

ESTATE NAME : Blackfriars

WHEN BUILT : 1871

LAND HISTORY : Previously the site of The Magdalen Hospital for the Reception of Penitent Prostitutes; the land was purchased with part of George Peabody's original donation, and the cost was £13,200.

ARCHITECT : Henry Astley Darbishire

BUILDER : William Cubitt & Co

ESTATE HISTORY : This was the sixth estate to be built by Peabody. The first sixteen blocks provided accommodation for 300 families, and the Annual Report for 1872 shows a rental income of £3,117 18s. 6d. Applications for rooms were so numerous that the Trustees soon built three further blocks, giving a total of 384 dwellings. The return on income on this estate was over four per cent, at a time when the return on the first estates built by Peabody was under two per cent. In 1874 the average wage of tenants on the estate was £1 4s. 2d. and rents ranged from 2s. 6d. to 5s. 9d.

Land here was cheaper than for the estates the Trustees had built north of the river, so the height of the blocks was reduced to four floors. The laundries and drying rooms were in separate buildings rather than in the attics as had been the case on earlier estates, and initially there was a bathroom in the basement of most blocks although later these became disused. Darbishire abandoned the corridor access he had used on the first estates, and instead used staircase access; each staircase gave access to five flats per floor.

The Builder no. XXIX in 1871 commented, "The aspect . . . is decidedly superior to that of the other establishments erected by the Trustees. The buildings are not so lofty, are more spread about, have trees in front of them next to the high-road and within the quadrangles and are altogether more home-like and less barracky."

A summary of all Peabody estates prepared in 1919 states that Blackfriars had two coal stores which could hold a total of 70 tons of coal, and there were 30 pramsheds. Permanent underground air-raid shelters were constructed in the inner square in October 1939. Four blocks were badly damaged by a bomb in September 1940; there was further damage in May 1941, and slight damage from flying bombs in late 1944.

Modernisation of the flats began in the 1950s and was completed about 1962. This work made all the flats self-contained and led to a reduction in the number of dwellings on the estate as smaller flats were amalgamated.

On 11th July 1962 HM Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother visited the estate and unveiled a plaque to mark the centenary of the founding of the charity. In November 1996 the whole estate was listed Grade II because of its significance in the history of working-class housing.

NOTABLE RESIDENTS : George Brown, who had been born at Peabody's Stamford Street estate, lived on the Blackfriars Road estate from the age of six months until after he left school. He later became a Labour M.P., was appointed Foreign Secretary and Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, and eventually received a peerage, taking the title Lord George-Brown. He mentions his early years as a Peabody resident in his autobiography "In My Way."