The factory that never was?

The Sanitas Company works in Watts Grove, Tower Hamlets

Guy Thompson

Introduction

Thanks to the pioneering work of Louis Pasteur in the field of microbiology and Sir Joseph Lister in the field of surgery, the development of effective antiseptics for use in the hospital and the home became an important branch of applied chemistry during the second half of the nineteenth century. The discovery of the antiseptic properties of carbolic acid (phenol), a by-product of coal tar, and turpentine (the distilled resin of pine trees) during this period led to a scramble by inventors to patent advances in the field of disinfectant manufacture. Some of these innovators, such as John Jeyes, who patented the eponymous cleaning fluid in 1877, remain household names to the present. In contrast, the name of Charles Kingzett is today almost forgotten; however Sanitas, the business that he co-founded in 1878, was synonymous with domestic disinfectants for nearly a century. This article explores the history of a factory built by the Sanitas Company in the East End of London in the early 20th century, and the unexpected uses to which it was put during the one hundred years of its existence.

In 2015, Pre-Construct Archaeology undertook a programme of historic building recording at 13 Watts Grove, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, prior to its demolition. The property was a former office building, which formed part of a factory built by the Sanitas Company Limited in 1914. The building survey was carried out prior to the redevelopment of the former Watts Grove Depot site to provide 148 new homes. The development site was centred on Ordnance Survey NGR TQ 37536 81932 (Figure 1).

No. 13 Watts Grove stood on the western side of the former Watts Grove Depot, a council owned facility that occupied a large site bounded by Watts Grove, Yeo Street and Glaucus Street. The property was a detached brick building constructed over two storeys with single storey elements to the rear, part of which appeared to have been added at a later date. At the time of recording the property was disused and the former depot vacant.

Charles Thomas Kingzett and the Sanitas Company

The driving force behind the Sanitas Company was Charles Thomas Kingzett (1852–1935), an accomplished chemist and prolific writer who combined his scientific interests with a strong entrepreneurial streak. Born in Oxford in 1852, Charles was the third child of Charles and Ann Kingzett.[1] The family was of modest means and both Charles' father and grandfather worked as servants; in fact, the latter was employed by one of Oxford's colleges.[2]

At the age of fourteen, the younger Charles Kingzett obtained employment as a junior assistant in the Oxford University Laboratories, where he attended classes and lectures given by distinguished scientists including William Vernon Harcourt and the experimental and theoretical chemist Sir Benjamin Brodie.[3] When he was seventeen years old, Kingzett qualified as an Associate in Arts of the University of Oxford. Having briefly taught privately in Oxford and Bloomsbury, in 1870 Kingzett was employed by the chemist and inventor Walter Weldon (1832–1885) to work as an assistant at his laboratory in Putney, southwest London. Weldon was an authority on the manufacture of chlorine and the recovery of sulphur from alkali waste, devising processes that were widely used by manufacturing chemists. During this period, Kingzett wrote a series of articles on the alkali trade for the journal *Iron*, which were subsequently published under the title *The History, Products and Processes of the Alkali Trade* (1877). Having left Weldon's employment in 1872, Kingzett became chief chemical assistant to the distinguished medical scientist

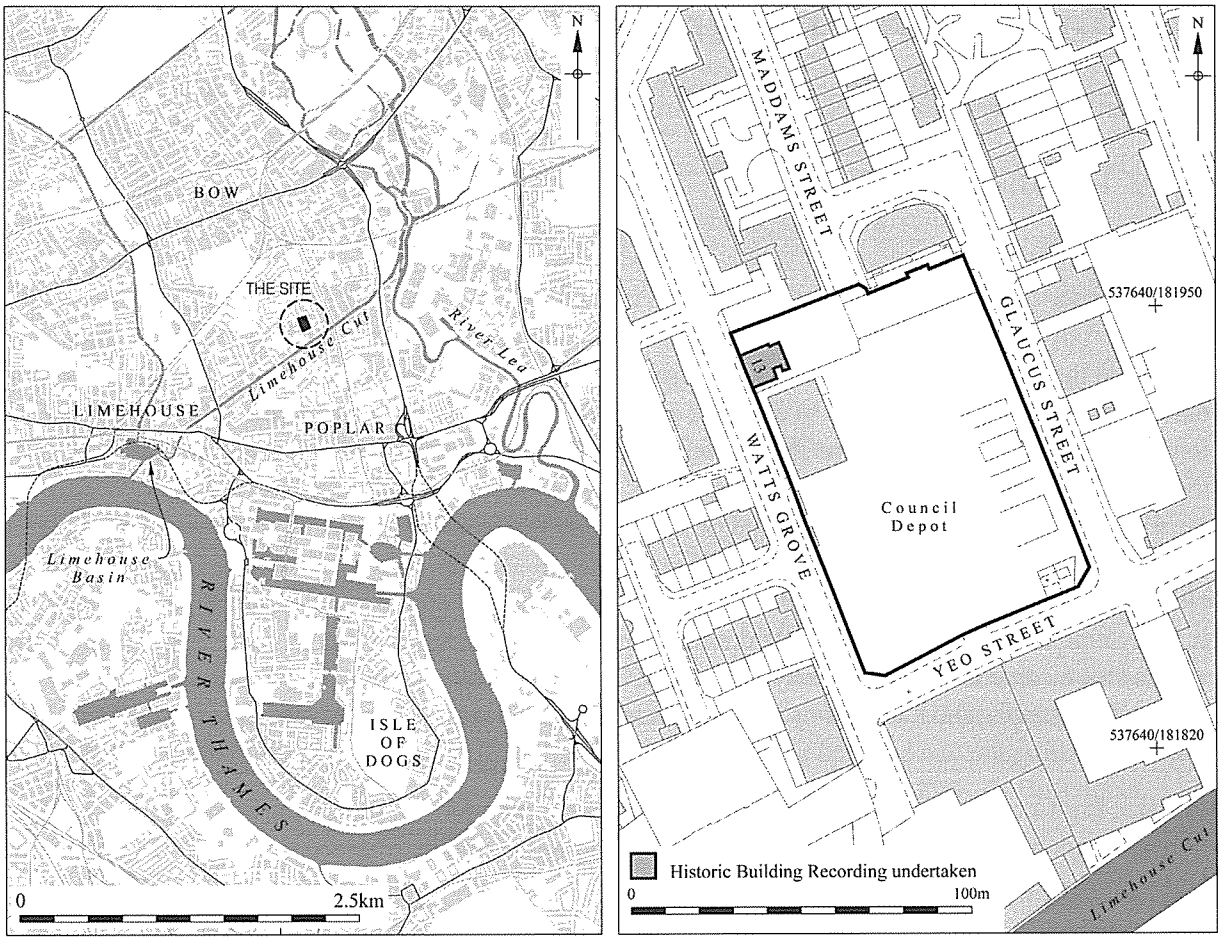


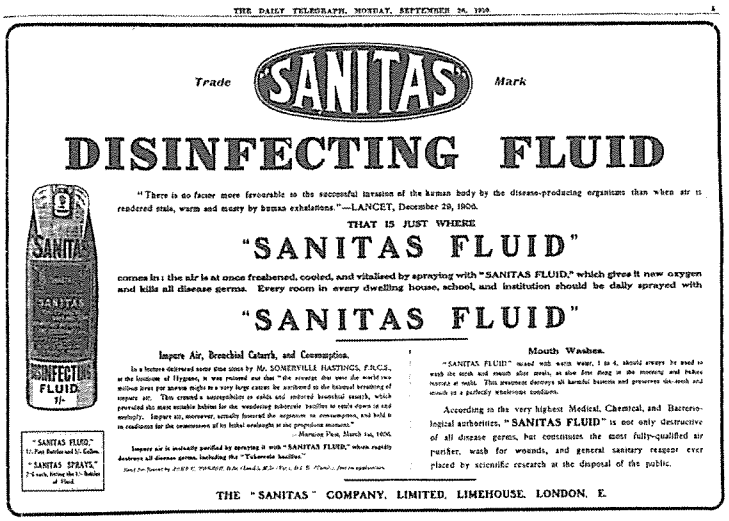
Figure 1. Site location

Johann Thudichum (1829–1901) at the latter's laboratory in Kensington. There, Kingzett assisted in Thudichum's pioneering researches into the chemistry of brain matter, which he later described in his book *Animal Chemistry, or the Relations of Chemistry to Physiology and Pathology* (1878).

Kingzett launched his first commercial venture in 1877, when he entered into partnership with Dr Horatio Benjamin Paul and Joseph John William Acworth as Analytical and Consulting Chemists, trading from premises in Fenchurch Street and Victoria Street, Westminster. The enterprise was short-lived however and Kingzett left the partnership at the end of the year.[4]

In addition to his work in the emerging field of biomedical research, Kingzett had long been interested in the aerial oxidation of terpenes and essential oils. In 1872 his first paper on the topic was published by the journal *Chemical News*, followed by articles concerning the oxidation of essential oils which appeared in the pages of the *Journal of the Chemical Society* in 1874 and 1875. Kingzett was quick to spot the commercial potential of his observations and in 1876 he obtained patent protection (with Maximilian Zingler) for the invention of 'improvements in the production of antiseptics and disinfectants'.[5]

The process devised by Kingzett and Zingler involved forcing a current of air through hot turpentine in the presence of water. The turpentine was oxidised by the air, producing camphoric peroxide, which rose to the surface of the aqueous solution. The oxidised oil of turpentine, which had powerful anti-microbial properties, could then be collected and bottled for use as a disinfectant.[6] Secondary reactions produced peroxide of hydrogen, soluble camphor and thymol, which were also effective antiseptic agents.[7] These dissolved in the water, producing an aqueous solution that could be collected and packaged ready for use in the home or elsewhere.


THE DAILY TELEGRAPH, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 1910

Trade "SANITAS" Mark

DISINFECTING FLUID

"There is no factor more favourable to the successful invasion of the human body by the disease-producing organisms than when air is rendered stale, warm and moist by human exhalations."—LANCET, December 29, 1900.

THAT IS JUST WHERE

"SANITAS FLUID"

comes in: the air is at once freshened, cooled, and vitalised by spraying with "SANITAS FLUID," which gives it new oxygen and kills all disease germs. Every room in every dwelling house, school, and institution should be daily sprayed with

"SANITAS FLUID"

Impure Air, Bronchial Catarrh, and Consumption.

Mouth Washes.

According to the very highest Medical, Chemical, and Bacteriological authorities, "SANITAS FLUID" is not only destructive of all disease germs, but constitutes the most fully-qualified air purifier, wash for wounds, and general sanitary reagent ever placed by scientific research at the disposal of the public.

THE "SANITAS" COMPANY, LIMITED, LIMEHOUSE, LONDON, E.

Figure 2. An early twentieth century newspaper advertisement for "Sanitas" Disinfecting Fluid (Daily Telegraph & Courier 26/09/1910 © British Newspaper Archive)

Figure 3. Newspaper Advertisement for "Sanitas" Powder (Illustrated London News 28/06/1924 © British Newspaper Archive)

The Sanitas Company Limited (1878–1899)

It has been suggested that Kingzett's marriage to his first wife Adeline (née Froggatt) and the necessity of securing an income sufficient to support a growing family impelled him to establish a business to manufacture oxidation products.[8] Whilst these factors may have encouraged him to scale-up the business, Kingzett and Zingler had in fact already founded a co-partnership to make and distribute disinfectant and antiseptic products more than a year before his wedding in October 1878. The business initially traded from premises in Moorgate Street in the City of London, under the name 'Sanitas'. At the beginning of 1878 Kingzett, Zingler and Edward Downs converted the partnership into a limited liability joint stock company, which traded as The Sanitas Company Limited.[9] The new company undertook to purchase the rights to the letters patent granted to Kingzett in January 1876, together with all trademarks, contracts and stock-in-trade of the existing business for half of the company's capital value of £100,000. At Christmas 1878 the company consolidated its operations at No. 2 Letchford Buildings, 3 Colts Lane, Bethnal Green, where it had previously established a factory to manufacture oxidation products. The board of the new company was headed by Kingzett, who was appointed Managing Director. Kingzett's fellow directors included his old business partners Edward Downs and Maximilian Zingler, who was appointed Secretary.

Whereas Kingzett was single-minded in his devotion to the advancement of pure and applied chemistry, Zingler (c.1831–1902) had a catholic range of interests, both professional and scientific. Born at Brelitz in Silesia in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Zingler obtained doctorates in law at the universities of Vienna and Breslau before moving to England in the early 1850s.[10] During the years that followed, Zingler busied himself in what he described as 'literary occupations', before becoming the Assistant Secretary to the Submarine Telegraph Company in 1859. In 1863 he became a naturalised British subject. Like Kingzett, Zingler was a keen entrepreneur and acquired patents for several of his inventions. Between April 1874 and July 1876 Zingler was granted seven patents (one in conjunction with Kingzett), the majority of which were for innovations in the manufacture of varnishes, dyes and metallic paints, but which also included a 'composition for coating ships' bottoms'.[11] In addition to his post on the board of Sanitas, Zingler was for many years the Secretary of an Austrian railway company.[12]

The Sanitas Company's initial share issue was successful, attracting investment from members of the professions and the gentry. Its earliest shareholders included James Doulton, one of the family behind

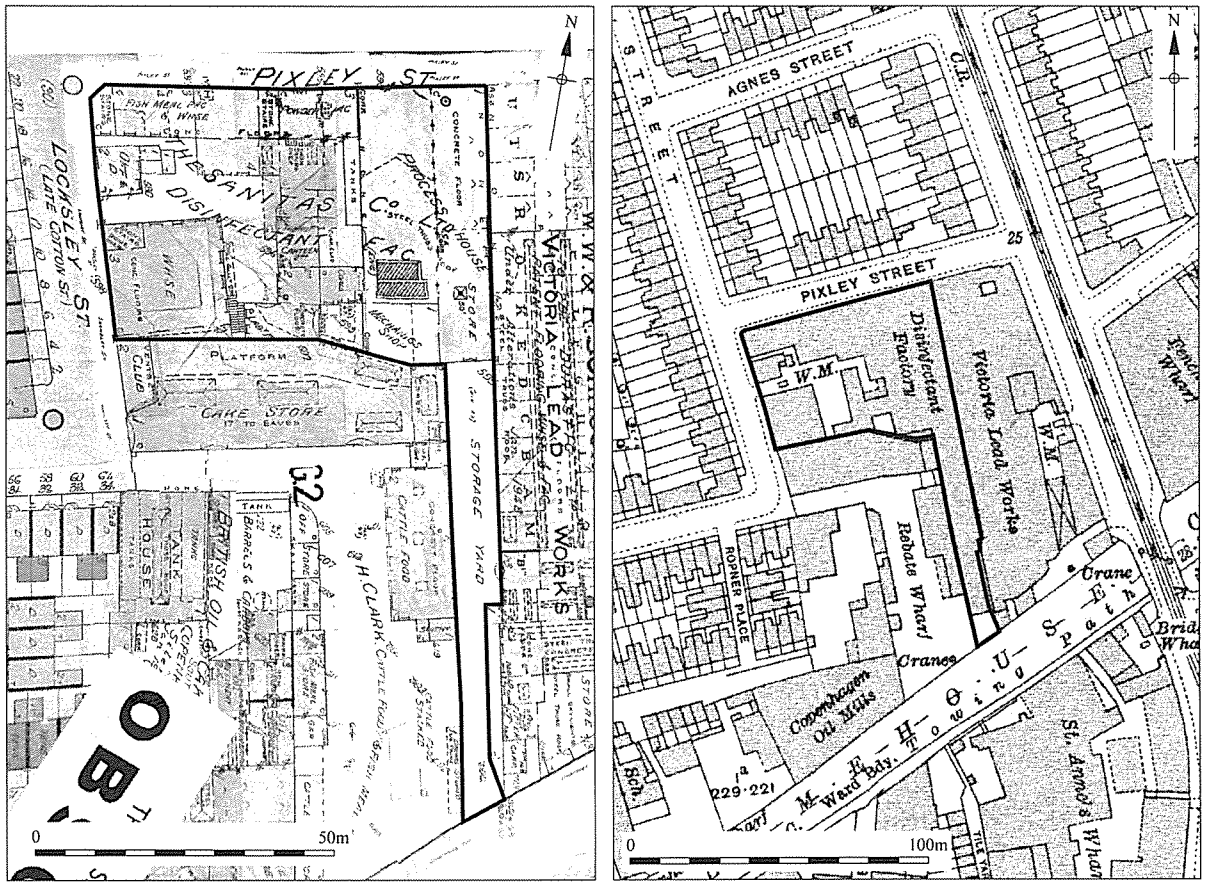


Figure 4. Locksley Street Sanitas factory: c.1910 Goad fire insurance map, 1916 Ordnance Survey 1:1,250

the eponymous Lambeth pottery, seventeen self-described gentlemen, five accountants, three solicitors, a ship owner, an engineer and the Marquis of Exeter.[13]

Despite a few setbacks in the early 1880s, by the middle of the decade business was sufficiently buoyant to enable the company to establish a subsidiary to distribute English-made Sanitas products to North American and European markets, though this was subsequently reabsorbed by the parent company.[14] In 1898 it was decided to reconstitute the Sanitas Company as a limited liability company under the name of the "Sanitas" Co Ltd, although the reorganisation had little impact upon its day-to-day business, which continued as previously.[15] By the early twentieth century the company had obtained a Royal Warrant for the supply of disinfectant to the royal household, which it continued to hold until the early 1980s.[16]

Products and core brands

From the outset, Sanitas manufactured antiseptics and disinfectants for agricultural, domestic, industrial and institutional uses. At the core of the company's range were the two principal products of the oxidation process, which were marketed respectively as Sanitas Fluid and Sanitas Oil.

Sanitas Fluid was the aqueous solution produced by the oxidation of turpentine. It was a colourless, non-poisonous liquid, the active ingredients of which were soluble camphor and thymol. Widely used as a household disinfectant and antiseptic wash, Sanitas Fluid was recommended 'for purifying the air, washing wounds, disinfection of linen and sprinkling on sheets, carpets etc and gargling sore throats'.[17] The product was available in 1s. bottles and was also supplied in jars and casks (Figure 2). Sanitas Oil comprised the oxidised oil of turpentine produced by the oxidation process. Rich in camphoric peroxide, the product was a more powerful antiseptic and disinfectant than the aqueous solution. It was used as

an antiseptic dressing, as a disinfecting emulsion, for fumigating sick rooms, the treatment of lung and throat complaints, in addition to varnish making and even for bleaching wax and feathers.[18]

Most products in the Sanitas range were derivatives of Sanitas Oil. One of the most popular lines was Sanitas Powder, a dried variant of Sanitas Oil, which was recommended 'for disinfecting urinals, earth closets, stables, kennels, drains, farmyards, and all offensive and putrid substances'.[19] It was available in 6d packs, 1s dredgers and 1-cwt sacks and was used by local Boards of Health, railway companies and other institutional customers (Figure 3). Sanitas also manufactured a range of hard and soft soaps, which were used in hospitals and workhouses, tooth powder and soap powder as well as veterinary products including sheep dip and ointments for mange. By 1903 the company had even added the manufacture of golf balls to its portfolio of sanitising and disinfectant products.[20]

Under Kingzett's leadership, the company was at the forefront of new developments in the field of antiseptics and disinfectants. In 1906 Sanitas further expanded its range with the introduction of 'Bactox', a germicide designed for 'rough disinfecting and surgical use'.[21] Two years later the company launched 'Sanitas-Oko', which was marketed to consumers as 'the strongest disinfectant in the world'.[22] In 1910 Sanitas 'Bathol' was introduced, a bath preparation that was said to 'palliate stiffness and stimulate the skin, and refresh the system generally'.[23] The company's advertising continually promoted new uses for established products, including the use of Sanitas Fluid as an insect repellent and Sanitas Powder for ridding gardens of slugs.[24] The company even won an award at the Royal International Horticultural Exhibition for the latter product's effectiveness as a deterrent against garden pests.[25]

Charles Kingzett was a tireless promoter of Sanitas products, and rarely missed an opportunity to extol their benefits in print. In 1880 he published the first edition of *Nature's Hygiene: A Systematic Manual of Natural Hygiene*, an accessible popular account of the properties and uses of antiseptics which ran to several editions. In addition to explaining the relatively new microbial theory of disease transmission and the role of antiseptics in combatting infection, the book described at length how each Sanitas product was made and how it worked. Rival products received much less attention, except where the author sought to highlight their shortcomings.

Each year, the directors of Sanitas allocated a portion of the company's annual budget to newspaper advertising, which remained a central element of the company's marketing strategy until the 1960s. In addition to regular advertising in the local and national press (Figures 2 and 3), the company maintained its public profile through association with venues such as the Royal Agricultural Hall in Islington, which hosted events such as the Cruft's Dog Show (which one Sanitas advertisement memorably described as 'the elite of Dogdom') and the annual Cattle Show.[26]

Expansion (c.1900–1914)

By the mid-1900s the Sanitas Company had outgrown its Bethnal Green premises, which it had occupied for more than a quarter of a century. In 1906 the firm acquired a large freehold manufacturing site at Locksley Street in Limehouse, where it consolidated its works and offices the following year (Figure 4).[27] The new premises comprised a four-storey block with smaller outbuildings which occupied a corner plot at the junction of Locksley and Pixley Streets, a site previously occupied by the Copenhagen Oil Mills.[28] In addition to facilities for processing, filling and packaging Sanitas products, the factory had a laboratory, ample warehousing space and office accommodation, the latter adjacent to the entrance from Locksley Street. The new factory was accessible from London's waterways via the Limehouse Cut, with which it shared a narrow wharf frontage equipped with cranes to unload raw materials carried by barges from the London Docks.[29] Although the company abandoned the premises in the early 1930s, most of the buildings of the Locksley Street factory are still standing at the junction of Copenhagen Place and Pixley Street.

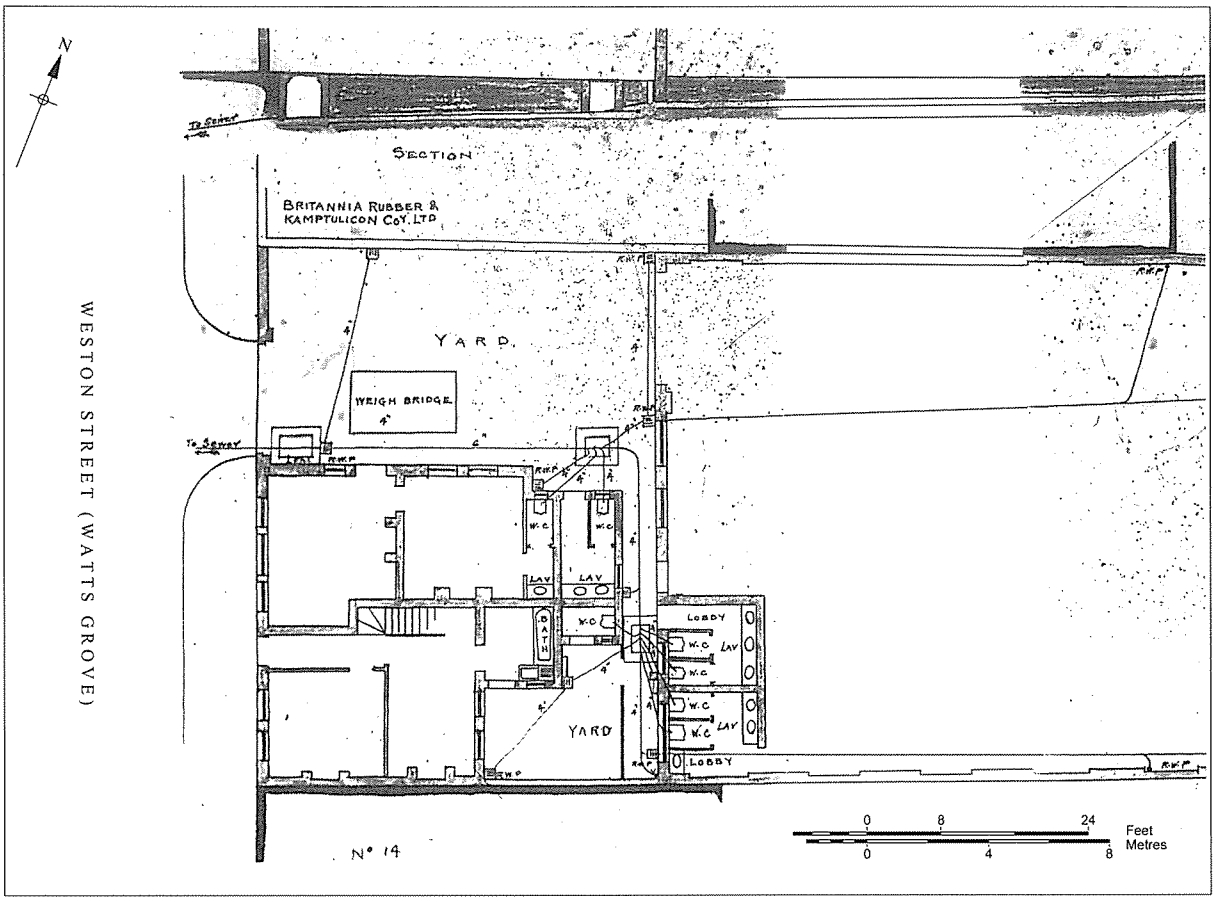


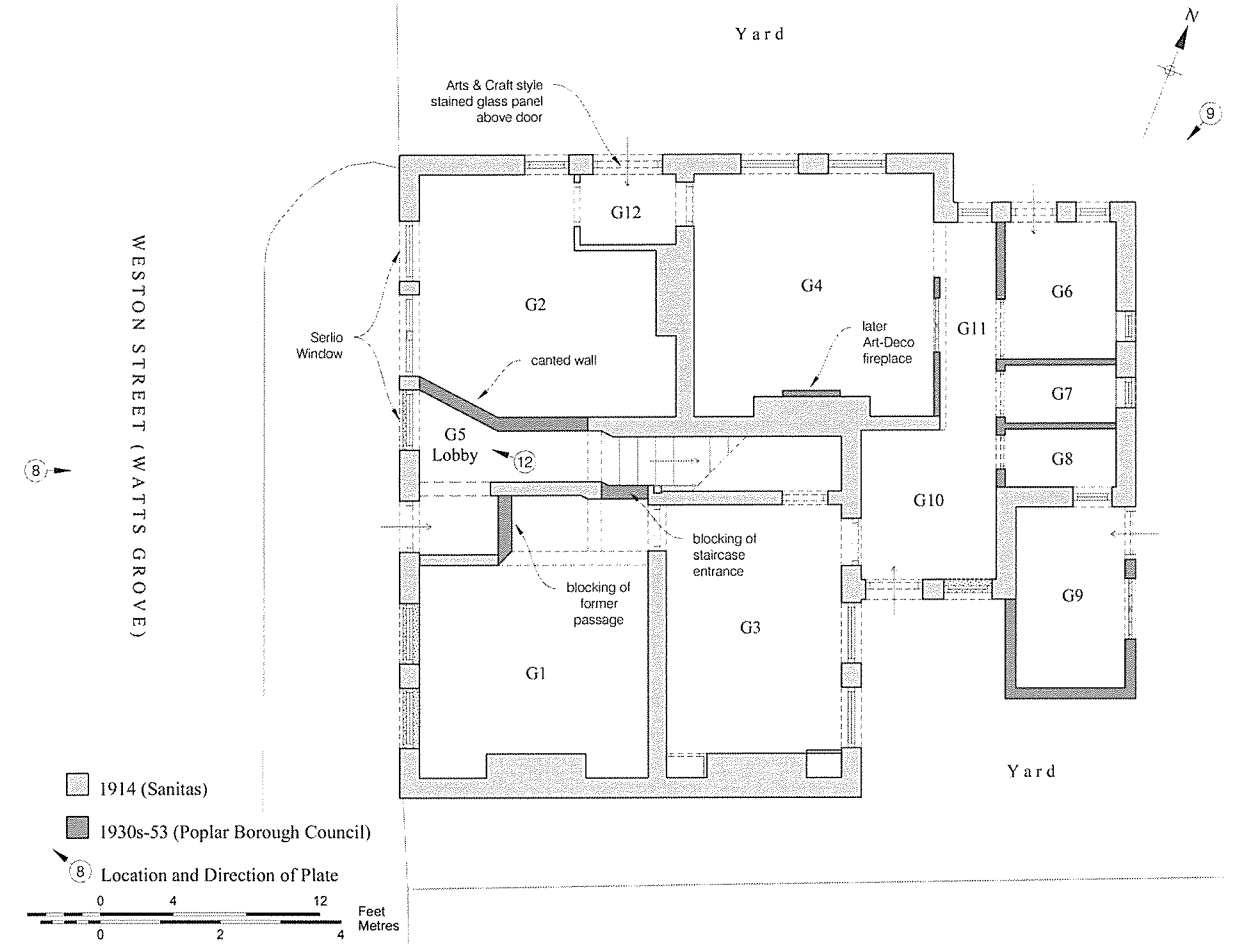
Figure 5. Drainage plan of the Sanitas factory, Weston Street, 1914

The 'relief' factory in Weston Street (Watts Grove)

Throughout the 1900s trade was sufficiently profitable to permit the company to pay shareholders a generous annual dividend of 7½%.[30] In 1911/12 sales reached an all-time high, enabling the company to turn a record profit of £15,913.[31] Whilst the Locksley Street factory was significantly larger than its predecessor in Bethnal Green, historical maps indicate that there was little or no room for expansion at the site (Figure 4).[32] With turnover and profits continuing to increase annually, the company decided to create additional manufacturing capacity at a new site within easy reach of the existing works in Limehouse. In March 1914 the Sanitas Company purchased a freehold plot of land on the west side of Glaucus Street, Bow Common, a little over 1km to the northeast of the Locksley Street works, where it proposed to develop a new 'relief' factory.[33] The site chosen comprised a substantial parcel of vacant land in the possession of Hector German, a wealthy surveyor and architect who owned extensive real estate in the neighbourhood.[34]

Although historical maps indicate that the site earmarked for the 'relief' factory was previously undeveloped, it lay in a busy manufacturing district that was home to several particularly noxious industries. When Sanitas acquired the site in 1914, Glaucus Street and neighbouring Weston Street contained two varnish factories, a paint works, a nitric acid manufacturer, a metallic cask manufacturer, an incandescent mantle factory and an electricity generating station.[35] While the site chosen for the new factory did not have direct access to London's waterways, the southern end of Weston Street provided access to wharves on the north bank of the Limehouse Cut. The site also had good links to the city's road network via Devons Road.

A drainage plan of the new factory dated 24 September 1914 (Figure 5) shows that the company proposed to erect two buildings on the site; a compact office block adjacent to the entrance from Weston Street (present-day Watts Grove) at its western extent, with a substantial factory unit to the rear.[36] The offices



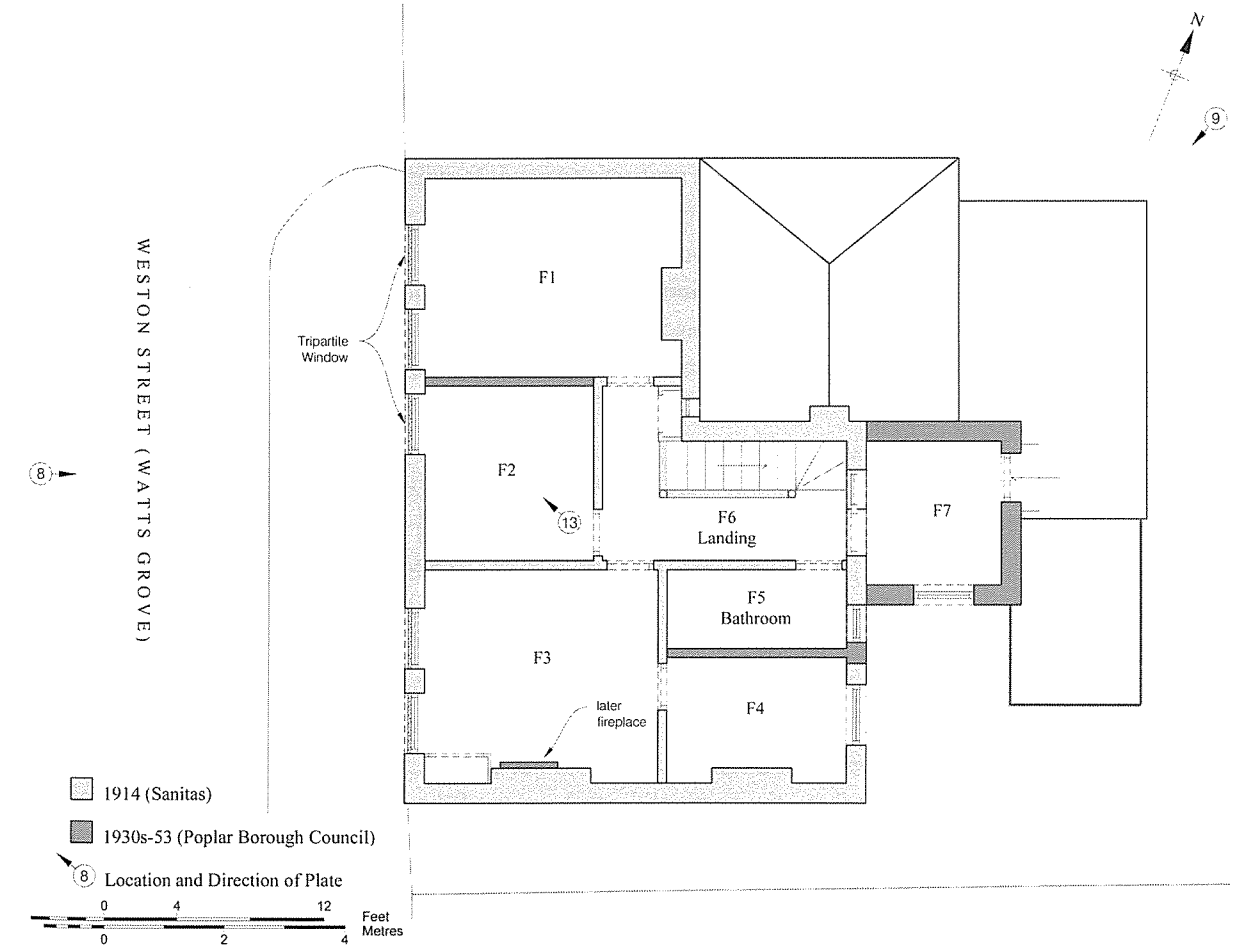


Figure 6. Office building ground floor plan, 2015. 1:125

Figure 7. Office building first floor plan, 2015. 1:125

Figure 8, West elevation, 2015

were built in a similar position relative to the factory building to those at the Locksley Street works, a conventional arrangement for the period.[37] To the north of the offices lay an open yard area, vehicular access to which was gained from Weston Street. A weighbridge was situated a short distance from the Weston Street entrance to record the loads of vehicles entering and leaving the works. There was no direct vehicular access to the site from Glaucus Street.

Office building

The office building was constructed over two floors, with single storey ranges projecting to the rear (Figures 6 and 7). The principal west-facing elevation and its return to the north were constructed of high quality red brickwork, while the rear elevation was constructed of lesser quality yellow London stock bricks (Figures 8 and 9). The west elevation was practically an advertisement for the company, featuring a stone entablature inscribed with THE SANITAS COMPANY LIMITED which extended to the full width of the façade above the first- floor windows, surmounted by a prominent oversailing cornice below a brick parapet wall (Figure 8). At ground floor level an elaborate window displayed a Serlio architectural motif, with a taller central arched opening flanked by lower flat-headed openings. A prominent date plaque of 1914 was set in relief within a rough cast tympanum to the central arch.

The 1914 plan (Figure 5) showed that the ground floor of the building originally comprised four principal rooms, with ancillary accommodation to the rear. Access to the southern pair (rooms G1 and G3) was gained from an entrance hall which led off Weston Street/Watts Grove. A narrow quarter-turn staircase which led off the entrance hall provided access to the upper floor. The northern pair of rooms (G2 and G4) were accessed from a door in the north elevation leading from the external yard to the north. There was no communication between the rooms on the north and south sides of the ground floor of the building. At the eastern end of the entrance hall lay a small square bathroom (room G10), while the corresponding space in the northern range (room G11) contained a water closet accessible from room G4, suggesting that the latter facility was for the use of the occupants of rooms G2 and G4 only. To the rear of these rooms lay two water closets that were accessible only from the yard to the north of the building (rooms G6 and

Figure 9. North and east elevations, looking south west, 2015

7) and from a smaller yard to the southeast (room G8), indicating that these facilities were originally designed for the use of employees who worked outside the offices.

A survey of the building undertaken prior to demolition revealed that the four main ground floor rooms retained many of their original decorative features, including plaster cornices, moulded picture rails and skirting boards.[38] The quality of decorative treatment in room G2, which was lit by the elaborate Serlio window in the western elevation of the property, was of a higher standard than elsewhere, suggesting that it may have been intended for use during office hours by a senior employee, such as the factory manager. Further evidence for the higher status of room G2 included room G12, a small lobby in the northeast corner of the room adjacent to the side entrance, which was not shown on the 1914 plan. The decorative details of the lobby indicated that it was built at the same time as the rest of the building. Features that suggest that comparatively high status of this room included an original ornate Arts and Crafts style stained glass panel to the door light.

Given that the sole means of access to the first floor was via the central stair (both in 1914 and 2015) leading from the Weston Street/Watts Grove entrance, it is probable that the rooms on the upper level, together with the offices and bathroom on the southern side of the ground floor (rooms G1, G2 and G10) were originally intended to be a self-contained maisonette, most likely for the use of a resident factory supervisor or caretaker and his family. Although original plans of the first floor have not survived, it is evident that it originally contained two rooms along the western elevation (rooms F1/2 and F3) and a third room to the rear (room F4/5). Both 'front' rooms were originally heated (rooms F1/2 F3 and F4/5) and were probably designed for use as bedrooms (Figure 7). The upper floor rooms were plainer than those on the floor below and exhibited no signs of cornices or ceiling decoration.

Factory building

The 1914 drainage plan (Figure 5) reveals little detail about the layout of the factory building to the east (rear) of the office block, other than the presence of two separate but adjoining lavatory suites in the southwest corner of the building. The northern suite was accessed from the factory yard, whereas its neighbour was accessible only from within the factory building. This arrangement suggests that the

latter facilities were intended to be used solely by those working on the factory floor. The plan suggests that the remainder of the building comprised a large open space, lit by windows in its west, northeast and east walls. While an aerial photograph of 1946 indicates that the building was approximately the same height as the adjacent office block, a later Goad fire insurance plan does not indicate the presence of a first floor, suggesting that it was a single-storey structure (Figure 10). The Goad plan also indicates that the factory building was surmounted by a steel truss roof, lit by a central (glazed) lantern and a number of small skylights along the parapet, which can also be seen in the aerial photograph. Neither the 1914 plan nor the Goad map gave any indication of other internal subdivisions. The factory had an approximate internal floor area of 880m^2.

The impact of the First World War on the Sanitas Company and the Weston Street factory

The First World War brought both new opportunities and challenges to the Sanitas Company. Having supplied institutional customers for several decades, Kingzett was quick to identify the armed forces as a potential market for the company's products and in September 1914 he applied to supply disinfectants to the Admiralty.[39] Although his offer was declined owing to existing contractual arrangements with other suppliers, Kingzett found a willing customer in the War Office, which awarded the company numerous contracts to supply disinfectants over the years that followed. In addition to supplying huge quantities of its established brands, the company introduced entire new ranges of preparations for washing wounds, antiseptic dressings and for purifying sick rooms.[40] The company also launched new product lines that were designed to tackle the insanitary conditions that British troops encountered on the Western Front and other theatres of war. These included tins of 'Anti-Vermin Paste', designed to kill lice, which was marketed to family members of soldiers serving in the trenches.[41]

In a memorandum to the Treasury written in 1916, the War Office stated that the company was 'one of our most important firms for the supply of disinfectant'.[42] Huge quantities of Sanitas disinfectant fluids and powders were also purchased by the Office of Works for distribution to other Government departments. Between 1918 and 1920, the company supplied more than 20,000 containers of disinfecting fluid to the department.[43]

Like many other private manufacturing concerns, the Sanitas Company's finances were severely impacted by the First World War. By the first half of 1916 the company was experiencing a severe labour shortage as employees left their jobs to enlist in the armed forces. Profits were also hit by the rising cost of raw materials and transport.[44] Nevertheless, the directors still managed to pay out a dividend of 7½% to shareholders in 1916, although they were forced to dip into the company's reserves to fund it.

To meet the demands of the War Office and other Government departments, the company was obliged to hold larger stocks of raw materials than previously, which in turn necessitated a significant increase in its working capital.[45] In September 1916 the Sanitas Company issued new shares to the value of £14,800 to finance the expansion of its buildings and plant.[46] Nine months later in June 1917, Kingzett informed shareholders that difficulties with obtaining supplies of raw materials had worsened over the course of the preceding year, while the shipment of export orders had become correspondingly difficult. Nevertheless, whilst domestic consumer demand for the company's products had also fallen, this was offset by increased sales to municipal and institutional customers.[47] The company's largest customer remained the Government, with the War Office taking the largest share of the goods supplied. Although Kingzett maintained that this trade returned little in the way of profit, exports had increased sufficiently (despite the depredations of German submarines) to enable the firm to pay an increased dividend of 8% to shareholders at the height of the war.

With the factory in Locksley Street working flat-out to fulfil the demands of the War Office and domestic and foreign customers, it is perhaps surprising to discover that the company does not appear to have made any use of the newly-completed 'relief' factory in Weston Street during the First World War. In his annual report to shareholders in June 1916, Kingzett reported that the premises had been let out on

a short-term lease, though he did not explain why or to whom.[48] A street directory of 1920 lists a company called Darby & Sons as the occupant of nos. 12, 13 and 14 Weston Street, Bow Common.[49] This company was described elsewhere in the same directory as 'Army and Government Contractors manufacturers of oil and gas stoves and heating apparatus, zinc, tin and japanned goods', and was one of several firms which supplied cooking apparatus to the War Office and Ministry of Munitions during the First World War.[50] Unfortunately however, directories published in 1910 and 1914 (i.e. before the Sanitas relief factory was built) list the same company at nos. 12, 13 and 14 Weston Street, King's Cross Road, suggesting that the reference to the company at the Bow address in the 1919 directory is a typographical error.

In fact, the occupiers of the Weston Street factory during and immediately after the First World War were Messrs C. Groom Ltd, manufacturers of tents, marquees and waterproof covers.[51] First established in Portsmouth in 1821, Groom's was originally a supplier of sails, ships' stores and other goods to the Royal Navy. The firm grew rapidly after being reconstituted as a limited liability company in 1896.[52] By 1911 the company had factories and warehouses in Dod Street, Limehouse, Broad Street, Portsmouth, Dundee and Manchester, with head offices in Gracechurch Street in the City of London.

Even before the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, Groom's had been contracted to supply tents and other goods to both the Admiralty and the War Office. In contrast to the vast conscript armies of Austro-Hungary, France, Germany and Russia, the pre-war British Army was a professional regular force of less than 250,000 men, backed up by a volunteer reserve of roughly twice that number. Following the creation of Kitchener's 'New Armies' in 1914/15 and the introduction of conscription two years later, the army expanded massively, growing to nearly three-and-a-half-million men by November 1918.[53] The expansion of the expeditionary forces in France and across the Empire necessitated the purchase of huge quantities of tents for use in camps and depots. During the First World War, British and Imperial forces used a wide variety of patterns of tent, ranging from specialist hospital and stores marquees, through the ubiquitous 'bell' tents that slept up to 15 men ('Tents, Circular, Double' and Tents, Circular, Single') to simple cotton bivouacs for two men ('Shelter, Mk I and Mk II'). In addition to tents, the company was contracted by the Ministry of Munitions to manufacture a range of other

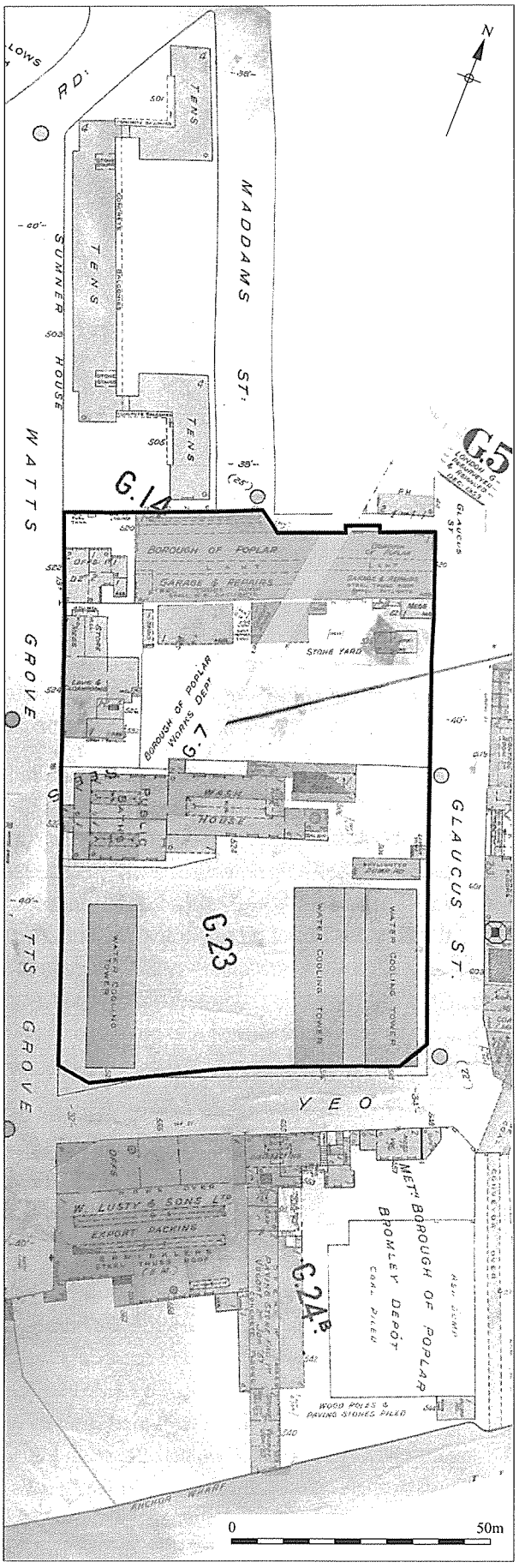


Figure 10. 1951–53 Goad Fire Insurance Map. 1:1,250

Figure 11. Letterhead of C. Groom Ltd, 1917 © The National Archives (MUN 4/4234)

goods for the Army, including cotton bandoliers ('Bandoliers, Cotton, 50 Rounds, Mk II') designed to carry .303 calibre small arms ammunition.[54]

The company's balance sheets indicate that Groom's held huge quantities of stock during the conflict, which necessitated the acquisition of additional premises for the duration of hostilities.[55] By 1917, the company had gained possession of manufacturing and warehousing premises in Weston Street (the 'Weston Works') and neighbouring Glaucus Street (Figure 11). It is conceivable that Groom's manufactured cotton tents and other infantry equipment at the Weston Street factory, which were stockpiled at the Glaucus Street premises, before being delivered to the Army for onward distribution to fighting units. Alternatively, Groom's may have used both buildings as warehouses, given that the layout of the Weston Street factory could be readily adapted to either use.

The Sanitas Company after the First World War

Whilst C. Groom Ltd was still in possession of the former Sanitas factory in 1919, the company's name is not recorded in directories for subsequent years.[56] Balance sheets from the early 1920s indicate that the company's stock holdings were dramatically reduced after the war, suggesting that it probably gave up the temporary accommodation at Glaucus and Weston Streets not long after the conflict ended.[57]

There is no known evidence to indicate that the Sanitas Company tried to regain possession of the Weston Street factory following the end of the First World War, although this may be a consequence of a lack of surviving corporate records. Nor is it clear when the company disposed of the factory, which must have been something of a white elephant following the departure of Groom's. In the years immediately after the war, the fortunes of Sanitas continued to fluctuate. Domestic demand for the company's products recovered from its wartime slump, in large part due to the influenza epidemic of 1918. The post-war recession hit the export trade severely, although holders of preference shares continued to be paid dividends of 9% between 1920 and 1923.[58]

Following the retirement of Charles Kingzett in 1926, the Sanitas Company appears to have set out to diversify its range through the acquisition of several popular over-the counter medication brands. The same year the company acquired half the capital of W. Woodward, the manufacturers of Gripe Water, a treatment widely used for colic and other gastrointestinal ailments in infants.[59] Other brands

purchased by the company during this period included 'Liqufruta', a patent herbal cough medicine that had originally been marketed as a treatment for tuberculosis, which the company purchased in 1931. Two years after acquiring the latter brand, the company built a factory in Fowler Street, Camberwell SE5 to manufacture Liqufruta products.[60]

In 1926 the Sanitas Trust was established to acquire the ordinary share capital of the Sanitas Company. Despite the failure of the share issue that accompanied the creation of the Trust, the new company managed to return net profits of £62,294 in its first year, thanks largely to a boost to sales caused by an influenza outbreak in early 1927.[61]

By November 1931 the company had relocated to 51 Clapham Park Road London SW9.[62] Owing to the absence of an intact corporate archive, the circumstances of the company's decision to leave its base in Limehouse for new premises in Clapham in the late 1920s/early 1930s are uncertain, although the restricted nature of the existing site at Locksley Street may have played a part. The company continued to trade from the Clapham address until the mid-1960s, when it moved to a purpose-built block in nearby Stockwell Green.[63]

The Weston Street factory during the interwar period

Directories give no indication regarding the use to which the former Sanitas works was put after the departure of C. Groom Ltd in the early 1920s, so it is possible that it was empty during this period. Other factories in the immediate vicinity also appear to have been vacated around that time, perhaps a consequence of the recession that followed the brief post-war economic boom of 1919–20.

In 1922 notices appeared in local newspapers advertising the sale of the Phoenix Works, a freehold factory and office complex comprising an area of about 21,000 sq. ft in Glaucus Street, which lay immediately to the southeast of the former Sanitas works.[64] Having been previously occupied by a paint manufacturer for several years, the Phoenix Works was acquired by Poplar Borough Council, which utilised the site as a stone yard.[65] This acquisition was part of a wider trend whereby the borough council took possession of former industrial premises, which were then adapted for public use. The council's interest in acquiring land and premises in the district had begun in 1899, when it built an electricity generating station in Glaucus Street. The power station was extended on several occasions in the early twentieth century, culminating in the erection of cooling towers on the site of a former soap works at the junction of Glaucus and Yeo Streets in the mid-1920s (Figure 10).[66]

The 'municipalisation' of the district intensified during the interwar period. In 1928 Poplar Borough Council announced plans to erect new baths and washhouses in Weston Street, adjacent to the municipal stone yard. Financed by a loan of £12,000, the baths opened to the public in the early 1930s.[67] At the same time, the council built a four-storey block of flats called Sumner House on the site of the former Britannia Rubber Works at the northern end of Weston Street, which was itself renamed Watts Grove in commemoration of a local councillor in 1937.[68] As well as building new homes for residents, the council demolished several slum properties in the street in the same year.[69] By the end of the 1930s the council had gained possession of the disused former Sanitas works, which it converted into a garage for its motor vehicles.[70]

A Goad fire insurance plan of 1953 suggests that the factory building was easily adapted to its new use (Figure 10). Around the same time as the conversion of the factory, the office building in Watts Grove was converted into an administrative block for the adjacent council garage. This change of use necessitated several alterations to the fabric of the building (Figure 6). These included erecting a partition halfway along the entrance passage from the street and demolishing part of the wall in the southwest corner of Room G2 to form a rather awkward 'dog-leg' lobby (Room G5). The former entrance to the staircase from the old hallway was blocked and the bottom three steps were removed. Following the removal of these steps, the staircase was probably realigned or replaced, so that it led directly from the new lobby to the first floor. The newly-fashioned lobby was lit by the southernmost light of the Serlio, which was

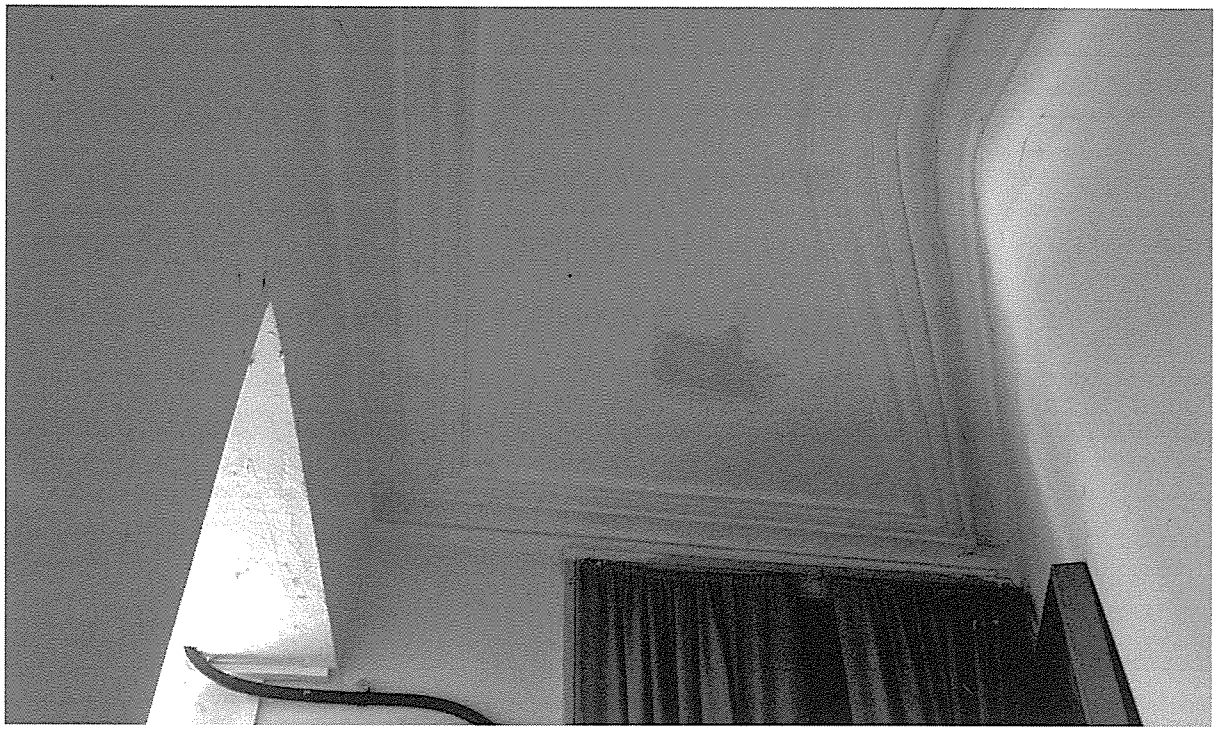


Figure 12. Canted wall (right) taking in southernmost sash of Serlio window in hall G5, looking west

detached from the remainder of the window by an awkward canted wall built in what had been the southeast corner of Room G2 (Figure 12). The cornice of the ceiling in the new lobby was reworked along the line of the canted wall to match the decorative scheme elsewhere on the ground floor. A narrow brick-built fireplace with Art-Deco stepped decoration characteristic of the period was inserted in the chimney breast of Room G4 at the same time. Historical maps also reveal that additional toilet capacity was created in the enclosed yard space to the rear of the block at some point between 1937 and 1953, presumably at the same time that the other alterations to the property were made (Ordnance Survey Revised Edition 1937, not illustrated; Figure 10).

On the first floor, bedroom F1/2 was subdivided to create Room F2 (Figure 7). This was a small square unheated room, lit by the southernmost light of the tripartite window in the western elevation (Figure 13). Former bedroom F4 was subdivided on its northern side to create Room F5, which was latterly used as a bathroom. In keeping with the reduction in the size of the fireplaces elsewhere in the building at the time, the original fireplace in Room F3 was removed and replaced by a narrower grey-tiled fire surround and hearth.

The Watts Grove Depot since 1945

The former factory and administration block continued to be used by Poplar Borough Council and its successor Tower Hamlets Council (after 1965) as a depot for rubbish collection and street cleaning vehicles into the twenty-first century. The adjacent residential terrace (14–19 Watts Grove) was demolished in the 1930s and the site subsequently redeveloped as part of the Glaucus Street Council Depot (Figure 10). By the early 1950s the entire block bordered by Watts Grove, Yeo Street and Glaucus Street was in the possession of the Council. During the 1960s first the slipper baths and then the power station fell out of use and both were eventually demolished, following which the land on which they had stood was absorbed into the enlarged garage complex, which was renamed the Watts Grove Depot.

Historical maps reveal that the former Sanitas factory building cum garage was demolished at some point between 1974 and 1989. Maps and aerial photographs indicate that an open-sided shed with a pitched metal roof was erected on the site of the east end of the former building; it is likely that this structure

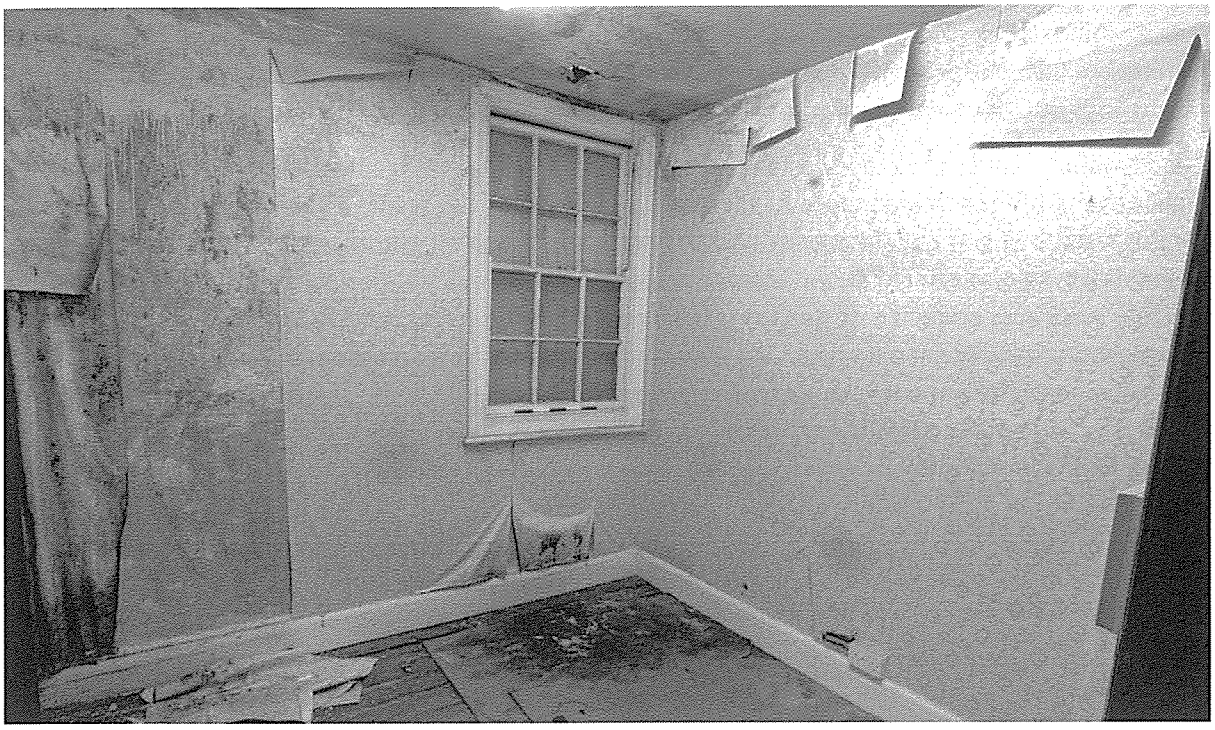


Figure 13. Room F2, looking west, showing detatched part of tripartite window

was a fuelling station and canopy for which planning permission was granted in 1975.[71] This suggests that the factory was probably demolished in 1974/5. By the late 1980s the only standing structures on the site were no. 13 Watts Grove and the fuelling station, although these were subsequently joined by an unremarkable metal clad shed that was erected on the site of a short-lived council-owned building that stood to the south of the office block. As recently as 2013 the depot was used to accommodate street cleansing vehicles operated by Veolia Environmental Services, while no. 13 Watts Grove was occupied by Tower Hamlets Council's Building Control (drainage) department. At the end of 2014 an application to demolish all buildings and structures on the site of the depot to provide 148 new homes was permitted.

Discussion and Conclusions

If the significance of a building were determined by aesthetic and architectural considerations alone, then it would be easy to overlook no. 13 Watts Grove. The building itself was structurally unremarkable, built with solid one and a half brick thick walls, with machine cut softwood for floor and roof joists and softwood for all other joinery. Despite the flourish of the ground floor Serlio window, the building was not in any way architecturally distinguished. The identity of its architect remains unknown, perhaps unsurprisingly given that the designers of industrial buildings figured at the bottom end of the hierarchy of their profession during the Edwardian period.[72]

Visually, the most striking aspect of the building was the prominent corporate branding displayed over the western elevation, which made it stand out against its drab and somewhat rundown surroundings when it was recorded by PCA in 2015. This type of permanent advertising was once a common feature of late Victorian and Edwardian factories, although remarkably very few examples have survived into the twenty-first century.[73] Prior to its recent demolition, the inscribed entablature of 13 Watts Grove represented a rare survival of the once ubiquitous 'brandscape' of late nineteenth and early twentieth century industrial Britain.

Plans and photographs indicate that the former factory building that stood to the rear of the offices until its demolition in the 1970s was equally architecturally unremarkable. It comprised a large, single storey rectangular box, a widely used design that could be readily adapted to accommodate various forms of

manufacturing.[74] Historical aerial photographs suggest that the building was probably sufficiently tall to admit more than one factory floor, although there is no evidence that this capacity was ever utilised. Its nondescript design was well suited to use as a garage, the role that it fulfilled for most of its existence.

The layout of buildings on the Weston Street/Watts Grove site was also typical of its period, with the higher status offices located close to the gateway (enabling the management to keep an eye on the comings and goings of the workers) and the productive buildings to the rear. Similar arrangements of buildings could be found at countless factories across the manufacturing districts of Great Britain. Notable surviving examples of this layout include the Sanitas Company's works in Locksley Street, Limehouse, which the company used as its principal manufacturing site from 1906 until the early 1930s. This tried and tested arrangement of administrative and manufacturing buildings was also present at Brunner Mond's ill-fated soda crystal and caustic soda factory at Crescent Wharf, Silvertown, which was built in the mid-1890s.[75]

Whereas no. 13 Watts Grove was aesthetically and architecturally undistinguished, there is a strong case to argue for its historical significance. Foremost among the building's claims of historical interest is its association with Charles Kingzett and the Sanitas Company. Rising from humble beginnings in provincial Oxford, Kingzett was a pioneer in the field of effective clinical antiseptics and household disinfectants. Whereas many of the businesses that were established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to manufacture and supply disinfectants failed within a few months or years of their foundation, Kingzett's determination, drive and scientific acumen ensured that Sanitas became one of the best known and most successful companies in the field.[76] Kingzett's achievement was recognised by his profession's in-house journal, the *Journal of the Chemical Society*, which accorded him the honour of a lengthy obituary following his death in 1935. Kingzett's obituarist noted that his aptitude for both business and chemistry was unusual. Whereas Kingzett's near-contemporary Jesse Boot (1850–1931) used his organisational and marketing skills to transform the eponymous pharmacy founded by his father into a national retailer, Boot lacked Kingzett's technical expertise. In contrast, the equally well-known John Jeyes (1817–1892) was an 'outstanding' inventor, but an inept businessman whose company went into liquidation within five years of its formation.[77] Jeyes' name is only known today thanks to the actions of a group of investors who purchased the company name and the rights to his invention, which is still produced 143 years after it was patented. Like Charles Kingzett, the owners of the Jeyes Sanitary Compounds Co Ltd developed an extremely effective marketing strategy that ensured that their products became synonymous with hygiene in the home and the workplace.

Thanks to the effectiveness of its products and the ubiquity of its advertising, the Sanitas Company achieved widespread public recognition during its long existence. The name 'Sanitas' was used as a shorthand for domestic disinfectant by all strata of society for many decades, an accolade that the company shared with only two other British manufacturers, Jeyes and Izal.[78] Ultimately, the Sanitas Company all but disappeared from popular consciousness during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. So too have the factories that manufactured the company's products. Of the four factories built by the company (Locksley Street, Watts Grove, Clapham Park Road, Fowler Street SE5 and Stockwell Green), only two survived into the second decade of the twenty-first century and only one (Locksley Street) to the present.

The Watts Grove factory is also historically interesting for the fact that despite having invested a significant sum of money in the property, the Sanitas Company never appears to have used it. Indeed, the apparent ease with which the newly completed buildings were adapted for use as a factory or warehouse by C. Groom Ltd, suggests that the company may never have installed any manufacturing plant there before it was leased to its wartime occupants.

The factory was one of many in Britain that were repurposed in aid of the war effort. Whilst some premises were formally requisitioned by the Government during the conflict, many others changed use as a result of initiatives by their owners, or following informal approaches from the authorities. Founded in early 1915 to oversee the manufacture and supply of materials and munitions for the war effort, the

Ministry of Munitions combined the pre-war procurement functions of the Admiralty and the War Office into a single, all-powerful department. It is possible that the Ministry persuaded Sanitas to lease the premises to Groom's, much as it convinced the Brunner Mond company to convert a disused caustic soda factory at Silvertown to the purification of TNT, despite the latter company's concerns regarding the safety of the process in a built-up area.

The subsequent reuse of the former Sanitas factory and offices by Poplar Borough Council reflects the increasing 'municipalisation' of the district during the interwar period. This process encompassed the provision of council services directed at enhancing and maintaining the built environment (such as rubbish collection and street cleansing services), as well as efforts to improve the health and wellbeing of the residents of one of the capital's poorest and most overcrowded boroughs. The latter included the construction of the new slipper baths next door to the Sanitas factory in the early 1930s, part of a programme to ensure that all residents had access to bathing facilities. Launched in the early 1920s, when temporary slipper baths were erected in Wick Lane, Old Ford and Violet Road, Bromley-by-Bow, the scheme was subsequently expanded to include a new open-air swimming pool in Violet Road, only a short distance away from Watts Grove (Figure 4).[79] These initiatives also represented an opportunity to provide paid work for unemployed residents, a cause championed by George Lansbury (1859–1940), a former mayor of Poplar who subsequently became First Commissioner of Works in the Government of 1929–31 and later leader of the Labour Party.

Poplar Council's social policies also encompassed the clearance of slum housing in Weston and Glaucus Streets and the provision of improved accommodation for residents. The latter process began with construction of Sumner House in the late 1920s and resumed with renewed vigour after the Second World War. By the mid-1970s the district was dominated by social housing and Council services, a far cry from the busy manufacturing district in which the Sanitas Company chose to build its 'relief' factory in the years immediately preceding the First World War.

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Notes and References

Abbreviations

TNA (The National Archives), LMA (London Metropolitan Archive), THLHLA (Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archive), LBTH (London Borough of Tower Hamlets)

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