EASTGATE, FORMER ISLINGTON WORKHOUSE

St John's Way, N19, Islington

by

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Historical Analysis & Research Team

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ENGLISH HERITAGE

EASTGATE, FORMER ISLINGTON WORKHOUSE, ST JOHN'S WAY, N.19, ISLINGTON

'Eastgate' is the former boardroom and offices building that belonged to an enormous Victorian workhouse that once occupied a seven-acre site on the north side of St John's Way in the north of the borough. This building is the sole surviving remnant of the workhouse which was demolished in 1972. It is now occupied by the Irish Centre and a Women's Counselling Service . London Region's Historic Buildings Adviser Martin O'Rourke has requested some historical information to support an application to list the building.

THE ISLINGTON WORKHOUSE

The workhouse, complete with an infirmary, was built by the Board of Guardians of St Mary's Parish, Islington 'to meet the needs of the parish under the Poor Law'. A competition was held in 1865 and the winning design chosen : a building on the pavilion principle designed by Robert Henry Burden (c.1840 - 1913). The foundation stone was laid on 25th July, 1868 by William Harvey, Chairman of the Board of Guardians, whose speech expressed the hope that the building would be, when completed, 'a model of its kind to the whole kingdom.'[1] It was to be home for the Parish's old, mentally or physically disabled, or destitute (mostly unmarried mothers).

The building was vast, large enough to house over 1,000 inmates in a series of wards contained in a long, formidable frontage to St John's Way terminating in pavilions, with a chapel located behind the central block. Two ranges of buildings housing the infirmary, launderies, staff accommodation and an administration block were located away from the building at the back of the site, next to open countryside. The main block was built of yellow/ brown London stock brick with red and white brick banding, and Portland stone dressing. It was three storeys high with a clock and bell tower surmounting the central block. The two pavilion wings projected forward from the main building line and were flanked by the two detached buildings: a reception block and the office block which is the one that still survives.

The workhouse was completed in 1871 but only after much conflict between the architect and the builders John Nutt and Co. Mr Burden evidently felt that that the builders had not carried out the work according to his specification and used cheap materials (*The Builder* June 11 1870). Further additions followed in 1876, including new wings to the central structure, enlargements to the schools, a new swimming pool and a probation block. In 1889, 'additions to the offices at Islington Workhouse for the Guardians of St Mary's, Islington by Mr W. Smith, architect,' were made (*The Builder* May 25th 1889). This must be the date of the addition to the east of 'Eastgate'; of Mr W.Smith, nothing is known. In the 1890s the infirmary was full to bursting and another opened in the former Small Pox Hospital on Highgate Hill in 1901, now part of the Whittington Hospital.

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[1] *Islington Gazette* 28th July 1868

The London County Council took over the running of the workhouse in 1930. After the Second World War the workhouse was adapted for an old peoples' home called Hillside, with 1, 200 beds and 300 staff. When it closed in 1972, the residents were moved to new small homes or hospital. The G.L.C. demolished most of the building except for Eastgate for housing, a public park and a community centre (Caxton House).

The workhouse at Upper Holloway was a major commission for Robert Henry Burden, early in his career. The design took advantage of the sloping site to create a terrace in front of the building giving a certain grandeur and using the basement storey for stores. The main building had long corridors from which access could be made to the wards on either side. The entrance hall contained the main staircase with the dining hall behind, with a chapel above it. The chapel was lined with coloured brick and had an open timber roof. The infirmary, built on the pavilion principal to the rear of the site contained large, well lit and ventilated wards, each with 32 beds and day rooms from which access to the gardens could be gained. An administration block, a later addition, linked the two ward ranges. The right-hand front building, Eastgate, originally contained the board room on the ground floor with clerks offices above, a tradesman's waiting room, another large waiting room and three offices. It had (and still has) a large bow window at the back. The corresponding building on the left hand side contained the porter's lodge, two large receiving wards with beds that could be folded into the wall when not in use.

R.H. Burden had begun practise around 1860, only a few years before winning the competition for the Islington Workhouse. He was elected a Fellow of the R.I.B.A. in 1878. His other works were the Craven Schools and Lecture Hall, Marshall St; model dwellings in Grosvenor Mews; schools in South Audley Street and 'numerous villa residences and business premises in various parts of London and the suburbs'.[2]

CONCLUSION

The Eastgate building is, like the workhouse, Italianate in style of the same materials, yellow and red brick with stone dressing. It it plain inside as one would expect: a staircase with cast iron balusters, a ceiling rose and plaster cornice in the former board room on the ground floor, and some original cast iron columns and partially glazed partitions to create separate offices on the top storey, in the east part of the building.

Eastgate is not an outstanding building architecturally but of significant local historic interest. Islington appears to have been particularly rich in philanthropic institutions in the nineteenth century but contemporary institutional buildings nearby, The Asylum of the Aged Pilgrim's Friends Society and the Alexandra Orphanage, have been swept away. There are only six former workhouses listed in London and perhaps another building, albeit a fragment, would assist the preservation of a notorious and peculiarly Victorian building type.

Susie Barson
Historians' team
English Heritage, August 1999

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[2] *R.I.B.A. Journal* 12 April, 1913 p.412

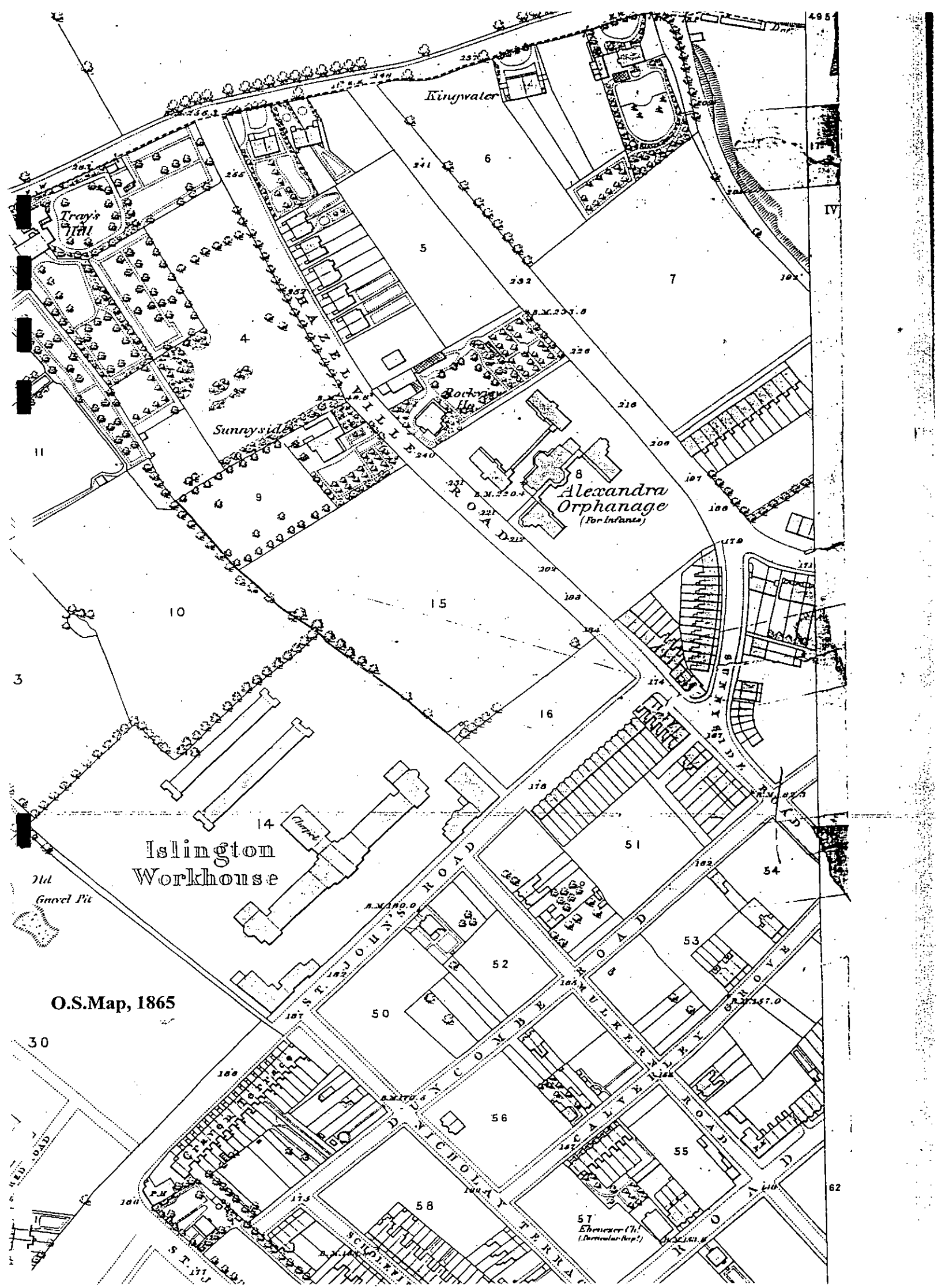
SOURCES

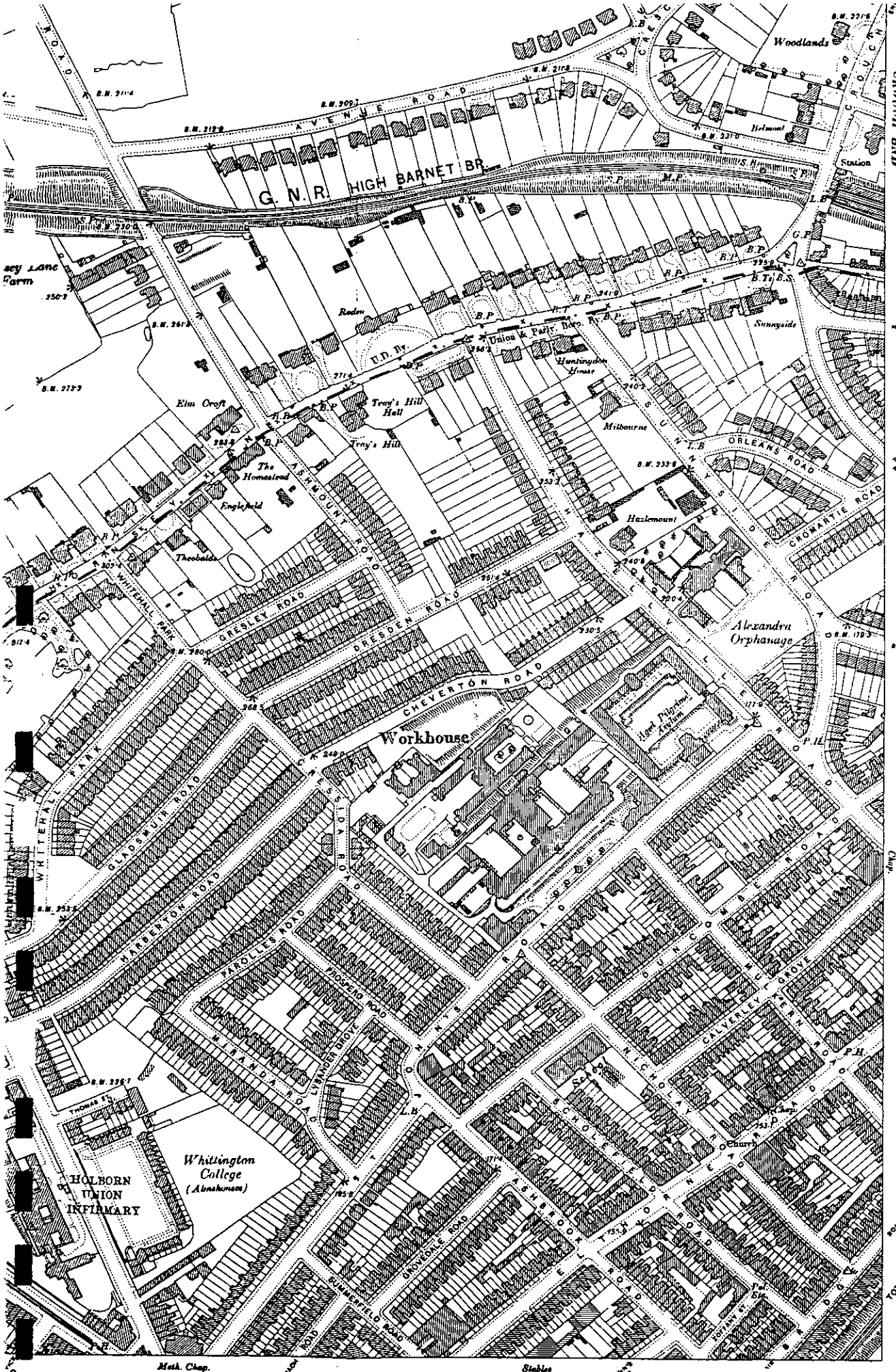
The Builder June 12 1869 pp 458; 464-465

RIBA Journal 12 April 1913 p.412

Islington Gazette 28th July 1868

Picture Collection, Islington Local History Library: special thanks to Ms F. Weld.


Kingwater
Tray's Hall
HAZELVILLE ROAD
Sunnyside
Rockview Ho.
Alexandra Orphanage
(For Infants)
Islington Workhouse
Chapel
Old Gravel Pit
ST. JOHN'S ROAD
HULLERMAN ROAD
DYCOMBE
ALVEREY ROAD
DENICHOLAY TERRACE
ST. PAUL'S ROAD
O.S.Map, 1865

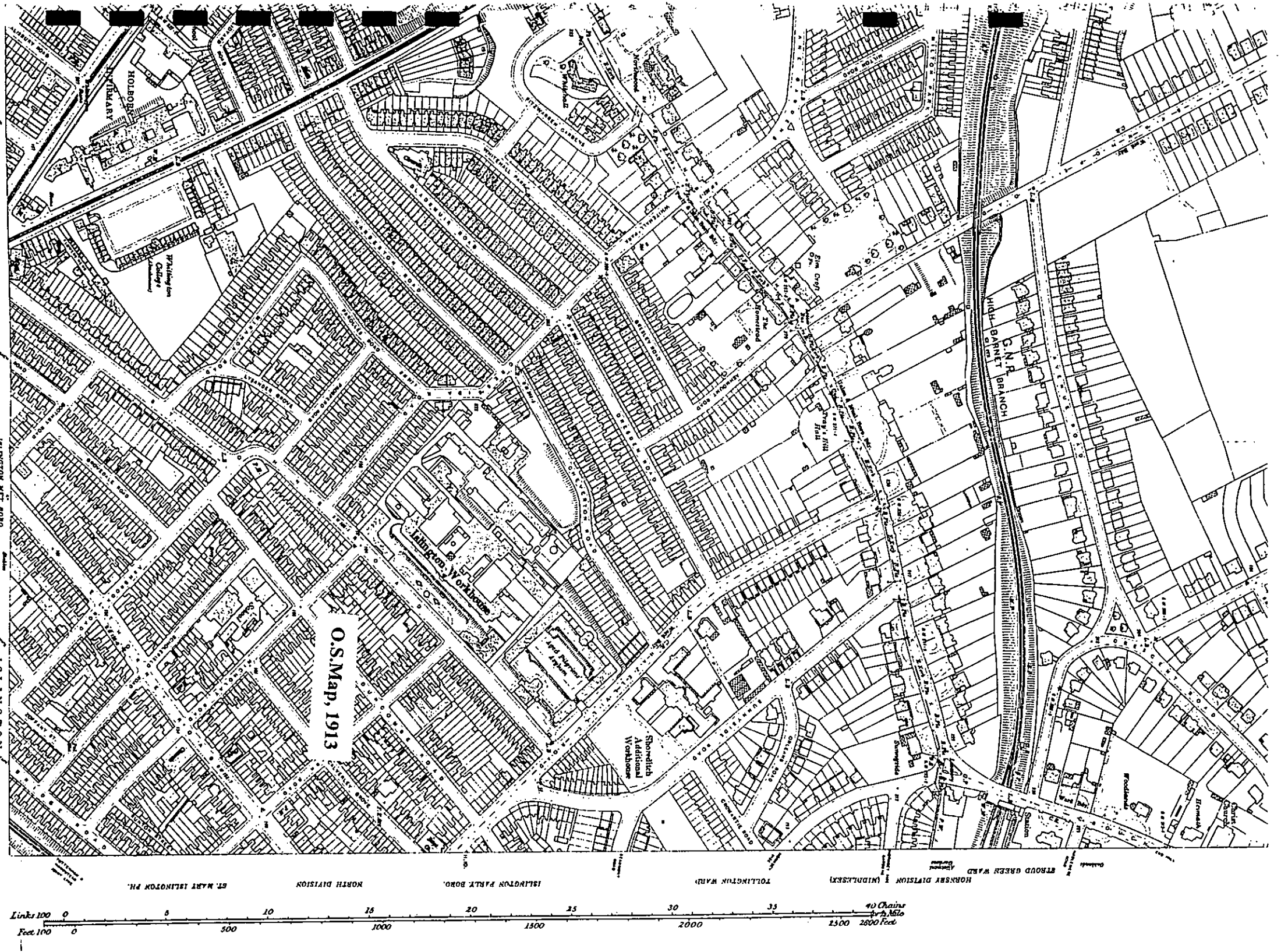


O.S.map, 1895

Reduced from the original Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map to a scale of approximately 1:4340 (or about 15 inches to a mile).
This Edition published by Alan Godfrey, Dunston, Gateshead in 1995.

10 30 35 40 Chains (or ½ Mile)
500 1000 1500 2000 2500 2600 Feet

N.B — The representation on this map of a Road, Track or Footpath is no evidence of the existence of a right of way.


O.S.Map, 1913
UPPER HOLLOWAY
ISLINGTON
HOLLOWAY ROAD
G.N.R. HIGH BARNET BRANCH
Islington Workhouse
Shoreditch Additional Workhouse
Links 100 0 5 10 15 20 25 30 33 40 Chains
Feet 100 0 500 1000 1500 2000 2500 2600 Feet

ISLINGTON WORKHOUSE, UPPER HOLLOWAY.——Mr. R. H. Burden, Architect.

ISLINGTON WORKHOUSE, UPPER HOLLOWAY.——Mr. R. H. Burden, Architect.

Petersfield.—At that portion of the town adjoining the London and Portsmouth-road, a shop 40 ft. in length, brick-built and slated, in the occupation of Mr. J. Caplen, wheelwright and builder, adjoining College-street, has fallen inwards. Six men were employed in excavating a pit alongside, but had left shortly before. The premises were about being converted into a steam brewery and malthouse; and old store buildings having been removed, and a great part of the ground excavated at considerable depth for cellarage, &c., a portion of which ran alongside of the building in question, and, as it seems, too near for its stability, the foundation gave way, and the whole pile, with the exception of the front wall, fell.

Nenagh.—At the slate-quarries near Nenagh, three men were at work under a projection of stone several tons in weight. The constant strokes of the hammers while they were preparing a rock for blasting seem to have shaken the immense stone overhead, which came down like a thunderbolt, breaking one man's legs and arms into splinters, and crushing the body and head in a frightful manner. The other men were more or less severely injured.

Brighton.—While workmen were engaged in putting on the roof timbers of three or four houses just being built at the top of Southover-street, the party-wall of the corner house and next adjoining suddenly bulged and gave way on the ground-floor, bringing with it the wall above, the roof timbers, and scaffolding, precipitating the workmen to the ground, injuring two of them,—one especially receiving a fracture of the ribs,—and necessitating their removal to the hospital. An eye-witness ascribes the accident to evident haste in construction, the materials of the party-wall on the ground-floor being composed of three parts mortar and rubbish; and while in a green state the wall above was carried thereon, all in bricks, causing too sudden a weight before the work had sufficiently set.

Bolton.—A serious fire has occurred in the Bolton Market Hall, a fine structure, 294 ft. in length, and 215 ft. in breadth, and costing upwards of 50,000*l.* The fire originated in one of the lock-up shops underneath the gallery, occupied by a provision dealer. The ornamental ironwork of the doors had to be smashed in. By that time the shop was one mass of flames, and the fire had also communicated to adjoining shops, as well as to the canvas covering of shops in the gallery, which were filled with drapery goods. There being a plentiful supply of water the fire was speedily arrested. The damage is estimated at 500*l.* or 600*l.*, partly covered by insurance.

PHILOSOPHICAL HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE.

IN a recent letter to Professor Donaldson, M. Cæsar Daly (of the *Revue Générale de l'Architecture*), who had been running after him on the Nile without success, makes some observations which have a general interest. M. Daly says,—

"The Viceroy has named me Commander of the Medjidie. I have collected a considerable amount of data on the Egyptian monuments of all periods (old Egyptian and Arabian). I will forward to you shortly the most important document written by me since I held a pen. Now, our writers, without an exception, to my knowledge, have written volumes on the different styles of architecture, without ever giving a really scientific definition of what constitutes a *style*, and consequently nobody has undertaken to show scientifically in what genealogical, rational, and æsthetic relations the styles stand to one another. The consequence is the utmost confusion in the language, and a thorough want of philosophy in the expoundings of the history of our art. It is certainly, to all first appearances, rather bold to speak in this apparently hard manner; but I think that I am fully justified in doing so, and the more so because I have attempted the two things myself, and written what I might call a synthetical and philosophical sketch of the history of our art, from the oldest historical times until the present day. I have attempted even a step more: I have tried to discriminate, in the midst of modern confusion, the elements which are destined to combine together and to constitute

just that I should make them known. I have hesitated a long time about it, being fully aware of the prejudice existing among all artists against the immixture of science in the department of art. The prejudice is not without a cause, and a strong and good one even; nevertheless it is blind to a certain degree, like all prejudices, and acts sometimes against the interest of art itself. Excuse this apparent boasting, but the pamphlet is already in print, and I only wait to read over the proof-sheets on my return to Paris, before giving *le bon à tirer*; you will receive it, consequently, in all probability, in the month of August next—of July, perhaps. If the matter excites any interest among the English confraternity, I will perhaps go over to give explanation *viva voce*. From Jerusalem I go to Beyrout, Damascus, Balbeck, Cyprus, Rhodes, Smyrna, Ephesus, Constantinople, Athens (a point or centre of several excursions), and I will come back to Paris, traversing Naples and Rome, giving a fortnight to them. I calculate that with all this I shall still be in Paris in the middle of June. I shall thus have seen, in a sort of moving panorama, the antique world, and have compared occidental and eastern art. I have started with a programme of questions: the history of the arch is one of the points, and I have new data and new conclusions to produce on that subject: you will see shortly. In the meantime, I *am* sorry not to have met you somewhere abroad."

SEWERAGE AND SEWAGE.

Herne Bay.—Mr. Bazalgette, the engineer of the Thames Embankment and London Main Drainage, has visited the Bay at the invitation of the committee. He inspected the present imperfect outfalls, and will shortly submit a plan to the committee. He expresses a strong opinion that the authority ought not to be content with having a scheme for the Old Town only; but that this opportunity should be taken of having one scheme of drainage for the Old and New Town, by which the sewage of the latter should also be conveyed away to the eastward, instead of being sent out opposite the middle of the town to defile the foreshore, and gradually create a nuisance.

Gainford.—Mr. Lamb, surveying clerk to Mr. Ross, architect, Darlington, has been employed by the Sanitary Committee to prepare plans and estimates for the works required for the sewerage. He considers that a sum of 750*l.* will be required for drainage purposes, exclusive of any cost of water supply.

Purification of Sewage.—A paper has been read at the French Academy of Science, by MM. Mille and Durand-Claye, civil engineers, on the chemical analysis of the liquid matter of sewers. Their experiments were conducted at the expense of the city of Paris, and under the direction of a special commission. It was ascertained that the waters of the sewers of the capital could easily be purified by means of sulphate of alumina, at a cost of one centime per cubic mètre of liquid. The 190,000 cubic mètres of the latter, which are daily allowed to run to waste, contain a quantity of useful matter the value of which amounts in the course of the year to about 280,000*l.* The operation of purifying the waters divides the fertilizing substances as follows:—The phosphates remain in the sediment; the potash is in dissolution in the liquid; one third of the nitrogen is absorbed by the water, the two other thirds by the sediment.

Little Gonerby Local Board.—Upon the recommendation of the drainage committee, this Board has determined to adopt and carry out the plan and report of their surveyor, Mr. Jas. Marsh, C.E., for improving the drainage of the district. The first part of the work will be commenced shortly.

"A Bishop among Architects."—A late bishop being desirous of enlarging his palace, caused an architect to prepare plans of the proposed alterations; but when he came to know the estimated cost of the works, he declined to proceed. "What cheque shall I draw for your fees, sir?" said the bishop to the architect; who told him that, as the plans were abandoned, his charge would be a hundred

THE NEW ISLINGTON WORKHOUSE.

WE illustrate this week the new workhouse for the parish of St. Mary, Islington, now in course of erection in Upper Holloway. The foundation-stone was laid in July last by the chairman of the board of guardians. The site of the new workhouse (which contains about seven acres and three quarters of land) is in the St. John's-road, and very near the Alexandra Orphanage. Being on the "Hornsey Rise," the ground is very much higher in the rear than it is in front, a circumstance which has been turned to advantage by introducing a lower or basement story under the main building, for stores, permitting further of the formation of a wide double terrace its entire length, which, as a platform for the building, enhances its general appearance. The fall of the ground towards the front has facilitated the drainage, and a thorough system is being constructed with the view of rendering every part of the building and yard perfectly dry. Underground vaults for coal have been provided.

The buildings externally are all of bright yellow stocks, relieved by bands and arches of red and white brick; Portland stone being sparingly introduced where other material would soon perish owing to the elevated and exposed situation.

The general arrangement of the several buildings will be seen on reference to the plan, and is as follows:—

A. Casual wards.
B. Porters' rooms and receiving wards.
C. Board-room and offices.
D. Outdoor relief offices.
E. Main house.
F. Dining-hall and chapel over.
GG. Refractory wards.
H. Stores.
I. Kitchen building.
KKKK. Infirmary Wards.
L. Administrative block.
M. Separation wards.
N. Doctor's residence and dispensary.
O. Laundry.
P. Stoneyard and shed.
Q. Yard closets and sheds.
R. Dead-house, stable, &c.

The main building possesses a frontage of about 420 ft., and a corridor 8 ft. in width extends its entire length on every story, communicating on either side with wards about 18 ft. 6 in. wide. It is proposed to obtain a proper classification of the inmates by means of iron gates and separate staircases at certain intervals.

The entrance is in the centre, with a vestibule conducting to a principal staircase, behind which is placed the dining-hall, with the chapel over. The ground story of the main house will be 13 ft. 3 in. high in the clear, and the one and two-pair stories 12 ft. each.

The dining-hall is 70 ft. by 45 ft., and 16 ft. high, and the chapel will be finished internally in coloured brick, with an open-timbered roof.

The infirmary, which is placed centrally in the rear, is on the pavilion principle, and will consist of wards 96 ft. long by 24 ft. wide, those on the ground floor being 13 ft. high in the clear, and those on the one and two-pair stories 12 ft. high. They are lighted by windows on both sides extending to within 1 ft. of the ceiling, constructed in three heights, the two lower being double hung, the upper hung to hinges opening inwards for ventilation. It is intended to warm the wards by the "Galton" stove placed in the centre, two to each ward, by means of which pure warmed air will be introduced; the side walls will consequently permit of the uniform arrangement of the windows and beds. At the further end is a large window, which will contribute much to the cheerfulness of the wards, and at the same time assist the ventilation in connexion with louvres or fanlight over the door, which is at the opposite end.

A nurse's room, with inspection window, and separate scullery, fitted with a small cooking-stove and washing sink, will be provided to each ward. Each ward will contain 32 beds, affording consequently between 850 and 900 cubic feet to each occupant. Two large day or convalescent rooms are provided, communicating with spacious airing grounds.

The administrative block is placed centrally, and will consist of kitchen and scullery, apartments for the superintending matron, stores, and bedrooms in the upper part for the nurses.

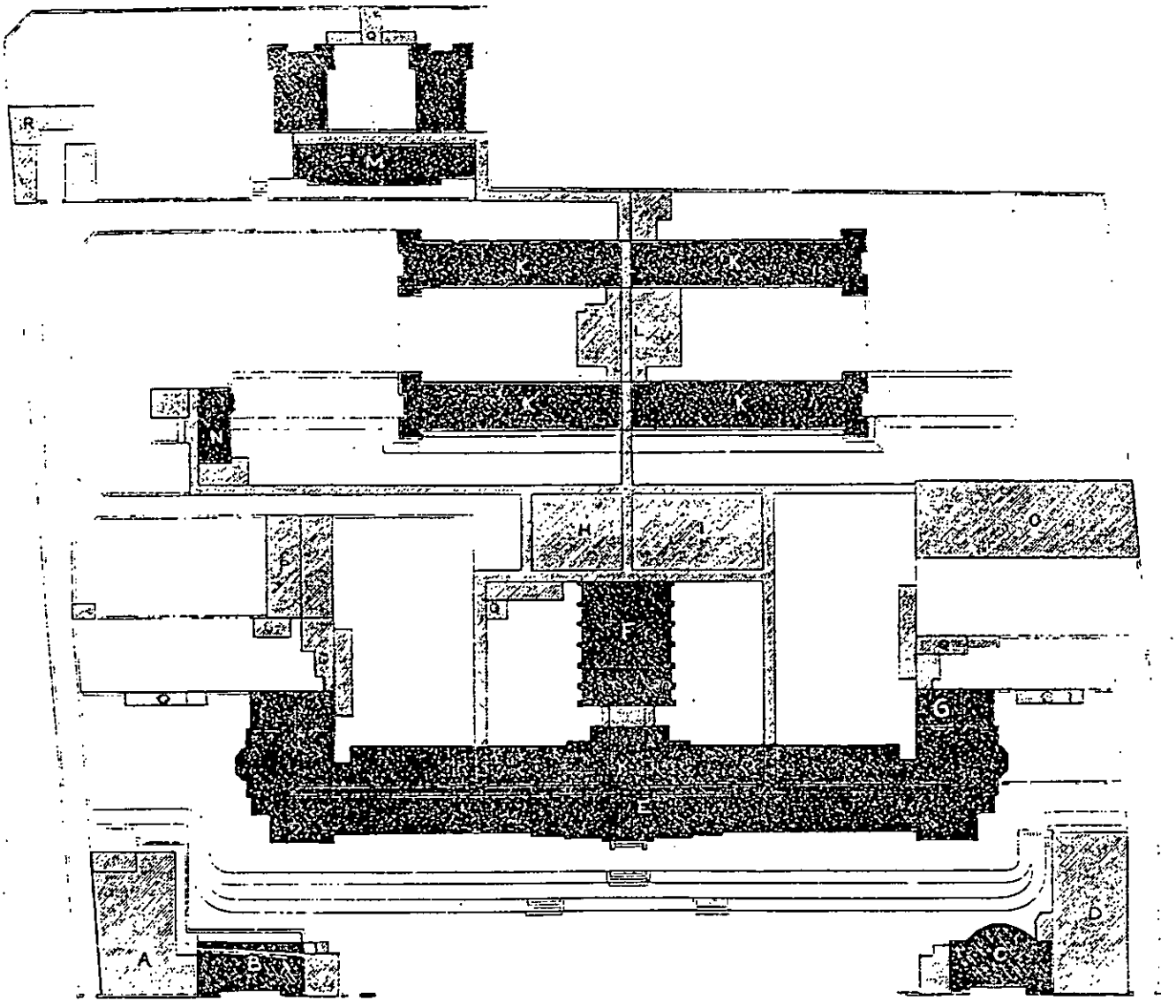
The "separation" wards form a detached

Access to all parts is provided by means of cartways up the two sides of the site, and enclosed corridors afford communication to every portion of the building under cover. Lifts will be provided in the several buildings. The right-hand front-wing building contains the board-room, with clerks' offices over, tradesmen's waiting-room, also a large waiting-room, 70 ft. by 45 ft., and three offices for out-door relief. The corresponding building on the left hand contains porter's lodge and rooms in connexion, two large receiving or probationary wards, each 25 ft. by 16 ft. and 12 ft. high, with attendants' room adjoining; also the casual wards, one of which is 50 ft. by 20 ft., and the other 55 ft. by 18 ft. 6 in.; they are 14 ft. 6 in. high to the springing of the roof, and 21 ft. to the apex of the roof-light. The beds for the casual wards will be after a design by the architect, and so arranged as to turn up bodily against the wall when not in use, leaving the floor clear for the purpose of cleaning. They are also very inexpensive as to cost.

The buildings will be supplied throughout with hot and cold water, and warmed by ventilating grates and stoves in all wards and rooms, and by hot water in the corridors.

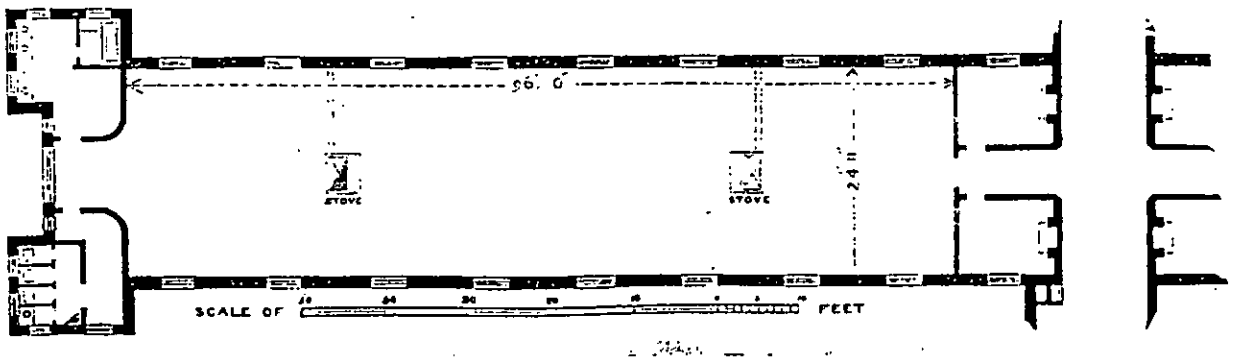
Mr. R. H. Burden is the architect. The contractors are Messrs. Nutt & Co., the contract amount being 63,300*l*. The engineer's work is being executed by Messrs. Jukes & Co. The gasfitting by Messrs. Faraday & Son. The baths are from Messrs. Rofford & Finch. The bells will be on the electric principle. Mr. Barrett's fireproof flooring has been used for the main corridors. Mr. Lewis is the clerk of works.

ISLINGTON WORKHOUSE.



Block Plan.

Scale, one inch to 100 ft.



Views of Islington Workhouse from Islington Local Studies Collection

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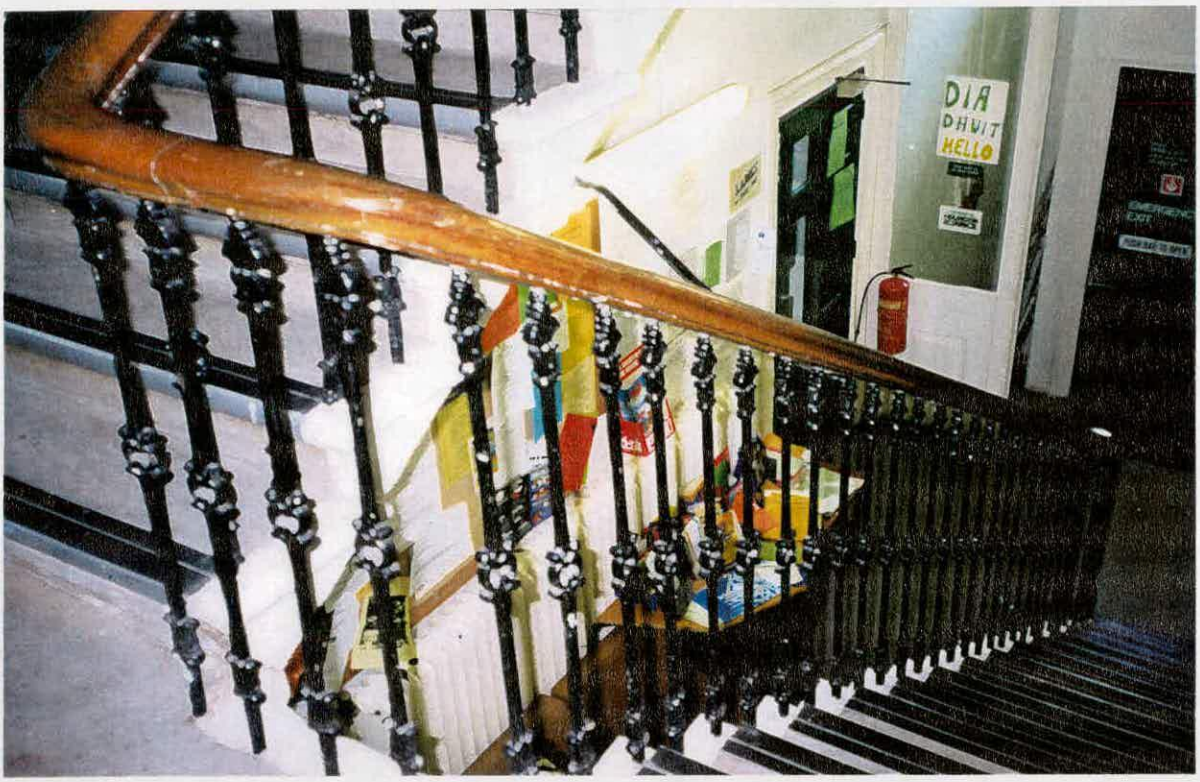
Islington Wor
Post Card

W. H. Logsdon & Sons, Photo. ISLINGTON WORKHOUSE, ST. JOHN'S ROAD.

Islington Workhouse.

Y59 L 074 HIL
'Hillside'
St Johns Way 1972
L I366

Eastgate: exterior



and interior views