, in other words variety shows twice nightly. There was a bioscope room by 1914 and the place was a full-time cinema by 1923 when an organ was installed.⁸⁷

The Hippodrome was taken over by Associated British Cinemas in 1935, and demolished in 1939 for replacement with a purpose-built cinema. This was designed for ABC by W. R. Glen, and the lower parts of a sparingly detailed brick-clad building were up when war stopped work. Controls on building materials prevented resumption of the project until 1955, when it was seen through and opened as the Regal Cinema, with a revised interior scheme by ABC's architect, C. J. Foster, and a capacity of 1,528, of which 504 were in the circle. The cinema closed in 1982 and after a period of disuse was altered internally to form a nightclub. 'N'tyce' was closed down in 2008 as it had become 'a magnet for the generation of crime, violence and disorder'.⁸⁸ A locally based project to reopen the venue as the Woolwich Grand Theatre was launched in 2011.⁸⁹

There was other redevelopment in the locality in the 1950s as the Ogilby Estate had granted sixty-year leases in the late 1890s. A much wider scheme for rebuilding the Estate's commercial properties, mostly on Powis Street, was promulgated in 1956 and partly seen through over the next few years. From this there were ripples along Wellington Street. The southern corner with Thomas Street, a prime commercial site, was cleared and redeveloped for the estate in 1956–8, by Montagu Evans & Son, architects, with Malthouse Ltd, builders. The L-plan three-storey shop and office block, brick and stone faced, was named **Thames House** (1–9 Wellington Street and 7–11 Thomas Street) and occupied by Dagenham Motors, the Ford dealership, as a car showroom. Beyond an entrance and staircase bay on Wellington Street, five further bays were added in 1958–9. The upper storeys

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initially housed the Woolwich Chamber of Commerce, and later came to be used as council offices. The lower storey became a DIY store and then, in 2000, the Great Harry, a public house. This was plundered and gutted by arson during looting on 8 August 2011. The boarded-up fascia was rapidly covered with graffiti and described as a ‘wall of hope’; within days it had been painted over with Council messages reaffirming regeneration.⁹⁰

Contemporary development included **15 Wellington Street**, a three-storey brick- and marble-faced Midland Bank of 1958–9 with an attractively asymmetrical four-bay façade, designed by Laurence Gotch of the prolific bank architects, Gotch, Saunders and Surridge.⁹¹ There was also 25–27 Wellington Street, rebuilt on a similar scale in the late 1950s and demolished in 2007.⁹²

Public buildings south of Love Lane

Post Office, Thomas Street (demolished). Post-office provision in Woolwich was not centralized until 1873 when, after two years of representations from the Woolwich Local Board of Health, a Central General Post Office was established on Green’s End, facing the end of Powis Street. This was soon supplemented with a long narrow sorting office to its rear, but it proved inadequate to the postal service’s enormous growth and in 1887 the Board of Health urged the provision of a better central post office for Woolwich. After desultory progress local pressure increased and in 1889 Henry Cecil Raikes, Postmaster General, saw to the acquisition from the War Office of a plot north-east of the Royal Engineers’ barracks that had remained garden ground. Here, facing Thomas Street on the south side of Love Lane, a large Central Post Office was built in 1890–1 and George John Lockwood, Postmaster, moved in from Green’s End, where sorting continued. Within the Office of Works the plans may have been prepared by Edward George Rivers, who had been responsible for GPO work in Woolwich in the early 1880s. The building was a three-storey,

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four-bay, red-brick, Queen Anne block with rubbed-brick and terracotta-tile detailing to a pilastered and pedimented front. A richly ornamented gable bore a moulded-brick 'VR' monogram on its prominent south return elevation.⁹³

Pensions legislation in 1911 caused many post offices to expand. The Woolwich Branch Post Office was substantially enlarged onto the quadrant of ground to its south-east in 1914–16, despite wartime difficulties with labour and materials. Albert Robert Myers was the architect for the Office of Works, Edward Proctor & Sons the builders. The single-storey additions comprised a long front range, for a larger public hall and oak-built counter, faced in red brick with Portland stone dressings and including two classical doorcases. That in the end bay was for an entrance to a sorting office, laid out to the rear in a triple range of top-lit sheds, internally metal-framed, with the obligatory watching gallery. The north-bay entrance of the old building was blocked up. The public counter closed in 2008, the sorting office in 2011. Clearance then opened space in front of Tesco's Woolwich Central.⁹⁴

The War Office decided to give up the Grand Depot Barracks in 1960 and Woolwich Borough Council stepped in quickly with a bid to redevelop the land. First intentions, worked up by W. H. Gimson, Borough Engineer, were for housing, including a students' hostel for Woolwich Polytechnic, and multi-storey car parking. Transfer of the property began in 1961 when the LCC imposed revisions to Gimson's scheme, in part to accommodate the Home Office which wanted a site for a police hostel. This was soon abandoned, but the Ministry of Works had come forward proposing a Crown building to house government staff from various departments then scattered around Woolwich. In 1963 the Council appointed Armstrong and MacManus, already retained for the site that eventually became General Gordon

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Square, as consultant architects for the whole Grand Depot Barracks site project in pursuit of the ideal of comprehensiveness. But local-government reforms overshadowed the proposals and it was the 1970s before any buildings were completed.⁹⁵

Thomas Spencer Hall of Residence (*demolished*). The first of these was the students' hostel, on a north-west part of the site. Post-war shifts in the Polytechnic's purpose and character made this new departure necessary. From the 1950s full-time students were increasingly numerous and drawn from outside the local area. Further, the university model of 'living in' was gaining sway and the council's own housing-clearance schemes reduced the potential for lodging in the district. Concerns about possible overcrowding led the Council to combine forces with the Polytechnic to provide dedicated student accommodation.⁹⁶

The hostel was designed for Greenwich Council in 1966–7 by what had become Frederick MacManus and Partners; the job architect was Edward Jones, who worked with Christopher Cross and Brendan Woods under the partner-in-charge Brian Smith. There were further delays with the securing of central-government financial support and building followed in 1969–71. The hostel was opened by its namesake, Sir Thomas Spencer, a former student at Woolwich Polytechnic, later a governor and chairman, who also served as chairman of the Woolwich Building Society and managing director of Standard Telephone and Cables.⁹⁷

It was a nine-storey Miesian slab block of study bedrooms for 284 students, above a more extensive base that contained a dining-room, bar, staff accommodation and squash courts. The reinforced-concrete frame was clad in sand-coloured brick with strips of steel-framed windows, almost fully glazed to the ground-floor recreational areas. A private terrace and lawn further enhanced these spaces. Devised by

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Jones as ‘a very straight modern building’, it made ‘no concessions to any ideas of social grouping or the picturesque’.⁹⁸ It was demolished in 2008.

Crown Building (*demolished*). The government offices conceived by the Ministry of Works followed, to the east, close to the Post Office where the barracks’ block of 1803 had stood. Designed in the late 1960s in the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works, this plain seven-storey block was built through the then recently formed Property Services Agency in 1973–5. Its manner was similar to, if less streamlined than, that of Thomas Spencer Hall. Crown Building was demolished in 2011.⁹⁹

Peggy Middleton House, Grand Depot Road (*demolished*). Between these two buildings the largest part of the former Grand Depot site was ultimately taken by Greenwich Council itself, to house its own officers. This change of plan arose from convergent pressures. At the time of local-government reorganization in 1965 Woolwich Borough Council was leasing large amounts of speculatively built office space, in particular at Churchill House. It was painful for Woolwich to concede its municipal identity to Greenwich in the merger. This was a concomitant factor in a determination to concentrate the bulk of the combined complement of municipal staff in Woolwich. At the same time, more military land was destined to become available for public housing, and the scheme for public buildings on the General Gordon Square site had run into problems. A scheme promulgated in 1966 proposed a substantial block of council offices on the Grand Depot site, as a central part of much more ambitious town-centre renewal ideas. But these had to be scaled back and there was no significant progress with the offices until 1973, when the sale of Greenwich Town Hall made the ‘central administrative complex’ feasible.

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Councillor John Cartwright, the Council Leader, spearheaded the advance, and designs were prepared by the Borough Architect, J. M. Moore. His scheme provided two levels of car parking as a podium for the brick-faced offices, projected as a loose Y-plan and four-storey western block joined by an entrance range to a larger eastern block, a five-storey hexagonal ring. This use of interlinking hexagonal geometry, brick and raised pedestrian circulation echoed Sunderland Civic Centre (1968–71, Sir Basil Spence, Bonnington and Collins). Building work began with George Wimpey and Co. as contractors, but inflation and other economic pressures meant that the larger eastern part of the scheme had to be abandoned in 1974. The car-park podium, Y-shaped block and entrance range were complete by 1977, with the concrete footings for the second phase constructed and left visible. The complex was named Peggy Middleton House, after a former mayor of Greenwich Metropolitan Borough, who died in 1974. It had a low-key banded exterior, hard red-brown bricks alternating with continuous strips of aluminium-framed windows. The podium was faced in cast-concrete panels and sat in a landscape of access roads, flights of steps and brick-edged raised flowerbeds. A flexibly planned interior made no show – the Town Hall on Wellington Street continued to provide the authority’s civic and ceremonial spaces. Peggy Middleton House was demolished in 2010–11.¹⁰⁰

Uphill and to the south-west, where the military clothing factory of 1856 had stood, **Civic House, 20 Grand Depot Road**, was built in 1981–2, after the abandonment of a scheme to reroute Grand Depot Road, to be the local headquarters of the National Union of Public Employees. It was designed by the Carpenter Farrer Partnership, architects, with Walter Lawrence and Son as builders. The four-storey red-brick block was due to be demolished in 2012.¹⁰¹

Love Lane regeneration

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Failure to see through the ‘central administrative complex’ project in the 1970s meant that Greenwich Council continued to operate from a number of scattered buildings. A new attempt to deal with this was planned from 2004 and launched in 2006 as part of a wider scheme that gained leverage through the Council’s surrenders and purchases of land to open the way to linked commercial and speculative developments of the whole area south of Love Lane, along with a major frontage on the south side of Wellington Street, almost eleven acres in all. Collado Collins Architects were the Council’s masterplanners, and consents were granted in 2007 for what was both hailed and criticized as a massive attempt to regenerate Woolwich town centre.¹⁰²

Woolwich Centre, 35 Wellington Street. The first part of this project was a new office block for council staff, to replace and improve on Peggy Middleton House. This was built in 2009–11 on the site of 29–55 Wellington Street, most of which had already been devoted to council offices. Design was handled by HLM Architects, working with Buro Happold, structural engineers, and Wates Construction. Rubble from the demolished buildings was recycled on site as a hard-core piling mattress. The six-storey, steel-framed structure has its lower levels glazed, to suggest open government, and there is through access. Brick-clad intermediate storeys project to Wellington Street on pilotis, with a western ‘pod’ stone-clad. The rest of the Wellington Street façade is set back with reflective glass in deference to the old Town Hall, to create a ‘civic space’ between the two buildings. The upper storeys have an outer glass skin within which air can circulate while energy is conserved; there are shallow-arched concrete ceilings and solar panels on the roof. The building has office accommodation for around 3,000 council staff, a basement library, a business centre, public-service counters on the ground floor, and a high-level viewing gallery set askew in a podium box, saving the main block from too monolithic an appearance, and a further nod to the Town Hall.¹⁰³

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The masterplan earmarked the remainder of the Love Lane site for residential and retail purposes, and also included a new police station. The central and driving feature, on the site of Peggy Middleton House, was a large ‘flagship’ superstore for Tesco, which worked with St James’s Investments and through Spenhill as its developers. A ‘piazza’ with smaller shops was proposed to link this store to General Gordon Square, with Love Lane retained as a road, complemented by crossing pedestrian routes to provide ‘permeability’. At the north-east corner, on the site of the Post Office, a mainly residential tower block was proposed and, in the face of concerns, quickly scaled down from thirty to twenty-five storeys. The project as a whole incorporates wind turbines and bore holes for heat recovery. Around 1,000 new homes are planned, some 300 of them designated ‘affordable’, with most of them allotted to the south-west part of the site.

Sheppard Robson, architects, prepared a first scheme for the superstore part of the development. The Commission on Architecture and the Built Environment criticized this in 2008 as being ‘aggressive’. After revisions and approvals work on the first phase of what was labelled Woolwich Central was carried through in 2011–12, with Willmott Dixon as the main contractors and Whitelaw Turkington as landscape architects. Above the store, large blocks of housing, clad in zinc and Trespa panels, rise to seventeen storeys for 259 apartments, of which seventy are to be ‘affordable’. These blocks push forward close to Grand Depot Road and there are narrow perimeter access ways, Anglesea Lane to the east, Royal Engineers’ Row to the west. The scheme, flats above a superstore, said to be the largest Tesco development in Europe, was dubbed a ‘Tesco Town’ and seen as likely to be a prototype. There were also concerns about the impact the development would have on existing Woolwich shops.

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The tower on General Gordon Square and blocks to the west are to follow at the time of writing. The approach to the Tesco store via the plot earmarked for the tower was in 2012 set to be temporarily landscaped as Ordnance Square.¹⁰⁴