

**Historical and contemporary archaeologies of social housing: changing  
experiences of the modern and new, 1870 to present**

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**Emma Dwyer**

**School of Archaeology and Ancient History**

**University of Leicester**

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**Thesis abstract: Historical and contemporary archaeologies of social housing:  
changing experiences of the modern and new, 1870 to present**

Emma Dwyer

This thesis has used building recording techniques, documentary research and oral history testimonies to explore how concepts of the modern and new between the 1870s and 1930s shaped the urban built environment, through the study of a particular kind of infrastructure that was developed to meet the needs of expanding cities at this time – social (or municipal) housing – and how social housing was perceived and experienced as a new kind of built environment, by planners, architects, local government and residents. This thesis also addressed how the concepts and priorities of the Victorian and Edwardian periods, and the decisions made by those in authority regarding the form of social housing, continue to shape the urban built environment and impact on the lived experience of social housing today. In order to address this, two research questions were devised:

- How can changing attitudes and responses to the nature of modern life between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries be seen in the built environment, specifically in the form and use of social housing?
- Can contradictions between these earlier notions of the modern and new, and our own be seen in the responses of official authority and residents to the built environment?

The research questions were applied to three case study areas, three housing estates constructed between 1910 and 1932 in Birmingham, London and Liverpool. During the course of answering these research questions, three further themes have arisen, which have broader relevance beyond this thesis:

- How to interpret buildings that have a life extending beyond their original purpose.
- The practice of contemporary archaeology as it relates to the built environment

- How new kinds of environments are created and experienced, and how this can be investigated through material evidence.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

This research uses archaeological building recording techniques, documentary research and oral history testimonies to explore how concepts of the modern and new between the 1870s and 1930s shaped the urban built environment, and how these Victorian and Edwardian concepts continue to shape the built environment today.

Specifically, this research will examine the emergence of social housing as a new phenomenon in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this thesis, social housing is defined as housing that is owned and managed by government agencies, local authorities and not-for-profit organisations, such as charities and present-day housing associations, which use any profit generated through rents to maintain existing homes and finance the construction of new homes. The housing charity Shelter states that ‘a key function of social housing is to provide accommodation that is affordable to people on low incomes’ ([shelter.org.uk](http://shelter.org.uk)).

The provision of housing for the poor has much older origins than the establishment of the first Peabody Trust or municipal housing schemes during the late nineteenth century. Medieval hospitals provided for the bodily needs of their inmates and cared for their souls (Orme and Webster 1995, 49; 88). This important source of relief for the poor was disrupted by the dissolution of monasteries in England during the early to mid sixteenth century and provision of poor relief became largely secularised. Merchants and tradesmen who wished to perpetuate their name within their native parish, and fulfil their social obligation established small charitable foundations (Prescott 1988, 104–5; 127, Huey 2001). Provision of housing for the poor continued to be dependent on charity and often poor-quality lodgings until the late nineteenth century when parliamentary acts enforced the demolition of sub-standard homes, and then encouraged the construction of new homes by local authorities.

The planning, construction, and supervision of housing was a new responsibility for local authorities and charitable organisations, and the experience of moving to a new estate, away from existing social and familial networks, would have been a new

experience for estate dwellers. The concerns and priorities of early urban planners were manifested within the buildings and landscapes of social housing, as were the relationships that residents had with their homes.

Buildings shape the lives of those who live in them, and have their own biographies; the relationships that people have with their homes can be expressed physically, through alteration, decoration, and the use of rooms. Yet equally, residents have also changed how they think about, and relate to their homes, without making any physical alterations – a challenge for an archaeologist to interpret and understand. Social housing is often an environment over which residents have limited control; this research will highlight how residents construct a personal identity tied to a place, and use space to create their own autonomous identities, challenging identities that might be perceived as having been externally imposed.

Social housing, as a distinctive kind of contemporary landscape, is a subject area that has seen some study in contemporary and historical archaeology, but one with tremendous contemporary relevance. At its height during the decades after the Second World War, social housing formed one third of Britain's housing stock, and more than half in some boroughs. Social housing is a common field of enquiry in other subject areas, namely sociology, geography, anthropology, and urban planning studies. Archaeology offers a different approach with evidential value; the buildings, landscapes and the people populating and managing them, now and in the past, that are the subject of this thesis, also act as the source material.

## **Research Questions**

1. How can changing attitudes and responses to the nature of modern life between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries be seen in the built environment, specifically in the form and use of social housing?

This question will examine the extent to which civic, commercial and charitable institutions on the one hand, and residents of social housing on the other, have been

responsible for shaping the form, perception and experience of the urban built environment between the 1870s and 1930s. A greater sense of responsibility was felt by national and local governments towards the poor during this time, as housing in urban centres was lost to expanding commercial areas and cities became overcrowded (Ravetz 2001, 24) and was expressed through urban planning and architecture. During the 1920s and 1930s new building forms took advantage of technology, as greater use was made of pre-fabricated construction in order to answer a shortage of skilled construction workers and increase the rate at which new homes could be completed (Buckley 2010, 22).

Social housing was designed and managed by charities and local authorities in what could be seen as a top-down manner to efficiently fit people into 'healthy' surroundings. Local authorities and charitable landlords initially continued to monitor housing after its construction, through policies regarding who could take up housing, and rules regulating the use of public and private spaces. Organisations such as the Peabody Trust, the Octavia Hill Housing Trust, and the Guinness Trust saw their role as pursuing social objectives that went beyond the provision of healthy housing, and became a 'top-down movement to secure decent housing for the respectable working class, and to 'civilise' and pacify the urban poor' (Malpass 1999, 45). Such institutional involvement in the provision of housing was a departure from the dominant means of provision (and one that remained dominant until the mass home-building of the inter-war and post-war periods) – that is, private landlords renting homes, such as houses (including back-to-backs), tenements, and lodging houses.

Tenants were also engaged in their own housing provision, through the sub-letting of whole rooms to families, or taking in lodgers. In London in the late nineteenth century more than 300,000 people were housed in one-room tenements, and more than 900,000 lived in illegal lodging houses or doss houses (Davies 2009, 15); there was demand for increased and improved housing provision. Residents played a role in shaping the environment in which they lived; the identities and roles of people are created through the built environment, and in turn, it is possible to see how their

responses are documented in that same environment, a fluid relationship existing between people and the environment in which they live.

While the first research question is concerned with the manifestation of past ideologies and concerns in the built environment, the second question seeks to address the impact that Victorian and Edwardian concerns have had on life for social housing residents in the present day:

2. Can contradictions between these earlier notions of the modern and new, and our own be seen in the responses of official authority and residents to the built environment?

This question asks whether there are contradictions between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century concepts of the modern and new as played out in the form of flats, houses, shops and amenities, and those of the present day. Some planners, local authorities, and organisations engaged in the development of social housing were more overtly and intentionally building a new future than others. The Garden City movement was keen to engineer the creation of new communities (Ravetz 1974, 121) and the perceived concerns of the Peabody Trust to reform the behaviour of its tenants, and of the Eldonian Village to retain a historic community, will be explored later in this thesis. If there are contradictions and variations, can they be seen in the responses of official authority and residents, to the built environment of the social housing estate? This involves looking at how notions of what was (then) modern and new were expressed materially, perhaps as a reaction against an earlier state of affairs; the 'modern' is an evolving notion that exists in relation to something else.

Each of the case study areas was constructed in response to a specific set of local issues relating to the housing of the poorest members of society; the local context has now changed since the original construction of the case study estates, and the conflict between earlier housing priorities and those of today will be played out in the form, use and perception of flats, houses, shops and amenities, and public open spaces. Life on a municipal housing estate today means living a modern, post-industrial life in an

environment that has been designed and formed according to the principles and priorities of an earlier time; residents and landlords have dealt with this situation in different ways.

## Methods

McNeill and McNamara (2011) explored the concept of the building biography, in the context of the history and development of 'The Australia' hotel in Sydney, Australia, and how 'biographical tropes have... become a well-established mode of story-telling about the role of home in contemporary societies' (McNeill and McNamara 2011, 150). Rather than a home being viewed as an unchanging and bounded container for domestic life, the production of a biography reveals 'the ways in which a house itself, and domestic life within it, are intimately bound up with wider social, economic and political processes' and leads one to 'consider all sorts of entanglements that render the built form as heteronomous, the result of many hands, few of them strictly speaking architectural' (ibid). The production of a building is a useful tool, in the case of this thesis, for mapping the intended design of the home against how it was actually built, changed and lived in.

Leading on from studies in the social construction of technology, the success (or otherwise) of any material object cannot be understood through that object alone, and instead resides in the social context of that object's (or building or landscape's) reception and use.

The 'Ethnographies of Place' undertaken by Alan Mayne, Tim Murray and Susan Lawrence (Mayne and Lawrence 1998; Mayne and Lawrence 1999; Mayne, Murray and Lawrence 2000) in their study of the 'Little Lon' (Little Lonsdale Street) district of Melbourne provides a model approach for this research, whereby buildings and landscapes, and the human impact upon them, are integrated with detailed investigation of documentary records and oral histories. This casts light on different scales of experience, at the level of the individual, the household, and the urban neighbourhood.



The methodological approach to this study will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Three. Within each of the study areas, three distinct kinds of evidence have been used:

- A physical dataset, namely the buildings and landscapes of each of the case study areas. Buildings analysis was undertaken in conjunction with the collection of oral history testimonies; in places, this has introduced contradictions to the existing accepted narratives.
- Primary and secondary documentary sources and their limitations are explored. The questions asked of these sources will go towards providing the historical context of case studies. Much of the theoretical approach to this research has emerged from interdisciplinary thought about the urban built environment and issues surrounding the provision and use of social housing. This has a historical context, which originates in the provision of social amenities, including housing, by philanthropic, commercial and local government organisations from the late nineteenth century onwards. Architects' plans, reports, and minutes of meetings of local authority planning and housing committees provide much of the established historical context of the case studies, which can be challenged or confirmed, or complicated through comparison and integration with buildings analysis and oral histories.
- Primary oral history sources have been collected from longstanding residents of the case study areas, and secondary sources from regional and national archives.

## **Case Studies**

The time period that has been chosen as the focus of this study, the period between the 1870s and the 1930s, laid the foundations for the integrated provision of public services by the post-Second World War Welfare State. Until 1945, social and welfare facilities, including housing for the poorer members of society, were provided by a variety of organisations, including local government, commercial organisations, and philanthropists. Each organisation had their own motives for making housing provision, reacting to local situations, which were then manifested in the form of their estates,

the provision of services, and in the subsequent life of that estate up to the present day. After 1945 housing provision became more standardised, and new philanthropic and commercial organisations played a smaller role in providing social housing – the Peabody Trust proved to be an exception to this rule, continuing to provide socially rented housing alongside Local Authorities in London to this day. With the development of a Welfare State after the Second World War, local and national government played a greater role in the provision of housing. The Town and Country Planning Act (1947) facilitated the giving of government grants for the major redevelopment of areas damaged by wartime bombing, and the Housing Act (1949) gave local authorities further powers and financial assistance to provide municipal housing. The Act enabled Local Authorities to acquire existing homes for improvement or conversion, with the national government providing grants of up to 75% of the cost. The Act also enabled Local Authorities to provide housing for all of society, not just the skilled working classes, but also those who had previously been unable to afford the relatively high rents of municipal housing, as well as providing homes for middle class tenants. Such a policy aimed to provide estates with a variety of homes attracting all income groups, a return to the aims of the Garden City movement.

While this research could have focused on council estates built as part of the expansion of the Welfare State after the Second World War, which have a great diversity in architectural form, the individual origins of such estates, their purpose, and organisation would be broadly similar across the country. A study of earlier social housing provision recognises the importance of local geographical, political, and historical context, which is manifested in the present-day built environment and in the experiences of those living in social housing today.

The following criteria influenced the selection of case study areas:

- The existence of organised community groups on or near the estates; these provided receptive groups of long-standing residents, mostly retired, female members of the local community, who were pleased to provide oral history testimonies.

- Estates should have been in overall continuous use as social housing, although many former tenants will have made use of their Right to Buy their homes; between 1981 and 2011 more than 2,500 of Kingstanding's council houses were sold to their tenants (Birmingham City Council 2013; UK Data Service 2015).
- Availability and extent of documentary evidence relating to the planning, construction, and organisation of social housing estates.
- Survival of domestic, commercial and institutional buildings on estates.

Accordingly, while there are some similarities between the study areas, there are also a number of differences. Each of the social housing estates was constructed at a point between 1910 and 1934 as a response to a local housing needs and concerns relating to the housing conditions of the poorest members of society. These dictated the form and appearance of those estates, the socio-economic backgrounds of individuals and families who made their homes there, and the ways in which the estates have transformed and evolved up to the present. Local conditions have changed since the original construction of the case study estates, and any conflict that might exist between earlier housing priorities and those of today are played out in the form, use and perception (by residents and those with responsibility for managing housing) of flats, houses, shops and amenities, and public open spaces.

The Peabody Trust and other philanthropic and semi-philanthropic organisations provided mass social housing from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, and the Acts of Parliament that enabled Local Authorities to clear large areas of towns and cities, build their own homes, and let these out to residents were passed during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The case study areas I examine date, in their present state, to the early twentieth century, but the inclusion of historical context and earlier comparative studies from the 1870s onwards allows me to set the context for the examination of my case study areas during the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

The detailed case studies chosen for this research are located in three geographical areas; these will be presented and discussed in greater detail in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

### **Warren Farm Estate, Kingstanding, Birmingham (Chapter Four)**

The Warren Farm Estate was planned and constructed as a suburban cottage estate by the Birmingham Corporation between 1928 and 1932 to provide homes for more than 30,000 people. The population of Birmingham had increased rapidly by more than 300,000 in 30 years, from 713,000 in 1901 to 1,027,000 in 1931 (GB Historical GIS/University of Portsmouth, 2013b), in part through some surrounding villages being incorporated into the city's boundaries, but also through the expansion of large-scale manufacturing, which drew country-dwellers to move to the city to earn their living in factories. Pressure on available housing also arose through 'slum' clearance programmes commenced after the First World War. The Warren Farm Estate was constructed on farmland five miles north of the centre of Birmingham and was designed to be largely self-sufficient, with shops, schools, a doctor's surgery, swimming baths, cinema, pubs and churches. Not all of these facilities were built, as construction took place during the Great Depression of the 1930s and available municipal funds were reduced. The private sector, local churches and philanthropic groups took responsibility for the provision of amenities. Buildings analysis and oral history recording was undertaken with long-standing local residents, recruited from users of the St John's Centre, Kingstanding.



Figure 1. A terrace of houses in Hurlingham Road, Kingstanding.

### **Bevington Street area, Liverpool (Chapter Five)**

The Eldon Grove Labourers' Dwellings and the Bevington Street Cottages in Liverpool comprise three Grade II-listed, three-storey apartment blocks, which are empty and currently awaiting redevelopment, and rows of terraced housing in Bevington Street and Summer Seat. These were built by the local authority in Liverpool in 1911–12 to improve the housing conditions for dock workers and others in the Vauxhall area, just over half a mile from the River Mersey. Existing terraces of housing and courts of back-to-backs were demolished in order to construct the model housing, which was unusual in that, rather than being constructed on farmland in the suburbs as other model housing of the time, it was built close to existing social amenities and the docks, where many of the tenants were engaged in casual labour. Eldon Grove and Bevington Street formed part of a much wider scheme of 'slum' clearance in Liverpool, before and after the First World War. In turn, there has been much redevelopment of this replacement housing in Vauxhall, some by community-led organisations such as the Eldonian Village and the Weller Streets Housing Co-operative. The results of buildings analysis and oral history recording, undertaken with local residents at the Eldonian Centre in Vauxhall, will be presented in Chapter Five.



Figure 2. Cottages in Summer Seat, Liverpool.

### **Peabody Trust Estate, Bethnal Green, London (Chapter Six)**

The Bethnal Green Estate was opened in 1910 by the Peabody Trust, a housing charity established in London in 1862 by the American banker and philanthropist George Peabody. The Bethnal Green estate was the Peabody Trust's fifteenth estate to be opened in the city and comprises a group of eight five-storey blocks (with an additional storey in the attic) facing a courtyard, each floor of a block containing two or more flats. The flats were most recently modernised during the 1990s following a period of tenant consultation, but had originally been associated flats with shared facilities, including lavatories, baths, communal laundries and pram sheds. No other facilities were provided on the estate as the flats were located in an existing urban centre. Building recording and analysis was undertaken and oral histories collected from residents through the Peabody Trust's Sundial Centre in Tower Hamlets; the Peabody Trust's own archive was also consulted.



Figure 3. The Peabody Trust estate, Cambridge Crescent, Bethnal Green.

## **Chapter Outline**

The structure of this thesis can be outlined as follows:

### **Chapter One: Introduction**

This first chapter outlines the project's aims, sets out the structure of the thesis, and introduces the research questions. The reasons for choosing this particular period of study, and the specific built heritage case studies, documentary resources and oral history testimonies that will form the core of the research will be explained. Each case study offers a particular perspective upon on the form and function of urban social housing estates between the 1910s and 1930s, and the changing nature of life on those estates throughout the twentieth century, as expressed in the ways that residents use, and respond to, their built environment.

### **Chapter Two: Research Context**

This chapter contains a consideration of key concepts explored in this research, such as the nature of urbanism and modernity, and will define areas where research and understanding of the subject has been lacking; consideration of these concepts has informed the research questions.

The theoretical background to this research is collated through a review of the relevant literature; while archaeologists have a long history of examining standing buildings and the urban landscape, practitioners in other fields, namely historical geography and particularly sociology, have contributed work which examines the contemporary development and use of social housing, the relationships that residents have with their homes, and the role that social housing and its residents play in shaping the form, function, and perceptions of the urban built environment. These other disciplines exhibit a contemporary material engagement, but lack the historical context and interdisciplinary contributions offered by a historical archaeology approach. The potential contributions that could be made to the field of archaeology by these practitioners will be evaluated.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology and Sources**

This leads on from the research context chapter and expands on how previous work in archaeology and other fields has influenced this study's research methodology, and how the sources consulted for this research have been selected.

This section will describe and discuss the methodological approaches that have been used to analyse the case studies and answer the research questions. The sources comprise:

- A physical dataset, namely the buildings and landscapes of each of the case studies.
- Documentary sources, both primary and secondary, will be used, and their limitations will be explored.
- Oral history sources, both primary oral testimonies from present-day estate residents and archived interviews from local and national archives.



## **Chapter Four: The Warren Farm estate, Kingstanding, Birmingham**

The Warren Farm estate in Kingstanding formed part of an extensive programme of house building undertaken by the Birmingham Corporation during the inter-war period; housing estates were constructed around the perimeter of the city to house Birmingham's expanding population and relieve crowded housing conditions in the inner city. The model of modern housing that was chosen was one that ostensibly looked backwards, to the garden city movement of the turn of the twentieth century, rather than the preferred option of the Birmingham Corporation's Planning and Housing Committees for modernist apartments with integrated amenities, seen in continental Europe (City of Birmingham 1930).

Housing in Kingstanding was constructed to meet the needs of residents in the 1930s, and conflict and contradictions exist between those needs, and those of the estate's residents today. The failure to complete amenities planned as part of the estate, ensure the provision of local workplaces, and integrate the Warren Farm estate (and others like it) with the rest of the city, has had an impact on the fabric and form of estates, and the lives of estate residents. Residents have made their own adaptations to their environment in order to negotiate the problems created by living in a place designed for the needs of another time, and the introduction for tenants of their 'Right to Buy' their local authority-owned home has led to the transition from housing estates being shared environments to collections of private spaces.

This chapter will summarise the historical context of the establishment of the Warren Farm estate in order that the specific social and economic contexts that apply to the buildings and urban landscapes of this case study and the residents who populated it can be understood.

In this chapter, as well as the subsequent chapters five and six, addressing case studies in Liverpool and London respectively, my research questions will be applied to the data gathered from this case study. This includes the analysis of standing buildings and the wider estate landscape, oral history testimonies (primary testimonies collected from

estate residents, and secondary testimonies from the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery archives) and documentary sources relating to the origins of the estate. This chapter and those following will evaluate the results of fieldwork, oral history and documentary research against the historical and social context of the case study areas, in the process questioning perceptions that have persisted in the documentary record and in the social perceptions of the case study areas.

## **Chapter Five: Bevington Street Area, Liverpool**

The area around Bevington Street in Vauxhall, Liverpool, has witnessed successive waves of rebuilding, as the city was rebuilt according to the needs of its expanding, and then rapidly declining, population. Courts of back-to-back housing, constructed in the early- to mid-nineteenth century to accommodate those whose livelihoods depended on the nearby docks and related industries soon became overcrowded. Liverpool was the first city to employ its own Medical Officer in 1847 in order to improve the city's health, and in 1898 the University of Liverpool established a School of Hygiene to provide training to the city's health inspectors and engineers. Concerns for public health drove the clearance and replacement of areas such as Vauxhall, and the construction of housing and tenements such as those in the Bevington Street area from the 1900s onwards. Whole areas of the city were re-ordered, the previously mixed residential and industrial areas now separated. New kinds of spaces to live in required rules to guide estate life, and resident superintendents to oversee housing and tenants.

The decline of Liverpool's docks and associated industries during the period after the Second World War, and the development of suburban estates around the city's perimeter, led to the decline of Liverpool's inner-city districts; areas of housing that were perceived as not being needed were demolished and the land cleared and left vacant, and neighbourhoods emptied of their residents. Objections to the dispersal of neighbours and communities led to the development of housing co-operatives in the inner-city, such as the Eldonian Village, located adjacent to the Bevington Street Area.

## **Chapter Six: Peabody Trust Estate, Bethnal Green, London**

The Peabody Trust has been a major provider of socially rented housing in central London for more than 150 years. The Trust's Bethnal Green estate, located in London's East End, opened in 1910, replacing a group of lower-density terraced housing with eight five-storey blocks, in an area where the population was rapidly increasing. Analysis of the form and fabric of the Bethnal Green estate, and the oral testimonies of Peabody Trust residents and former staff has offered insight into the changing use and development of the estate, particularly after modernisation of the estate during the 1960s and 1990s.

## **Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusions**

This chapter provides a summary of the conclusions of the research project and an evaluation of its contribution to the study of the historic and contemporary built environment. This chapter states how the research questions have been answered, and makes suggestions for future research in the field.

## **Critique of Existing Literature**

The interdisciplinary nature of this subject is such that research has been carried out by others in a number of relevant disciplines, including sociology, historical geography, and material culture studies, as well as archaeology. The contributions that these disciplines have made all share a material engagement with the built environment of social housing estates, and related studies that have prompted my research questions are set out below and explored more fully in Chapter Two.

## **Historical Context**

The period between the 1870s and the 1930s laid the foundations for the more integrated provision of public services by the post-Second World War welfare state. Until 1945, social and welfare facilities, including housing for the poorer members of

society, were provided by a variety of organisations, including local government, commercial organisations, and philanthropists, each with their own motives for provision. The provision of social housing by charitable institutions such as the Peabody Trust continued after the Second World War, but did not expand at the same rate as state provision.

This period saw the creation of networked cities, where the growth of cities required the introduction of systems and infrastructure to connect, accommodate, and transfer resources – including the population. Urban corporations sought to introduce discipline and order to the city, through the widening of streets, institution of sewerage, water and gas-supply networks that spanned regions, and the removal of districts categorised by planners and social campaigners as ‘slums’ (Dennis 2008). In particular, new social trends raised the expectations that many held towards housing, both their own, and that of other people. While local authorities provided the infrastructure that towns and cities required in order to function, it was assumed that market forces would always meet the need for homes, with supply keeping up with demand. During the nineteenth century this was broadly the case, but there were wide variations in the availability of housing stock in the large cities (Wohl 1977, x). Reports and campaigns from social campaigners and investigators, like the industrialist and philanthropist Charles Booth (1889), the founder of the Salvation Army, William Booth, confectioner Seebohm Rowntree (1901) and Dr Thomas Barnardo, highlighted the continuing plight of people living in areas categorised as ‘slums’. Political economists identified sections of the population who, by their own efforts, would never be able to obtain a satisfactory standard of accommodation.

The last three decades of the nineteenth century saw the origins of policies aimed at solving the problem of how to house the poor. Philanthropic organisations and town and city councils took on this role, and the period from the 1870s to the 1930s saw the legislative frameworks and physical buildings and infrastructure put in place that ensured (theoretically) that the poorest members of society would have somewhere healthy and safe to live, laying the framework for the post-Second World War welfare

state. The built environment that resulted from these efforts and frameworks facilitated a new kind of lived experience for residents.

## **Interdisciplinary Context**

The work of Foucault (1977) and Lefebvre (1991), discussed in Chapter Two, has underlined the influence of the designed environment upon power relations, and the discipline imposed by elite groups (in this research, national and local government, planners and architects) upon the built environment. Buildings shape the lives of those who live in them, and have their own biographies; the relationships that people have with their homes can be expressed physically, through alteration, decoration, and the use of rooms – but residents can also change how they think about, and relate to their homes, without making a physical mark.

It is possible to examine the ways in which people's identities and realities are created through the built environment, and in turn, how their responses are documented in that same environment. Rather than a top-down imposition of ideas onto a passive population, a more fluid relationship exists between people and their environment. Daniel Miller has discussed the concept of 'appropriation', the process through which (in the case of this research), tenants adopt and alter their mass-produced house or flat in order to turn it into a place they can relate to, often through physical alterations, the accumulation of ornaments, or the subversion of the intended use of the dwelling (Miller 1990).

The effect of regeneration and gentrification on communities has been a research theme in planning studies, sociology and geography, examining transformed places and landscapes (Glass 1964; Hamnett 1991; Lees et al 2013; Smith 1996). This very archaeological consideration of the material impacts that people have on a landscape, and vice versa is a key consideration of this research; how do transformations in the built environment change the way that people perceive that environment? By asking whether the changing attitudes and responses to the nature of modern life between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be seen in the built

environment, specifically in the form and use of social housing, this thesis examines how, for example, changes in housing policy and priorities have a tangible and intangible impact on the built environment.

The idea of a transformed landscape and experience was and remains a powerful one in the Bevington Street area in Liverpool and the Peabody Trust estate in Bethnal Green, London, where residents moved to new (in the early twentieth centuries) housing from the immediate, older, area. This was not the case in Kingstanding, where residents were moving to a new area, away from existing social and familial networks. In Liverpool, more recent parallels exist in the Eldonian Village and Weller Way, housing co-operatives that were established by the former tenants of housing that had been condemned as 'slums' and cleared. The tenants were assigned new housing in disparate parts of the city's suburbs, but were keen to maintain their communities and personal connections with their respective districts in Liverpool. By establishing housing co-operatives, residents were able to gain control over their surroundings (McBane 2008; McDonald 1986; Meegan 2003). Departure from a familiar urban area, perhaps to a suburban housing estate, or even just a new part of town, could result in a change, or loss in informal social connections. The casual nature of much low- and un-skilled labour was such that workers were spatially dependent, and reliant on local knowledge and the maintenance of social networks built up through years of living and working in an area; knowledge that was easily lost.

Maintaining social networks was especially difficult in inter-war suburban estates, where there were few shops and social facilities. Sitting outside in the front garden, or stopping to talk to neighbours in the street, were key elements in the emergence of a new kind of social life on the inter-war suburban housing estates (Bayliss 2003, 382) that fitted in with existing social networks, as well as providing opportunities for people to manipulate, sustain, or negotiate their specific place within the community. In his study of the residents of Levittown, Pennsylvania, examining the changes that were brought about by the move to suburbia, Herbert Gans found that people moving to Levittown in the post-war period did not intend to build a new community, but rather wished to move into a new house in which they could carry on the old ways of

family life, relationships with their friends and neighbours, and carry out civic activities (Gans 1967, 146–7). The continuation of old social relations on new housing estates was reported by Michael Young and Peter Willmott (1957) in their study *Family and Kinship in East London*, where extended families had moved from Bethnal Green in the East End of London to the new council estate of ‘Greenleigh’ (a pseudonym for Debden, near Loughton in Essex) during the immediate post-war period; not all people who moved to new estates were able to maintain such networks of relationships, as will be shown below.

### **Studies of Social and Workers’ Housing in Archaeology**

Previous studies of social housing from the late nineteenth century to the present day have been predominantly carried out by sociologists (Gotham and Brumley 2002; Mah 2009 and 2012; Young and Willmott 1957), geographers (Bayliss 2003; Datta 2006; Llewellyn 2004; Ravetz 1974 and 2001; Ravetz and Turkington 1995), planners (Darling 2000) and historians (Lowe and Hughes 1991; White 2003). The study of social housing has not been a dominant theme in later historical archaeology, although studies have been undertaken of working class housing, specifically housing associated directly with industry (Campion 2001; Casella 2005; Connelly 2011; Matthews 1999; Nevell 2011 and 2014b; Rimmer 2011). The introduction of factory working during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries led to the growth of industrial centres, both in existing large towns and cities, and new settlements established to support a single industrial complex. Such industrial suburbs and towns existed as new communities, in much the same way as early twentieth century suburban council estates, such as Kingstanding in Birmingham. Model villages established as factory colonies, such as Bournville in Birmingham, established by chocolate maker George Cadbury from 1893 (Harrison 1999), and Port Sunlight in Merseyside, built by soap manufacturers Lever Brothers between 1899 and 1914 (Hubbard and Shippobottom 2005) were influenced by the Garden City movement (Miller 2010), which itself inspired suburban council estates of the early twentieth century.

Lucy Caffyn's study of workers' housing in West Yorkshire (1986) placed new kinds of industrial housing in their landscape context, and Stephen Hughes' *Copperopolis* (2000) took a holistic approach to the study of the landscape of the copper industry in and around Swansea, concentrating on the surviving structures and technology of the industry. This was integrated with documentary research and landscape and buildings survey to produce a more social archaeology of the housing, religious and institutional buildings of the town.

Some of the narratives resulting from research into the nature of workers' housing are broadly of power relationships, and their social manifestation through surveillance. An emphasis on the control of the built environment through design by planners, architects and builders, and resistance activity on the part of residents, have been popular themes in archaeologies of ordinary housing of the later historical period (Caffyn 1986; Funari and Zarankin 2003; Hughes 2000; Symonds 1999). This thesis will prioritise the pro-active autonomy of residents rather than their reactive resistance, and attempt to understand why particular choices have been made, perhaps through emulation or aspiration, on the part of residents.

More nuanced research that prioritises residents' autonomy has been carried out by Eleanor Casella and Sarah Croucher (2010), a micro study of the household archaeology of the site of a group of cottages at Alderley Edge in Cheshire. The excavation data was situated within a much wider study incorporating oral histories and documentary research. Casella and Croucher's review of the methodology used (ibid, 197) reflected on the relationship between ethnographic and archaeological sources of evidence encountered during the project. On a particularistic level, the oral history recording undertaken with former residents of the cottages being excavated helped identify how specific objects and features were produced, distributed, consumed and discarded, and helped to determine trench locations, interpret stratigraphy and features and identify date ranges for artefacts excavated during the project. This moved on to more analytical and interpretive uses, illuminating the relationship between the excavated features and artefacts and their broader social, economic and political contexts. Casella and Croucher found interviewees sometimes



contributed alternative or conflicting recollections; oral history sources are not necessarily an accurate representation of the past, what Alessandro Portelli (1981) calls the 'different credibility' of memory, but rather what the present remembers about the past.

Casella and Croucher's research is located within a limited body of published work examining the excavation of working class housing, although much more exists in the 'grey literature' of excavation and post-excavation reports. Keith Matthews' study of 'slum' courtyard and street frontage dwellings at Hamilton Place in Chester (1998) indicates the crowded conditions in which residents lived; some families at Hamilton Place would sleep in a single room, with little privacy, challenging the attitudes towards the body and sex that have prevailed since the nineteenth century. Comparison of the excavation data with census returns from 1881 indicates that space in dwellings was sub-let to lodgers. The keeping of lodgers was an important source of income for poorer families and a familiar element of urban society, but was condemned by housing reformers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as morally corrupting, as non-relatives often had to share sleeping accommodation with other members of the family (Ruonavaara 1996).

When compared with the studies of industrial workers' housing outlined above, work on the social history of large-scale speculative housing, or studies of urban industrial landscapes, little work has been carried out by archaeologists into social housing, as a distinct type of built environment. Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas's (2001) study of an abandoned late twentieth-century British council house explored the theme of alienation by examining the material culture of what could be seen as a marginalised and socially disenfranchised family in the late twentieth century, and less overtly, the process of marginalisation and alienation that archaeologists affect on those they study. The distanced and dispassionate process of archaeological fieldwork could have masked the more distressing project conclusion, that the house was abandoned by a single mother in the wake of a relationship breakdown, rendering herself 'intentionally homeless' and ineligible for further housing assistance from the local authority (ibid 166–7).

Victor Buchli's (1999) study of the Narkomfin Communal House in Moscow sought to understand the building in terms of domestic life and changing policies of the Soviet state, not just the meaning of material culture in a modern context, but by focusing specifically on the households within a single apartment block. The building was specifically planned to encourage communal living, during a pre-Stalinist phase when the State sought to intervene in domestic life through the manipulation of architectural design and material culture. Later political changes brought about changes to the way of life within the Narkofim apartment block, as the residents adjusted and responded to changing ideological and social pressures and demands. *An Archaeology of Socialism* was originally intended as an ethno-archaeological investigation into the relationship between the material environment, behaviour and cultural change (Buchli 2002, 132). Analysis of the micro-level changes of individual households at the Narkomfin examined how these changes at the macro-level of official discourse had an impact on people's lives (ibid, 133–4).

Similarly, Rodney Harrison's (2009) argument for the contribution that archaeology can make to the study of the post-Second World War Welfare State emphasised the potential of the design of council estates to illustrate how changing state ideologies are expressed through the design of the built environment, and the ways in which the residents of those estates have engaged with their environment and material culture to negotiate and manage everyday life on the estate. Harrison undertook interviews with some of the current and former residents of the Carpenters Road Estate in Stratford, east London, which focussed on the nature of the residents' sense of place and their social attachments to the space of the estate.

Harrison emphasises the acts of resistance made by residents in the face of Newham Borough Council, the area's Local Authority, and organisations engaged in the development of the area. Tenants' actions led to the creation of 'a social space from what was essentially a "non-place"' (Harrison 2009, 253). The modifications made to flats were regarded as individual responses to estate managers' attempts to control residents (ibid, 255), but this does not seem to acknowledge residents' autonomy

extending further than these reactionary acts – perhaps because opportunities to re-shape estate life from the ground up have been limited.

Sociologists Kevin Gotham and Krista Brumley (2002) have tried to move beyond concepts of adaptation and resistance that have been attached to narratives regarding the engagement of American public housing tenants with their homes. Instead they have looked at how people living in public housing construct a sense of personal identity tied to a place, and use 'space' to create their own autonomous identities, and challenge externally imposed ones. Construction of such identities does not necessarily mean making an outward display, or a physical alteration to one's home.

Gotham and Brumley highlighted the use that tenants in a US housing project made of the spatial metaphor of 'safe spaces', for example, to provide a measure of security and protection against the risks of living in public housing; identified by residents as robberies, burglaries, and the likelihood of victimisation by other residents (Gotham and Brumley 2002, 275). Safe spaces are settings where people can act with dignity, independence and autonomy, and in the context of Gotham and Brumley's study were situated between the private life of the flat or apartment, and the surrounding large-scale institutions. Such environments might include parks, playgrounds, pubs and cafes, and staircases, for example. As well as identifying the importance of 'safe spaces', Gotham and Brumley analysed how residents delimited areas of criminality through 'hot spaces' and 'hot streets', creating no-go areas that acted as the opposite of safe spaces. Residents also used identity 'embracement' and 'distancing' in their speech and behaviour (that is, the manner in which residents spoke about and lived in their housing project, using their spatial identity to construct a political identity) to affirm their own attachment to a particular place, distancing themselves from other, more negative images of public housing space. All of this behaviour was crucial for residents to live safely in their neighbourhood, but wouldn't necessarily leave a physical imprint on the home, or be permanent in its nature.

Sefryn Penrose's examination of the de-industrialised landscape of the former Morris Motor Works at Cowley, Oxford touches on the impact that closure of much of the

factory had on surrounding neighbourhoods. Workers' housing and former industrial buildings have become homes for students and white collar workers, and the post-Second World War social housing estates of east Oxford 'are still by-words for urban decay' after deindustrialisation resulted in a 'growing mismatch between the characteristics of those seeking work and the kind of jobs available (Penrose 2010: 176). The decline of industry left industrial landscapes, and their occupants, unbalanced and without replacement. Penrose examines the transition of spaces from industrial to post-industrial use and meaning, with what she terms an explicitly archaeological exploration of the way that transition has been recorded in the landscape, those elements of the former industrial landscape that do remain representing narratives of loss. Equally, however, material culture is multi-temporal; it is created and altered at different times but all are located in the present.

Penrose acknowledges that analysis of the former Morris Motor Works in Oxford belongs in political or sociological studies as well as archaeology, but the constituent materials of the site, and its analysis remain in the present, 'their structure tirelessly rearranged and their use endlessly changed' (Olivier 2002: 140); analysis of those remains is archaeology. Penrose's research examines particular recorded snapshots of Cowley's past, that are located within the present, but misses out the process of transition and experience of change that connects these events; these processes of transition and the experience of change and 'newness' in the built environment is a focus of my research.

An increasing recognition of the importance of understanding the origins and development of every-day buildings such as housing, has led to many more examples of relatively recent social housing becoming the subject of archaeological and architectural study. Such building recording studies are often undertaken before modification or demolition, and are increasingly set as a condition of planning consent by local authority planning archaeologists or conservation officers. Such an example is offered by the recording of Wulfruna Court and Grange Court, on the Graiseley Estate in Wolverhampton (Cook 2007). The Graiseley Estate was constructed between 1956 and 1960, and comprised two eight-storey blocks built with reinforced concrete

frames, clad with brick and concrete. As with many modern buildings, the circumstances of the estate's design and construction were relatively well understood, but a focus on the estate's laundry and other communal facilities provided a lens through which the estate's changing social relations could be examined.

In London, small-scale tenement blocks form a prominent part of the urban built environment, and are a type of building that is relatively rare outside the capital, built between the 1850s and 1930s to provide a high density of housing in the city's inner-city districts, close to places of work. The Peabody Trust developed and owned many estates of tenement housing, but other philanthropic and commercial owners also developed estates. Occasionally the Peabody Trust has chosen to undertake renewal of some of its housing; two of the tenement blocks at Peabody Avenue in Pimlico were recorded by Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) in 2008, prior to demolition. The estate originally comprised 26 four- and five-storey blocks when constructed between 1874 and 1876; four of the blocks were destroyed by bombing during the Second World War and replaced with a playground and lock-up garages (Tetreau and Westman 2009).

The Peabody Estate on St John's Hill in Clapham was recorded by the MOLA standing buildings team in 2012, prior to the estate's demolition and replacement with higher density housing. The estate opened in 1936 and comprised 21 blocks of five-storey flats, conforming to linear and L-shaped plans; the estate contained a total of 353 flats, as well as workshops and pram sheds. The estate was designed and constructed during the economic depression of the 1930s, and whereas flats designed and constructed by the Peabody Trust during the 1920s contained their own bathrooms, no such facilities were provided at the St John's Hill estate – instead, as a cost-cutting measure, each flat's kitchen contained a bath which could be covered over with a plank to provide a work surface (Pierazzo et al 2013).

Culross Buildings, in Kings Cross, London were recorded by Pre-Construct Archaeology in 2008 prior to their demolition. Culross Buildings were constructed in 1891–2 by the Great Northern Railway (GNR) to provide rented accommodation for GNR workers and

residents displaced by the enlargement of the adjacent Kings Cross Station. The buildings comprised a four-storey tenement block with ten flats on each floor, and a Mission Hall and canteen for railway workers were also constructed on the site. The flats were only modernised with the addition of kitchens and bathrooms in 1984 (Robertson 2010).

The examples of building recording of social housing outlined above were carried out as part of the planning process, in advance of their demolition, and as is sometimes the case in building recording studies, there can be a tendency for project reports and guides to the subject to be overly empirical, the focus placed on recording rather than interpretation (Morriss 2000; Swallow et al 2004). To compound the problem, the process of recording a long-abandoned building, without the benefit of oral history testimonies from residents, or seeing how spaces are used, perceived, and adapted, as those studies above have done, leads to accounts which lack the nuance needed to better understand what is perceived as a common building type. The next chapter will set out the research context for this thesis; defining the key terms used as well as setting out the origins and development of social housing as a distinctive urban and suburban landscape, and the experiences of those living in this kind of environment as it undergoes transition and change.

## Chapter Two: Research Context

### What is modernity?

Modernity, and the process of becoming modern, is one that ‘entails the demolition of “traditional” forms of life and the construction of new, “modern” alternatives to them’ (Vernon 2014, 1). ‘Modernity’ is a problematic term, but one with continued currency ‘because without the term it is difficult to think comparatively about historical change over time and across space’ (ibid, 128).

Marshall Berman suggested that the origins of modernity lie in Europe between the late fifteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a time characterised by commercial, industrial, urban and agricultural ‘revolutions’, and saw the processes of becoming modern as a natural chronological progression (Berman 1982; O’Shea 1996, 8). The city was a central site in these interconnected economic, political and social transformations, and has been a focus for explorations on the nature of modernity as it has been enacted over the last two centuries.

Marshall Berman’s discussion of the nature of modernity, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: the experience of modernity* (1982) viewed modernity as a primarily chronological phenomenon, confined to the developed ‘West’ during the period after the Reformation. Berman divided modernity into three phases, each a stage in the evolution of a new set of social conditions experienced by society between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries:

- From the beginning of the sixteenth century until the end of the eighteenth century, society began to experience the tropes of modern life; ‘they hardly know what has hit them’ (Berman 1982, 17).
- From the revolutionary wave of the 1790s onwards ‘a great modern public abruptly and dramatically comes to life (ibid) with a shared experience of the revolutionary age. In the nineteenth century the modern (urban) public could remember what it was like to live, materially and spiritually, in worlds that

were not modern at all. 'From this inner dichotomy, this sense of living in two world simultaneously, the ideas of modernization and modernism emerge and unfold' (ibid). The focus on the processes of urbanisation and the effect of workers moving to industrial centres during this period was epitomised by Friedrich Engels' study of industrial Manchester, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844).

- During the twentieth century the process of modernisation expands to take in virtually the whole world, and the developing world (Berman 1982, 17–18).

Berman's model depicted a clear separation between the traditional and the modern, placing distance between the past and present by making the past appear to be a foreign entity. As James Vernon (2014, 4) has stated, the production of a caricature of the past does the same for the modern – depicting it as a series of revolutions from a traditional past to a modern present-day with a linear progression. Similarly, Frederic Jameson (1984, 56) warns that to speak of 'modernity' or 'post-modernity' 'risks setting up an image of cultural homogeneity within a cultural phase' (Thomas 2001, 3).

Perry Anderson (1984), Peter Osborne (1992) and Miles Ogborn (1998) have criticised Marshall Berman for conflating modernity with the European and North American capitalism of the last two hundred years. Instead, they assert that the experience of the modern is specific and localised; Berman's description of the modernisation and transformation of Paris, St Petersburg and New York in *All That is Solid Melts into Air* flattens the differences between them. Ogborn prefers to think of the 'modern' as a particular relationship to time and history, where the 'modern' is simply 'the new', and the contemporary, marking a separation from the past.

Berman's account of modernity as being rooted in the processes of industrial capitalism and urbanisation can also be challenged by looking back at the work during the late nineteenth century of Ferdinand Tönnies (1957) and Max Weber (1958) who preferred to emphasise the cultural, political, and institutional foundations that structure modern life, and so emphasising 'the historical novelty of systems and conditions that their contemporaries took for granted as natural' (Vernon 2014, 4).



Tönnies identified two types of social organisation: *Gemeinschaft* (community; and the mutuality of social life) and *Gesellschaft* (society; 'an individualism in which voluntary association was instrumental and self-serving' [Vernon 2014, 3]). Tönnies believed that a shift from the former to the latter was a condition of the modern, industrial environment. For Weber, modernity was characterised by the shift of political authority away from local, and possibly individually-led, forms that enabled particular groups or people to rule communities, to 'anonymous bureaucracies that governed subjects through abstract systems of rational control' (Vernon 2014, 4). The creation of Weber's 'anonymous bureaucracies' could fit well with a particular way of viewing the development of systems of mass and social housing, and the associated changes to social life from the later nineteenth century onwards.

Berman has been criticised for taking an over-universalistic (and Euro-American-centric) concept of modernity; Alan O'Shea argues that instead of there being a common experience of modernity, it is historically specific and geographically contingent, and varies by experience of class, gender and race (O'Shea 1996, 8). Julian Thomas suggests that particular understandings which we might now consider as 'modern' and 'which had been in a rarefied circulation for many centuries achieved a position of hegemony, and began to operate as the principles around which people structured their lives' (Thomas 2004, 3).

As the term 'modernity' now has so many culturally contingent meanings, 'it is no longer clear whether the term can do any analytical work' (Vernon 2014, 6); however, thinking through modernity allows us to analyse and mark processes of historical transition, to think through shared historical patterns and processes, and how they are experienced differently. As James Vernon states, 'as the term modernity no longer describes a specific condition or process of transformation, it is often used to describe any context in which the rhetoric of the modern is found' (ibid, 5).

Berman does acknowledge that modernity can also be defined as the experience of the changes he outlines above as 'newness', a qualitative, rather than chronological, concept. It is this experience of the new, and the reaction of the residents of urban

social housing from the late nineteenth century onwards towards it, that I am particularly interested in; the experience of living through, and making sense of, 'modernity' (or 'newness'), and the practical negotiation of one's life and identity within a complex and fast-changing world (Berman, 1982). For most people, most of the time, engagement with the modernising world has been through a material consumption and engagement with the world, rather than the political organisation that Berman emphasises; seeking a better life through material betterment and becoming self-consciously 'modern' in terms of material choices (O'Shea 1996, 29–30).

Perhaps there is something of worth in Berman's 'inner dichotomy' (1982, 17), the state of being simultaneously traditional and modern. Yet rather than this being, as Berman believed, a transitional phase on a linear track from a traditional way of life to the pinnacle of urbanised modernity, this might be a pragmatic means by which to cope with the new situation of a rapidly changing environment.

## **The nature of the modern city**

During the late eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries more people moved from the countryside into towns and cities, many in order to work in the new factories and other allied industries. Birthplace statistics (Langton and Morris 1986) indicate the extent to which people moved away from their county of birth during the nineteenth century. Census returns from 1851 indicate that in the industrial towns and cities of central Scotland, south Wales, north-west England and the west midlands, more than one quarter of the population had been born outside the county in which they now lived. Particular industrial cities had even higher populations that were born elsewhere; 38.3% of the population of London in 1851 was born outside London, 57.5% of the population of Liverpool was born outside the city, 40.9% of the population of Birmingham was born elsewhere. This trend continued during the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. In 1911 more than one third of people living in the north-west of England were born somewhere other than the town in which they lived, and 40% of people living in the south-east of England were born elsewhere (Langton and Morris 1986, 10–29; Pooley and Turnbull 1998). Migration,

whether from another country or the next county, was a common experience in British towns and cities.

Residential districts were established and expanded close to the new areas of employment in these industrialising cities, guaranteeing a regular supply of labour for factory owners. Accommodation took the form of areas of industrial housing, including workshop dwellings, terraced houses, back-to-backs and tenements (Nevell 2011, 594) constructed by speculative developers or employers. In Britain, areas of eighteenth and nineteenth century industrial housing in Birmingham, Glasgow, London, Manchester, Sheffield and York (Belford 2006; Connelly 2011; Jeffries et al 2009; Nevell 2011, Symonds 2005) have been recorded and analysed through excavation and building survey, in the most part in advance of commercial redevelopment and construction work.

By the end of the nineteenth century, wages for many of the more skilled workers had increased, and along with improved transport systems, led to opportunities for greater occupational and geographical mobility; this allowed some to 'escape' to the suburbs, where they were able to find more secure tenancies, and increasingly, buy their own homes (Thorns 2002, 16–17). For many people who relied on casual or low-skilled work, and relied on being able to live close to potential sources of employment, inner-city tenements remained one of very few housing options, and the older cores of cities changed in their function and population composition.

At this time local authorities provided the infrastructure that towns and cities needed to function: roads, drainage, educational, social and cultural institutions, and the accommodation of public transport, but demand for homes was largely dealt with by the commercial market. The rise of the public health movement and reports from social campaigners and investigators, like the industrialist and philanthropist Charles Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army William Booth, and Dr Thomas Barnardo, highlighted the continuing plight of people living in areas categorised as slums, and political economists identified sections of the population who, by their own efforts, would never be able to obtain a satisfactory standard of accommodation (Burnett

1986, 140). The climate of opinion regarding acceptable standards of housing for the poorest members of society changed, and the last three decades of the nineteenth century saw the origins of policies aimed at solving the problem of how to house the poor. The period from the 1870s to the 1930s saw the legislative frameworks and physical buildings and infrastructure put in place that would ensure, in theory at least, that the poorest members of society would have somewhere healthy and safe to live. Simultaneously, this period also saw the introduction and implementation of rational comprehensive planning in towns and cities, leading to the separation of activities through zoning, the creation of new kinds of spaces within the city and new forms of connections between those spaces. Public life was focused on the inner city, and private domestic activities in the suburbs; the city and its suburbs became increasingly gendered places, as divisions were incorporated into the design of urban spaces, and as Levy and Beall (1995) and Thorns (2002, 20) suggest, suburbs (at least during the day) became under-serviced neighbourhoods for women and children.

## **The origins and development of social housing**

The easing of housing conditions in towns and cities, and the gradual transition of responsibility for the provision of housing for workers from speculative builders and employers, to philanthropic organisations and the state, has its origins in a number of Parliamentary Acts, which also partly acted as catalysts for house building.

The first of these Acts, the Common Lodging Houses (Shaftesbury) Act 1851, was introduced by Lord Shaftesbury, who campaigned widely on behalf of working people for the improvement of conditions in factories and for the abolition of the employment of children as chimney sweeps. The 1851 Act gave local authorities the power to regulate lodging houses as well as to provide their own (Ravetz 2001, 22). The Artisans and Labourers Dwellings (Torrens) Act, 1868 introduced by the Liberal MP William Torrens, allowed local councils to close houses that were considered unfit to live in, and required owners to repair or demolish insanitary homes (ibid, 22). The Artisans and Labourers Dwellings Improvement (Cross) Act of 1875 was introduced by the Home Secretary Richard Cross in order to challenge established slum districts by

reforming housing provision (White 2003, 21). The Act applied to towns with a population of at least 20,000, and allowed whole areas to be declared 'insanitary', and for reconstruction schemes to be prepared (Ravetz 2001, 22).

These three Acts of Parliament responded to perceived risks to public health rather than housing need among the poorest members of society (Ravetz 2001, 22). The on-going passing of Parliamentary Acts relating to the quality of housing, along with the reiteration of local bylaws, and the pursuance of private Acts of Parliament by local authorities in Liverpool, Glasgow and Birmingham in order to build their own housing, suggests that it was difficult to draft national legislation that could be enforced (Morton 1991, 15).

Perhaps part of this difficulty lay in the imprecise nature of what defined a 'slum'. There were multiple factors that were perceived to contribute to the worsening condition of housing; landlords, badly built or maintained buildings, pollution, overcrowding, or the 'feckless occupants' condemned in contemporary literature (Ravetz and Turkington 1995, 5). The categorisation also changed with time, and certainly much housing which was constructed in the inner cities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was intended to be of good quality, its categorisation only changing with the introduction of the previously mentioned factors (Nevell 2011, 595). Social reformers raised awareness of living conditions in areas such as Hungate in York, assessed by Seebohm Rowntree (Rimmer 2011, 618) or London (Booth 1889), but representation of the personal experiences of residents, other than as the subject of study, was limited.

### **Early private philanthropic housing projects**

The Cross Act of 1875 gave local authorities the power to clear entire areas of sub-standard housing, but they were required in turn to construct new housing on the cleared sites. Rather than undertaking this rebuilding themselves, many local authorities turned to charitable housing organisations such as the Peabody Trust, established in 1862 by the American philanthropist George Peabody (Dennis 2008,

272), or building companies like the Four Per Cent Industrial Dwellings Co. Ltd. This semi-philanthropic company was established by the banker Nathan Mayer Rothschild, to construct tenement blocks in the East End of London, with the purpose of providing accommodation for the many thousands of Eastern European Jews residing there, who had fled the anti-Semitic pogroms undertaken in the aftermath of the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881. The company's objective was to provide healthy homes at a rent that the poor could afford to pay, not exceeding five shillings per week; at this time, a skilled labourer such as a bricklayer might earn between £1 16s and £2 in a week, and a (usually female) match-maker working in the East End might earn between 6 and 12 shillings in a week (Bowley 1900). Shares in the company would produce an annual dividend of no more than four per cent (White 2003, 18–19), at a time when an investor would expect to receive up to twice as much return on their investment (Burnett 1986, 126).

In a few cases local authorities undertook their own rebuilding schemes. The London County Council demolished housing in the Old Nichol (Figure 4), an area of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century weavers' 'cottages' in east London built by 'speculative builders of the most scampy class' (VCH 1998, 124, cited in Guillery 2004, 94). The Old Nichol was characterised in late-nineteenth century newspaper accounts and literature as 'slums' and the LCC reconstructed the area as the Boundary Street Estate between 1890 and 1900 (Figure 5; Swenarton 1981, 28).



Figure 4. A street in the Old Nichol, east London, c. 1890. © London Metropolitan Archive.

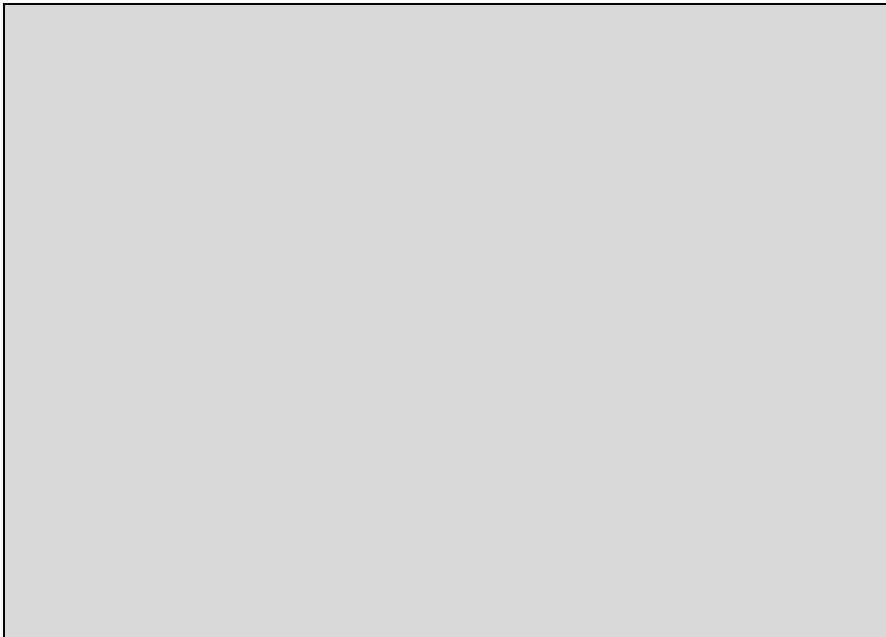


Figure 5. The Boundary Street estate shortly after completion. © London Metropolitan Archive.

In 1890 further legislation was passed (the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890) which formally gave local authorities the ability to deal with housing shortages by building new accommodation themselves; such opportunities were not always taken

up, however, and so organisations like the Workmen's Housing Council were established to press for municipal councils to take up house building (Swenarton 1981, 29).

While private companies, philanthropic organisations, and local authorities each had differing motives for constructing housing, these different motives did not necessarily find expression in the form and appearance of those buildings. The tenements completed in 1887 by the Four Per Cent Dwellings Company in Flower and Dean Street in Spitalfields were three six-storey blocks with sub-basements. The buildings were bisected by a number of open staircases and landings, from which access was gained to each flat. The buildings contained a total of 198 flats, ranging from single rooms with a shared scullery and WC, to four-roomed flats with their own scullery and WC. 138 of the flats each comprised two rooms, namely a living room and bedroom, as well as a scullery and WC. The living room contained the cooking range, an alcove (which many occupants screened off and installed a bed) and a built-in dresser where occupants kept and displayed the household's ceramics and glass. Construction costs were greater than anticipated, and so most flats were let out for more than the five shillings a week that the company thought was an acceptable level of rent for the poor to pay (White 2003, 21–23). While the structure of the building was soundly built, of brick and reinforced concrete, and some money had been spent on decorative features like wrought iron handrails on the stairs, and decorative terracotta keystones, shortcuts were also made. Sometimes the chimney flues leaked smoke into the living rooms, and the small windows meant that light did not penetrate all of the rooms on the lower floors. Gaslight was not installed in the tenements until 1900 (ibid, 33–4).

In 1884 a Royal Commission was held, enquiring into the conditions of the 'Housing of the Working Classes'. The Commission found that parts of the larger towns and cities were particularly overcrowded, as street improvements and commercial expansion reduced the number of available dwellings in the areas where the poorest 'wanted' to live, their choice of housing often being limited by their proximity to work opportunities. In London, the demolition of housing for street improvements, and the construction of railways, shops and offices, often removed the worst slums and



rookeries, but the people displaced by redevelopment still had to find somewhere to live, and get to work.

During the process of giving evidence to the Commission, the inhabitants of poor quality housing were not given the chance to pass on their own views; the poor were never consulted over the kind of help that would be of most use to them (Wohl 1977, 242). Housing reforms imposed the views, standards and priorities of reformers, who believed they were sufficiently familiar with the lives of the poor to know what they wanted from their homes, as one submission from the Royal Commission stated, 'A man ought not to be allowed to live in a bad home' (Ravetz 2001, 25–6). The poor were, perhaps, infantilised, as victims of unhealthy conditions, who were deserving of 'improvement'. Furthermore, little account was often taken by many philanthropic, local authority, and commercial landlords, of the changing needs of tenants and the changing environment, rapidly leading to inflexible housing provision which did not meet tenants' needs (Ravetz 1974, 89).

In 1918 the Tudor Walters Committee on the standards of post-First World War local authority housing (chaired by Liberal MP Sir John Tudor Walters) drew on planning ideas formulated by the garden city and model workers' dwelling movements, and sought to improve the economic and social conditions of the poorest members of society by creating healthier and better-designed housing and communities. These 'homes fit for heroes', perceived as a reward for the sacrifices made by the masses during the First World War, would be a distinctive addition to the built environment. Later on, the Housing Act of 1924 ensured that government money was made available for the construction of homes, much of which was undertaken by local government, and aimed at re-housing those who had not been helped by existing local authority schemes and charities, and were still living in what was perceived as slum conditions (Meller 2001, 222).

The Tudor Walters Committee proposed a minimum standard for housing, namely a two-storey home with a living room, parlour, and scullery on the ground floor, and three bedrooms and a bathroom on the first floor (Scott 2004, 7). During the

nineteenth century increasing concern for moral welfare had driven social campaigners to demand enough bedrooms in the home for male and female children to sleep in separate rooms. In 1860 George Godwin, the editor of *The Builder* stated that 'there should always be three [bedrooms]; so that the male and female children may be separated. Cottages for families with only two bedrooms lead to an incredible amount of vice' (cited in Caffyn 1986, 95). This ideal has persisted into the twentieth century, although the possession of three rooms that could be used as sleeping accommodation could still only be dreamed of by the very poorest living in tenements and older social housing. The Tudor Walters Committee specified that houses would have wide frontages to increase the amount of daylight entering the home, and large gardens to the front and back, and homes would ideally be built at a density of no more than 12 per acre (Scott 2004, 7). Housing density was much higher in urban areas developed during the nineteenth century; In the Camp Hill area of Leeds housing density was 100 homes per acre before housing clearance schemes in the 1930s, and in the area around York Street in the centre of the city, housing density was 138 homes per acre (Caffyn 1986, 44).

Economising on the number of rooms in a home could make great savings. The architect and town planner Raymond Unwin, who with Barry Parker designed Letchworth Garden City in Hertfordshire, wrote a pamphlet for the Fabian Society entitled *Cottage Plans and Common Sense* in 1902 (Figure 6). In it he argued that the standard house plans adopted by speculative builders should be rejected, and instead each home should be adapted to suit its aspect, making the best use of available sunlight. Unwin and Parker also sought to remove the parlour from the typical house plan, in favour of a single, large living room. Where a potential tenant was unable to afford a larger home, containing both a living room, which would accommodate the cooking range, and a parlour, then the latter should be omitted.

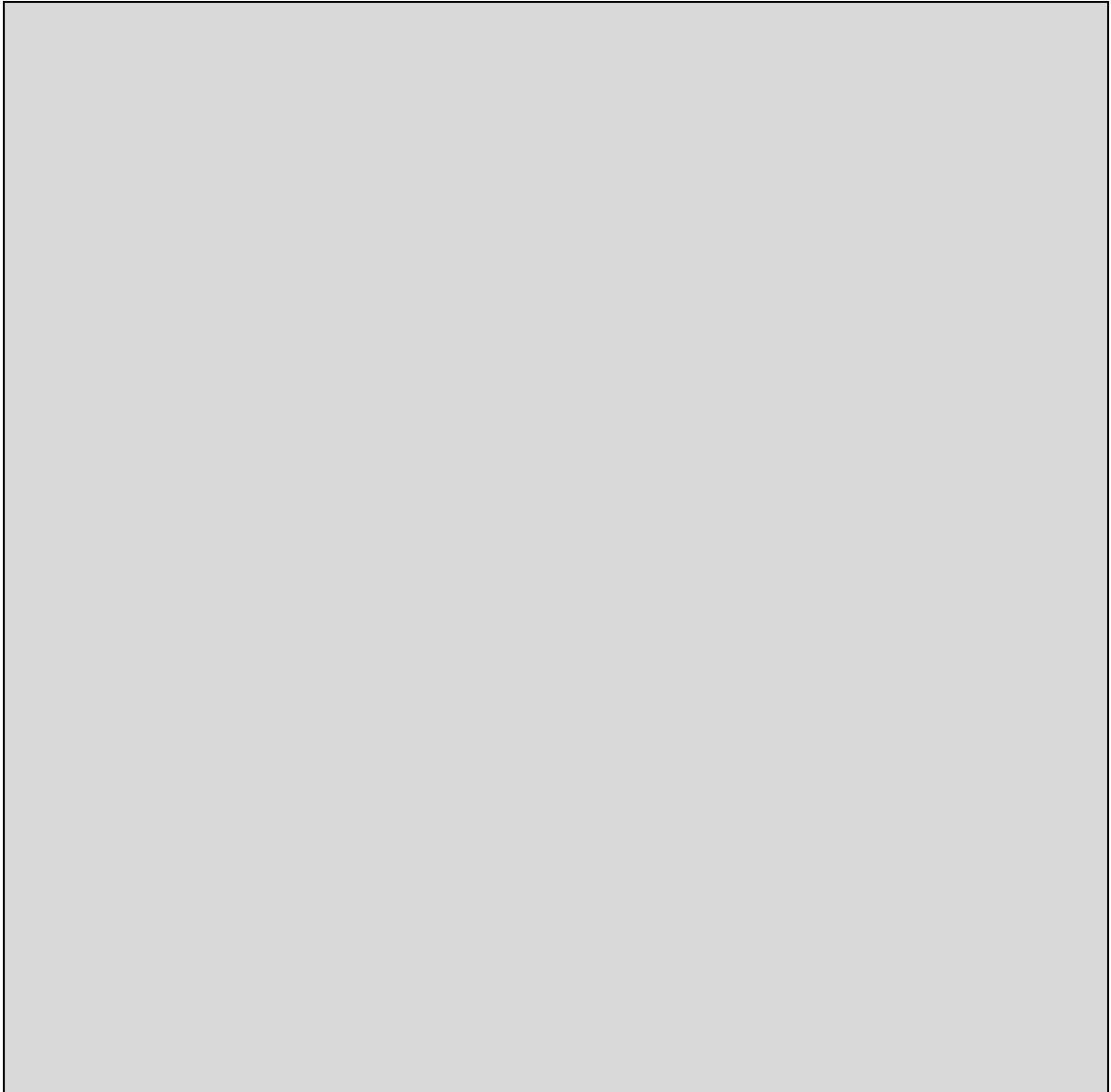


Figure 6. Example of artisans' houses (with parlours) for a model development, from Unwin 1902.

Those interested in the provision of healthy and economical homes might not be able to argue with the proposition, but Mark Swenarton (1981, 21) suggests that Unwin and his business partner Barry Parker regarded the 'elimination of the parlour less as an economic necessity than as a desirable goal' (Swenarton 1981, 21). Parker and Unwin saw entrance halls and parlours as unnecessary luxuries that took up valuable space; the parlour was not put to frequent use, and by removing it, they would create one large room for family living, rather than allow tenants to (as they saw it) imitate those higher up the social scale by having a surplus of unnecessary rooms:

‘However desirable a parlour may be, it cannot be said to be necessary to health or family life... There can be no possible doubt that until any cottage has been provided with a living-room large enough to be healthy, comfortable and convenient, it is worse than folly to take space from that living room, where it will be used every day and every hour, to form a parlour, where it will be used only once or twice a week’ (Unwin 1902, 11).

Unwin’s assertion that every space within the home should have to work hard to justify its existence was not shared by potential tenants; the parlour was a best room reserved for guests and formal occasions, and a quiet place for reading, symbolising the aspirations of the ‘respectable working class’ (Swenarton 1981, 22). At Letchworth, the homes that had been built without a parlour were deeply unpopular with tenants: ‘The workmen and their wives... do not take kindly to this innovation; they like the parlour and they mean to have it’ (quoted in *The Garden City* 1906, 187).

The introduction of new housing forms was not always something to react against, however. Rather, the new lifestyle opportunities they presented were embraced, although perhaps not always out of choice. People desired to ‘fit in’ with the new prosperous surroundings offered by the housing estates constructed after the First World War. A 1939 survey of a municipal housing estate at Kingstanding, in Birmingham, found high levels of debt from hire purchase (HP) agreements; the furniture of newly arrived residents was said to look:

...very shabby and dirty when it set out in a new light room. One of the first outlays of the re-housed family is often on curtains with which to hide their dilapidated possessions from the inquiring eyes of the neighbours. A greater number of rooms may call for more furniture, and many people feel that new beds are a necessity. The fear of being accused of bringing vermin into new houses seems to be sufficiently strong to make some housewives undertake instalments on new beds for the whole family (Soutar et al 1942, 42).

By the time of the First World War, despite the introduction of legislation compelling local authorities to build housing, council housing accounted for less than half of one per cent of Britain's housing stock of seven million homes, a total of 28,000 homes (Lowe 1991, 5). By 1938 the proportion of council housing had increased to 10 per cent. More than 90 per cent of the new local authority housing constructed during the period between the First and Second World Wars was located on suburban estates. Prior to the First World War, housing constructed by speculative builders, employers, or philanthropic organisations accounted for the majority of the nation's housing stock. The housing reforms of the inter-war period, combined with greater availability of mortgages enabled people to move into local authority housing, or to buy their own; those who could afford to do so comprised a newly redefined social class between the very poor, and the middle classes (Ravetz and Turkington 1995, 18).

Despite the building boom immediately after the First World War, it was not until the 1930s that the very poor, displaced by slum clearance programmes, found homes in council housing (Lowe 1991, 5). Initially the level of rents was set quite high, in order to make back at least some of the money spent on construction (reminiscent of the relatively expensive rents set by the Four Per Cent Dwellings Company in London in the 1880s).

## **Social housing after the Second World War**

The construction of new homes accelerated after the Second World War, as local authorities sought to replace the homes destroyed by wartime bombing, and build additional homes for the growing population. National and local government were responsible for the construction of two million homes before the Second World War, this increased to four million after the war.

The second half of the twentieth century saw a change from large-scale renting (whether from local authorities, charitable institutions or private landlords) to property ownership. Increase in disposable income enabled people to save house deposits and take out mortgages, but one of the most significant drivers of increased

home ownership during the second half of the twentieth century was the expansion of local authority tenants' right to purchase the home they rented. Local authorities had always had the ability to sell homes to tenants, but it was rare for them to do so until the 1970s. The sale of council houses and flats to tenants varied by local authority; between 1966 and 1978, 12,180 council houses in Birmingham (10% of the city's social housing stock) were sold to sitting tenants, at discounts of up to 30% (Hansard: 3 August 1978). Nationally, 16,000 council homes were sold to their tenants in 1971, 45,000 in 1972 and 33,000 in 1973. (Hansard: 18 May 1976).

After the introduction of the 1980 Housing Act, brought in by the newly elected Conservative government, one in three council tenants purchased their homes. Purchasers received a substantial discount of between 33% and 50% of the market value of the home, reflecting the rent already paid by the tenant, and to encourage take-up of the scheme. Between 1980 and 1990 1.25 million former local authority homes were sold to tenants under the Right to Buy legislation (Whitehead 1990; Hughes 1991, 94).

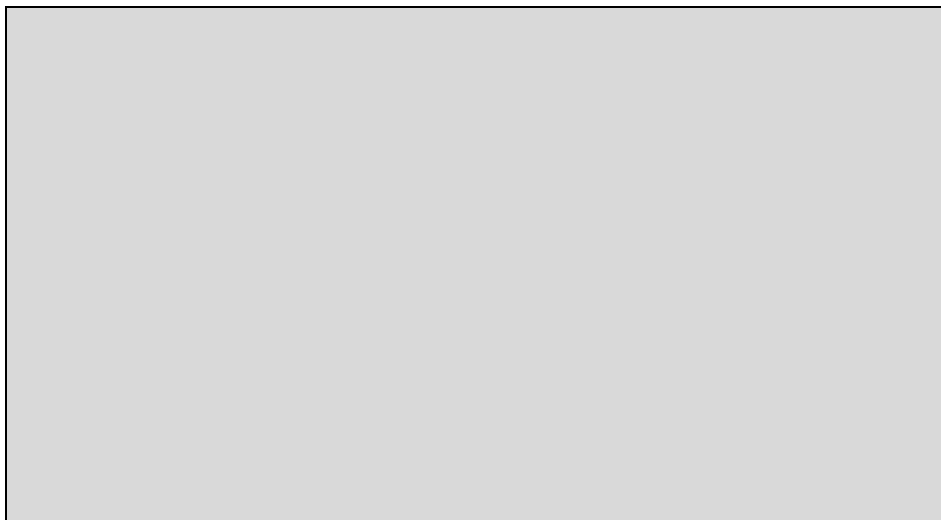


Figure 7. Margaret Thatcher with the Pattersons of 39 Amersham Road, Harold Hill, Essex – the Greater London Council's 12,000<sup>th</sup> home buyers, 1980 (© Press Association).

The policy of Margaret Thatcher's government sought to reverse the trend of what they saw as the increasing dominance of the state over the life of the individual, and

instead to transfer capital wealth from the state to the people, creating a property owning democracy. The Right to Buy was intended for (and mostly taken up by) long-standing residents; it was a legislative requirement for purchasers of local authority homes to return their tenants' discount on the original purchase price if they sold their home within the first five years after purchase.

The Right to Buy transformed the environment of social housing estates and the lives of those living on estates (for good and bad); local authority housing estates changed from being publicly owned and operated entities, to accumulations of individual, private spaces. This changed the experience of living on estates, both for those who brought their homes under Right to Buy, and those who did not buy their homes, or have subsequently moved to council estates.

After the introduction of the Right to Buy, social scientist John Dolan (1999) saw the 'tenant' as being subordinate to the 'homeowner' in terms of material structures of power and resources. Dolan saw former tenants as needing to express their difference as homeowners to those who remained as local authority tenants. Shifting from being a tenant to an owner potentially produced a disturbance of identity of the tenant – so they articulated a new identity. Dolan developed a typology of estate homeowners (Figure 8; 1999, 65–70), perhaps caricaturing homeowners in an un-nuanced way as he did so. The typology included three kinds of new homeowners on council estates:

- The *Transformers*, who were concerned with distinguishing their house from others of identical appearance on the estate, by making changes to the appearance of their home. Dolan gives the example of houses altered through the addition of half-timber cladding, Spanish hacienda-style scalloped, whitewashed walls and textured brickwork.
- The *Privatizers* 'represent the majority of those who have exercised their right to buy, and they appear to have two distinguishing totem architectural expressions: the enclosed glazed porch, and the front boundary fence or wall' (Dolan 1999, 66). New forms of boundaries marked off newly acquired property from that of the neighbours, some of whom may also have purchased their

homes through the Right to Buy. Dolan suggests that such additions were available only to those whose homes were no longer under local authority control.

- The *Market Traders* turned their home into a market commodity, through the construction of a garage or extension, and neutral decoration. Anthropologist Diana Young has discussed the use of colour by participants in the London property, and how the use of the colour white creates perceived and actual value through the production of detachment, depersonalising the home and accelerating the circulation of properties in the market (Young 2004). A home that is more 'homely' in its appearance 'is literally too infused with its previous owner to be readily appropriable' (Buchli 2013, 128).

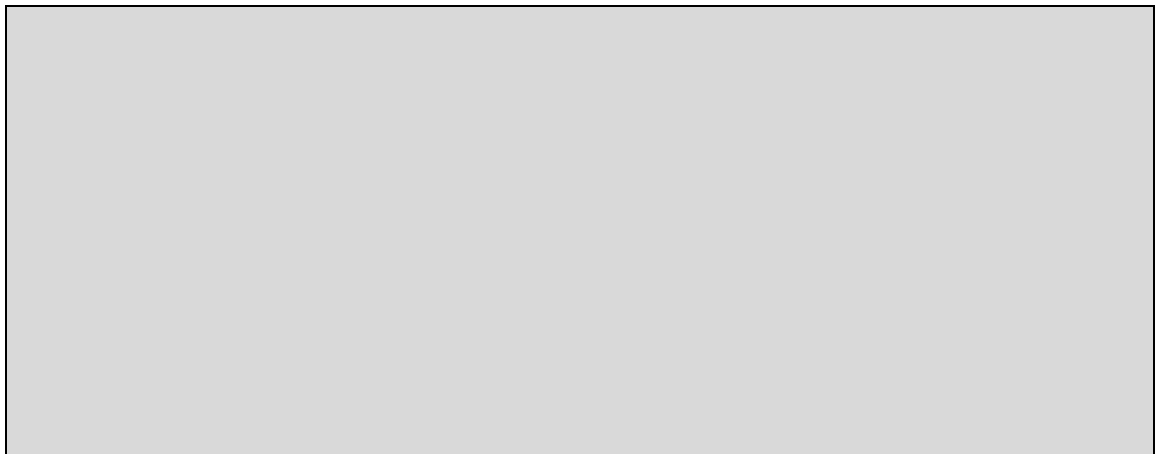


Figure 8. Former council houses depicted in John Dolan's (1999) study, adapted by their owners and characterised by Dolan (1999, 65–7) as 'Transformers' (left) and 'Privatizers' (right).

Dolan's typology simplifies the experience of former council house tenants. As this thesis shows, some tenants did not make changes to their home after purchase; others made changes to their homes while still tenants. The experience of many residents who were involved in this project was that it was more important to mark your home out as your own, and shape it to accord with your own priorities (whether the home legally belonged to the resident or not) than to make your own home different to those of others.



## The experience of modernity

Lives and identities are created through relationships with the built environment, and in turn, relationships are documented in that same environment. Rather than a top-down imposition of ideas onto a passive population, a more fluid relationship exists between people and their environment. Daniel Miller has discussed the concept of 'appropriation', the process through which (in this case), tenants adopt and alter their mass-produced house or flat in order to turn it into a place they can relate to, often through physical alterations, the accumulation of ornaments, or the subversion of the intended use of the dwelling (Miller 1988). In his study, Miller examined how the tenants of a London estate decorated and altered their kitchens (or in the case of three project participants, did not).

A comparison with the negotiations faced by individuals when adapting to a new housing form is provided by the replacement of traditional courtyard houses in Seoul, South Korea, with modern concrete-built houses and apartments during the years after the Korean War of 1950–53 (Seo 2012). Courtyard houses, which comprised rooms arranged around an external courtyard, had been the single dominant form of dwelling in Seoul for centuries, but large numbers were replaced during the middle of the twentieth century by modern houses and apartments that could be built quickly and cheaply. This new kind of housing introduced a new spatial setting that reshaped domestic lives. The aim of Seoul's post-war housing development was to modernise and enhance living conditions, 'some planners regarded the old domestic culture as outmoded and unhealthy, unsuitable for a modern way of living' (Seo 2012, 95). Seoul's city planners regarded the Western style of living as modern – so they didn't just construct apartment blocks, but ensured the new buildings reflected a Western style of living. Bathroom floors were constructed on the same level as the living room, instead of being reached by a step, which previously preserved the distinction between clean and dirty areas of the home in the courtyard house; radiators were installed instead of under-floor heating. The residents resisted the intentions of planners – on moving in in 1970, the residents of the Hangang apartments in Seoul lowered the bathroom floors, and the new residents of the Agency for International

Development (AID) apartments installed hot water pipes under the floor to restore the traditional *ondol* heating system (Seo 2012, 95).

Geographical and social mobility are locked together; the process of moving from the familiar inner city to peripheral housing estates was a transformative experience, as seen in the biographies of new estates and their residents, as well as the consequences of this movement for the people and places left behind. In 1953 the sociologists Michael Young and Peter Willmott interviewed families living in the inner-city London borough of Bethnal Green, in order to gain an understanding of how the urban working class lived as a community, and in 1955 interviewed those same families who had moved out to the London County Council's (LCC) new housing estate at Debden, near Loughton in Essex, to which Young and Willmott gave the pseudonym of 'Greenleigh'. The majority of tenants on the new estate had been those that the LCC had determined were in greatest need, tenants who were at the top of the LCC housing list and were living in overcrowded and 'unhealthy' houses in Bethnal Green. A minority of the tenants at Greenleigh, however, had obtained their new house by exchanging their home in Bethnal Green with a Greenleigh resident who wished to return to east London. Residents faced a dilemma; "I was between two thorns," said one of our informants still living in the borough, "I didn't want a flat but I didn't want to leave Bethnal Green" (Young and Willmott 1957, 127). Mrs Stirling, a Greenleigh resident, was dealing with the consequences of her own decision to leave Bethnal Green; 'If we could take the house with us, we'd go back like a shot' (ibid, 127).

By the end of the twentieth century social housing functioned in a very different society to the one for which it was devised. In many parts of the country, working class identity is no longer centred on common occupations. Alice Mah (2009) has written of the devastation that can occur in communities, like the interwar housing estates of industrial towns and cities, when significant de-industrialisation occurs. Communities (and the homes that comprise them) were often based on the traditional family model, of men working in industry, and women staying at home with children. With a decline of male-dominated manufacturing work, and rise of female employment in services, Mah has found that idealised notions of solid families and strong communities were

common on the housing estates she studies, representing a form of nostalgia, a way of trying to hold onto fading social structures during socio-economic change.

The urban theorist Alison Ravetz (2001) has pointed out that when municipal housing was first planned and built, there was no apparent need to plan for the future of estates and their inhabitants; it was assumed that estates would develop into stable and permanent settlements. Tenancy rules (such as not undertaking work, or taking in lodgers) seemed to create peaceful estates and mitigate against any disruptive behaviour by tenants – a rather paternalistic approach for councils to take, and one that didn't allow for spontaneous evolution of commercial or social enterprise to occur on the estates. Towards the end of twentieth century, urban society became less localised; estate dwellers were no longer united by working for the same large industrial employer, for example, and local authority housing increasingly housed the very poorest and jobless. The infrequent and ineffective public transport that dogged the interwar cottage estates has rarely been improved 80 years later, and leads to a narrow choice of provision in terms of access to work, social amenities, and even food, with residents relying on the few shops that an estate might offer. In Kingstanding in Birmingham, many of the allotments that initially provided fresh food to tenants were subsequently built upon. Talmadge Wright (1997, 106–9) has found that inner-city social housing is often classified as a 'refuse space'; space that is physically, socially, politically and economically marginalised, and that academic and public (often journalistic) accounts that focus on the problems within social housing often overshadow residents' own efforts to create a meaningful place and community.

A common narrative of suburban working class life was the sense of loneliness experienced by the tenants of council estates (Bayliss 2003, 376). As will be seen in Chapter Four, this was reflected in oral history testimonies from the Warren Farm Estate. Darrin Bayliss (2003) has proposed that the powerful narrative of loneliness is a problematic one, and by drawing on oral testimonies from the residents of the Watling Estate at Edgware in north London, and the Roehampton Estate in south-west London, both constructed in the 1930s, has sought to challenge it. It was not the policy of the London County Council (LCC) to provide accommodation for social activities on its

estates, and Watling and Roehampton were no exception. Space was left for private individuals and organisations to develop social facilities such as meeting halls and public houses, and Watling tenants set up a residents' association, with the aim of providing social and sporting activities. Public sociability and street activity were key to the emergence of a new kind of social life for people who were moved from the inner-city districts of Kings Cross and Islington to Watling. The longer walk to the far distant shops or bus stop gave opportunities to stop and talk, and informal networks of mutual support underpinned a new sense of community (Bayliss 2003, 382).

Oral testimonies from the Roehampton estate, where a larger number of the tenants worked in white-collar administrative jobs rather than unskilled and skilled work, suggest that the tenants there rejected gregariousness and public sociability, equating privacy with respectability, and preferring to engage with the Dramatic, Gardening, and Musical Societies set up there (Bayliss 2003, 387). Charitable organisations and residents established such facilities on housing estates across the country, including the Warren Farm estate in Kingstanding, where the Kingstanding Settlement provided amenities. This will be explored further in Chapter Four.

The well-documented views of the tenants of Kensal House, in North Kensington, London, have been analysed by geographer Mark Llewellyn and architectural historian Elizabeth Darling in order to explore the discrepancy between the idealised model dwellings developed by specialist architects and designers, versus the reality of everyday life on the housing estate. This is a perceived discrepancy that architectural practice has endeavoured to eliminate within the last 40 years by enabling tenants to participate in the design and management of estates (Darling 2000, 167; Llewellyn 2004). This will be explored further in the form of the community-led-designed Eldonian Village, as part of the Bevington Street area case study in Chapter Five.

Kensal House (Figure 9) opened in 1937, and was commissioned by the Gas Light & Coke Company (GLCC), a utility company, and was intended to be a model housing development, showcasing the very latest in gas heating, lighting and cooking technology, demonstrating how working class tenants could be provided with an all-

gas service. The GLCC wished to assert market dominance of gas over electricity, and lobbied planners and local and national government to ensure that gas was supplied to new housing; but the GLCC also wanted to show its commitment to public service. The architects commissioned to design the flats at Kensal House, Maxwell Fry and Elizabeth Denby, wanted to address the social problems associated with both 'slum' dwellings, and the relatively isolated suburban 'cottage' developments being constructed by local authorities during the inter-war period (Darling 2000, 169). The result at Kensal House was 'no ordinary block of flats but a community in action, with social rooms, workshop, a corner shop, with larger flats, better balconies, even a separate drying balcony and ... a nursery school' (Fry 1975, 143).

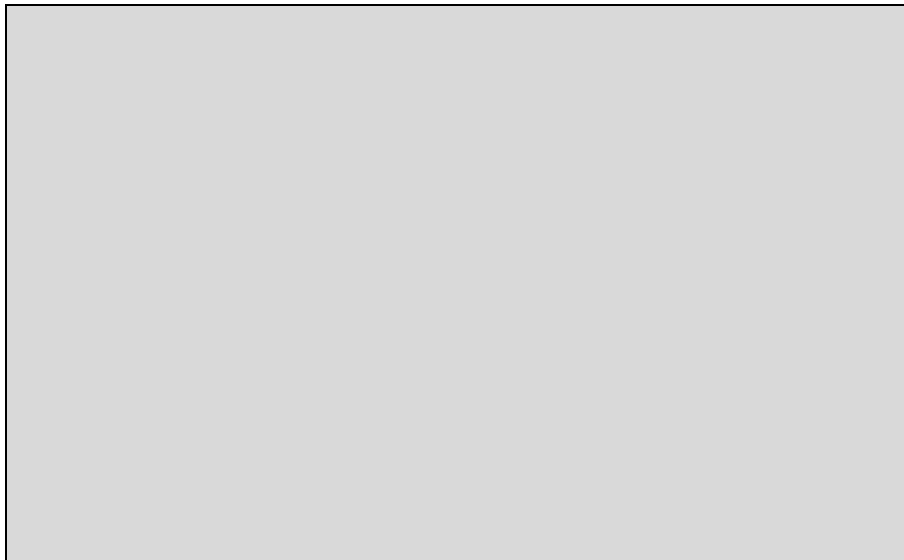


Figure 9. Kensal House, Ladbroke Grove, London, 1937 (544/40 [28] © Courtauld Institute of Art).

During the months after it opened, Kensal House was used by the GLCC and other construction and utilities organisations in magazine advertising and on film, as an example of good design and for the promotion of efficient and smokeless fuel. Tenants conveyed a positive message of life on the new estate, praising the clean air and additional leisure time their technologically up to date homes gave (Darling 2000, 171).

While Kensal House was intended to be a development of model dwellings, making the best use of the latest technology and architectural ideas, the reality for many tenants

was rather different, as indicated in a survey of residents carried out by the GLCC in 1942, five years after the flats opened (Darling 2000, 172–3). 61 of the 68 families surveyed believed they were better off living there than in the older housing that made up much of North Kensington and Ladbroke Grove, but there were complaints about the damp emanating from the cast concrete walls, and the noise from the Feathers Club (a voluntary organisation part-funded by the then Prince of Wales, which provided social and entertainment facilities and workshops for undertaking household repairs). The flats were only maintained by the landlord on an irregular basis, and the dedicated balcony for drying laundry that each flat was provided with was of an insufficient size, and in many flats faced a railway line, so the separate sun-balcony, which opened off the living room, was often used instead, despite this being prohibited in the Kensal House rulebook. The small kitchen (intended only for the preparation and storage of food, and for undertaking other household chores), bathroom, and drying balcony of each flat formed a ‘working unit’, zoned away from the rest of the home (Llewellyn 2004, 233; Figure 10), so that ‘the important work of the house is carried on without disturbing the life of the living room’ (Fry 1938, 58). This was an important distinction to make when the anticipated tenants may not have had separate rooms for cooking, household work, sleeping, and ‘living’.

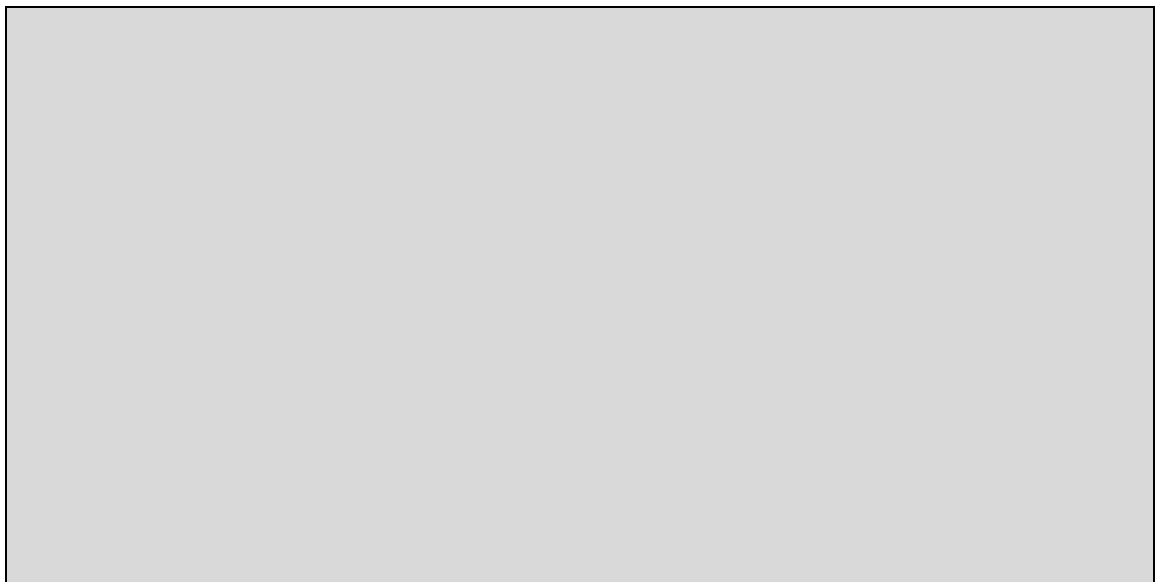


Figure 10. Part of the floor plan of Kensal House (French 2008).

Many Kensal House residents further subverted the intended uses of the rooms they were provided with; 21 of the families surveyed ate their meals in the tiny kitchen, 'perched at the ironing board or by the hatch' (Milne 1942) despite its intended use as a dedicated machine for cooking, thus maintaining the one living room that each flat was provided with as a formal space. 37 of the 68 families surveyed said they would eat in the kitchen if it was bigger, indicating that they had adapted in part to the GLCC and architect's intended lifestyle, but separating the activities of cooking and eating was in conflict with how tenants wished to live in their new homes. The arrangement of the new flats forced tenants to adapt their apartments to existing social customs by attempting to preserve the living room as a parlour as much as possible. Despite the negative feedback received by the survey, no changes were made to the running of the estate or the layout of flats; structural alterations would have been difficult and expensive to make during the Second World War, and during the subsequent post-war housing shortage.

The house building programmes following the Second World War did not produce more estates running on gas, and the GLCC lost interest in housing provision, transferring Kensal House to the London County Council (Darling 2000, 173).

A similar arrangement was made in the plan form of housing on the Warren Farm Estate in Kingstanding; the kitchen and bathroom were both located at the rear of the ground floor, away from the living room and the bedrooms. The kitchens at both Kensal House and the Warren Farm Estate were designed to be small in order that all labour-saving equipment could be easily at hand, and architects intended that eating should take place in the living room. The separation of cooking and living was in conflict with how tenants wished to live their lives, so they were forced to adapt their apartments according to existing social customs, by attempting to preserve the living room (intended by architects to be an everyday space for the family to eat, socialise, and do schoolwork) as a more formal parlour as much as possible (ibid 173). The results of a survey carried out into the opinions of the residents of the Quarry Hill estate in Leeds (Ravetz 1974, 172) found that, just as at Kensal House, the use of flats was adapted to the needs of the residents, some converting a spare bedroom to a

living room in order that they could preserve their living room as a formal 'front parlour'. The new spaces provided by the flats enabled residents to undertake new kinds of activities too, however, and as families grew up and contracted, the survey found that many spare rooms were turned over to hobbies.

At the Warren Farm Estate, tenants were not permitted to make structural changes to their rented homes, although many did seize the opportunity to construct garages on their garden plots, where space allowed. The Birmingham Corporation provided a standard pre-fabricated garage that could be erected for an additional weekly rent, and would enable wealthier tenants to keep a car, or store a motorcycle, which might have been considered a necessity for tenants who worked a long distance away from the estate.

The introduction of tenants' Right to Buy following the passing of the 1980 Housing Act meant that former council tenants who had brought the home in which they lived were now free (subject to planning permission) to make alterations to their homes. On the Warren Farm Estate, some former tenants chose to move their bathrooms upstairs, in order to create a larger kitchen, where the family could eat (unlike those in Kensal House); the living room could then become a more formal space. The addition of front porches and double glazed windows gave homes greater privacy. Through the alteration of their homes, tenants were able to subvert the architects' and planners' intentions, and in the process took possession of the spaces created for them, reproducing them in ways that were more personal to them. Such an approach acknowledges the agency and status of the residents in the reproduction of their space, in contrast to many modern architects, who took a 'year zero' approach to the planning of homes, which left little room for existing social practices.

## **Lived realities**

Several sociologists have viewed space as a basis of social action and conflict, and as a location for identity formation; Foucault (1977) and Lefebvre (1991) have underlined the importance of the designed environment in influencing power relations, and the



impositions that can be made by elite groups, such as planners and architects, through the medium of architecture. In *Production of Space* (1991) Henri Lefebvre writes of society being increasingly based around prohibitions and commands; this finds its way into urban space (Lefebvre uses the example of the traffic signal), where there are spaces that allow, and disallow – signified by ‘dos and don’ts’. Lefebvre’s model seems to allow little room for resistance, although he does allow for some element of agency; urban space, in particular, demands order and arrangement, because those who organise it (in the case of this research, planners, architects, housing providers) recognise the presence of disorder, the new and unpredictable situations that everyday life throws up, and so clamp down on the possibility of openness of meaning and use. Lefebvre’s Marxist approach sees everyday life as exploitative, oppressive and controlled, but capable of being changed (Highmore 2002, 113–5).

Sebastian Ureta (2007) undertook a study of low-income families’ expression of individuality through the personalisation of their new living spaces in Santiago, Chile. The form of buildings on housing estates in Santiago was a manifestation of the ideas of planners and developers about how low-income populations should live in the city. Ureta identified two main strategies that families used to adapt to their newly built dwellings. The first was a search for security and comfort in their new homes by families, by undertaking material transformation of home spaces. Partition walls would be moved and extensions built, the homes in question were owned by their occupants, and so they had more freedom to carry out such work than residents in rented accommodation. The second strategy was undertaking interior decoration, a process of self-expression and domestication of an otherwise blank box (Ureta 2007, 311–2).

Ureta reviewed how families in Santiago have changed the material configuration of their new homes to adapt them to their perceived needs, and undertaken decoration as a way to express their aesthetic ideas in their homes, but in this case, the appropriation of a new home by its owners was only one part of the general process of adaptation to a new living environment.

Ureta suggested that the act of a resident or family moving into a new home in Santiago could be considered as the 'domestication' of part of the population, who had previously been living in impoverished neighbourhoods, and would now live in the environs that authorities and urban planners believed were proper residents of Santiago (Ureta 2007, 312). The former living environments of the poor in Santiago were characterised by a do-it-yourself culture. The deregulated and informal nature of life in poorer neighbourhoods led to the establishing of identities and mediation of relationships with the community through the architecture of one's home. One of the aims of Santiago's housing policy was to integrate the poor into a way of life in which residing in a well-built home with modern facilities appeared to be the norm; a policy which is perhaps similar to that adopted by housing reformers in late nineteenth century Britain. Certain activities did not fit in with modern industrialised life, and the moral assumptions that went with it, such as a family sleeping in one room, undertaking work within the home, keeping a lodger – all were perceived as insanitary activities – that created dirt, but were also unhealthy for the body and mind, and were immoral. These new homes could accommodate the 'modern' nuclear family, but not the traditional extended one, and so the provision of public housing was a means of transmitting values into the personal space of the family, and enabled control of 'unconventional' social relations in the home. There was a disjuncture between the idealised model of urban life promoted by the planner or architect, and the actual lived reality of the housing scheme (Ureta 2007, 314–5). Most of the housing estate residents had formerly lived in close proximity, if not in the same house, with members of their extended families. The flats on the housing estate were often smaller than the dwellings the residents had left, forcing them to live as nuclear families, with the associated weakening of extended familial networks. This could have the effect of making individuals and families feel exposed and vulnerable, although an element of surveillance by, and on behalf of, neighbours could still be accommodated (Ureta 2007, 320).

As the twentieth century has progressed, social housing tenants have had an increasing amount of freedom to reshape their homes, and create a meaningful place. The everyday management routine at the Quarry Hill estate in Leeds, which opened in

1938, and was demolished in 1978, ensured that the external appearance of the estate was maintained in conformity with the architects' wishes. The estate had a resident gardener and caretaker, and the expected role of the tenant was to 'take an interest in his house, to pay the rent regularly, not to allow unreasonable wear and tear and to behave as *a good neighbour and member of the community*' (Ravetz 1974, 102; City of Leeds 1947, 3); this concept of a community was one imposed from above, not built up from below by tenants and neighbours. The Quarry Hill flats were adaptable to changing needs and standards, but largely due to work of the tenants. Improvements were made to the flats by the Leeds Corporation in the 1960s and 70s, such as the conversion of open fireplaces in the living rooms to smokeless fuels, and the replacement of worn-out sinks and baths, but the tenants were responsible for the interior decoration of their flats, an opportunity that was often seized with relish (Ravetz 1974, 172).

Herbert Gans' study of the West End of Boston in the 1960s (Gans 1962) suggested that people living there had a limited engagement with their surroundings, and suggested that social class had a part to play – the peer group society in the West End was a working-class culture, with a distrust of authority, and emphasis on the protection of friends and family. The people of the West End shaped the space in which they lived according to their needs. The modernisation of the city, initiated by the local authority and formulated as a strategic plan for the treatment of the space of the city as a whole, resulted in the driving out of factories, food markets, the expansion of the financial and administrative districts and the removal of low-rent working class neighbourhoods to the suburbs. This was a familiar situation in town planning of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Neighbourhoods cannot be studied in isolation, as specimens of a social class or an ethnic group, without understanding their relationship with other areas of the town or city.

## **Coping with a new environment**

The engineering of 'community' was an informing idea of the housing reform movement, particularly in the design and provision of the Garden Cities of the early

twentieth century. Such a project perhaps implied that there were either no working-class communities in the inner-city 'slums', or that those communities that did exist were inherently undesirable (Ravetz 1974, 121). The Garden City movement promoted the integration of different kinds of housing, tenants living alongside owner-occupiers, but this often did not happen in practice, and in the creation of new communities, private housing where homes were available to purchase or rent privately, might be constructed in an area neighbouring a municipal estate.

The separation of private and social housing, and the tensions that could result from this, reached an apogee at around the same time that Kingstanding and other suburban estates were being built, with the construction of the Cutteslowe Walls. A series of two-metre-high brick walls was constructed in 1934 by the developer of a private housing estate in Cutteslowe, a suburb to the north of Oxford, to separate the private housing from the public highways of the adjacent council estate. The developer sought to preserve the social exclusivity of the new housing; 10% of the houses in the adjoining council estate were let to so-called 'slum-clearance people' (Collison 1963, 77). The local authority made several attempts to demolish the walls, only having success in 1959 when changes to the laws concerning compulsory purchase were changed, enabling the council to purchase the land on which the walls stood (Blandy 2006, 19).

For residents who were re-housed on estates close to their original homes, it may have been easier to continue social relationships, but residents re-housed on suburban estates, like that at Kingstanding in Birmingham, had to build a new community, and learn to live in a new environment. Michael Hunkin (2011) has explored the community building undertaken by social, political and religious organisations on the Weoley Castle estate on the outskirts of Birmingham, where local authority provision of amenities, bus routes, and even public utilities were initially lacking. The friendship networks and economic opportunities on estates may have made a significant contribution to the regard residents felt for their homes (Pooley 1992, 8).

## **Experience of places in transition**

The housing estates that are the subject of this thesis were designed and built according to needs and priorities set out between the 1870s and 1930s, yet still form a defining part of the British urban landscape, and shape the contemporary lives of their residents as they negotiate an environment designed to meet the needs of another time. As a consequence, the estates are environments of transition and change, which can be seen in biographies – of buildings, and of those who live in them.

The processes of regeneration and gentrification (Glass 1964), although markedly different in their intended results, might offer a lens through which to see environments in transition. The greater trend towards inner-city living from the late 1960s and 1970s onwards led to the renovation and renewal of property to meet the needs of a new affluent population, forming part of a wider set of social changes (Thorns 2002, 171). Chester Hartman (1984, 302) has noted that in North American studies of displacement associated with gentrification, those displaced tend to be poor, contain a disproportionate number of non-white residents, the elderly, and large households. In seeking a new place to live, those who are displaced tend to move as short a distance as possible, retaining existing familial and social ties.

Similarly, in her study of an area of West Oakland in California, demolished as part of a 'slum' clearance programme from the 1930s onwards, and for the construction of the Bay Area Rapid Transit system (BART) in the 1960s and 1970s, Elaine-Maryse Solari (2001) describes a previously diverse and successful area, as seen through the examination of the results of the excavation of its nineteenth century housing, industrial and commercial plots. The success and diversity of West Oakland was seemingly at odds with representations of the area in contemporary accounts as morally corrupt, a marked parallel with accounts of the Bevington Street area in Liverpool, which forms one of the case studies of this thesis. The removal of much of the African American commercial district around Seventh Street, its schools and places of employment, altered the dynamics of the area. The few businesses that remained in the area soon closed for good, and residents had to go downtown to shop, changing

the area's economic and social profile; there were insufficient grocery stores, too many liquor stores and the remaining schools became overcrowded (Solari 2001, 29–31). Like the residents of inner-city Liverpool in the 1970s and 1980s, the community of West Oakland became politicised.

In their study *Family and Kinship in East London*, Young and Willmott (1957) noted that in moving, relocating and scattering communities, policy makers were ignoring the bonds and links between families, friends and neighbours that enable wider social relationships to work. Two generations of a family (the parents and children of a nuclear family) might be re-housed, leaving the third, older generation behind, requiring coping strategies to be created (Young and Willmott 1957, 138–140). In later studies, Young noted that a strong community spirit did develop in Greenleigh, and the importance of extended family in the everyday care of the very young and old persisted; despite, rather than because of, the housing allocation policies of the 1950s.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Taking a distinctly archaeological approach**

This thesis takes a distinctly archaeological approach, and the contextual, interpretive approach of historical archaeology, to study how the concepts of the modern and new that existed between the 1870s and 1930s shaped the urban built environment, and how these Victorian and Edwardian concepts continue to shape the built environment today.

A classic archaeological trope is that of establishing a 'baseline', in relation to which (in the context of this study) the historical and contemporary impacts of policy decision and alterations to the built environment of social housing estates can be analysed. The perspective of the archaeologist is also taken from the present; seeing a site as part of a constant process that has not ended.

Archaeology does not see landscapes and buildings as containers for events and actions, but rather as a means of combining human and material engagements, using the evidence of those buildings and landscapes as evidence. Previous historical and sociological studies of late nineteenth and early twentieth century social housing have failed to consider the effects of the built environment in the past and present, and the excessive focus on the material origins of such housing estates (an architectural approach) can fail to engage with the context of the site, or how residents and others have interacted with it over time.

### **A contemporary archaeology approach**

Archaeology is an interdisciplinary field, but contemporary archaeology brings new collaborative enquiry to the field, borrowing methods and approaches from humanities and social sciences.

There have been two broad definitions of contemporary archaeology; firstly that it is the undertaking of archaeologies *of* the present, secondly that it is the undertaking of archaeology *in* the present. These definitions are in part complementary, but they also compete.

The archaeology *of* the present has been defined as extending traditional methods and 'archaeological approaches to modern material' (King 2011, 322) and 'the archaeology of places or events that relate to the period of recent or living memory' (Harrison and Schofield 2009). Examples of prominent projects include the excavation and recording of a Ford Transit van formerly belonging to the archaeology unit of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust by a group of students at Bristol University (Bailey et al 2009). The undertaking of archaeologies of the world around us in the present day could be caricatured as (perhaps uncritically) expanding the list of things we can study archaeologically. 'As in all areas of archaeology, some of this work is theoretically and politically naive, methodologically unsound and banal in its conclusions' (King 2011, 323).

Archaeology *in* the present is one 'which takes as its focus the appreciation of the contemporaneity of archaeological engagement with the world' (Dixon 2011, 315) and is concerned with archaeology as a practice situated in the present; what it is to be an archaeologist, what the constructs of archaeology are, and how archaeological thinking can play a role in daily life, 'Using archaeological methods to understand, critique and actively engage with issues and debates in contemporary society' (King 2011, 323). Undertaking archaeologies of and with contemporary people in the present day 'raises distinctive methodological challenges and ethical concerns' (ibid). Studying contemporary consumption and social life 'may generate substantial risk not only to those being studied but also to others connected to them' (Voss 2010, 187). For Dixon, Buchli and Lucas and Graves-Brown 'emphasize a number of new concerns for archaeology, including, but not limited to, new types of material, new modes of engagement and a new politics of archaeology', contemporary archaeology as a mode of engagement with the world (Dixon 2011, 314; 318).



Barbara Voss (2010, 183) identifies two causes for the recent increase in profile and importance of contemporary archaeology within the wider field. The first cause is that 'historic preservation law brought increasingly recent "sites" under the professional jurisdiction of archaeologists' (Voss 2010, 183). Dan Hicks has written of the erosion of the discipline's chronological boundaries, the collapse of a buffer between the past and present:

'in the past few years the end-dates of archaeological research have been extended, encroaching at an increasing pace upon the present. The passing of the millennium accentuated this process, but it is among the practitioners of heritage management – in, for instance, English Heritage's use of the '30 year rule' in the process of listing buildings – that this beating of bounds has been most clearly exposed as a purely arbitrary exercise' (Hicks 2003, 316).

Voss's second identified cause of the increased profile of contemporary archaeology is that 'pressing social and political issues [for example the end of the Cold War, or increasing deindustrialisation] generated widespread interest in sites and objects that had previously received little attention' (Voss 2010, 183). While these two causes may seem separate – we study the present because it is there, or because it is changing so rapidly and may not be there for much longer – they are linked; the drafting of research agendas or passing of heritage protection laws being spurred on by a concern for a greater understanding of the recent past, formalised in documents such as English Heritage's *Change and Creation: historic landscape character 1950–2000* (Bradley et al 2004).

In her analysis of the increase in the profile of contemporary archaeology, Voss also draws attention to the role that different sectors have played in the development of contemporary archaeology, through the management of the historic environment (Voss 2010, 183). Curatorial and commercial sectors (and the expansion of the latter) have played a greater role in the development and promotion of historical and contemporary archaeology in the United Kingdom than universities (Belford 2014, 11),

although the university sector has been largely responsible for its theoretical development.

## **Undertaking contemporary archaeology**

Does undertaking an archaeology of the contemporary past require different methods and methodologies than those used for more ‘traditional’ archaeologies of the distant past? The lack of temporal distance that defines contemporary archaeology urges us to think differently about the past; ‘[I]urking beneath most archaeological codes of ethics is the unspoken postulate that the past has already happened and nothing can be done about it’ (Voss 2010, 185), but not in contemporary archaeology. Sefryn Penrose (2010, 171), in undertaking an archaeology of contemporary deindustrialisation, finds that ‘we are in the same position as everyone else: ignorant of the future. As archaeologists this may be an uncomfortable novelty but it is a window into understanding the material around us: landscapes that do not yet know their future’.

The relevance of an archaeology of the contemporary past for communities, undertaken on a local and intimate scale, is apparent; ‘when archaeologies of the contemporary past have been conducted they have been rather successful in forging new forms of sociality and community through the course of the archaeological intervention’ (Buchli 2010, 114). Such examples include Gabriel Moshenska’s work with north London school children on World War II air raid shelters (2009), which furthered local narratives and histories of the present day community and their families, in terms of the experience of the war, or Rachael Kiddey’s work with homeless people in order to conduct archaeological studies of contemporary homelessness in Bristol (Kiddey and Schofield, 2011) and York. Examining sites that are not usually widely accepted as being ‘heritage’, and fall ‘outside of established disciplinary concerns, practices and legal categories’ (Buchli 2010, 110) means that practitioners can work in experimental ways. ‘Contemporary archaeology is not merely the extension of post-medieval archaeology to consider material from within our own lifetimes. It is, perhaps, closer to a philosophical perspective on the world centred on

the immediacy of archaeological engagement with material, spaces, places and people' (Dixon 2011, 317).

## **Critiques of contemporary archaeology**

Criticism of contemporary archaeology has emerged alongside the development of the discipline itself. Barbara Voss (2010) has asked whether archaeology is necessarily the best way to investigate the contemporary world; 'some contemporary archaeologies bear a close resemblance to media studies, material culture studies, social geography, history, international relations, political science, and ethnography' (Voss 2010, 189). Audrey Horning calls for an archaeology in and of the present, which moves 'beyond self-justification and contributes to a broader re-envisioning of archaeological practice' (Horning 2011, 161).

A criticism levelled at the practice of contemporary archaeology by Michael Nevell is that other kinds of data sources 'seemingly provide more information than archaeology can ... Do we risk, as archaeologists, undertaking third-rate anthropology, economic history or sociology instead of material-based archaeological research?' (Nevell 2014a, 1). Nevell has drawn attention to the media reports surrounding the excavation of a Ford Transit van by students at the University of Bristol in 2006 (

Figure 11; Bailey et al 2009) and the recording of graffiti left by members of the Sex Pistols in an office in Denmark Street, London (Graves-Brown and Schofield 2011), which 'might lead the casual reader to think this was indeed the case' (Nevell 2014a, 1). Paul Belford has similarly stated that archaeologists may not always be the best people to interrogate lines of evidence; 'archaeology must ensure that it makes a distinctive contribution. In many cases, the research value of twentieth-century archaeology is open to question' (Belford 2014, 7).



Figure 11. Excavation of a Ford Transit van at the University of Bristol, July 2006.

The easy caricature of contemporary archaeology as a performance of conventional archaeological techniques in a way that is unhelpful to the reputation of the wider discipline, compared with more orthodox historical or anthropological research and analysis, masks the value of contemporary archaeology. Fieldwork and research in contemporary archaeology is adapting traditional, systematic methods and techniques of fine-grained and comparative analysis, broad-scale survey, and recording – to address new questions. Archaeology offers ‘unique insights’, but methodologies and theoretical insights emerge from other fields too.

Penrose (2010) acknowledges that her analysis of the impact of sites of deindustrialisation in Oxford could equally belong in political or sociological studies, but that an approach to the study of the impact of change on the landscape and those people who populate it, that is led by an engagement with the material remains of the present-day landscape, is an essential part of archaeology.

Contemporary archaeology breaks down some of the assumptions we make about the whole discipline – why, what, and how we record. Traditional archaeological methodologies might not always be sufficient to study the present and recent past; in

‘applying an archaeological sensibility [that is, an awareness of the world’s material constitution] to the contemporary world, it becomes increasingly clear that the habitual tropes of archaeological practice either do not work, or need to be rethought and reconfigured’ (Graves-Brown 2011b, 168). Work on the recent and contemporary past is characterised by a superfluity of information; the presence of so much data and polyphonic discourses results in the obscuring of past voices. ‘It is precisely the methodologies developed within archaeology to cope with a dearth of data that permit one to constitute these obscured, lost realms of experience, because the superfluity of information in the recent past have equally obscuring effects which inhibit our understanding’ (Buchli 2002, 132).

Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas (2001) and Paul Graves-Brown (2000 and 2011a) have emphasised the new concerns that have been generated by contemporary archaeology, including engagement with new types of material, but also new modes of engagement with that material, notably a political engagement. James Dixon (2009) suggests that archaeology has potential to do much more than to understand the past, and that it can also be used to understand ourselves; the archaeologist’s perspective on the relationships between people and things can be used to consider how we think and act in the present.

Paul Belford has examined the relevance and usefulness of archaeologies of the recent past (which Belford defines as twentieth- and twenty-first-century archaeology) to archaeological practice in Britain, and in doing so highlights a common, daunting theme - the scale of individual sites (especially industrial sites) and the wider resource, including non-archaeological resources (Belford 2014, 7). Belford gives the example of a watching brief near Congleton, Cheshire, which revealed a 1950s tiled floor and a concrete machine base of a former textile mill. There were few documentary records to accompany the site, and it was impossible to discern the function of the excavated part of the site, which revealed nothing of the social life of the workplace. Belford himself highlights that it is just as relevant to question the value of the watching brief exercise, as to question the value of the excavation of the site (ibid). This is not a problem unique to archaeologies of the recent past; perhaps we feel we should know

more about such a recent site because of our closeness to it, but might not have doubts about undertaking a watching brief and coming up with a similarly open interpretation at a more ancient site. Encouragingly, Belford is more positive about the usefulness of taking an archaeological approach to better understand industrial housing in the twentieth century, although his examples (2014, 8–9) of successful projects relate to the excavation of much older housing: eighteenth-century tenements in Coalbrookdale, Shropshire, with a kitchen range installed in c. 1780 that was in use until the building's demolition in 1967, and 1820s housing in Hinkshay, Shropshire, which was demolished in the 1970s. These sites all contained evidence of modifications and improvements made to housing during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the continued use of older technologies, reshaped to suit 'modern' life.

Belford instead suggests that the value of contemporary archaeology may lie in enabling us to better understand the present (Belford 2014, 9), creating a theoretically informed and politically engaged framework in which the 'recent' can be situated – archaeology making a contribution to contemporary life. Belford sees that the value of contemporary archaeology lies not in what it tells us about the recent past and present, but as a tool for community engagement with heritage (Belford 2014, 11) – archaeology as social work. An example is provided by Rachael Kiddey and John Schofield's excavation project in 2009–10, which involved working alongside and with homeless people in order to conduct an archaeological study of contemporary homelessness in Bristol. As well as investigating the materiality of homeless life, the project also acted to involve the participants in beneficial activities, and introduced the ethical dilemmas of working with vulnerable people (Kiddey and Schofield 2011). As Barbara Voss says, archaeologies of the contemporary past call into question both the methods that archaeologists conventionally use, and the fundamental assumptions that archaeologists make about the relationships people have with society and the material world; rather than dealing with a chronologically and psychologically remote past, are we increasingly carrying out an archaeology of 'us'? (Voss 2010, 184).

## Recording and research methodologies

This research examines how attitudes and responses towards the nature of modern life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be seen in the form and use of social housing; how the general provision of housing has changed, but also the changes that have been made within a single house, or the wider landscape of the estate in which it is located. In the same way that one might create an object biography, the production of a 'building biography' is a useful tool for mapping the intended design of the council house against what was actually built, and in turn, how what was built has been altered. Leading on from studies in the social construction of technology, the success (or otherwise) of any material object cannot be understood through that object alone, and instead resides in the social context of that object's (or building or landscape's) reception and use. By asking whether the changing attitudes and responses to the nature of modern life between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be seen in the built environment, specifically in the form and use of social housing, this research examines how, for example, changes in housing policy and priorities have a tangible and intangible impact on the built environment. Such tangible impacts include the renewal of housing in the Bevington Street area and neighbouring Eldonian Village in Liverpool, during successive periods, each a reaction to changing employment provision in the city; or the changes to homes in Kingstanding in Birmingham brought about by the Right to Buy.

This research goes on to ask whether conflicts and contradictions between these earlier notions of the modern and new, and those of the present day can be seen in the engagements with the built environment. This research looks at how notions of what was (then) modern and new were expressed materially, perhaps as a reaction against an earlier state of affairs; the 'modern' is an evolving notion that exists in relation to something else. Each of the case study areas was constructed in response to a specific set of local issues which have now changed since their original construction, and the conflict between earlier housing priorities and those of today will be played out in the form, use and perception of flats, houses, shops and amenities,

and public open spaces, and the engagement of different communities with those spaces.

The research questions have been addressed by gaining an understanding of how the buildings and landscapes of social housing estates have changed, and who has been responsible for those changes. Evidence was contained within the buildings and layouts of estates, including the use of particular building materials and construction techniques. The construction of a sense of identity, whether that is a personal one belonging to a council house tenant, or a corporate one belonging to a local authority or philanthropic organisation, does not necessarily mean making an outward display, or a physical alteration to one's home.

### **Importance of scale**

The housing estates studied for this thesis were large undertakings for the local authorities, planners and charity responsible for their construction, and upon completion were significant new environments for residents to negotiate. The specific and localised experience of the modern emphasises the importance of spatial scale. This project provides information at the scale of the home, the individual street or building, and the neighbourhood.

- At neighbourhood level, the contributions and strategic choices made by local authorities, planners and architects have to be understood. In his proposal for the archaeological study of the post-war Welfare State, Rodney Harrison (2009) advocates a higher-level exploration of how state ideologies are reflected through design and implementation; namely the influence of public housing (both in terms of design and the provision of services) on the physical landscape, by mapping how such housing has transformed the landscape at the level of city or nation. The outline plans and publications lobbying for post-war reconstruction that were issued by the Bournville Village Trust (1941a, 1941b), and literature and plans issued by the City of Liverpool and the Department of the Environment (1975) that relate to phases of large-scale clearance of



housing in Liverpool relate to these strategic choices, and how they were in part shaped by the existing conditions in Birmingham and Liverpool.

- Evidence is also contained within buildings and layout of estates, such as the use of particular building materials and construction techniques, and the kinds of buildings that local authorities chose to provide for residents. Building materials, plan form and external appearance reflect the priorities of local authorities, planners, and the architects they commissioned, whereas the alteration, and decoration of the home was the responsibility of the occupant, but under an element of restriction. Examination of individual estates, streets and homes 'allow an exploration of the ways in which state ideologies are reflected, accepted or resisted at the level of individual housing projects' (Harrison 2009, 251) but also allows for the biographies of individual estates, and everyday lives of residents, to be built. The handbooks given to the tenants of the Bevington Street area in Liverpool (City of Liverpool Housing Committee, 1955) and the instruction book kept by Peabody Trust estate Superintendents (1976) give insight into the expectations landlords had of their tenants.

### **Approaches taken by similar studies**

A model methodology for this project is provided by Alan Mayne's 'Ethnographies of Place' (Mayne and Lawrence 1999, Mayne and Murray 2001). Mayne's approach is considered 'ethnographic' because objects (or in the case of this project, buildings, and what people do with them) are integrated with detailed investigation of documentary records that cast light on individuals, households and urban neighbourhoods, producing a biography.

Some work has been undertaken to adapt Mayne's ethnographic approach to the study of archaeological sites; the 'Living in Victorian London' project was a collaborative research project between geographer Alasdair Owens (Queen Mary, University of London) and Nigel Jeffries and Rupert Featherby (Museum of London Archaeology) to develop an 'ethnographies of place' methodology, to study the

everyday, material history of cities, by organising excavated sites temporally and spatially and integrating the study of an excavated site and its artefacts with detailed investigations of documentary records, which cast light on the life histories of the individuals, households, and urban neighbourhoods within which the objects were located (Jeffries et al 2009).

Victor Buchli's (1999) study of the Narkomfin communal house in the former Soviet Union examined how state ideologies were manifested in and reproduced by the architectural space and material culture of communal housing projects, and the responses of residents to those changing ideologies, through their interaction with their homes, and how they were furnished and decorated. Daniel Miller (1988) also documented changes made by local authority tenants in London, to their kitchens, discerning the strategies employed to control the spaces where they live. Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas (2001) used archaeological techniques and the examination of an abandoned council flat to reconstruct its occupants' motivations for becoming 'intentionally homeless', showing the potential for archaeology to inform wider social policy. Buchli and Lucas made their case for adopting a methodology based solely on the examination of the site; 'what characterises this study above all, is the archaeological context in which the work was done; there were no informants – just like an archaeological site, the people had left, leaving only their material culture behind' (Buchli and Lucas 2001, 159).

Kathryn Fewster critiques Buchli and Lucas's assumptions regarding the meaning of objects remaining at the house, denying their multivocality. Without informants to consult, Buchli and Lucas categorised the material remaining in the house based on 'broad consumption divisions, such as one might find in a department store' (Buchli and Lucas 2001, 158), assuming a shared experience and familiarity, and (albeit due to the circumstances of the flat becoming available for archaeological study) denying the tenants 'the voice of their own belongings' (Fewster 2013, 35).

Rodney Harrison's (2009) study with residents of a council estate in Stratford, east London focussed on the nature of the residents' sense of place and their social

attachments to the space of the estate, through oral history interviews. 'All of the interviewees reflect on the nature of the community and the ways in which they 'leave an imprint' in the space of the estate' (Harrison 2009, 253). The estate was not a community at odds with its environment but 'a group of people who are committed to the production of the space of the estate as an integral aspect of their community' (Harrison 2009, 253).

## **Photographic records and their use**

The use of photographs has brought an extra dimension to this study, whether they are images taken for the purpose of recording the present-day built environment, or historic photographs produced for other purposes and retained in archives.

Photography is regularly used as a tool in archaeological building recording, to record the present state and structure of a building. Recording an empty building, stripped of furniture and fittings, facilitates the analysis of fabric, but can produce images that lack information about the use of a space. A room that is filled with contents, such as furniture or machinery – whether still in use or redundant – might be more difficult to structurally survey and investigate, but results in a richer photographic record, more likely to document the significance of an episode in a building's history (English Heritage 2006, 5).

Pétursdóttir and Olsen (2014) have undertaken analysis of the photography of ruined urban institutional and industrial buildings of the twentieth century, and call for reconsideration and appreciation of the role of photography in archaeology – that photography is not a means of objective documentation of material and the social realities that surround them, but is also an interactive and attentive way to approach the study of and engagement with material. Pétursdóttir and Olsen particularly targeted the criticism of such ruin imagery as 'ruin porn' – that it is superficial, and 'turns social and material misery into something seductive and aesthetically pleasing' (ibid, 7).

Research into the history and development of the built environment also incorporates the study of historic photographs, produced for reasons other than the objective recording of a building or street. It can be problematic to use historic photographs as illustrations without considering the context and process of a photograph's creation, and how the currency and use of that image has changed over time.

The circumstances surrounding the production of a photograph vary, according to its intended purpose. In 1939 photographer Bill Brandt was commissioned by the Bournville Village Trust in Birmingham to produce images of the city's back-to-back housing and its residents, and those of newly completed municipal estates at Kingstanding and Weoley Castle on the outskirts of the city for use in campaigning literature. The images will be discussed further in Chapter Four, and have been particularly useful in understanding the initial appearance of the municipal estates at Kingstanding, as well as the politics of the presentation of back-to-back and municipal housing in Birmingham.

The construction of new houses and tenements in Liverpool in the 1900s and 1910s was documented by the Liverpool Corporation, who photographed new streets, facilities, and the exteriors and interiors of new houses for use in promotional and campaigning literature on design reform and brochures accompanying the formal opening of new housing schemes. Images of new homes in Bevington Street and Summer Seat depict pristine (and mostly empty) streets and the interiors of sculleries and living rooms filled with good quality furniture. The images were hand-tinted to provide further clarity to these images of improvement, presented the possibilities available to new tenants, and provided a contrast with the crowded and insanitary homes presented in contemporary literature.

Francesca Berry discusses the origin and use of images in Bournville Village Trust's promotional and campaigning publications. The BVT photographic archive was 'testament to the Trust's ambition to promote its particular model of suburban domesticity at a national and international level' (Berry 2013, 2), an agenda for

domestic design reform that they sought to publicise via 'domestic identities and domestic spaces performed in mass media representations' (ibid, 3).

The new opportunities for domesticity, leisure, and altered familial roles offered by new municipal estates, such as the maintenance of a garden, living in new kinds of private space, cooking using modern, new facilities, and eating in a separate dining room away from the heat and mess of the kitchen – the potential for these new types of suburban domesticity to be less stable than those that were more familiar to residents who had moved from inner-city 'slums' 'warranted greater reinforcement via photographic construction and performance' by the Bournville Village Trust and its photographic agents (Berry 2013, 3).

The promotion of idealised living conditions in social housing was not restricted to newly-built homes. The Peabody Trust undertook improvement and refurbishment of many of its estates during the decades after the Second World War, eliminating shared facilities such as lavatories, and including new facilities such as built-in kitchens in bedsits. Conditions were documented before and after the improvement programmes, and the resulting images were used in Peabody Trust's own reports and promotional literature (Figure 12). Many images were of empty rooms, or rooms newly set out with furniture (Figure 70), but some featured residents in their improved homes (Figure 71). Such photographs show how older ways persisted for some residents, small homes being filled with large items of heavy furniture that the architects responsible for modernisation in the 1960s may not have foreseen, but that held great value to residents.

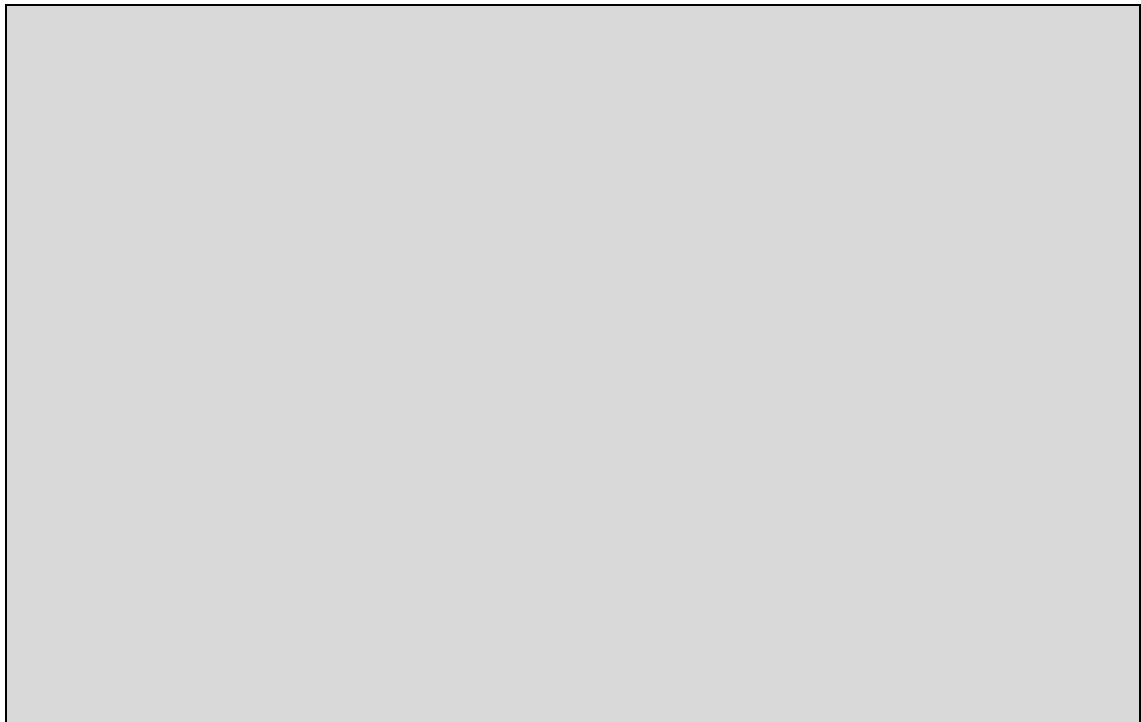


Figure 12. A lavatory at the Wild Street estate, Covent Garden, before and after refurbishment in the 1960s. Peabody Trust Collection, London Metropolitan Archive.

## Methodological approach

A traditional archaeological study would include survey of standing buildings and other landscape features, leading to an understanding of how the site functioned. As Laura McAtackney has explored in her studies of Long Kesh/Maze prison in Northern Ireland (McAtackney 2007; 2014), the cataloguing of sites in such a way might create an archive, but it does not uncover hidden narratives.

The approach this research has taken highlights the multiple perspectives held by residents, planners, architects and politicians through time, and acknowledges the subjective nature of the evidence from the built environment, documents, and oral testimonies. The case study sites do not have a single past that can be observed and described; they have gone beyond the original intentions of planners and architects. The integration of documentary analysis with field survey data draws out comparisons and inconsistencies, and has the ability to locate people and events not in the

historical record; while the official acts of building housing are recorded, their 'afterlives', how residents have negotiated their surroundings, are not.

## **Recording the built environment**

The separation between architectural history and archaeology is 'in part because of a misunderstanding on both parts of the underlying theoretical positions of each' (Clark 2001, 72–3). Richard Morris noted that 'some architectural historians caricatured archaeology as nothing more than an expensively inflexible system of indiscriminate data-gathering, while a number of archaeologists underestimated the sophistication of architectural and art historical methods' (cited in Wood 1994, 17). It is important to understand all contexts in which a building has been used, and where an understanding of the significance of the building depends on the knowledge of architects' work.

Buildings, and the landscapes or townscape in which they stand, are the physical expressions of social structure and activity, with sites impacting upon the landscape, and in turn, being shaped by the topography and terrain of the landscape.

Archaeological studies of the built environment have traditionally focused on buildings being 'read' and understood as those responsible for their construction intended them to be; however 'the questions to be asked of any structure must involve the people who built, inhabited and abandoned or demolished it, and the wider situations in which it existed' (Hicks and Horning 2006, 282).

Social housing is a common field of enquiry in other subject areas, namely sociology, geography, anthropology, and urban planning studies, yet archaeology offers a different approach, one that is led by the materiality and biography of the buildings and the urban and suburban landscapes in which they are located, and the responses by residents and those in official authority, to those buildings and landscapes.

This project has rapidly surveyed the built environment of the Peabody Trust Estate in Bethnal Green, Warren Farm Estate in Birmingham, and Bevington Street area in

Liverpool; the respective environments comprise the structures (houses, flats, and associated buildings) and the landscapes in which they are situated.

Photographic surveys of the exteriors of buildings (and where residents allowed, the interiors) were undertaken, plans of selected buildings were compiled, and written descriptions produced, resulting in a record of the present-day appearance, condition and use of the buildings and landscapes that comprised the case study areas. This produced a baseline, which could then be integrated with oral testimonies and documentary research to produce interpretive biographies of the built environment.

The building materials, plan form, provision of amenities and initial appearance of social housing reflects the priorities of local authorities, planners, and the architects those officials commissioned, whereas the alteration, and decoration of the home was the responsibility of the occupant, albeit often under an element of restriction. Examining the fabric of the buildings and landscapes associated with social housing has enabled me to understand how these particular kinds of landscapes were formed and changed, and who has been responsible for those changes.

The making of a building is an on-going process, one that does not follow a pre-formed plan (apart from that which relates to a building's original conception, a single intention, that existed at one point in time), and does not end with a 'finished' artefact. 'The "final form" is but a fleeting moment in the life of any feature, when it is matched to a human purpose, likewise cut out from the flow of intentional activity' (Ingold 2000, 188). The identities of residents (and local authority planners, architects and politicians) were created through and informed by the built environment of social housing estates.

When undertaking archaeological fieldwork 'the level of detail and rigour appropriate to one's investigation is determined by the questions one is asking, and the motivations behind the inquiry'. In some archaeological projects, precise detail relating to artefact alignment and location is required; for other projects photography and note-taking is sufficient to capture the required information (Schofield and Harrison



2010, 67). Every building is unique, and so every building recording project is different; the elements of most interest in a building may be those that create that difference, so strategy and techniques have to be adapted to the task. All building recording has to be selective, and choices made as to what to record, which techniques to use, based on the aims of the project, the nature of the building, and the circumstances of access (Westman 2004, 164). This is a principle that has extended across guidance issued by English Heritage for the recording and understanding of the historic built environment (Clark 2001; English Heritage 2006), is pragmatic and allows for flexibility – and for the facility to carry out new kinds of archaeology.

The intended forms and designs of the buildings of the Warren Farm Estate in Kingstanding, the Peabody Estate in Bethnal Green, and Bevington Street and Eldon Grove in Liverpool are relatively well understood. Many original designs and architects' drawings for these estates and others have been retained in Local Authority archives and were examined for this study; yet these documents alone do not provide an accurate representation of what exists on the ground, or of what was originally built. Architects' and planners' drawings depict what was intended, but not the final implementation, which might have changed due to budget restraints, as was the case with intended community buildings on the Warren Farm Estate, or later additions, many of which will have been made on an informal basis by local authority works departments or residents. Producing measured surveys of buildings that were architecturally well understood was largely unnecessary, and so existing plans and records were used.

Examination of the built environment in its current state was therefore an essential element of this project's fieldwork. The survey of the urban landscape in each of the case studies has quantified the types of buildings that each study area contains and the extent to which housing is interspersed with commercial, industrial and institutional buildings, public and private open spaces, and the concentrations of building types in particular zones of the built environment. This field survey identifies buildings and open spaces that were not originally part of the intended social housing schemes, and instances where intended buildings and spaces were not implemented. Fieldwork visits

to estates were undertaken on my own and with residents, when available. The present state of the built environment was recorded with a camera and annotations were made to plans of individual buildings and estates; I was then able to plot how the buildings and the landscapes in which they were located have changed.

The research sites were not always accessible, due to the reluctance of some residents to have the interiors of their homes photographed. In these cases, a lateral approach was needed, with less emphasis on recording photographically the interiors of buildings, focusing instead on the exteriors and their landscape setting, and greater care was taken to examine the more subjective elements of the sites, including archaeologically focused oral testimonies and representations of the sites by others.

Understanding how the housing estate as a whole relates to the townscape has been of importance; the Warren Farm Estate was set back from Kingstanding Road behind private houses and shops, reducing the permeability of the estate, that is, the extent to which urban form (the layout of streets and massing of structures) permits or restricts the movement of people and vehicles; the blocks of the Peabody Trust estates usually faced into a central yard, with only long stretches of window-filled walls facing the street, similarly restricting movement and interaction with the surrounding neighbourhood. A contrary approach was taken in Vauxhall in Liverpool; the newer housing, constructed in the 1910s, was designed to be open to the street, in contrast to the courts of back-to-backs that formerly filled the area.

Building recording has provided evidence of the physical interaction that residents have with the buildings on their estates, and how they have been able to make those buildings their own; how the built environment has affected those living in it, and constrained or enabled their actions. By combining buildings analysis with other techniques, including oral history interviews, other narratives that might otherwise be missing or obscured when only one source material is used become apparent.

Undertaking buildings analysis has enabled me to examine the built environment at different scales, ranging from the whole estate, to the street, to the individual home.

This multi-scalar approach, which incorporates increasing scales of analysis, can examine the home, the relationship of the home to its immediate neighbourhood, and to the estate in general. By examining relationships at these different scales, as is the case when using multiple source types, narratives that might ordinarily be obscured can be revealed:

- How residents construct a personal identity that is tied to a place
- How residents use space to create their own autonomous identities
- How residents challenge identities and meanings that might be perceived as being externally imposed.

In examining contemporary sites with a wide range and depth of evidence, I had to be selective in what I studied, and understand how making selections shaped my research questions and how I answered them.

## **Documentary analysis**

The construction of social housing by local government and philanthropic organisations was well documented at the time, although it is clear that the retention of documentary evidence relating to the three case studies has been differential and partial; as very ordinary buildings, the retention of records by local authorities was not a priority. For example, most building control plans for Vauxhall in Liverpool have not survived, and the early plans of the buildings which comprise the case study there have instead been obtained from Medical Board reports and prospectuses issued by the City Council. Despite such inconsistencies, surviving historic plans provide information about the intended and originally constructed forms of the landscapes and buildings of the Warren Farm Estate in Kingstanding, Bevington Street and Eldon Grove in Liverpool, and the Peabody Trust buildings in Bethnal Green, London. Building control plans were required by local authorities to ensure that new buildings and alterations made to older structures, complied with the standards set out in building by-laws, the

precursor of present-day planning legislation. These usually comprised floor plans, drainage plans, sections and elevations of proposed and existing buildings, and named the architect and builder. These were an indication of declared intent, rather than a confirmation of what would eventually stand.

Primary sources for the London case study included the notes collected by investigators working to complete Charles Booth's Maps of London Poverty between 1886 and 1903, the Peabody Trust archive at the London Metropolitan Archive, which contains plans of estate buildings, photographs, records of tenants, and of repairs and refurbishments, the minutes of the Peabody Trust, and of the London County Council (LCC) and Greater London Council (GLC) planning committees. Records that are still in regular day-to-day use have been retained by the Peabody Trust at their offices, and have been inspected there. The city archives in Birmingham and Liverpool both retain partial plans of estates and individual buildings, as well as early photographs, and the minutes of the planning and housing committees which oversaw the construction and management of the estates.

Large-scale twentieth century maps of the case study areas are retained at the British Library. Census information, which would ordinarily provide information about the size of families, origins and occupations of tenants, is only currently available up to 1911; the 1920 Census Act prohibits the disclosure of individual returns before the elapse of a period of 100 years. Aggregated census data and available tenant records and street directories have provided population data after that date. Map regression using nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ordnance Survey maps has charted the physical growth of an area, the impact of subsequent additions to the landscape, and identifies buildings and other features that might have been removed from the landscape, or altered. Maps have enabled the visualisation of the layout of the study areas, and the ways in which streets and boundaries relate to each other. Mapping has been supplemented with analysis of recent and historic aerial photography from the Historic England Archive in Swindon.

### ***Limitations of data***

Street Directories were published by the Post Office and other commercial enterprises between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, giving the addresses of businesses and residents (namely the head of household; other members rarely appear), usually on a street-by-street basis. During the late nineteenth century directories began to list higher proportions of the working class population, as well as tradespeople, although the very poorest, who were often more transient, are under-represented by this source.

Census returns provide a more developed depiction of the social composition of households, streets, and communities, with the potential to apply data to individual buildings. Individual returns (rather than the analysis of aggregated results) are only currently available for the period 1801–1911 inclusive, as census data is kept confidential for 100 years. Until 1841 the information collected on census returns was minimal, and usually comprised the name and address of the head of household, with data on the members of the household, their ages, relationships and occupations only being collected from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards.

Secondary sources include local magazines, such as the Peabody News, local newspapers held on microfiche at the respective city archives, and national newspaper collections at the British Library. Tenant records and local authority school board registers supplement census data, and continue to provide useful information for the period after 1911. School board registers, especially those for later decades are usually confidential, however. The potential offered by such resources was illustrated by Michael Hunkin (2011) who used a limited sample of the Education Census, kept by the Birmingham City Education Department between the 1920s and 1970s, to investigate the social composition and movement of residents to and from Jervoise Road in Weoley Castle, an inter-war municipal housing estate in the south-west of the city, during the 1930s.

## Oral history recording

This project engages with sites, materials and events that are located firmly within living memory, and so there is a wide availability and diversity of sources. Ethnographic data adds another dimension to a study of what is often seen as archaeologically unremarkable collections of buildings – social housing estates. Just as documentary and archaeological sources can contradict one another, oral history recording adds a third strand to an exchange that has been characterised as a ‘conversation’ (Beck and Somerville 2005, 470–1). The collection of oral tradition was a feature of early archaeological work, but as with any other type of source, the ‘trustworthiness’ of oral testimony has continued to be questioned due to its reliance on memory and intergenerational transmission (Jones and Russell 2012, 271).

In the fields of heritage conservation and public archaeology, greater emphasis has been placed on the meanings and values attached to the past, and this has led to the revival of interest in oral traditions. This has occurred particularly in areas such as urban archaeology, where members of the public have been able to engage with the production of site narratives through oral history testimonies, and have in turn ‘expressed their own interpretive frameworks, frequently contrary to those developed by professional archaeologists’ (Jones and Russell 2012, 272). In this research, oral testimonies have not been used to test the accuracy of documentary sources and built record, but to enhance understanding of space. The contradictions between all kinds of evidence are likely to illuminate the confused and negotiated nature of social life. Beck and Somerville have reflected that in interdisciplinary projects, archaeology is often the dominant discipline, to which oral history contributes in a one-way fashion, namely proving the results of the archaeological component ‘correct’, yet on the contrary, oral historical and memory approaches can destabilise existing grand narratives and question the assumptions that have underpinned archaeological narratives (Jones and Russell 2012, 267).

William Rathje’s review of Victor Buchli’s *An Archaeology of Socialism* draws attention to the fact that no detailed material records were kept of apartment renovations at

the Narkomfin Communal House, or of the arrangement of artefacts in the homes through time, so Buchli had to rely on oral testimonies contributed by residents for this information, and on attitudes towards the varying political environments under which life was lived there; 'Informants' stated attitudes and world views on their lives are... artificial negotiations to represent their lives in the ways they view as most useful in achieving their personal goals' (Rathje 2002, 146). So can archaeologists use oral historical accounts to approximate what Rathje called 'material culture realities' (Rathje 2002, 146)? Buchli acknowledges that the views and attitudes expressed by residents were negotiations through which to present their lives, but Rathje would rather that such statements were not used as 'hard data' (which might contain some objective, scientific 'truth') on the realities of the life and use of material culture at the Narkomfin.

Rodney Harrison and John Schofield have reflected on the growing use of oral history testimonies as a tool when undertaking archaeologies of the recent and contemporary past; 'Oral historical sources have the clear benefit of giving colour to the often grey architecture of the modern period; they tell us what things were like ... adding detail and personal prescriptives to the official records' (Harrison and Schofield 2010, 75). Rathje's criticism of Buchli's acceptance of oral histories, and Harrison and Schofield's summary of the benefits of including oral history recording alongside more traditional archaeological methods, seem too simplistic; the broader theoretical questions that surround oral history, namely those of the construction of narrative and sense of place, and popular notions of the past, relate directly to this research. Oral historian Alessandro Portelli (1981, 97–99) has highlighted 'what makes oral history different'; namely:

- Orality. The potential for oral sources to give information about groups whose written history is missing or distorted.
- Oral history as narrative. Part of the meaning of oral history lies in the way it is told; a few words might describe experiences which last a long time, or dwell at length on a few brief episodes.

- Subjectivity. Oral history tells us less about events, than the meanings behind them; not just the reporting of facts of what people did in the past, but also what they *wanted* to do, what they *believed* they were doing, and what they now (at the time of the interview) think they did. The importance of oral history lies not in the adherence to fact (no ‘adding colour’) but in the departure from it.

Eleanor Casella and Sarah Croucher’s review of the methodology they used in the Alderley Sandhills Project (2010, 197) reflected on the relationship between ethnographic and archaeological sources of evidence encountered during the project. On a particularistic level, the oral history recording undertaken with former residents of the cottages being excavated helped identify how specific objects and features were produced, distributed, consumed and discarded, and helped to determine trench locations, interpret stratigraphy and features and identify date ranges for artefacts excavated during the project. This descriptive use of oral history sources moved on to more analytical and interpretive uses, illuminating the relationship between the excavated features and artefacts and their broader social, economic and political contexts.

Casella and Croucher found that interviewees sometimes contributed alternative or conflicting recollections; oral history sources are not necessarily an accurate representation of the past, what Alessandro Portelli calls the ‘different credibility’ of memory, but rather what the present remembers about the past. The approach of Casella and Croucher’s project participants to oral history differed; some of the interviewees had prepared ‘set piece’ stories that could be repeated for different audiences with few variations, whereas others engaged in informal chats with the archaeologists outside of the more regulated environment of the interview. As a consequence, stories that had been imparted were sometimes withdrawn from the public record by request; there existed a blurred boundary between ‘private’ stories told in a specific context and ‘public’ stories intended for the permanent research record. This self-censorship introduced ‘silences’ in the oral history record, and created



an artificial gap between the oral historical and material evidence (Casella and Croucher 2010, 197–8).

Wendy Beck and Margaret Somerville's interdisciplinary research project involved interviewing members of the indigenous community at Yarrawarra in Australia. Interviewees were identified in consultation with the community, and interviews were conducted in small groups at events that were specially arranged and constructed for the purpose of the research. Oral interviews took place in the home, or at local organisations, using a semi-structured interviewing technique, allowing for some flexibility in the questions that were asked. Many of the events that stimulated place memories among the indigenous community were joint activities organised between the oral history and archaeology aspects of the project. Beck and Somerville were adamant that indigenous people were integrated into the research in a collaborative manner (Beck and Somerville 2005, 471–3).

The oral historian Linda Shopes (2002, 590–1) highlights the importance of conceptualising the oral history project around a focussed issue, and criticises some locally generated, community-driven projects, where interviews are typically structured around the life histories of the individual participants, rather than around specific research questions that cut across the experiences of the community. Projects which 'probe the details of everyday life and the peculiarities of place' (ibid, 591), although this project will be interested in those 'peculiarities of place', albeit within the context of a coherent group of interviews. As a contrast, Shopes highlights the fact that more scholarly projects can be too narrowly focussed, being shaped by very specific research questions that exclude unrelated areas of enquiry. An interest in details and anecdotes that support or illustrate a favoured theory might lead to other lines of enquiry being ignored. The researcher introduces their own distortions, controlling discourse by selecting those to be interviewed, shaping the interviewee's testimony by asking particular questions and reacting to answers, and then placing it into the context of their own research; perhaps attributing meanings that were not intended by the interviewee.

An increasingly popular technique used in social anthropology is 'Bimbling', a methodology where interviews are conducted in situ, in the buildings and locations where people have lived and worked. Interviews are conducted in and through a place, and so generating knowledge in a collaborative way, allowing interviewees to re-experience their connections and with the environment and to reminisce, prompting 'other life course memories associated with that individual's relationship with place' (Anderson 2004, 258). Byrne and Nugent (2004) and Harrison (2004; cited in Harrison and Schofield 2010) have used 'Bimbling' with aerial photographs of landscapes in Australia as a means to record oral accounts of areas of the landscape. Eleanor Casella and Sarah Croucher found that one of their project participants, Mrs Edna Younger, used the excavated features at Alderley Edge as 'anchor points for her recollections, with her memories being overlaid on the excavated remains (Casella and Croucher 2010, 198). John Schofield's fieldwork at Strait Street in Valetta, Malta involved locals returning to the former bars and clubs where they had worked, 'unlocking memories and stories, that together revealed values and meanings attached to places on the street' (Schofield and Harrison 2010, 77). This research has drawn on some of the elements that have characterised the above studies; using maps, plans and photographs as part of the oral history recording, on location; mapping memory and placing narrative in the context of depictions of place and landscape.

Oral history testimonies have provided insights into how estates were supposed to function (as planned environments) and how they actually did function, and have been compared and contrasted with building biographies for each of the case study areas. Rather than relying on physical evidence from buildings and landscapes as the primary source of evidence, oral history testimonies have been integrated with the results of documentary research and built heritage recording. In addition to the use of existing oral histories held at the British Library, Birmingham Central Library, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, the Museum of London, the London Metropolitan Archive and the Social and Community History Collections of the Museum of Liverpool for secondary analysis, oral history interviews have been undertaken specifically for this project. Participants, who were long-standing local residents, were recruited from local community groups, namely the Peabody Trust's Community Centre in Bethnal Green,

the New Heights community centre in Kingstanding, and the Eldonian Village Community Centre in Liverpool. Documentary research and interviews with residents in these areas highlighted the historical and current points of connection, tension and alienation within the communities. Until its closure in November 2014 and the transfer of recordings to local archive services, the North West Sound Archive in Clitheroe was the regional repository for oral history testimonies relating to Liverpool and the surrounding area, however the archive did not contain any recordings pertaining to the Bevington Street Area or Eldonian village. No diaries relating to any of the three case study areas were kept by participants in the Mass Observation projects, now archived at the University of Sussex. A greater understanding of the provenance and context of the existing oral history collections has been gained, in order to better evaluate the contribution they can make to this project; who conducted the interviews, for what reason, and when? What were the broad assumptions and specific questions that informed the enquiry?

### ***Oral History Questions***

The questions asked of the interviewees depended on context. General questions were asked of all interviewees, in order to establish a context for the interview, but the oral history recording did not comprise a series of life history interviews, of the kind that were collected for the BBC and British Library's 'The Century Speaks' millennium project (British Library, n.d.), with each interview being undertaken over a period of many hours. Instead, the specific questions that comprised each interview depended on individual circumstances, such as the interviewee's relationship with the local authority or landlord, or the amount of time spent living in social housing. The answers that interviewees gave then opened up other avenues for research.

Project participants were long-standing estate residents or former residents, with an existing relationship to the community. This approach did, however, mean excluding those who were relative newcomers to the estates, those who had moved further away, and those who did not have a residential relationship with the estates; namely policy makers, estate managers, social workers and local institutions. While interviewing a greater range of participants with varying views and experiences of

engaging with social housing would have extended the scope of the project, and may have provided further insight into the internal complexity of the communities under study, those insights would not have been in such great detail; an understanding of the experiences of non-residents as they relate to this research has been gained from the secondary analysis of existing oral history archives and documentary research.

The oral history testimonies provided insight at the scale of:

- The home
- The individual street or building
- The neighbourhood
- The estate
- The world outside the estate. Work, shopping, leisure. Family and friends.

The oral history questions were targeted at each of these scales. In contrast to the built heritage recording, which concentrated on the physical manifestation of late nineteenth and early twentieth century concepts of the modern and new in the built environment of social housing, the oral history interviews with residents targeted how perceptions of home, and its place in the wider landscape of the housing estate, have evolved. Linda Shopes (2002, 596) draws attention to the importance of approaching interviews in a spirit of critical enquiry; 'this means asking the hard questions that may cause discomfort, that address difficult or controversial topics that may reveal ruptures in the community'. While the aim was to avoid causing interviewees discomfort, and instead for them to find the process interesting and useful – this did mean asking questions that touched on issues of money, rent, expectations and values, exclusion, gender dynamics and social divisions within the community.

Interview topics included:

- Biographical information; date and place of birth, what their parents' and their own main jobs were, placing subsequent information in its social context.
- Where they lived before moving onto the estate, and what it was like.

- What their present home was like when they moved in, and what they thought of it.
- Have they carried out any building work or decorating on their home?
- What did they do on their first day living on the estate?
- Family and friends who live nearby.
- Describe a typical day on the estate now – from when they get up until they go to bed.
- Leisure and social life (clubs and societies, gardening)
- Shopping.
- What happens when friends and family come to visit.
- Favourite room in the house/flat.

As this project involved non-clinical research concerning human subjects, a project proposal and ethics approval form were submitted and ethical approval was obtained from the Departmental Ethics Officer for the conduct of oral history interviews. The audio recordings were collected using a solid-state recorder, which produced archive-stable WAV files. Once recordings were made, written summaries were produced which broke each recording into 5-minute segments, and a description was written for each segment; this allowed for only material necessary to the research to be transcribed. Where participants have agreed, the WAV files and written summaries will be archived with the British Library Sound Archive, as the case study sites are spread across the country; this enables the use of a single series of reference numbers for recording and archiving.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has examined the methodologies used to consider the three social housing estates that form this thesis's case studies, and has considered what it means to take a distinctly archaeological approach when undertaking archaeologies of the recent past. Whether extending the use of classic archaeological methods to modern material, or focusing on an archaeological engagement with contemporary society,

archaeologists undertaking contextual and interpretive archaeologies of the recent past face the problems associated with an abundance of data. Contemporary archaeologists also face the difficulties associated with examination of the familiar; Buchli and Lucas's 2001 study of a recently abandoned council flat has been criticised for making assumptions about the meanings of objects to others, because of their familiarity. Barb Voss has stated that archaeologies of the contemporary past call into question the methods and fundamental assumptions that archaeologists make about the relationship that people have with society and the material world, but also suggesting that we are at risk of undertaking an archaeology of 'us'.

This study aims to consider the ongoing impacts of the built environment and past decisions made about it, both in the past and the present, while making use of methods that reflect the collaborative nature of contemporary archaeology, borrowing methods and approaches from the humanities and social sciences. The following three chapters set out the case study areas researched for this thesis, namely the Warren Farm Estate in Kingstanding, Birmingham; the Bevington Street area of Vauxhall, Liverpool; and the Peabody Trust estate in Bethnal Green, London.

## **Chapter Four: Warren Farm Estate, Kingstanding, Birmingham**

### **Introduction**

The Warren Farm Estate, one of several large housing estates in Birmingham's outer suburbs, was constructed to meet the housing needs of the early 1930s; the political and cultural context of the time is embedded in the fabric of the estate.

Photographic recording of the estate's buildings was undertaken, and archived plans of individual buildings and the wider estate were examined. In addition to existing oral history interviews archived at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, three oral history interviews were undertaken with long-standing residents of the Warren Farm Estate, Kingstanding:

- Elsie Judd. Elsie was born in her home in Wanstead Grove in Kingstanding in 1932. After her parents died she took on the tenancy of the house, and then purchased the house from Birmingham City Council under its own 'Right to Buy' scheme in the 1970s.
- Muriel Cowan. Muriel was born in Dublin in 1934 and moved to Birmingham with her husband when she 21. Initially Muriel lived in Aston, and then moved to an inter-war maisonette in Yardley. They then moved to a terraced house in Lozells, with an outside lavatory and no bathroom, and were re-housed in Kingstanding when their house was earmarked for demolition in 1972. Muriel and her husband purchased their home in Cranbourne Road from Birmingham City Council in the late 1970s.
- Kathleen McCarty. Kathleen was born in Aston in 1929 and has lived in her house in Danesbury Crescent since the age of four; her parents brought the house from the city council in the 1970s.

## History of housing provision in Birmingham

The city saw a large increase in its population as a consequence of industrial development in metal trades and engineering during the nineteenth century, drawing in migrants from the surrounding counties and elsewhere in Europe. In 1700 the population of Birmingham was 15,000 (Meller 2001, 226); by 1801 the city's population was nearly 85,000 and over 700,000 in 1901 (Figure 13).

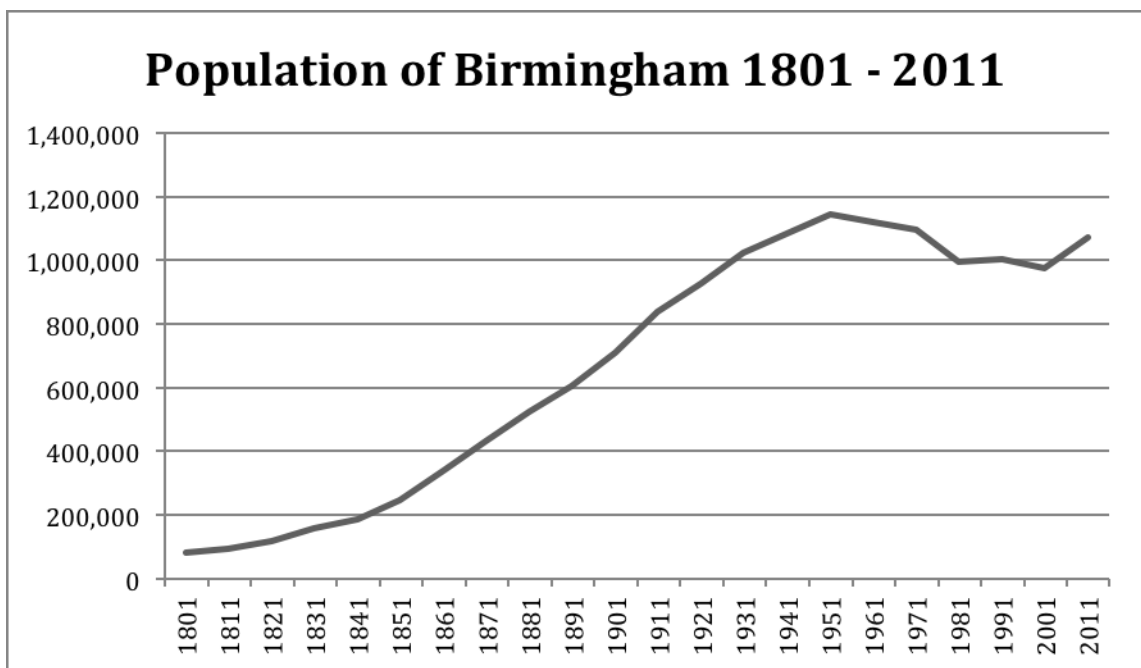


Figure 13. The population of Birmingham between 1801 and 2011, from census data (Source: University of Portsmouth. [www.visionofbritain.org.uk](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk)).

The rapid expansion of Birmingham's population during the nineteenth century resulted in the construction of housing of poor quality, and the overcrowding of that housing. The poor required cheap accommodation close to the city's food markets and sources of sometimes-irregular employment.

During the 1890s the Birmingham Corporation (the forerunner of the city council), along with the local authorities of other major towns and cities, sought to find a way to house the poor, in healthy and comfortable housing but at a lower rental than that charged by commercial and semi-philanthropic landlords (Morton 1991, 19–22).



From the 1870s onwards the municipalisation of gas and water supplies in Birmingham, the demolition of areas of the city centre and the construction of a commercial and banking district around Corporation Street and Colmore Row 'gave Birmingham a new sense of its civic identity' (Mellor 2001, 226). The clearance of areas of poor housing for this civic construction during the late nineteenth century did not require that new housing should be constructed in its place, and so the displaced poor further crowded into the available accommodation in the centre of the city (Chinn 1999, 5).

Large areas of terraced housing were developed on the outskirts of the city by speculative developers during the decades before the First World War, but this housing was aimed at the skilled labouring classes, not those who were in desperate need of housing. The city undertook some reconditioning of 'slum' housing between 1901 and 1913; 2,700 houses were reconditioned in order to improve facilities and sanitation, with bay windows installed to give additional daylight to living rooms. Areas of dense housing were 'thinned out' and private landlords were encouraged to upgrade their property, all funded by ratepayers. Broadly, however, the City of Birmingham saw that its task was to plan and facilitate development, leaving building and the associated financial risks, to private developers (Morton 1991, 25). Charitable organisations also implemented their own schemes, such as COPEC (Conference on Politics, Economics and Citizenship) who established a House Improvement Society in 1925, and began with the refurbishment of 19 back-to-backs in Pope Street, in the city's Jewellery Quarter; the houses were re-roofed, re-plastered and redecorated, and given a gas and cold water supply. A total of 355 homes were refurbished by COPEC in 19 schemes. 'Anyone sufficiently interested can identify the 355 houses taken over by the Society [COPEC] in the Central Wards. Their distinctive characteristic is green paint, and they also stand out from the drabness of their neighbours on account of their tidy and clean appearance. Where there were dismal and unhygienic courts, there are now gay little gardens; where there were dingy, airless rooms, adequate windows now give access to sun and air' (Bournville Village Trust 1941, 10).

## **Bournville Village Trust**

The Bournville Village Trust played an important role in the provision of social housing in Birmingham. The chocolate magnate and philanthropist George Cadbury established Bournville Village Trust (BVT) in 1900 to manage the Bournville Estate, the model housing development created next to the Cadbury's chocolate factory on the southern outskirts of Birmingham. The village would house many of his factory workers, but homes were also available for others to rent or buy. BVT developed wider objectives, including the amelioration of the living conditions of the working class in Birmingham and elsewhere in Britain. These philanthropic aims were achieved through the activities of its own research department, established in 1935 with a brief to research and report on national and international perspectives on housing, town planning, policies and schemes (Berry 2013, 4). This shift to a campaigning role, from having been primarily concerned with the provision of its own properties, was reflected in the preparation of publications, photography and exhibitions (James and Sadler 2004, 8) but its aims were not necessarily achieved through the provision of homes that were affordable to anyone other than the skilled working class.

For George Cadbury, the Bournville Estate had become a model of 'how working people could be housed in pleasant and healthy surroundings, without being the objects of philanthropy, and how the evils he had encountered in nineteenth century Birmingham could be avoided' (Bournville Village Trust 1941a, 1). BVT pursued their objectives by undertaking 'research into matters affecting the re-planning of the City of Birmingham' and the housing needs of central areas of the city. BVT published their research and proposals in well-illustrated and attractive volumes, involving high profile photographers and journalists such as Humphrey Spender of Mass Observation and Bill Brandt (James and Sadler 2004, 8).

In 1939 BVT commissioned Brandt to capture life in Birmingham's back-to-backs and cottage estates. The photographs were intended to provide visual evidence of the need to improve housing and sanitation in the city, and to contrast the conditions in Birmingham's back-to-backs with life on the new cottage estates, particularly the

Kingstanding estates and the Weoley Castle Estate, another of Birmingham Corporation's large municipal housing estates, located on the southern side of the city. Brandt's photos formed a narrative sequence relating to the design, construction and location of housing, and his photographs reflected the light, ventilation, space (in and around the home), recreation, and new opportunities for the tenants of the estate, presented as the answer to the problems of crowded and insanitary urban life.

Brandt drew comparisons between the urban slums and new suburban municipal housing in his photographs for BVT, taking photographs of activities and situations common to both forms of housing (Figure 14). Images drew attention to shared identities such as that of 'housewife', but also to the differences in their homes – the insanitary back-to-back versus the light and spacious sculler-kitchen, or the cramped urban living room versus the sunny garden (Berry 2013, 5–6). Images featured the residents of the homes that Brandt photographed, but in settings that were posed, and manipulated through use of lighting – to emphasise the darkness of insanitary slum housing, and the positive domesticating effects of good quality suburban housing on working-class families.

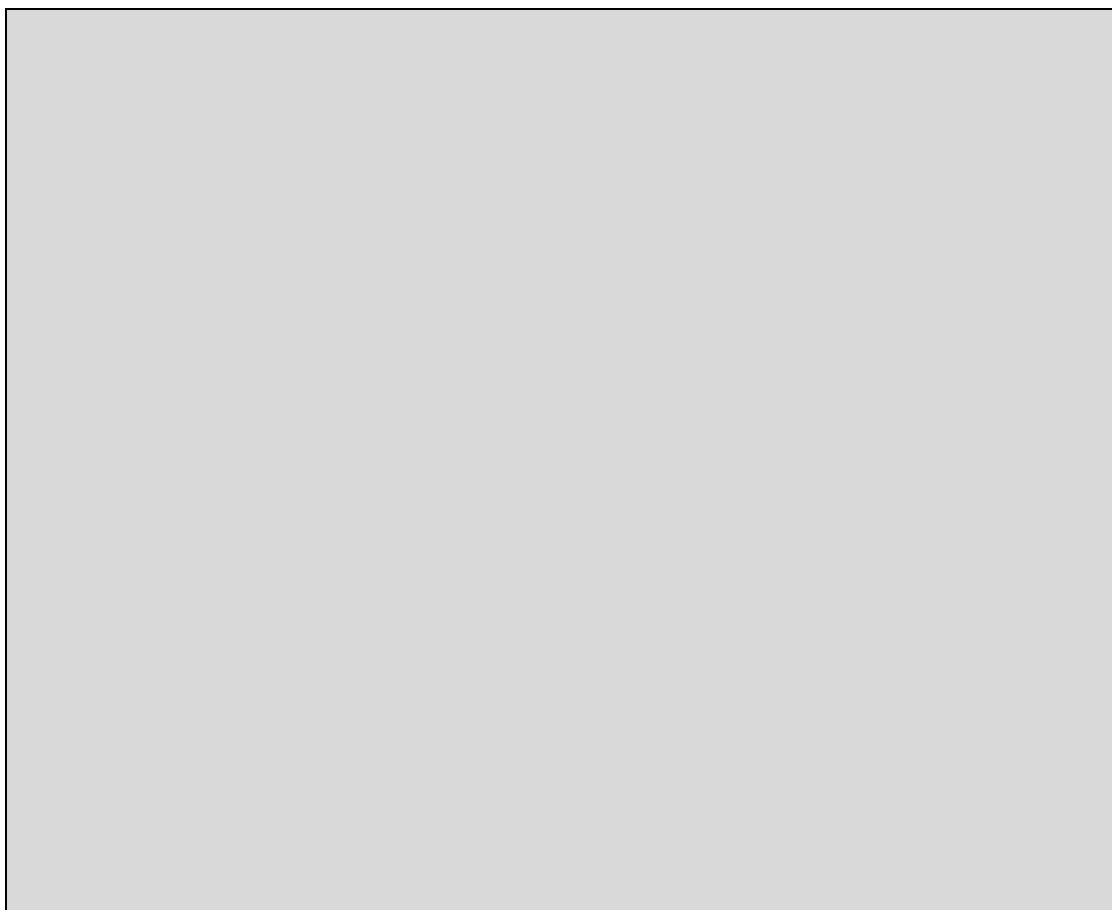


Figure 14. Photographs by Bill Brandt for the Bournville Village Trust, 1939. Top row: the scullery of a back-to-back house in Hockley, Birmingham (left, BVT 3FB3) and the kitchen of new house in Kingstanding (right, BVT 3FW1). Bottom row: the living room of a back-to-back house in Small Heath, Birmingham (left, BVT 3FS6) and the rear garden of a new house in Kingstanding (right, BVT 3FW11). All © Bill Brandt Archive and Bournville Village Trust.

## **Need for housing**

The Birmingham Corporation invested in some small schemes of social housing during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries, such as the Ryder Street and Lawrence Street cottages (Figure 15) constructed by the corporation in 1889 and 1891, which comprised 103 three-bedroom houses (Morton 1991, 18). The houses were demolished during the 1970s and the land developed as part of the expansion of Aston University.



Figure 15. Terrace A, Lawrence Street, Birmingham, by Phyllis Nicklin, 1968 (University of Birmingham: Birmingham's Buildings and Urban Topography collection: BB0128)

The First World War encouraged a new set of parameters in the provision of social housing. Politicians and the public saw public housing schemes as a reward for the sacrifice made by troops returning from the First World War, and by those who had endured sacrifices on the Home Front. The provision of improved housing was designed not just for ameliorating the conditions of slum-dwellers, but also those of ex-servicemen and the skilled working classes. The 1916 Easter Rising and the 1917 Russian Revolution raised the prospect of political unrest, communism and revolution, which have been cited as a further reason for the government to support the construction of new mass housing (Swenarton 1981; 2005). The summer of 1917 had seen a strike of engineering workers and widespread political unrest, the cause of which was found to be the shortage of housing (Swenarton 1981, 70–72).

The Housing Act of 1924 ensured that national government made money available for the construction of homes, and the city of Birmingham became the largest provider of council housing in the country (Meller 2001, 222). The city did this through building 'cottage estates' on former farmland around the perimeter of the city, the first of

which, the Pineapple Farm Estate in Stirchley, in the southern suburbs of the city, was completed in 1921, before the 1924 Act. The estate layout was a combination of straight roads, circles and crescents with open spaces, and houses built in blocks of varying length and number to break up frontages, a change from the parallel terraces that comprised much of Birmingham's inner suburbs. In the external appearance of the buildings and semi-rural locations, the cottage estates were inspired by the garden city and suburb movements, and were a form of housing that were popular with tenants. Due to financial constraints, which meant that places of work, leisure facilities and shops could not be immediately relocated, the cottage estates were unable to fully embrace the garden city ideals of having a socially integrated society.

In 1924 Birmingham's Public Works and Town Planning Committees recognised that in order for people to live in comfortable, hygienic homes close to their place of work in the city centre, flats would have to be built. Housing was needed that would be cheaper to rent than the cottage estates which were being built on the city's outskirts, and life in the suburbs also increased the amount of time and money spent on travelling to work for many people. The city council agreed to build experimental blocks of flats in a central district; a former clay pit in Garrison Lane in Small Heath, adjacent to the Birmingham City Football Club ground at St Andrews, was chosen. 180 flats were constructed, in 14 three-storey blocks, close to factories and other places of employment. Despite the provision of private bathrooms, electric lighting, and gas supplies for cooking and heating, these proved deeply unpopular with tenants; the weekly rents were over 8 shillings (Chinn 1999, 65), more than those living in inadequate housing were used to paying, and being similar (outwardly, at least) to the tenement blocks that many people in towns and cities were trying to leave.

### **Taking influences from elsewhere: deputation to central Europe**

In August 1930 the Birmingham Corporation sent a deputation, comprising the Lord Mayor, the general manager of the Estates Department, and members of the Estates and Public Works Committees, to study tenements and flats in Germany, Czechoslovakia and Austria in order to see if any lessons could be learned regarding

housing provision in Birmingham; it was the first British local authority to do so (Meller 2001, 235).

The deputation's report included detailed descriptions, plans and photographs of housing in Hamberg, Berlin, Prague, Frankfurt and Vienna (Figure 16), and concluded that while the ideal housing solution for the city would be to build single houses with garden plots, available space and finance would not allow it, and it would be impractical, being far from places of employment and other facilities in the city (City of Birmingham 1930). Much could be learned from the continent, where blocks of flats had sun-lit balconies, spacious courtyards and gardens, and central laundry and social facilities, therefore the City Corporation should build a decent quantity of flats, with amenities, in the city centre.

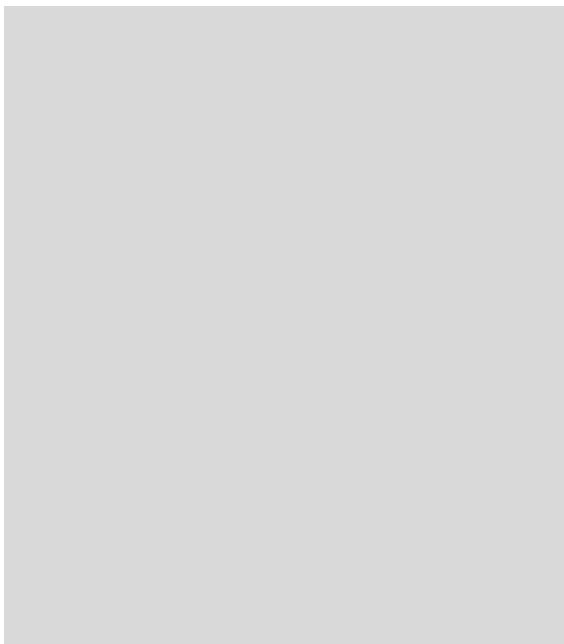


Figure 16. Tenement building with private balconies, Vienna (City of Birmingham, 1930).

The Birmingham Corporation did (eventually) build some flats inspired by their visit to Europe; St Martin's Flats, close to the centre of the city, were opened by the then Queen Elizabeth in 1939. Colleagues left behind in Birmingham were not convinced; so suburban cottage estates characterised much of the city's social housing provision during the inter-war period. The Warren Farm Estate, comprising 4,802 homes, was one such development, and was constructed on what was open farmland. The

Birmingham Corporation also constructed estates at the same time on the land of Kettlehouse Farm, to the north-west, and on Witton Lodge Farm to the immediate south. By 1932 Kingstanding was home to over 30,000 people, and collectively was the largest municipal estate in England, outside London.

The flats that the city council had begun to build in the centre of Birmingham proved unpopular with tenants who were too used to living in close proximity to neighbours and lodgers in the city's courts of back-to-back housing; the flats constructed by the Birmingham Corporation in 1927 at Garrison Lane, near the centre of the city, were known locally as 'The Mansions', a name that tenants soon changed to 'The Barracks' (Sutcliffe 1974, 192). In contrast the cottage estates situated on the edge of the city were seized upon with enthusiasm; Mick Hinton, who moved to Kingstanding as a child, described his new surroundings as 'Shangri-La' (Mick Hinton, 1999: BM&AG: R1281–1282). In deciding to build suburban cottage estates rather than flats, one particular idea of what it meant to live a comfortable and modern life, modelled on utopian ideals of central European housing, was rejected in favour of another.

### **Taking influences from elsewhere: the Garden City movement**

The garden city movement provided the initial inspiration for interwar suburban cottage estates across the country. Garden cities, first devised by Ebenezer Howard in 1898, were intended to be self-supporting, planned communities, with areas for residences, agriculture and industry, a reaction against the increasingly sprawling nature of towns and cities. This gave rise to the garden suburb, an environment which should cater for all classes of people, should have low housing density, wide tree-lined roads, woods and public gardens, and quiet. With Barry Parker, the Architect and Town Planner Raymond Unwin wrote a pamphlet for the Fabian Society, *Cottage Plans and Common Sense* (1902), which advocated the adaptation of house plans to best suit their aspect, and more efficient use of space in the homes of garden cities and suburbs. Garden suburbs still relied on existing urban infrastructure, but were built on green-belt farmland on the edge of the city, increasing the geographical isolation of such estates.



## The development of Kingstanding

By 1918 Birmingham was experiencing a housing shortage, made worse by the war-time influx of workers to munitions and armaments factories, a shortfall of 12,000 dwellings (Cherry 1994, 114). The construction of the Warren Farm Estate at Kingstanding formed part of the first wave of massive investment in council housing the city made before and after the Second World War. The City Corporation purchased greenfield sites around the outer rim of the city, expanding its boundaries to build low densities of housing.



Figure 17. The area later occupied by Kingstanding, shown on an Ordnance Survey map of 1921

Between 1919 and 1939 50,268 municipal homes were built in Birmingham, housing approximately 200,000 people. Fifteen of the estates were particularly large, and accommodated more than 1,000 homes (Table 1; Meller 2001, 228). A further 54,536 houses were built by private enterprise; most private and municipal homes were constructed on estates spread around the outer rim of the city. There was a high demand for private houses because of a fall in building costs, low interest rates for

loans (especially those offered by Building Societies). The unemployment rate in Birmingham was also lower than in other cities, and wages were increasing for those who were in work (Briggs 1952).

Name of estate	Number of dwellings
<b>Warren Farm, Kingstanding</b>	<b>4,802</b>
Fox Hollies and Gospel Farm, Hall Green	3,762
Lea Hall, Stechford	3,486
Weoley Castle, Selly Oak	2,718
Billesley Farm, Yardley Wood	2,442
Marlborough House and Fast Pits, Yardley	2,171
Allen's Cross, Northfield	2,161
<b>Kettlehouse, Perry Barr</b>	<b>1,500</b>
<b>Witton Lodge Farm, Perry Barr</b>	<b>1,374</b>
Batchelor's Farm and Norton Boys' Home	1,360
Tyseley Farm and Spring Road	1,350
Pype Hayes, Erdington	1,344
Kent's Moat	1,227
Dad's Lane, King's Heath	1,114
Heybarn Farm, Small Heath	1,041

Table 1. Birmingham's principal municipal estates, constructed between 1919 and 1939; the three estates that comprised social housing provision in Kingstanding are highlighted in bold (source: Developing Birmingham, 1989).

The housing estates at Kingstanding were built on one of these greenfield sites, on areas of former farmland at Kettlehouse Farm, Warren Farm and Witton Lodge Farm (Figure 17). The resulting estates were constructed at a density of 12 houses to an acre, and owed much to the garden city movement, but without the 'social mix' that the movement had originally aspired for (Meller 2001, 222). Instead, Kingstanding was a product of the economic, social and political factors of the time, and continued a nineteenth-century tradition of social segregation in suburban development; private

housing was constructed in Kingstanding, but was focussed along the main arterial routes, located away from the contemporary social housing.

The new estates constructed on the outskirts of Birmingham introduced a new design element to the city, what Gordon Cherry criticised as ‘a complex geometric pattern of straight roads intersected by circles and crescents made for a loose, open layout, often wasteful of land, and, with poor landscaping, bleak and lacking in intimacy’ (Cherry 1994, 114), residents leaving behind everyday contacts of the inner city, and facilities, for long empty streets of housing with few focal points (Meller 2001, 238).

Although Kingstanding (and Birmingham as a whole) was hit by unemployment in the 1930s, the city corporation was not unusual in setting moderately high rents for ‘respectable working class’ tenants on its new housing estates. In London, the Borough of St Pancras had demolished slum housing and constructed new flats in their place at Walcot House and Aldenham House in Euston, completed in 1928. The Borough could boast:

‘Borough Councils had built houses for the respectable, they attracted the nice people, and the people for whom the houses were intended never got there; but in this instance those who had lived in the old houses were now living in the new – a genuine transition’ (St Pancras [Metropolitan Borough] 1928, cited in [municipaldreams.wordpress.com](http://municipaldreams.wordpress.com)).

Despite the rents charged to tenants at Kingstanding being higher than those charged for back-to-back and other older housing in the city (see below), oral history testimonies indicate that not all of the tenants were drawn from the ‘skilled and respectable working classes’ and were re-housed from areas of cleared ‘slum’ housing, including Elsie Judd, interviewed as part of this research, and whose parents and neighbours were re-housed from Aston. High unemployment continued on the estate, exacerbated by the distance that the unemployed who were living there now had to travel to find work or claim dole.

## Design of housing

At Kingstanding the garden suburb was reduced to a low-cost formula, with houses being largely identical in plan; some were pre-fabricated in factories and assembled on site (Meller 2001, 235). The original plan form of each house on the Warren Farm Estate was broadly similar, but architects made an effort to bring variety to the built environment by arranging the houses in pairs or short terraces of four or six, some laying out of cul-de-sacs, and by treating the exterior of the buildings in a variety of ways. All of the houses were constructed of local red brick, laid in stretcher bond, and had tiled pitched roofs; some houses were constructed using pre-fabricated concrete panels. Many houses were covered with cement render, scored to resemble ashlar masonry, and painted. Features were also made of windows visible in gable ends, window boxes were provided, decorative timber 'shutters' (which didn't serve a practical function) were features of some homes, and decorated canopies and door surrounds made a feature of the front doors, distinctiveness being marked instead by the use of coloured paint. Not all of the features that the architects designed and implemented have lasted, either through failure to maintain them, or because homes that had been taken into private ownership through the right to buy scheme had been subject to building work. Attempts were made to follow some of the Garden Suburb design principles, setting houses back from the road and using hedges for property boundaries. The provision of large gardens and the enthusiasm for gardening during the estate's early decades could perhaps be seen as a material expression of the ideals of self-sufficiency, but the resulting housing still managed to look rather like the long straight inner city terraces that architects and planners wished to move away from (Figure 18).

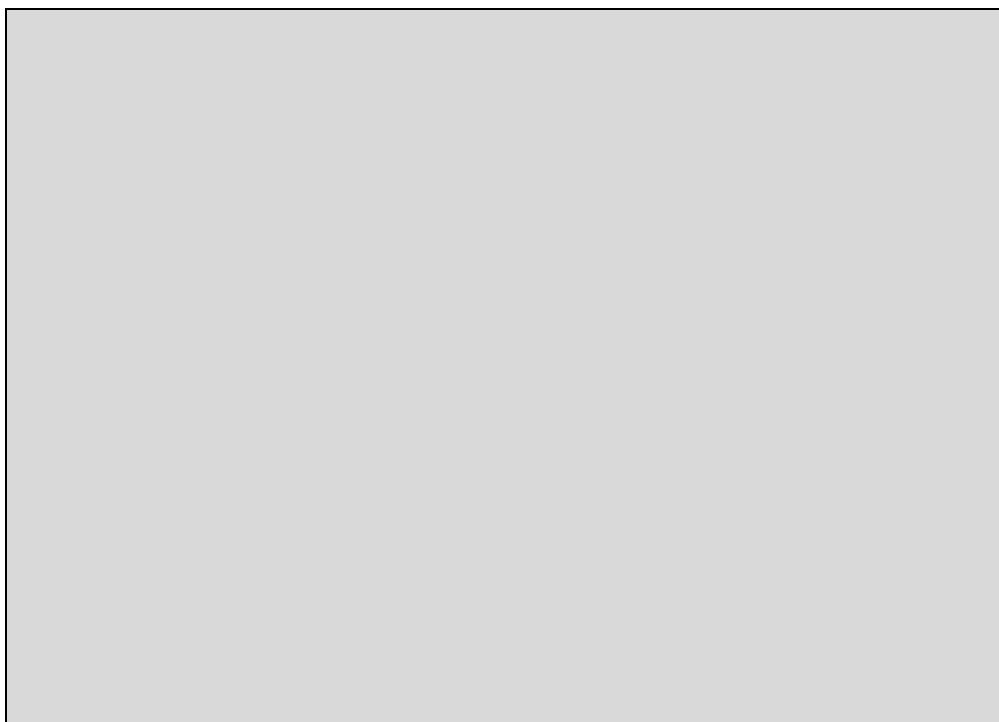


Figure 18. Terraced housing in Hurlingham Road, Kingstanding, 1932. Birmingham Libraries Local Studies and History Dept, LSH Works Photo Survey WK-K10-0022 (3/1253).

In Birmingham the provision of such technologically up-to-date homes did not come cheap, and the rents charged for these homes, as had been the case at the Garrison Lane flats provided by the city corporation a few years before, were beyond the means of the very poor, so did not directly ease living conditions for those who needed the help most. This was a common problem among the newly-constructed housing estates of the time (Meller 2001, 238). During the 1930s the weekly rent for a back-to-back house with three rooms in the Summer Lane neighbourhood, immediately north of the city centre, was 6s per week (Chinn 1999, 67). At the same time the weekly rent of Elsie Judd's childhood home in Kingstanding was 10s 6d, the equivalent of £88 in 2014 when related to average earnings (Officer and Williamson 2014). The 6d was an extra payment for a hot water boiler, installed behind the coal fire in the living room; the houses at Kingstanding were built with only a cold water supply as standard, and Elsie's parents had to decide whether they could afford the extra bill.

Many residents did arrive in Kingstanding as a result of slum clearances, however, perhaps indicating that residents were willing to make a substantial financial sacrifice in return for improved housing conditions. The estates at Kingstanding were completed during the Great Depression, so many tenants were unemployed and living on public assistance, having left behind friends and extended family networks (Meller 2001, 222, 234).

The houses on the estate were built without garages, but some tenants soon applied to the city corporation for permission to erect them on their garden plots, almost as soon as they moved onto the estate. Plans submitted for planning consent between 1930 and 1932 indicate that standard pre-fabricated garages could be erected by the Birmingham Corporation for an additional weekly rent. Car ownership was rare in Kingstanding, but bicycle and motorcycle ownership was widespread; ownership of some form of vehicle was a necessity for tenants who worked a long distance away from the estate.

One of the principles of Garden Suburb design was that homes should be individually designed in order to make best use of their location, but in order to reduce the costs incurred in designing the estate, like many other mass housing schemes of the inter-war period and since, only two basic house plans were produced, both containing three bedrooms. Larger houses had a hall with stairs leading to the first floor and a front parlour, rear living room, and kitchen on the ground floor, and three bedrooms and a bathroom on the first floor.

The smaller houses had a living room, lit by a bay window at the front of the house, and a kitchen/scullery and bathroom on the ground floor. As the practicality of the mass-production of homes meant that the Garden Suburb ideal of constructing individual homes to make best use of light could not be followed, the provision of a bay window in what was intended to be most-used room in the house would go some way towards meeting these ideals. A door at the rear of the living room led to the rear of the house, where the kitchen/scullery and bathroom were located. For semi-detached houses and those located at the end of terrace, a small opening in the

exterior of the side of the house led to an under-stairs storage area, where coal deliveries could be made, without bringing dirty sacks through the house. As was also the case in the Bevington Street area in Liverpool, and the Peabody Trust tenements in Bethnal Green, cupboards and dressers were fitted throughout the houses to enable residents to keep their dwellings tidy. The first floor of each house contains three bedrooms, two of which were heated by fireplaces when built.

Both house types were arranged in pairs or short terraces of four or six. Such a narrow range of plan forms did not allow for very small households, who might not make use of all the rooms in the house, or very large multi-generational households for whom three bedrooms would be insufficient. Before moving to Kingstanding in 1930, Elsie Judd's parents had lived in 'in one of them little back houses' in Aston, a district of Birmingham a mile north of the city centre, three miles from Kingstanding. Elsie's maternal grandmother lived with them; it was a common occurrence for elderly relatives to live with younger family members: 'I don't know whether they lived with me mom or me mom lived with me grandma'. When Elsie's parents moved into their new home, grandma came as well. Several years later Elsie's older sister was unable to get a home of her own after marrying, so had to remain in the family home, living in the back bedroom of the house with her husband and first son, until the child was nine, when they were able to move to a flat in Quinton, a suburb on the western edge of Birmingham. In order to accommodate this extension to the family, Elsie slept in a single bed in an alcove in her parents' room, her grandmother had her own small bedroom, and Elsie's brother slept on a folding bed in the living room.

In some instances, in order to meet the demand for small flats, the city council later converted the end houses of a small number of terraces into two flats, each with one bedroom, occupying the ground and first floors of the house.

Photographs of Kingstanding were published in *Architect and Building News* on the 30th of October 1931, one showing 'a typical house on the Kingstanding housing estate. Shutters and window-frames are painted in shades of vermilion, cream, and bright green, the colours being varied in each house' (Figure 19; Anon 1931, 115).



Figure 19. 'A typical house on the Kingstanding Estate' *Architect & Building News*, 30th October 1931, p115



Figure 20. One of a pair of semi-detached houses in Cranbourne Road, Kingstanding



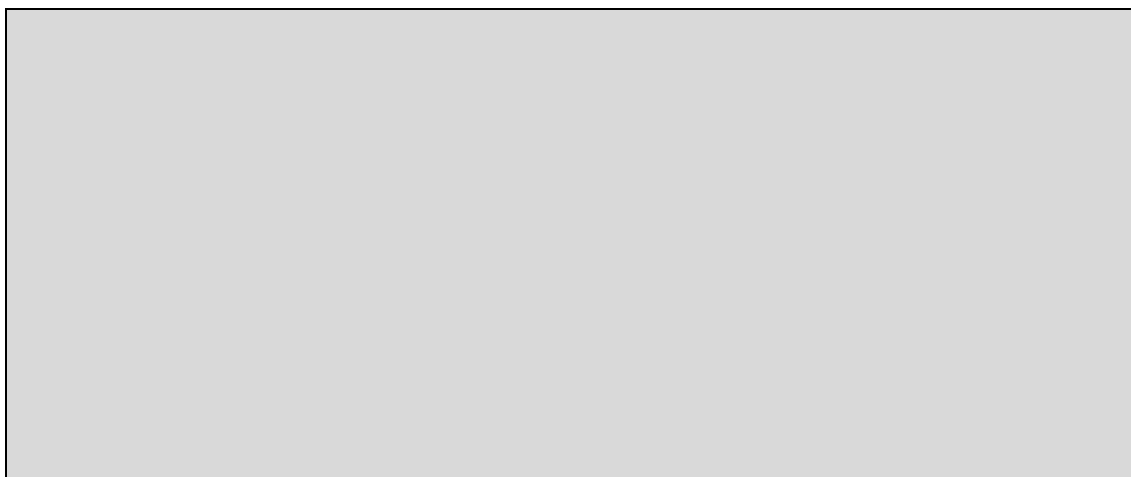


Figure 21. Example of non-parlour class of council house, from a roll of design templates in the records of Humphries & McDonald, Architects. 1927. Birmingham Archives and Heritage BA&H: MS 1599/6 (87/1978)

Each house in Kingstanding incorporated the latest standards of public health and hygiene, including an indoor lavatory and purpose-built bathroom (in the smaller house type, this was located on the ground floor, adjacent to the kitchen/scullery at the rear of the house). When the Cowan family moved from a nineteenth century terraced house with no bathroom and an outside lavatory to a house in Kingstanding in 1972, they particularly enjoyed having their own bathroom. Muriel's two sons 'thought it was like being on a luxury holiday' (Muriel Cowan). The living room, front parlour (where there was one) and bedrooms each had their own fireplace. All houses were supplied with gas and electricity, and three bedrooms were also included in the standard plan; one for the parents, and separate rooms for male and female children.

The three bedroom house was a response to the ideal family of four, an externally imposed ideal that was often not a reality for tenants; Kingstanding resident Elsie Judd was born in her house in 1932, her parents and grandmother having moved there not long before. Elsie's grandmother had her own bedroom, as did her parents, and Elsie shared the third bedroom with her sister and brother. Three generations of one family living in a single dwelling was a common familial situation, yet the ideal of the family of four went on to dictate family size, furniture and material culture in the home, creating

an active relationship between the home, its decoration and furnishings, and its inhabitants (Ryan 2011, 220).

In an interview recorded by the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in 1999, Kingstanding resident Mick Hinton described the over-crowding in his childhood home in the centre of Birmingham, and the awkwardness of sharing space with his adolescent siblings:

‘The reason we moved was because it was so over-crowded, cause where we were growing up—I mean cause I was 14 and the others [three brothers] they were all older than me, and there were two younger sisters ... so you can imagine it was getting to a stage where the family was right mixed up ... And we were very, what would you call it, not so open about sex and that sort of thing, you never heard the word really and there were many words, many things that we [laughs] didn’t know about really until you went to work’ (Mick Hinton, 1999: BM&AG: R1281–1282).

Mick Hinton also spoke of the delight his family felt when they were finally offered a new council house at Kingstanding:

‘I remember though our names had been down for a council house – which was Shangri-La really, if you could get one. We were having difficulty [leaving their existing home], but of course there was so much sickness in the place ... And then eventually we had this thing, this letter came offering this house at Kingstanding, which was like manna from heaven, as you might say’ (Mick Hinton).

In order to keep costs to a minimum the smaller standard house plan did not make provision for a parlour, the distinctive, formal space that was the status symbol of the respectable working class. Where houses have been purchased by their tenants, a benefit that was offered by Birmingham City Council in the 1970s and was accelerated under the tenants’ ‘Right to Buy’ scheme of the 1980s, some owners made additions

such as conservatories, or moved the ground floor bathroom to the first floor, and so creating a larger kitchen, enabling the living room to become the more formal entertaining space that Parker and Unwin had wished to see vanish from this type of housing. The desire to have a separate formal parlour, away from the mess and noise of the kitchen, encouraged residents in Kingstanding to use rooms in a different way from their original intention. At Elsie Judd's home, the small kitchen accommodated a table for six people, but was 'very poky', being squeezed in between the bathroom door, a storage cupboard, the sink and cooker.

The more spacious living room in the young Elsie Judd's home contained a three piece suite, wireless, and a large storage cupboard to one side of the fireplace, which was one of a number fitted when the house was built; Elsie's mother swapped the plain wooden doors for glazed doors, and kept her best cups and saucers there. A polished table was placed in the front window 'so everybody could see it, with four dining room chairs around it, with leather seats and fancy backs.' The table and chairs were for use on special occasions only, 'it had a chenille cloth on it, so we weren't allowed to put anything on it'. At Christmas the table was brought into the middle of the room, 'It was a luxury' and one that was perhaps far from Parker and Unwin's thoughts when they were considering a more utilitarian lifestyle.

## **Design of the landscape**

The overall plan for Kingstanding (Figure 22 and Figure 23) had included space for shops, churches, pubs, allotments and other social amenities, but it was intended that these would be supplied by commercial and voluntary organisations, rather than the city council. Some small groups of shops were built by the city council, at the centre of the Warren Farm estate, and at Kingstanding Circle, a road junction at the boundary of the Warren Farm and Kettlehouse Farm estates, but the second-hand furniture shops, pawnbrokers and corner shops that had been previously relied upon in areas such as Aston were missing. Instead, residents were expected to make purchases in the few local shops, or leave the estate to make most purchases, with the city centre being some five miles away. Elsie Judd's father was unemployed when the family moved to

Kingstanding, and he collected his dole money from the Labour Exchange in the centre of town, walking there and back. Even once he obtained a job with the city corporation, Elsie's father could not afford the bus fare, and so cycled to and from work each day.

Healthcare facilities were not initially provided by the local authority; in 1930 planning permission was granted for the construction of a dwelling house and doctor's surgery for Dr S D Povey, on Warren Farm Road (Birmingham Building Plans 1930: 50727). The building was still standing and in use as a health centre when the fieldwork took place in 2011.



Figure 22. A plan of the proposed Warren Farm Estate at Kingstanding, 1928. Birmingham Archives and Heritage.

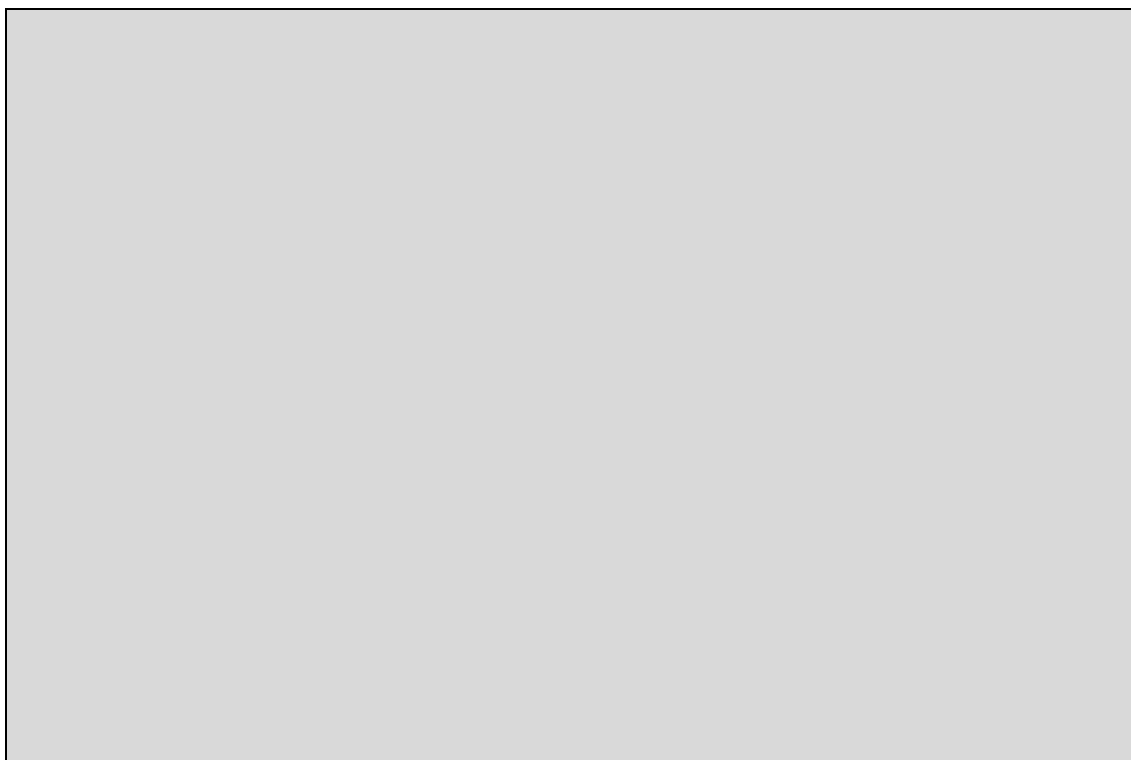


Figure 23. A detail of the green at the centre of the proposed Warren Farm Estate, Kingstanding. Shows open areas designated for development as schools, a swimming baths, community hall, public house, and other social amenities. Birmingham Archives and Heritage.

A survey undertaken in 1932 compared the facilities of the newly completed Kingstanding, and its population of 30,000, with Shrewsbury, which had a population of a similar size. Shrewsbury had '30 churches, 15 church halls and parish rooms, five other halls and two public libraries; Kingstanding had one church and one hall' (Briggs 1952, 235). Organised religion, charitable institutions and community groups played a large role in providing communal facilities for the residents of Kingstanding. In the following decades an Anglican church and Methodist chapels were opened in several locations on the estates in Kingstanding, and the Congregational Church sold the site of its chapel in Steelhouse Lane, in the centre of Birmingham, and built a new chapel in Kingstanding with the proceeds in 1934 (Meller 2001, 241). The Roman Catholic Church of Christ the King took up a prime position on the northern side of the 'village green' at the centre of the Warren Farm Estate. The Catholic Church has since developed a significant role in the social life of Kingstanding; the development of the New Heights Centre by the parish in 2004 has provided a base for pensioners' lunch

clubs, coffee mornings and exercise classes attended by some of this project's oral history interviewees, and offering a food bank, furniture for those in need and shopping for the elderly. Muriel Cowan was unable to remember many instances of those in the neighbourhood accepting help from the church before the New Heights Centre was established.

Plans for a Community Hall at Kingstanding, constructed by the City Corporation, seating 500 and acting as a focal point for the new estates and the surrounding area, were never fulfilled. The planners had left space for social facilities such as meeting halls and public houses, and while civic authorities didn't always have the resources or inclination to provide amenities, tenants did. The Perrystanding Community Association was established in 1929, when 'Kingstanding was a hopeless sea of mud' (Anon 1984, 17) for the benefit of the council tenants of Kingstanding and the private residents of Perry Barr. In June 1932 the Association issued a public appeal to raise £1,500 to erect a community hall for Kingstanding. In its appeal the Association presented a bleak picture of the facilities on the estate:

'There are as yet no public parks, no playing fields, no buildings where social, recreational, or educational gatherings can be held (other than the schools which for various reasons are often unsuitable) and no public library nearer than two and a half miles. Those who have an intimate knowledge of the district are concerned over the problems which arise when numbers of young people are deprived of the opportunity of satisfying their natural desires for organised communal life' (Anon 1984, 17).

With the addition of funds from local charities and the Cadbury family, the appeal was successful. A site at the corner of Kings Road and Kingstanding Road was leased from the Corporation and the Lord Mayor opened a small hall in January 1933. The Community Hall provided the main social and educational focus for Kingstanding residents throughout the early years on the estate; the Community Association also acquired 11 acres of land on the estate for use as sports fields (Anon 1984, 17). The residents of other estates across Birmingham petitioned the City Council for improved

facilities (in the case of the Shenley Fields estate in the south-west of the city, building their own community hall) and compiling and publishing their own community magazines (Hunkin 2011, 5).

The Kingstanding Settlement was a similar, resident-led organisation to the Perrystanding Community Association; it was established by residents who were re-housed from Aston, were familiar with such projects, and wanted one for their new area (Meller 2001, 241). With the assistance of philanthropic social workers, the Settlement constructed two large halls in Kingstanding, with a games area, lounges, workshop, committee rooms, and kitchen, and supported sports teams, an amateur dramatics society and an opera group (Anon 1984, 18). Just as elite and civic involvement in working class life, such as that of the Cadbury family, had characterised much philanthropic activity in inner-city Birmingham in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, 'the evidence from Kingstanding suggests that, even with all the physical transformations of the new estate, that cultural hegemony remained unbroken' (Meller 2001, 243).

The Ex-Servicemen's Club in Warren Farm Road held gardening competitions for local residents, and a large area of allotments, known locally as 'The Pimple', was provided. The allotments, bounded by Hurlingham Road, Sidcup Road, Finchley Road, Ellerton Road, Warren Farm Road and Danesbury Crescent, were largely built on with new housing in the 1970s and early 1980s. Two cinemas were built, in 1931 and 1935, as well as one large public house. During the interwar period breweries were enticed to close down some city centre pubs and build large 'road houses' on the new suburban estates, which could attract and supply a more mixed clientele than the inner-city 'working men's pubs'.

Public sociability and street activity were key to the emergence of a new kind of social life for people who were moved from the inner city districts to the new suburban estates, as Darrin Bayliss (2003) found with his work studying the creation of new communities on suburban inter-war housing estates in London. The longer walk to the far distant shops or the bus stop might give opportunities to stop and talk, and



informal networks of mutual support underpinned what was, for some, a new sense of community. There was a strong age and gender bias to some activities carried out in the estate. When estate residents lived in the city's back-to-back housing, washing was carried out in communal laundries or wash-houses, but on the estate washing was confined to the home, meaning increased household bills and fewer chances to socialise with neighbours.

## **Making house into home**

For those tenants who had previously lived in Birmingham's inner-city back-to-back housing, moving to a new home at Kingstanding provided a very different kind of environment. The new homes at Kingstanding contained new kinds of spaces and facilities not contained in the nineteenth-century courts of back-to-back housing that formerly characterised a large of proportion of Birmingham's housing stock.

For many new tenants at Kingstanding, making the most of the new surroundings meant learning new skills, such as gardening. Kathleen McCarty's father belonged to the Ex-Servicemen's Club in Warren Farm Road, which hosted a gardening club, awarding annual prizes for the best garden, flowers and produce. Kathleen's father, and later on Elsie Judd's brother-in-law, both became keen gardeners on moving to Kingstanding. The estate's news-sheet had gardening tips for those who wanted to learn more. Elsie's father 'wasn't a gardener, but he kept it tidy', and grew beans and kept fowl, while Muriel Cowan's husband constructed a brick shed in the garden, which was painted to 'look like a little cottage'. The regular gardening competitions encouraged tenants to look after their gardens, but regular visits made by the rent collector also served as a reminder to tenants to keep their properties in good condition.

The introduction of new housing forms was not always something to react against. Rather, the new lifestyle opportunities they presented were embraced, although perhaps not always out of choice. A 1939 survey of one of the municipal housing estates at Kingstanding found high levels of hire purchase (HP) agreements, as

residents desired to 'fit in' with their new prosperous surroundings (Soutar et al 1942, 42). Kingstanding resident Fred Heath reflected on the changing economic fortunes of the estate:

'There was a pawn shop bus of a Monday morning from the Circle at nine o'clock and it was full of women going to the pawn shop, but gradually it dropped off and off—people started to manage better with the money... and then gradually started to get better dressed. I had a proper suit for the first time in my life, so did me brothers and everywhere around, gradually people was getting better dressed and they was looking after their money better'.

Elsie Judd remembered how her parents accumulated more furniture for their living room as their financial position improved between the 1930s and 1950s: 'we got on a bit'. A sideboard and an upright piano was brought for the living room, which Elsie's father would play, and mother would polish it, 'it was her pride and joy', yet despite all this furniture 'we weren't well off'. While they were still council tenants Elsie's parents also undertook to improve the fabric of their home; Elsie's mother applied for and received a council permit to remove the coal fire grate and boiler from the living room, and installed a new, more 'modern' (although still coal-burning) grate, the implication being that what the city council issued was not modern.

The estate was designed to be occupied by a particular kind of unit, the nuclear family, and perhaps did not allow room for other kinds of extended families, or for lodgers – a common means for a family or individual to earn additional income. Indeed, tenancy conditions did not allow commercial work to be undertaken in the home, and as in Bevington Street in Liverpool and on the Peabody Trust estates, the kinds of small scale informal work that had formerly characterised working class life – taking in washing, or a lodger, for example, was simply no longer a part of life. These were major changes – not restrictions and responsibilities that would have been placed on many tenants when they were living in the 'slums' of the inner city. Estates like Kingstanding aimed to achieve new standards of health and hygiene for their residents, encouraging family-centred values, facilitating new standards of mothering

and childcare. A by-product of this focus on the nuclear family was the exclusion of lodgers, the widowed and the unmarried, and the long-established strategies that residents had to cope with poverty.

Tenants were supposed to seek permission to undertake alterations to their rented house, although many residents carried out work anyway. Kathleen McCarty's parents decorated their home, and adapted the built-in cupboard in the corner of the dining room, her father fitting glass panelled doors in order that mother could display ornaments in it. Elsie Judd stated that the rent collector would monitor the condition of the houses, reporting any bad conditions and unauthorised changes. In addition, Elsie also remembered the unannounced visits of health inspectors, who would check bedding and furniture for bugs; 'you would know who had bugs as the fumigator's lorry would come round'.

The urban theorist Alison Ravetz (2001) has pointed out that when municipal housing was first planned and built, there was no apparent need to plan for the future of estates and their inhabitants; it was assumed that estates would develop into stable and permanent settlements. Tenancy rules (such as not undertaking work, or taking in lodgers) seemed to create peaceful estates and mitigate against any disruptive behaviour by tenants – a rather paternalistic approach for councils to take, and one that didn't allow for spontaneous evolution of commercial or social enterprise to occur on the estates. Towards the end of twentieth century, urban society became less localised; estate dwellers were no longer united by working for the same large industrial employer, for example, and local authority housing increasingly housed the very poorest and jobless. The infrequent and ineffective public transport that dogged the interwar cottage estates has rarely been improved 80 years later, and leads to a narrow choice of provision in terms of access to work, social amenities, and even food, with residents relying on the few shops that an estate might offer. In Kingstanding in Birmingham, many of the allotments that initially provided fresh food to tenants were subsequently built over. Talmadge Wright (1997, 106–9) has found that inner-city social housing is often classified as a 'refuse space'; space that is physically, socially, politically and economically marginalised, and that academic and public (often

journalistic) accounts that focus on the problems within social housing often overshadow residents' own efforts to create a meaningful place and community.

### ***The Right to Buy***

Muriel, Elsie and Kathleen brought their homes in the 1970s, before the national 'Right to Buy' scheme brought in by the Conservative government in 1980. Many of Birmingham City Council's tenants brought their homes before the 1980 Housing Act was introduced; between 1966 and 1978 more than 12,000 council houses, approximately 10% of the city's social housing stock, were sold to sitting tenants, with discounts of up to 30% for long-standing tenants. Similar schemes were established by local authorities across the country, with that of the Greater London Council inspiring the commitment in the Conservative Party's 1979 manifesto.

With the passing of the 1980 Housing Act and the introduction of nation-wide 'Right to Buy' former tenants were now free (subject to planning permission) to make alterations to their homes. On the Warren Farm Estate, some former tenants chose to move their bathrooms upstairs, in order to create a larger kitchen, where the family could eat (unlike those in Kensal House); the living room could then become a more formal space. The addition of front porches and double glazed windows gave homes greater privacy. Oral history interviews with residents indicated the extent to which tenants did make changes to their homes while they were in Local Authority ownership, and also how they altered their homes after Right to Buy. Kathleen McCarty and her parents did not feel need to change their house in Danesbury Crescent upon buying it. How did they make it their own? The McCarty family had started while they were still renting from the council – Kathleen's father took pride in the garden, making topiary patterns in the privet hedges, and in keeping the house in good order.

Through the alteration of their homes, tenants were able to subvert the architects' and planners' intentions, and in the process took possession of the spaces created for them, reproducing them in ways that were more personal to them. Such an approach acknowledges the agency and status of the residents in the reproduction of their

space, in contrast to many modern architects, who took a 'year zero' approach to the planning of homes, which left little room for existing social practices.

Although houses were built as council homes, many residents have worked hard to buy their homes, refurbishing and redecorating them. Extensions were constructed, and internal alterations made to create dining rooms, larger kitchens, conservatories, and the bathroom moved upstairs. Use of ornamentation as part of original construction was unusual (this diverted funds) but is a feature of later refurbishment of homes following the 'Right-to-Buy' schemes of the 1970s to 1990s.

## **Community building**

The next chapter on the Bevington Street area and Eldonian Village in Vauxhall, Liverpool considered the experience of a transformed landscape, a part of the city that was constantly undergoing periods of renewal as the population of the area remained relatively stable. This was not the case in Kingstanding; for residents this was a new area, away from existing social, familial and work networks, and so new relationships had to be made.

Elements of older communities and neighbourhoods that were re-housed in Kingstanding remained; Elsie Judd recalled that their next-door neighbour in Kingstanding had lived in the same street in Aston as the Judd family. Moving with family and friends retained social links, but moving from 'a people-centred to a house-centred existence' (Willmott and Young 1957, 154) changed the dynamics of those links.

First impressions of estate life were not positive; the housing, amenities and infrastructure at Kingstanding had not been completed by the time the first residents moved in: 'Mum didn't like the area at first—she liked the house but she didn't like where it was because it was all fields and nothing was finished' (Elsie Judd). Elsie's account provides a sharp contrast with the images of recently completed housing in Kingstanding produced by photographer Bill Brandt in 1939. As explored above, Brandt

was commissioned by the Bournville Village Trust, in its campaigning role, to photograph life in the city's back-to-back housing and on the city's newly-completed sun-lit and airy suburban cottage estates, including the estates at Kingstanding (Figure 24; James and Sadler 2004, 5–6).



Figure 24. Home life in Kingstanding, photographed by Bill Brandt, 1939 (left: 3FW3; right: 3FB15). © Bill Brandt Archive and Bournville Village Trust.

Michael Hunkin's (2011) research into estate demographics through the Birmingham City Council education census, which was collected between 1900 and 1970, and recorded the occupations of heads of households, where families lived and where they had moved from, indicated that Kingstanding was a place of flux – in one week 36 families absconded without paying their rent. Community cohesion is affected if families are constantly moving; the oral history interviewees involved in this project are those who stayed, so only gaining one perspective.

The means by which attempts were made to construct a new community can be seen in the fabric of the built environment, for example the structures and the missionary work of the churches and philanthropic societies that were established in Kingstanding.

## **Social life on and off the estate**

For those interviewed for this project, social life today is largely played out on the estate; Elsie found that was more to do in Kingstanding now than when she was a girl, fetching groceries from nearby shops, visiting the church and the New Heights community centre. Muriel might 'toddle off for the day' with a friend to Sutton Coldfield, and also keeps busy with hobbies and charity work through the New Heights Centre; before retiring Muriel had been active in charity fundraising at Lucas's automotive components factory, undertaking sponsored silences and organising dances. Socialising with friends and colleagues would be done at social clubs attached to St Theresa's, St Francis, and St Thomas's RC parishes, all located off the estate.

Social lives have changed as the lives of the interviewees changed, as child-care, school and play took place largely on the estate, and as the amenities improved. As previously mentioned, Sue Long (who was interviewed for the British Library's Millennium Memory Bank project in 1999) missed the more communal lifestyle of the back-to-back housing where she lived until moving to Kingstanding in 1971, and the assistance with child-care from relatives and neighbours. As a child, Kathleen would go to the recreation ground in Hommerton Road, a ten-minute walk from Danesbury Crescent, where there was room to play football, she met other children, and played on the swings and roundabout. The Odeon cinema on the estate was also popular with Kathleen, Elsie and Muriel. Special days out might involve venturing further afield; Elsie and her family would go to Sutton Park for picnics on Bank Holidays.

## **Relationship between social and private housing**

Kathleen McCarty's parents took up the opportunity to buy their home from the city council in the late 1970s, before the adoption of the national Right-to-Buy scheme; doing so would make them more secure, and tenants were restricted in what they could do with a council house. Kathleen's parents, and then Kathleen herself, have carried out some work to the house, replacing the windows, fitting a new kitchen, and

keeping it decorated, but compared with other former tenants in Kingstanding, were quite restrained.

After Elsie Judd's parents died, the city council wanted to take the house back, and convert it two self-contained flats, helping to meet a need for smaller properties that had not been anticipated when the estate was originally planned and constructed. Elsie and her neighbours petitioned the council and she was allowed remain, the tenancy of the house transferring to Elsie. When the opportunity to buy the house from the city council was offered, Elsie and her husband decided to take it up. As the tenancy was in Elsie's name alone, her husband Peter had argued 'if anything happens to you [Elsie] we'd [Peter and his young brother Bernard] be out on our ear'. Elsie and Peter took out an 18-year mortgage from the city council and brought the house for £4,000.

Upon buying the house, Elsie and Peter undertook extensive alterations, spending another £2,000 on fitting new wooden-framed windows, a gas fire in the living room, moving the bathroom upstairs into the smallest bedroom, and knocking the kitchen and former bathroom through to create one large kitchen and dining room, with a DIY kitchen fitted by Peter; 'I thought I was someone because I'd got a new kitchen' (Elsie Judd).

The Cowans had been paying £7 per week rent, and in 1978 they were offered the chance to buy their house from the council, paying a £100 deposit and taking out a £5300 mortgage. Muriel and her husband had made some minor alterations as tenants; there were council limits on what you could do to a rented home. The front doors were painted different colours, but within a limited palate, and double glazed windows were installed by the council while they were still renting. But the Cowans still did what they wanted to improve their home; 'we felt proud of the house'.

Muriel's husband was a carpenter, and he fitted display cabinets on either side of the fireplace, replaced the window ledge, built another cabinet on the wall opposite the fireplace, moved the door from the living room to the kitchen to the former pantry under the stairs, and moved the ground floor bathroom into a rear extension, creating



a larger kitchen. The previous tenant was an elderly woman and the bathroom had been refurbished, but Muriel and her husband found that the quality of work undertaken was not good. Muriel and her husband took down the ceiling in the living room and found bricks missing from the chimney. She was glad that she and her husband had done so much work to their home; 'I know what's in this house now. It's my dirt, nobody else's'.

The large estates built on Birmingham's outskirts stood as separate self-contained environments, but alongside private housing developments built on similar lines to social housing; at Kingstanding, private housing was built along Kingstanding Road, the main road leading through the area. The construction of social housing in Birmingham during the interwar period transformed the physical environment of the city to one of low-rise suburbs. The physical environment would be changed again with the appointment of Herbert Manzoni as the City Engineer in 1935, who was responsible for the post-World War II urban regeneration of central areas of the city, creating a transport network built around the car, and the accelerated demolition of inner city housing, which increased the problems of housing the poorest. Tall blocks of flats were constructed to accommodate those residents cleared from the inner city, and the social clubs and associations that had developed in Kingstanding could not do so in blocks of flats (Meller 2001, 250).

### **Council vision vs. reality**

During the period immediately after the First World War there was concern about the potential for a culture gap emerging between tenants (and the conditions they were used to living in) and the new housing on expanding suburban estates (Ravetz 2001, 115). The housing clearances that had begun in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and continued into the 1970s displaced large numbers of tenants through slum clearance and drew people to new housing who would not previously have been council tenants, due to the relatively high rents charged by local authorities (ibid, 117). Those who did live in slums had been characterised as not respectable, a sweeping statement to make in Birmingham, where prior to slum clearance programmes

immediately before and after the Second World War, more than 40% of the city's population lived in back-to-back housing (Chinn 1999).

In this chapter I refer to the community in Kingstanding, but as geographer Alison Ravetz suggests 'perhaps a more fruitful concept to apply to traditional working class life than the ambiguous one of "community" would be "localism"' (Ravetz 2001, 116). The immediate locality supplied the economy, shared culture and frameworks of personal development for those in Kingstanding, but the collapse of a single stable industry could have a huge impact on the residents and their built environment, as we will see in Chapter Five, with the collapse of dock-related industries in Liverpool.

## **Contemporary Kingstanding**

In 1979 Birmingham City Council began a ten year plan aimed at the modernisation of the 30,000 interwar council houses with 'antiquated facilities'; the City Council had already sold a substantial proportion of its inter-war housing to tenants, between 1966 and 1978. Houses were re-roofed and rewired, kitchens enlarged, and ground floor bathrooms were moved upstairs (Chinn 1999, 157).

The interviewees felt there was a strong sense of community, mostly based around the church and other social groups to which they belonged, but they were also fearful of incidents of crime and vandalism, drug and alcohol abuse, and the decline of local shops and services; local shopping was overpriced and lacking in fresh food.

## **Conclusions**

Through the alteration of their homes, tenants were able to subvert the architects' and planners' intentions, and in the process took possession of the spaces created for them, reproducing them in ways that were more personal to them. Such an approach acknowledges the agency and status of the residents in the reproduction of their space, in contrast to many modern architects, who took a 'year zero' approach to the planning of homes, which left little room for existing social practices.

Practices associated with life in the older back-to-back housing in Birmingham, such as accommodating grandparents or married siblings and their families in the home, or maintaining formal spaces for display and entertaining, were continued. Negotiations were made within the home in order to accommodate practices that were counter to the intentions of the architects and planners. As Elsie Judd reported in her oral history interview, her parents strove to buy a piano, sideboard, and polished dining table to fit in their living room; leaving the family with the small table in the kitchen to eat their regular meals. Alternative sleeping arrangements were assigned when Elsie's older sister, her husband, and their new-born son arrived to stay, arrangements that continued for nine years until Elsie's sister's family were able to find a home of their own.

## **Chapter Five: Bevington Street Area, Liverpool**

### **Introduction**

Bevington Street, Eldon Grove and Summer Seat (the Bevington Street area) are located in Vauxhall, an inner-city district of Liverpool, on the northern side of the city centre. Two of the main roads leading north from the city, Vauxhall Road and Scotland Road, pass close to the study area, which was itself truncated by the construction in the 1970s of the Wallasey Tunnel (the second Mersey Tunnel) to the south. Bevington Street is located three quarters of a mile from the River Mersey and its commercial import and export docks, historically a major source of employment for the city's residents, particularly those in Vauxhall. Manual labour at Liverpool's docks was historically undertaken on a casual basis, so dockworkers preferred to live in neighbourhoods situated close to the docks, such as Vauxhall.

This chapter examines an environment of transition, the impacts that housing policies and decisions have had on multiple phases of development, transition and transformation in Vauxhall; the environment of earlier nineteenth century housing in Vauxhall, what replaced it in the 1910s, and the subsequent changes brought about by the housing co-operative movement. The area was formerly a mixed one, with residential and commercial premises located next to small-scale manufacturing works and stables; work and home were intertwined.

Through the removal of the nineteenth century 'slum' housing and its replacement with housing that aimed to follow the principles of model housing, the Bevington Street area became a regulated, zoned environment, with commercial activity taking place elsewhere. Play by children was regulated, through the provision of playgrounds. Caretakers were recruited to ensure the tenants used the facilities as the city corporation intended. From 1911 the Bevington Street area existed as a new kind of environment, and many residents would have experienced the old environment, as

well as the more dynamic environment in transition, where older housing, cleared areas, and new housing were located next to each other.

The 'new' designed landscape of 1911, with intended functions for spaces and structures has itself seen transformation, as the use of spaces and circumstances of ownership have changed and adapted to meet challenges thrown up by the political climate of the 1980s. The current built environment of Vauxhall has been shaped by what Alice Mah (2012) has called 'official urban imaginaries' (planning and design policies), that is, layers of policies and decisions, made at different times, some forgotten, but still impacting on the built environment in the present day (2012: 154).

Far more striking than the decisions made by planners, perhaps, have been the decisions made by tenants as they took – or relinquished – control of their own environment. Nineteenth-century Vauxhall offered elements of flexibility in terms of how housing was arranged, where manufacturing and commercial activity took place. The slum clearances of the early twentieth century introduced a regulated environment – the regulation of play, of the location of employment and commercial opportunities, the regulation of homes in terms of rooms having specific functions and a specific number of occupants, and a rule book to go with them.

## **Description of buildings and landscape**

### **Before the dwellings**

Like many other large towns and cities in Britain, Liverpool's emergence as a port and industrial city during the nineteenth century resulted in the emergence of residential districts close to the new forms of employment, creating areas of tenement dwellings (Thorns 2002, 15). The high demand for housing close to the docks lining the River Mersey led to overcrowding in the districts closest to the river, in back-to-back housing arranged around courts, and in cellar dwellings, the latter being particularly damp and cramped (Burnett 1986, 61). Courtyards were accessed via tunnels, and facilities including standpipes for water and waste bins were shared between the occupants of

each court. As most houses backed directly onto others there was no opportunity for through-ventilation of houses (City of Liverpool 1911, 237).



Figure 25. Vauxhall on the 1864 1:1056 Town Plan of Liverpool (not to scale) © Landmark Information Group Ltd.

The failure of landlords to not properly maintain what were already poor quality buildings caused most problems with the city's housing stock. The City Corporation's initial tactic for ridding itself of insanitary housing was to place the onus on owners to demolish and replace sub-standard property, and by doing so they 'would rid themselves of the annoyances of receiving notices from the council' (City of Liverpool 1911, 86–88). The Housing Committee also worked with owners to improve homes in the courts, by improving the provision of WCs and substituting ash bins (which were regularly emptied of household waste) for the older ash pits.

Liverpool was a pioneer in the municipal provision of public health, and became a progressive city in terms of housing policy (Mah 2012, 162). The poor housing conditions and lack of sanitary infrastructure associated with the rapid urbanisation of the city during the early nineteenth century caused a variety of infectious diseases,

including cholera, smallpox, TB and typhus, and so the city appointed Dr William Henry Duncan as its own Medical Officer of Health, the country's first, in 1847 (Knowles 2003, 7). As part of continuing efforts to improve the health of Liverpool, the University established a School of Hygiene in 1898, which included a museum housing models, recording and illustrating many aspects of public health, and used as teaching aids for the students enrolled on courses at the School of Hygiene. These instructive models included models of water supply apparatus and sewerage infrastructure, building construction and materials, and models of insanitary buildings and areas (Figure 26) and of areas of rebuilt housing – including a wooden model of the redeveloped Bevington Street Area (Liverpool School of Hygiene Museum Collection X/29).

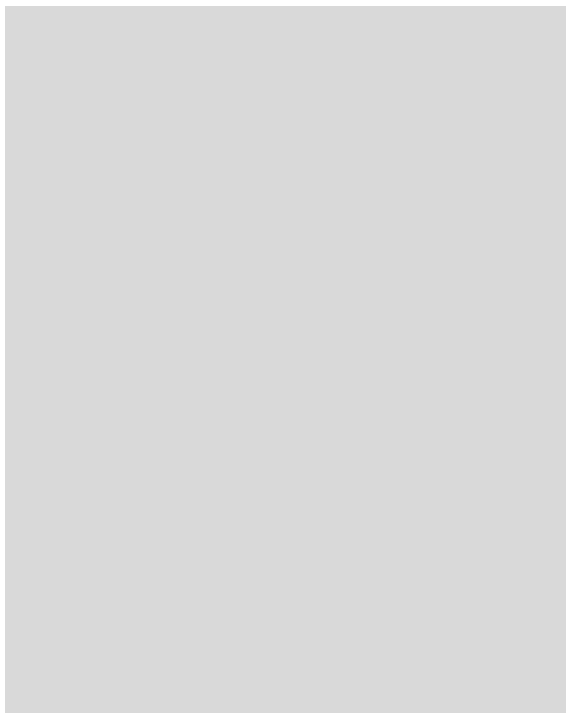


Figure 26. A model of insanitary housing in Renshaw Street, central Liverpool (National Museums Liverpool, cat. no. 4[X/4]).

Many houses were sublet, so that they accommodated several individuals or families. Sub-let houses had to be registered with the City Corporation and regularly inspected in order to prevent overcrowding, but not all sub-let houses were registered. Homes were subject to night visits by members of the Health Department, which had an immediate impact on the lives of the overcrowded residents (rather than the landlord, who might have owned a number of properties and lived elsewhere). The Health Department's report for 1911 gives the example of a night-time inspection of a 3-room

tenement in St Martin's Place in Vauxhall, ostensibly let to a woman and her grown-up son and daughter. The inspectors found that two of the rooms were being sub-let; in the first room inspected there lived a couple and their 20-year-old son, and in the second they found a man and his two children. The wife of the lodger in the second room was found hiding under the chief tenant's bed (City of Liverpool 1911, 103, 257), hinting at the commotion and intrusion caused by such spot checks, but also bringing up questions of perceived notions of privacy and aversion to situations that did not conform to the 'established norm' of a nuclear family, living in close proximity with one another. Subletting and overcrowding were reasonable responses to expensive rent (Pooley and Irish 1984, 60).

Another, more permanent reaction by the City Corporation against insanitary overcrowded conditions in inner city Liverpool was the clearance of large areas of the city condemned as 'slums', and their replacement by model dwellings. Plans of the 'Bevington Street Insanitary Area' from the 1900s indicate that the area was a mixed one, containing dye works, stables, workshops and five pubs in addition to housing (Figure 27). Buildings scheduled for demolition are depicted on Figure 28 in yellow, dwellings erected by the city corporation on the former sites of insanitary property are depicted in blue (now faded to green). Figure 27 and Figure 28 depict an area in transition, with areas of slum housing facing clearance, some areas already cleared of housing and waiting construction, and some areas of new housing were already constructed, in particular tenements in Gildarts Gardens, Arley Street and Eldon Street.

Figure 28 also depicts a large number of public houses; those that had already been closed by the corporation are shown in black, and open pubs in red. The correlation between insanitary poverty and the provision of alcohol that the city corporation chose to depict on the development plans is similar to that of the map *The Modern Plague of London: showing the public houses as specified in the London Directory*, compiled by the National Temperance Publication Depot in 1886. These maps were drawn for particular political purposes; in the case of the London map (Figure 29 and Figure 30), to graphically depict what temperance societies considered was a disease, the rash-like spread of public houses, and the contribution they made to poverty.



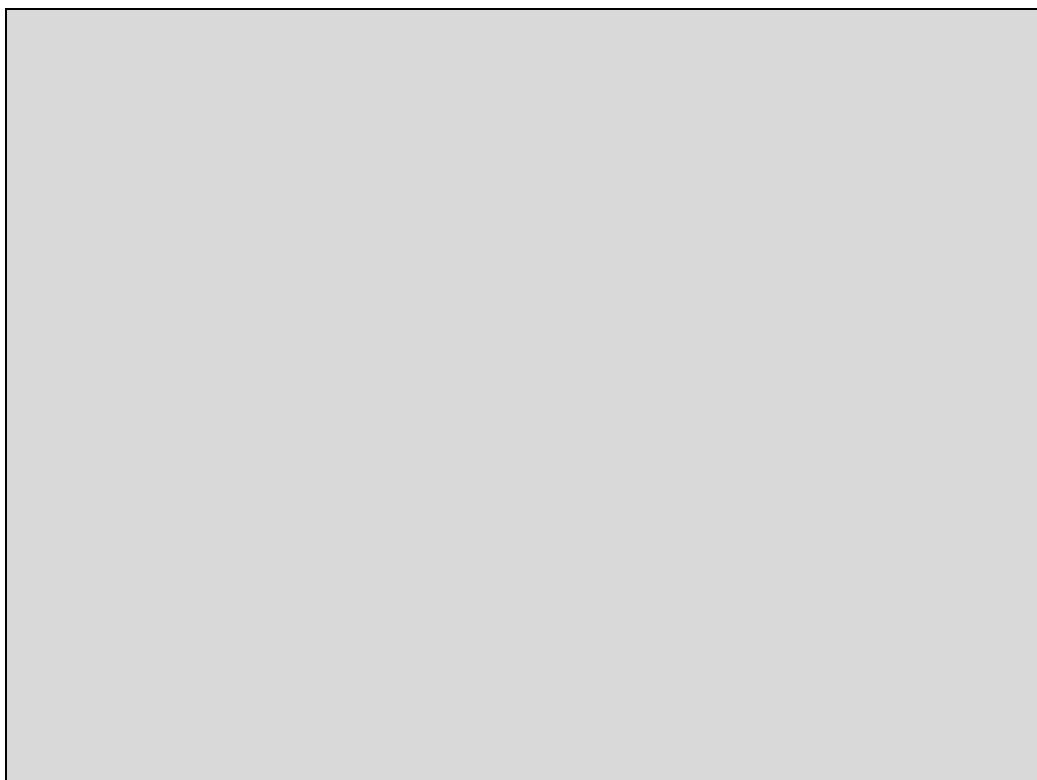


Figure 27. Plan of the 'Bevington Street Unhealthy Area' from City of Liverpool, Programme of the opening ceremony of Bevington Street Dwellings, June 14th 1912.

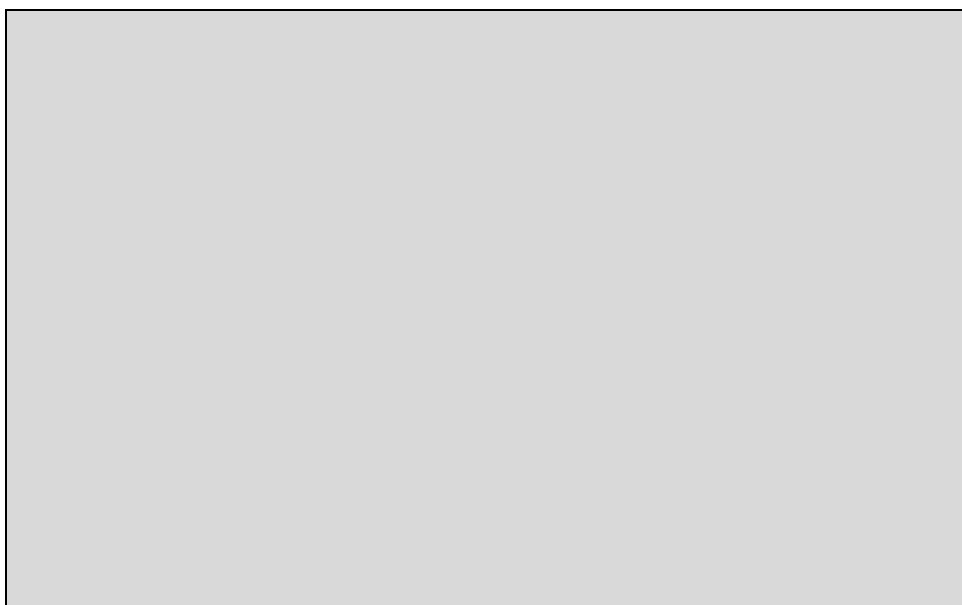


Figure 28. Detail from 'Maps showing a group of Insanitary Areas dealt with by the Corporation', from City of Liverpool, 1909. *Annual report of the City Medical Officer*.

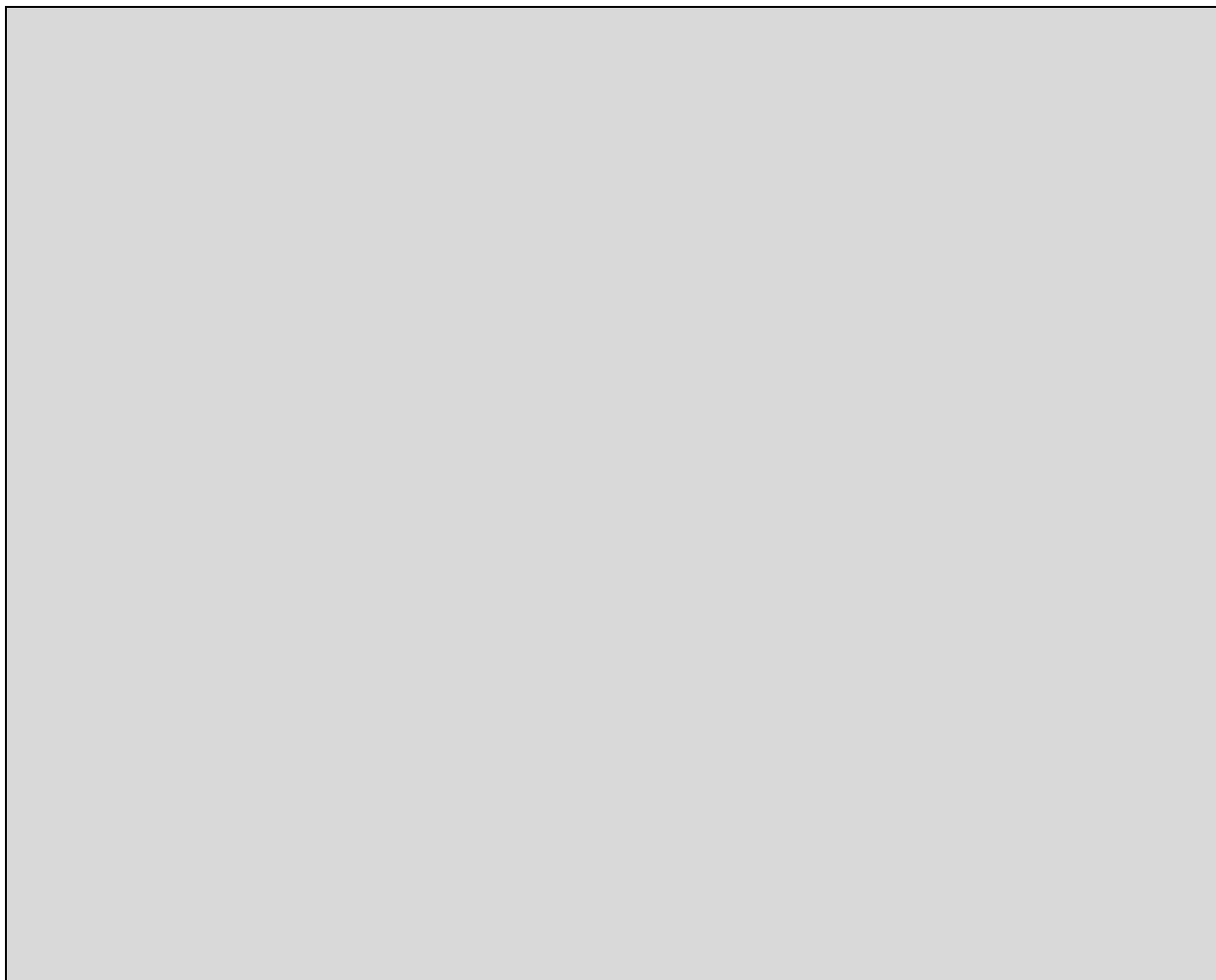


Figure 29. *The Modern Plague of London*, published by the National Temperance Publication Depot depicting public houses in London, 1886.

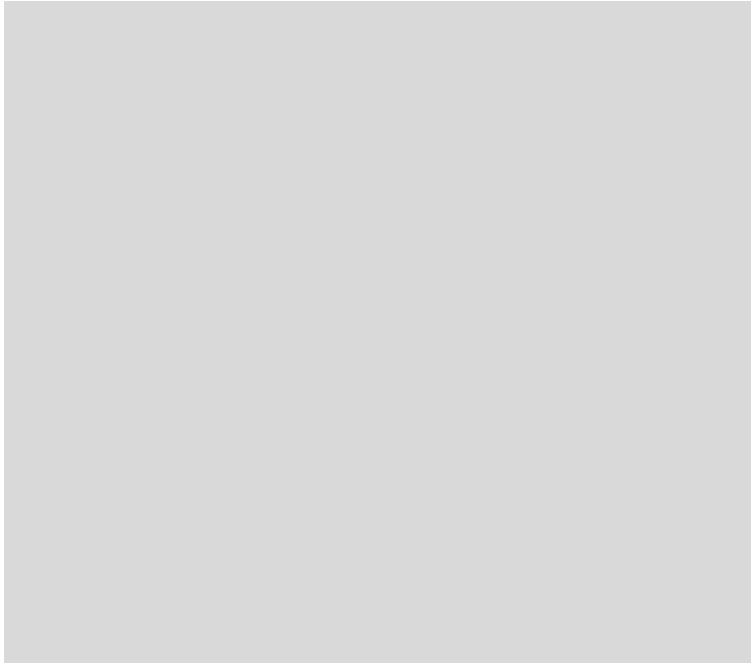


Figure 30. Extract from *The Modern Plague of London*, 1886, showing public houses in Whitechapel.

Residents of areas such as Vauxhall experienced a significant amount of change to their environment. A few decades later, in 1955–6, sociologists Charles Vereker and John Barron Mays of Liverpool University carried out a study of an area of central Liverpool, due for clearance and redevelopment. Two thirds of the local residents who were interviewed by Vereker and Mays wanted to remain in the area, and of the married couples living in Crown Street, nearly three quarters of the wives had been born there and had extensive networks of relatives living close by. Despite this fondness for the area, residents were aware of the decline of the old ‘ordered and respectable living’, and the introduction of those they referred to as ‘Intruders’ – Liverpudlians who were bombed out of the docks area and were tenanted in the nearby interwar Corporation flats (Vereker et al 1961).

After the redevelopment of the area around Bevington Street, the new model dwellings constructed by the City Corporation would be reserved for those ‘dispossessed’ through the slum clearance. Throughout Liverpool, landlords and shopkeepers objected to the compulsory purchase of their property and the loss of trade following displacement of customers, as large areas of the city lay vacant (Pooley and Irish 1984, 33). A study carried out by the Department of the Environment and published in 1975, into the use of vacant land in inner city Liverpool, found that the

city had 500 hectares of vacant land. Liverpool City Council acquired approximately 50% of the vacant land as part of slum clearance programmes; the City Council adopted a policy of accelerated slum clearance in 1966, as the population of the city continued to decline (along with industry and other activities associated with the city's docks) during the post-war period. This land was, for the most part, reserved for housing, road schemes, public open spaces and schools, yet much of the land in the Bevington Street area that had been cleared as part of this programme has remained empty. 'Vacant land attracts vandalism and contributes to an atmosphere of obsolescence and decay' (Department of Environment 1975, 1).

### **The new dwellings**

The plans of the proposed new dwellings in the Bevington Street Area from 1912 emphasised the provision of open spaces as well as the new buildings; previously, the few open spaces were seized upon and built on or used as yards by businesses. Open spaces that were designed and intended solely for recreation were a new addition to the urban landscape, and began modestly, with the provision of wide pavements where children could play safely out of the road forming part of the design of earlier model housing schemes in Liverpool (Figure 31). Elements of 'zoning' were introduced to the urban environment, with commercial small-scale industrial activities being moved to other undeveloped areas of the city.

The new housing in the Bevington Street Area was designed for occupation by a particular kind of unit, the nuclear family. As has already been discussed, this and regulations on commercial activity did not allow room for other kinds of extended families, the taking in of lodgers, or the undertaking of small-scale work in the home. These were all significant changes – not restrictions and responsibilities that would have been placed on many tenants when they were living in the previously condemned 'slums'.



Figure 31. Model tenements with wide sidewalk for children's playground, Liverpool, c. 1903 (Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Transfer from the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts, Social Museum Collection, 3.2002.1762.1).

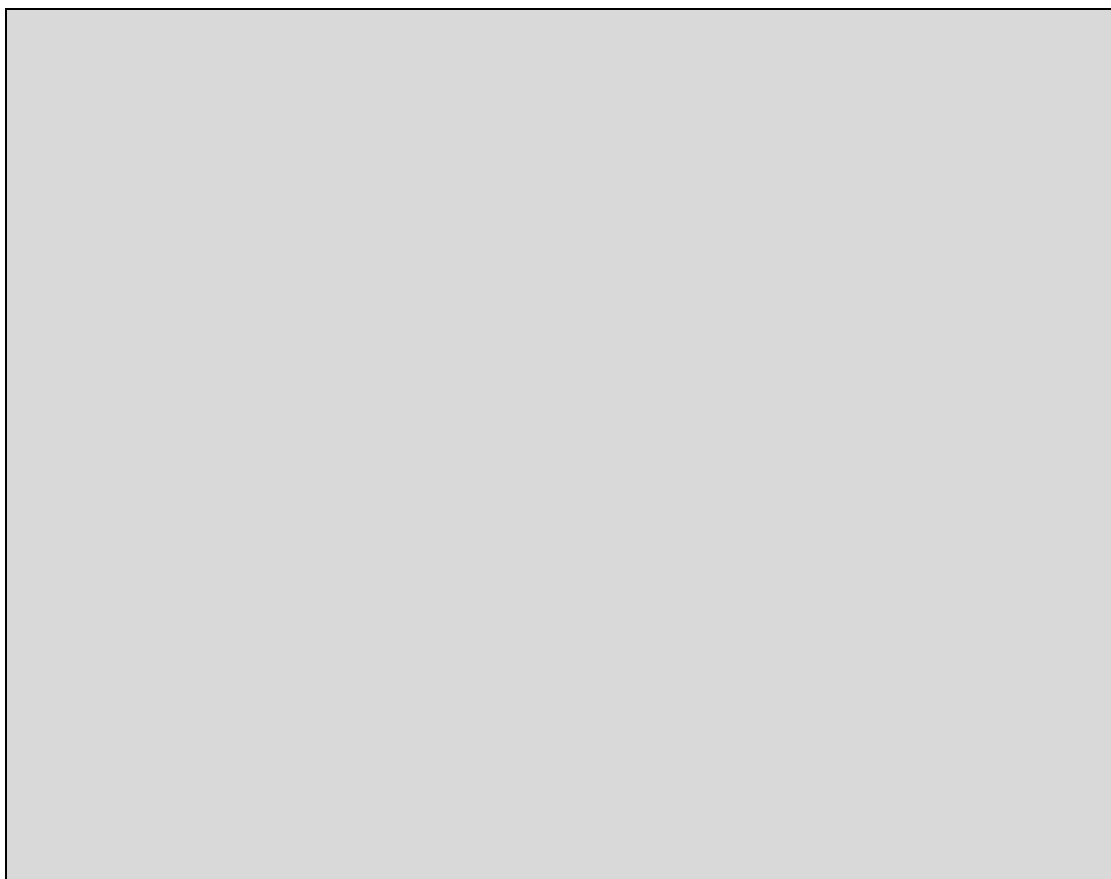


Figure 32. Block plan of the Bevington Street Area, showing new buildings and open spaces, from City of Liverpool, *Programme of the opening ceremony of Bevington Street Dwellings, June 14th 1912*.

### ***The cottages***

The new Bevington Street Area dwellings comprised 52 self-contained 'cottages' (terraced houses), (terraced houses), constructed of red brick with Welsh slate roofs, large windows with brick dressings to brick dressings to sills and lintels, decorative brick quoins and cement pebbledash render to selected render to selected elevations (Figure 33). Ornamentation of municipal housing was rare, but sometimes an effort would be made through the use of everyday materials, as at Bevington Street; diamond-shaped plaques alternately with 'AD' and '1911' (the year the housing was completed) were fixed to the front gables (

Figure 34). A foundation stone was laid in Bevington Street in a ceremony on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1910, placing the Bevington Street Area dwellings in the context of the Acts of Parliament that had enabled that had enabled their construction, and in the context of other workers housing constructed by the City constructed by the City Corporation in Liverpool (

Figure 35).



Figure 33. Elevations of houses in Summer Seat, Bevington Street Area, 1910 (Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Transfer from the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts, Social Museum Collection, 3.2002.3299).



Figure 34. Date plaques on the cottages in Bevington Street.

CITY OF LIVERPOOL HOUSING OF THE WORKING CLASSES ACTS 1890 TO 1909 WORKERS DWELLINGS BEVINGTON STREET AREA THIS FOUNDATION STONE WAS LAID ON THE TWELFTH DAY OF NOVEMBER IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD ONE THOUSAND NINE HUNDRED AND TEN THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JOHN BURNS PRESIDENT OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD		
COUNCILLOR S MASON HUTCHINSON COUNCILLOR O KYFFIN-TAYLOR COUNCILLOR AUSTIN HARFORD	LORD MAYOR CHAIRMAN DEPUTY        OF THE HOUSING COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN	
EDWARD R PICKMERE   TOWN CLERK		

Figure 35. The text of the Bevington Street cottages' foundation stone, laid in November 1910.

When first constructed, each cottage had a small entrance vestibule with stairs to the first floor, and living room and scullery on the ground floor. The living room contained a fitted dresser, and a store cupboard under the stairs. The scullery contained a sink, wash-boiler and bath and larder, and each home had its own hot water supply kept under tenants' control, supplied by a boiler fitted to the rear of the range in the living room. There were three bedrooms on the first floor, each with a storage cupboard and fireplace. Concern for the moral welfare of children increased during the nineteenth century since the middle of the nineteenth century, and any municipal authority would endeavour to provide enough bedrooms for male and female children to sleep in different rooms, where possible.

Lighting was, for the most part, provided by oil lamps; gas lamps were installed in the living room, scullery and 'best bedroom' (the largest bedroom, located at the front of the house). The cottage interiors were designed to be simple and hygienic with lots of storage space, and tenants' regulations were in place to ensure they were kept that way; the rooms did not contain wooden mouldings (which would collect dust), apart from a picture rail from which picture frames could be hung so as not to damage the walls. Wallpaper was not permitted, as insects might nest behind it, attracted by the nutritious flour-based wallpaper paste, and a 4-inch high cement skirting at the base of interior walls facilitated cleaning. The rear yard contained a WC, ashbin, and a gate



leading to a cobbled lane running along the rear of each terrace (City of Liverpool 1912, 77–8).

There was some architectural variation among the terraces; some cottages were set back a little, some had gables, and the fact that they were called ‘cottages’ in the city corporation’s literature is itself interesting, intentionally making a connection with the garden city movement and recalling a more bucolic environment than might have existed in inner-city Liverpool at the time. In plan form and the provision of facilities the Bevington Street and Summer Seat cottages were like many other terraced houses of the time and earlier.

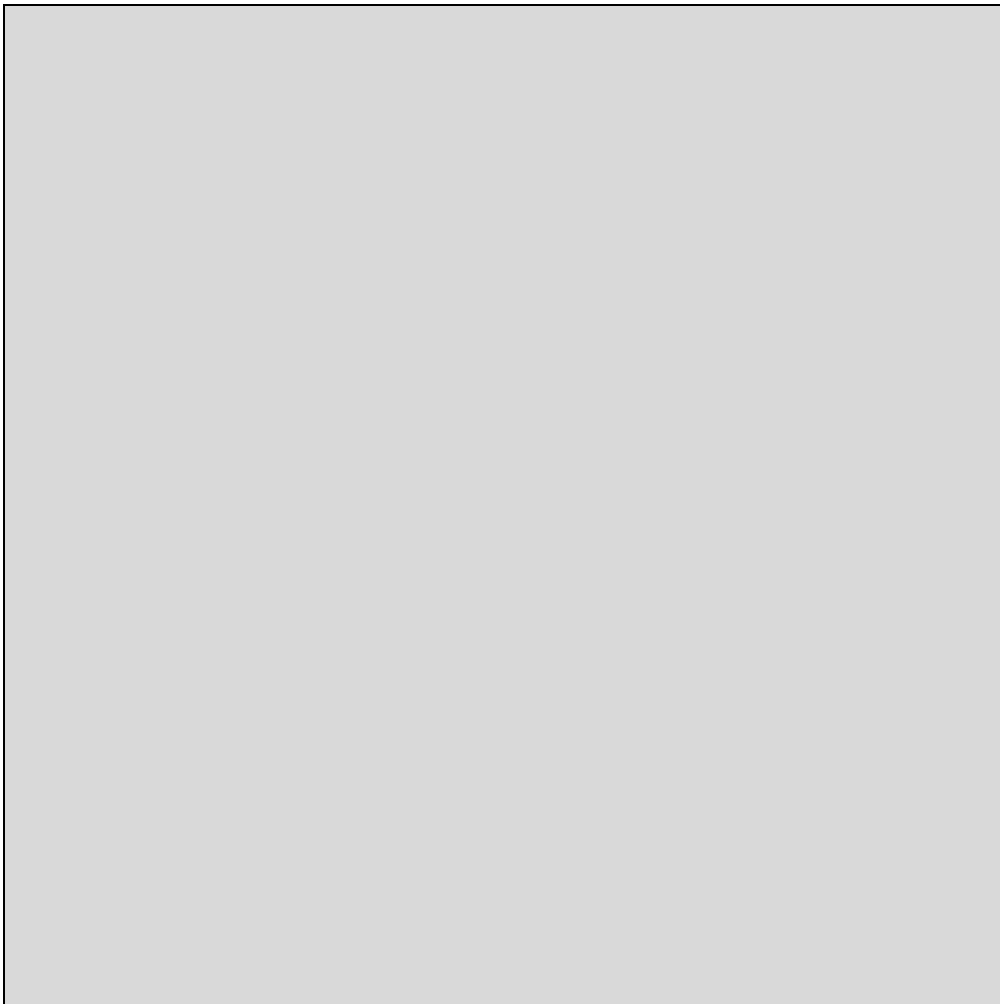


Figure 36. Ground and first floor plans of the Bevington Street and Summer Seat cottages. From City of Liverpool, *Programme of the opening ceremony of Bevington Street Dwellings, June 14th 1912*.

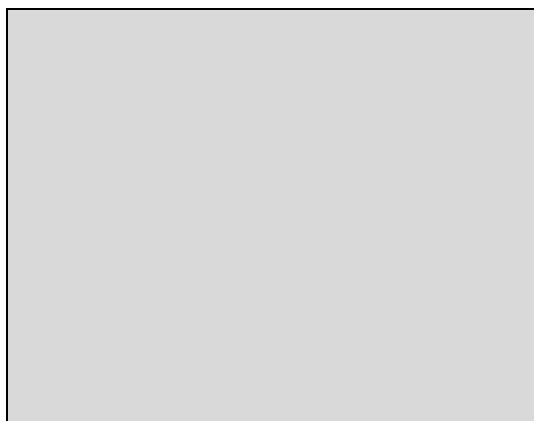
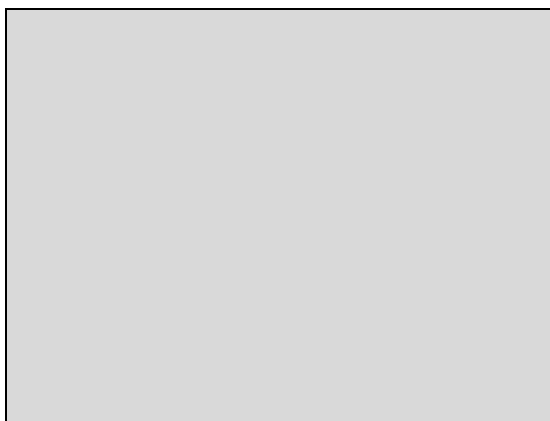


Figure 37. The living room (left) and scullery (right) of a Bevington Street cottage, 1912. From City of Liverpool, *Programme of the opening ceremony of Bevington Street Dwellings, June 14th 1912*.



Figure 38. Living room and kitchen of 2 Summer Seat, October 2011.



Figure 39. Front and rear elevations of Summer Seat cottages in October 2011.

### ***The tenements***

There were 174 tenements in eight, three-storey brick built blocks with slate roofs in Eldon Grove and Limekiln Lane; three of the blocks that faced on to Eldon Grove remain standing. The tenements on the ground floor were accessed directly from a covered 'piazza', and those on the first and second floors were accessed from external landings leading off a central internal staircase. Each tenement had a living room, a scullery, and an external WC housed on a landing in a rear outshot, which also contained a small yard area. Of the tenements 27 had three bedrooms, 70 had two bedrooms, and 77 had one bedroom. As in the cottages, gas lighting was installed in the living room and main bedroom, the remaining rooms being lit by oil lamps, and interiors were simple, bare plastered walls with cement skirting, and reinforced concrete floors; all capable of being washed by tenants in order to keep the dwellings clean and hygienic. The tenements contained cupboards and shelving in all rooms, and a ventilated food locker in the living room (City of Liverpool 1912, 76–8).

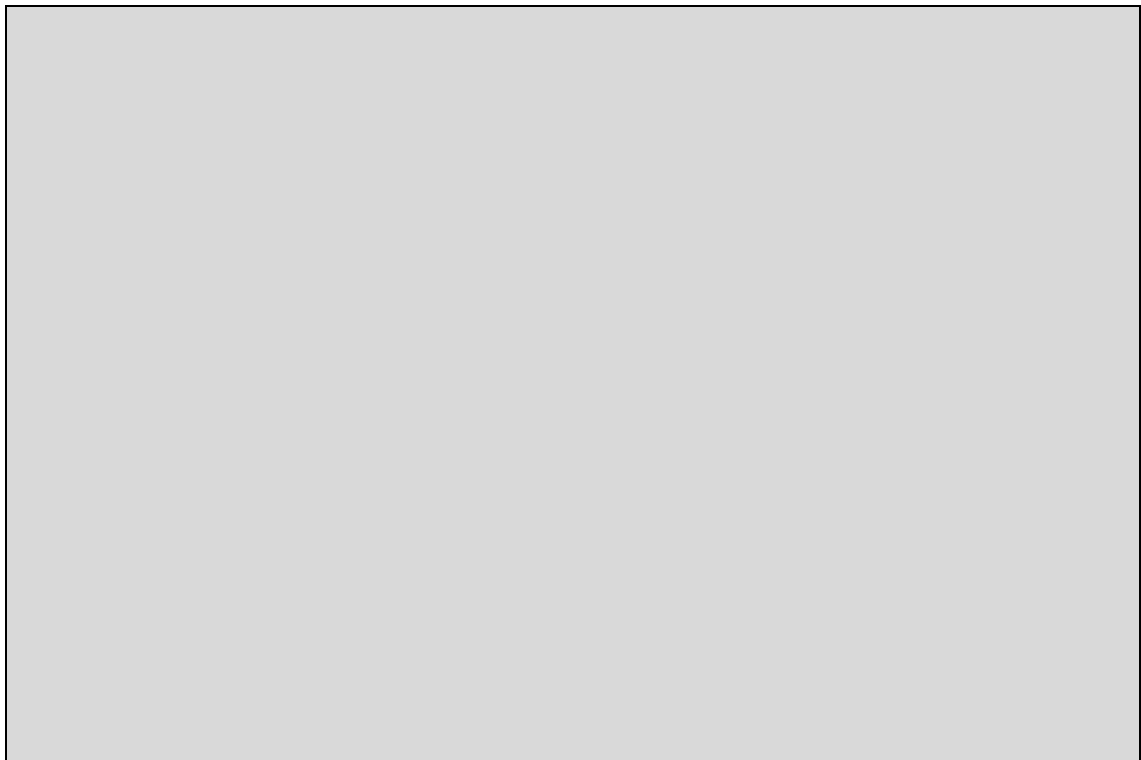


Figure 40. Elevation of Blocks B, D, E, and G, Bevington Street Area, 1910 (Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Transfer from the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts, Social Museum Collection, 3.2002.3300).

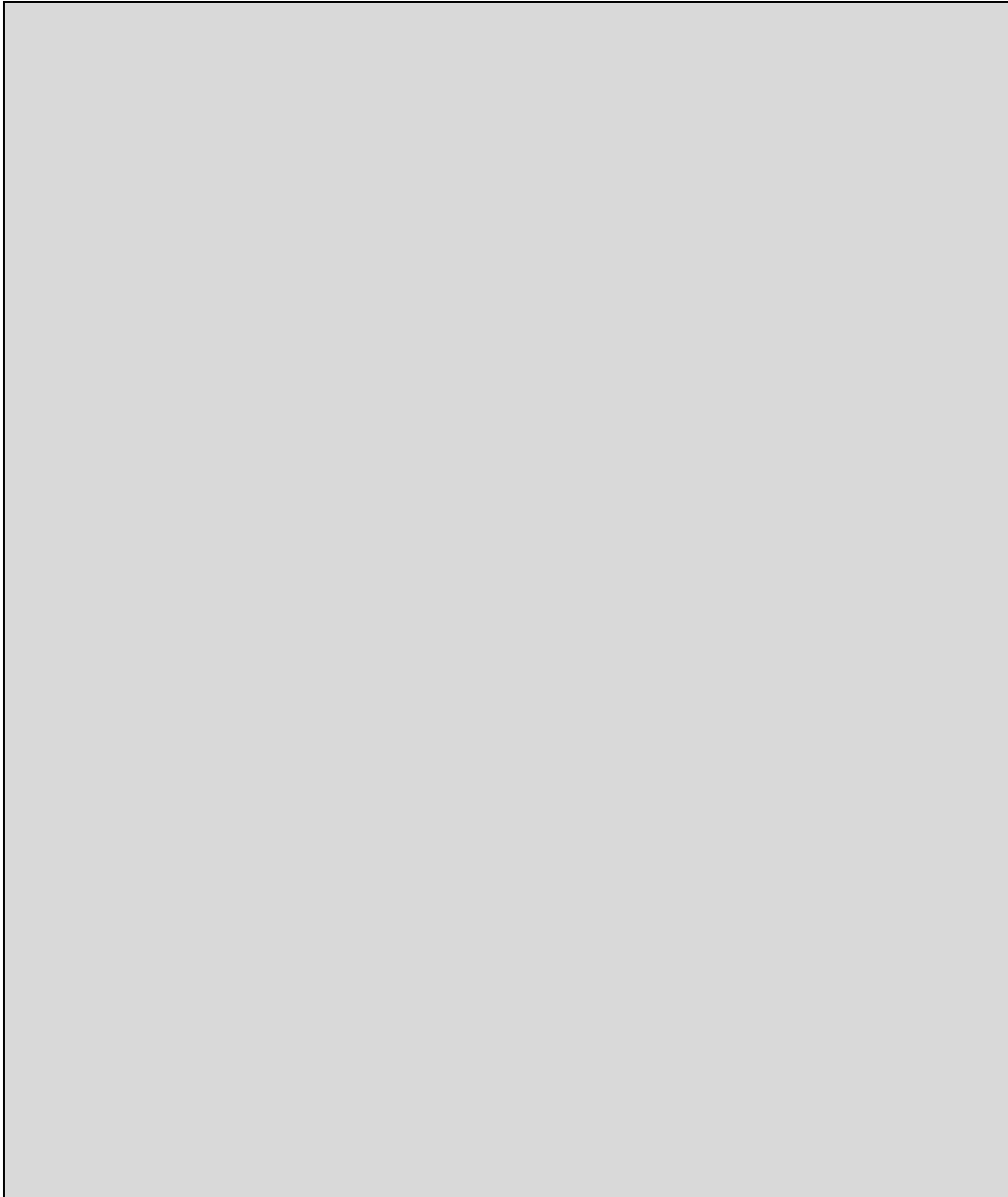


Figure 41. Ground and first floor plans of a section of the Eldon Grove tenements. From City of Liverpool, *Programme of the opening ceremony of Bevington Street Dwellings, June 14th 1912*.

The current derelict and unsafe condition of the Eldon Grove tenements meant that internal inspection of the buildings could not be undertaken, and no early photographs depicting the interior of the buildings could be located. The Eldon Grove dwellings have become a popular site for visits by urban explorers, and photographs of parts of the interior appear on Internet message boards (Figure 42). These images indicate that many of the internal walls, fixtures and fittings have been removed as part of previous refurbishment programmes.

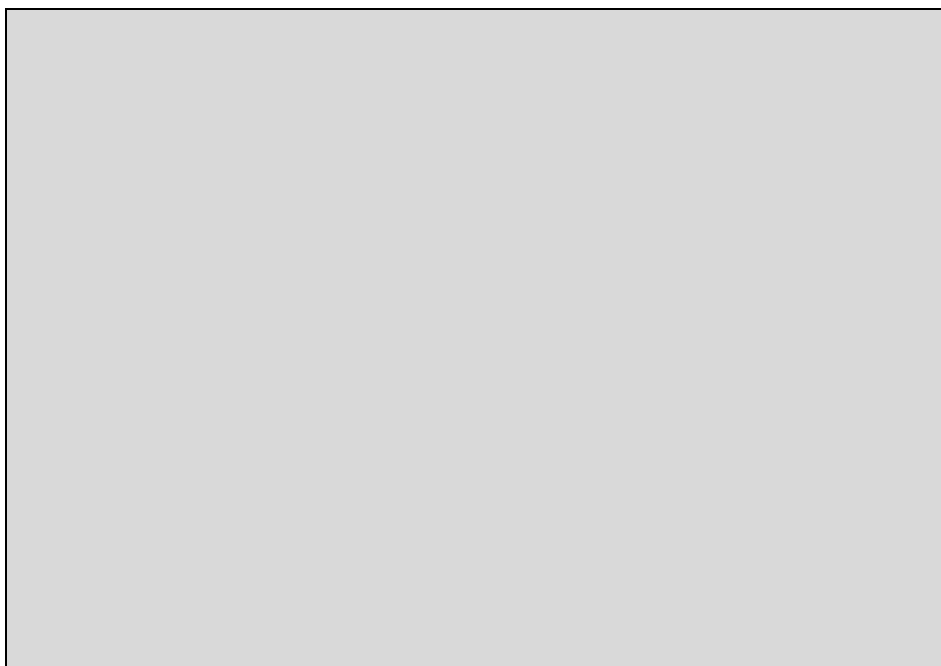


Figure 42. Interior of a tenement at Eldon Grove, looking towards the rear from the front entrance. Photographed by urban explorer Kevsy21 (<http://s659.photobucket.com/user/Kevsy21/library/>) 2011.

The city corporation used a formula to calculate the number of people the new dwellings could accommodate, and to reduce overcrowding, assuming that each room (whether a living room or bedroom) could accommodate two people – therefore a maximum of 1,372 people could be accommodated in the new dwellings. The new dwellings were let out at rents of between 1 shilling 9d and 6 shillings per week; in 1911 a general unskilled labourer earned an average annual wage of £74, or £1 8s 6d per week (Williamson 1982).

The intention at the Eldon Grove tenements was that each flat would have its own external WC, but oral history interviews with former residents Teresa Taylor and Eileen Dwyer suggest that families may have had to share their toilet facilities with next door neighbours between the 1930s and 1960s. As the building plans indicate that lavatories were accessed from individual tenements, this suggests that alterations were made to the plan form of the blocks, subdividing some larger flats into smaller flats with shared lavatory facilities – or that former residents misremembered aspects of life in the tenements.

Despite the careful calculations made by the city corporation, the housing in the Bevington Street area was subject to overcrowding; in the immediate post-war period Sheila Godwin had to move out of the family home in Eldon Grove upon marriage, as the two bedroom flat already accommodated her parents, her sister, her sister's husband, and their two children (despite the tenancy rules explored later in this chapter forbidding the subletting of space to anyone, including family members).



Figure 43. Block E, Eldon Grove Dwellings, with the former playground in front, October 2011.

The majority of the new homes were reserved for those who were 'dispossessed' through the clearance of the older housing; applicants for homes in the Bevington Street Area had to prove they had formerly lived in an insanitary house or cellar, or an overcrowded sub-let lodging house (City of Liverpool 1911, 238). 'The great majority of these dwellings are reserved for persons dispossessed through the demolition of property by the Corporation or in respect of which Closing Orders have been made or where houses have been reported as being overcrowded' (City of Liverpool 1912, 14).

The new dwellings were overseen by a caretaker or 'Keeper', who resided in a dedicated 'Keeper's House', a six-roomed flat with an office contained in a block in

Limekiln Lane, demolished in the 1960s in advance of the development of the Wallasey Tunnel. Existing corporation dwellings, constructed a few years before, were located to the south of Summer Seat, in Gildarts Gardens. Two shops were included in the Bevington Street Area development, one on the ground floor of a house in Summer Seat, and the other on the ground floor of Limekiln Lane tenement block H. A self-contained workshop, located in Gildarts Gardens, behind Limekiln Lane tenement block J, was available for tenants to use so that dirty or disruptive domestic work could be undertaken there, rather than in the home where it might cause damage.

By redeveloping the Bevington Street Area shops, industry and leisure became separated from each other and from the places in which people lived; activities such as shopping, or undertaking part-time work in a nearby small family business, were no longer intended to be undertaken in the informal, ad hoc way that they were before. Few places of work were now located within the immediate streets; shops were instead focussed along Vauxhall Road and Scotland Road, and the docks and associated industries remained the major source of employment. The Bevington Street area became a place that residents left in order to undertake work each day. The presence of regulations in the tenants' handbook and a resident caretaker suggests that the city corporation, at least, felt that supervision of tenants and the environment was needed. Caretakers were recruited by the city corporation to supervise municipal dwellings across the city, and to explain the principles of sanitation to tenants (City of Liverpool 1911, 251–2), who, it was thought, would be too used to living in insanitary conditions. Local authorities across the country were concerned about a perceived culture gap between tenants (and the conditions they were used to living in) and the new houses and estates (Ravetz 2001, 115). 'Resident caretakers would exercise a good influence with the tenants and would be respected by them' (Ibid, 251).

The plans of the new dwellings emphasised open spaces as well as the new buildings; previously, open spaces were built upon, or used as yards by businesses. Open spaces that were designed and intended for recreation were a new introduction to the built environment.

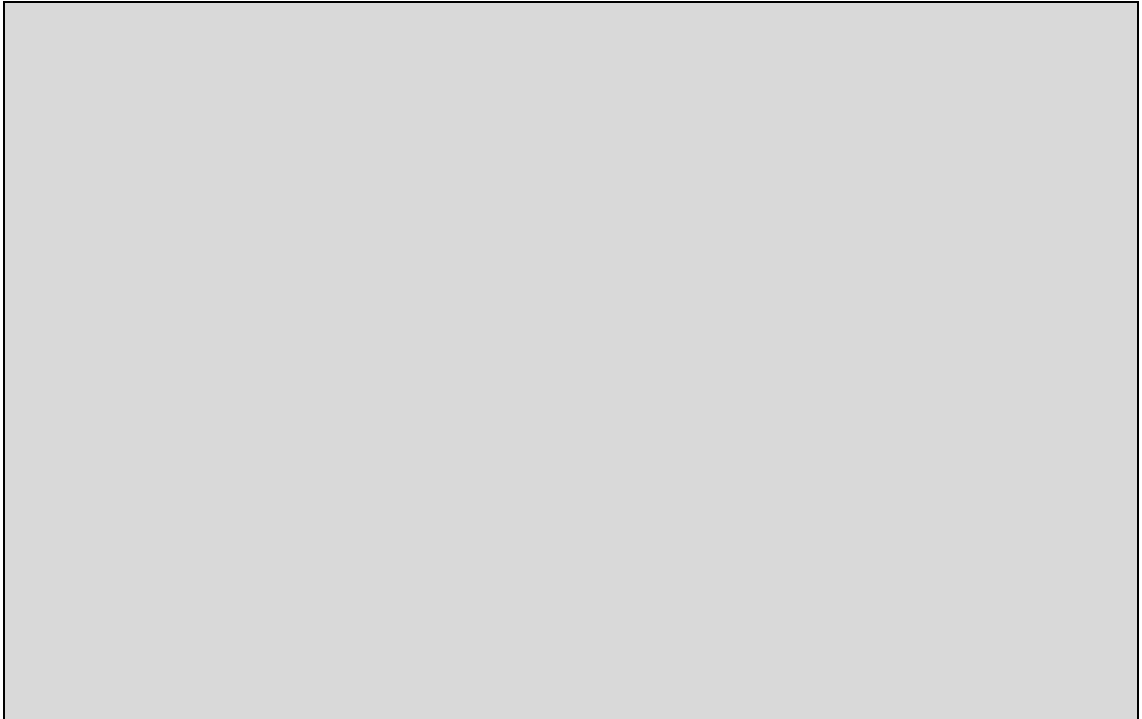


Figure 44. A football match at the playground during a visit to Eldon Grove by Liverpool FC manager Bill Shankly, 1965 © Liverpool Echo.

The redevelopment of the Bevington Street Area saw the introduction of trees, where there were none before. In time for the opening ceremony in June 1912, ash trees were planted in Summer Seat and Bevington Street; poplars flanked each side of playgrounds and fronted Limekiln Lane. The central area between the playgrounds was laid out as gardens, with a bandstand, where it was planned that band performances would be given twice weekly during the summer.

Public lavatories were installed under the shelters which connected the boys' and girls' playgrounds, which were themselves lit in part by two tall electric lamp standards, one placed at each end of playground; these featured drinking fountains in the base, and electric lights were installed in the bandstand and playground shelters.





Figure 45. The drinking fountain at the base of the electric lamp standard at the eastern end of the Eldon Grove playground, October 2011.

After the clearance of slums and construction of new housing in inner-city Liverpool, the city corporation reported that not only had housing been improved, but neighbourhoods too, with a reduction in the number of prosecutions for drunkenness and assault (City of Liverpool 1911, 240). The city corporation's Health Department reported that the tenants 'endeavour[ed] to make an effort to improve the internal arrangements of the dwellings' and tenants of the new cottages and tenements in turn reported that it was a 'privilege to dwell in them' (ibid, 240). In Bevington Street, Liverpool's Medical Officer reported that 'it is very gratifying to notice the improvement in the habits and cleanliness of the people, as indicated by the external and internal condition of the dwellings... there is a high moral tone, self respect is more in evidence, and a keener love of home prevails; the children also are better cared for, more suitably clothed...' (City of Liverpool 1913, 14).

Liverpool's resident caretakers were abolished after the Second World War (Ravetz 2001, 116), and the Limekiln Lane flat and office were later demolished as part of slum clearance, in advance of the construction of the Wallasey Tunnel. The excess of property in inner city Liverpool, associated with the post-Second World War departure of many residents for new suburban estates, and the decline of industrial and port-related employment, meant that there was no need for the tenements to be replaced.

Like many industrial towns and cities, Liverpool was subject to heavy aerial bombing during the Second World War, damaging and destroying many homes in Vauxhall and elsewhere. Gildarts Gardens took direct hits on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> May 1941, and three houses at the eastern end of Summer Seat (57–61) and three houses at the eastern end of Bevington Street (9–11) were damaged to the extent that they required reconstruction. All six houses were rebuilt between 1950 and 1951, and the reconstruction work appears to have been comprehensive; the brickwork on the external facades is fresher than that of the rest of the terraces, but the '1911' date stones were retained and reused, and the external appearance of the rebuilt houses is identical to those in the rest of the terrace. As part of the rebuilding programme each house at the eastern end of Summer Seat and Bevington Street had an electricity supply installed, allowing for electric lighting (in place of the limited gas lighting) and three electric plug points. The outside WC was moved indoors and a separate bathroom installed in the former pantry, instead of the bath that stood in the corner of the scullery. The substantial improvements to the six houses meant that Liverpool City Council felt able to charge a higher weekly rental of 15 shillings, instead of the 10 shillings 9d charged for other houses (352/ARC/116/318/2).

## **Living by the rules**

As was the case on many other municipal estates, tenants in the Bevington Street area were issued with handbooks by the City of Liverpool Housing Department, which set out the rules of their tenancy. The interest of such a document lies in the gap between the expectations the Housing Department had for their tenants, and the reality of life lived in municipal housing, and rules were based upon a particular perception of tenants and their behaviour. The City of Liverpool's tenants handbook was regularly revised, and later volumes took a conciliatory tone; 'It will readily be appreciated that there must be some conditions of tenancy, and that both the Landlord and the Tenant have certain responsibilities', although the handbook dating to 1955 (City of Liverpool Housing Committee 1955) still seems strict today.

The City Council seemed aware that such rules were unpopular with tenants, but were not sufficiently moved to ease them; Leslie Sanders, Chairman of Liverpool Housing Committee, stated in the volume's introduction: 'At first glance you may think that these are somewhat irksome or bureaucratic but on reflection I am sure that you will agree that they are necessary and designed to include the minimum of restrictions to ensure that the "few" do not cause annoyance to the "many"' (City of Liverpool Housing Committee 1955, 3). This spirit of compromise was reiterated later in the Tenants Handbook; 'From this [the tenancy agreement] it may seem that very little can be done without first obtaining permission, but these regulations are made with the very definite aim of protecting your own and your neighbour's welfare. They are not restrictions, but are meant as guides to preserve the amenities of the Estate where you live' (ibid, 16). In his introduction, Alderman Sanders went on to stress the role of tenants as partners in all municipal developments. 'By your interest and care for Corporation property – which is your property – you can achieve much to keep maintenance and running costs down to a minimum... I exhort you to play your part in making your estate a happy and healthy community' (ibid).

In 1955 the City Council still undertook the unannounced spot checks that had been a feature of life in the Bevington Street area's earlier slum housing, '...to ensure that the conditions are kept, the interior of the houses and flats are inspected at intervals. Certain objections have been raised from time to time by tenants against this periodic inspection, but all good landlords must keep the condition of their properties under review, and must see that the conditions of tenancy are fulfilled' (City of Liverpool Housing Department 1955, 19). To assist tenants in keeping their homes in good order, the handbook contained 'Helpful Hints' (ibid, 13) on proper cleaning and care of the home, information that would also have been passed on to tenants by the estate's resident caretaker.

The rules contained within the tenants' handbook extended across various areas of life. For example, all external painting was to be carried out by Housing Department, using assigned colour schemes; '[the colours] adopted are those that are best for groups of houses' (City of Liverpool Housing Committee 1955, 11) and any structural

alterations required the permission of the Housing Department, in addition to planning permission. Rules also extended to the use of tenants' homes; tenants required permission from the corporation for the use of a hosepipe or garden sprinkler, or to use water for non-domestic purposes (ibid, 15). Page 17 of the handbook stated that 'the tenant shall not, without first having obtained the written consent of the Corporation:

- a) Assign, sub-let, or part with possession of the premises or any part thereof, nor take in any lodgers, married children of the tenant and their families, or any other relatives, nor use the premises other than as a private dwelling house.
- b) Use, or permit to be used, any part of the premises or any outbuilding as a shop or workshop, or for the carrying on, or for the storage of implements of, any trade or business, nor store or expose any goods or material for sale or hire'.

### **The Bevington Street Area during the late twentieth century**

The redevelopment of Vauxhall continued after the First World War. The area's remaining slums were demolished during the 1930s and further blocks of tenements such as those at Portland Gardens, to the north of Eldon Grove, were constructed (Figure 46). This formed part of a wider scheme of development of flats in Liverpool's inner city districts during the inter-war period. The City Architect, Lancelot Keay, 'saw one of the principal benefits of central re-housing as the provision of services that were difficult to attain quickly in new, edge of city estates... the fabric of the slum districts that remained after redevelopment provided the shops, schools, pubs and churches, and leisure facilities that already catered for the typical day-to-day needs of the communities there' (Whitfield 2010, 370). Such older buildings and infrastructure have persisted into the present in areas like Vauxhall, by which residents orientate themselves.



Figure 46. The Portland Gardens Estate, Vauxhall, Liverpool, c. 1978, prior to demolition © George Evans

The population of Liverpool reached a peak of 846,000 in 1931. During the next twenty years, the population of the city fell by 77,000, as residents moved to new suburbs in the wider Merseyside area, or left the area entirely during the Second World War. The decades after the Second World War saw a dramatic decrease in the population of Liverpool, as the importance of the city as a port and manufacturing centre declined. In 1951 the population of Liverpool was 790,838; by 2001 it had fallen to 439,476, a reduction of 44% (Figure 47).

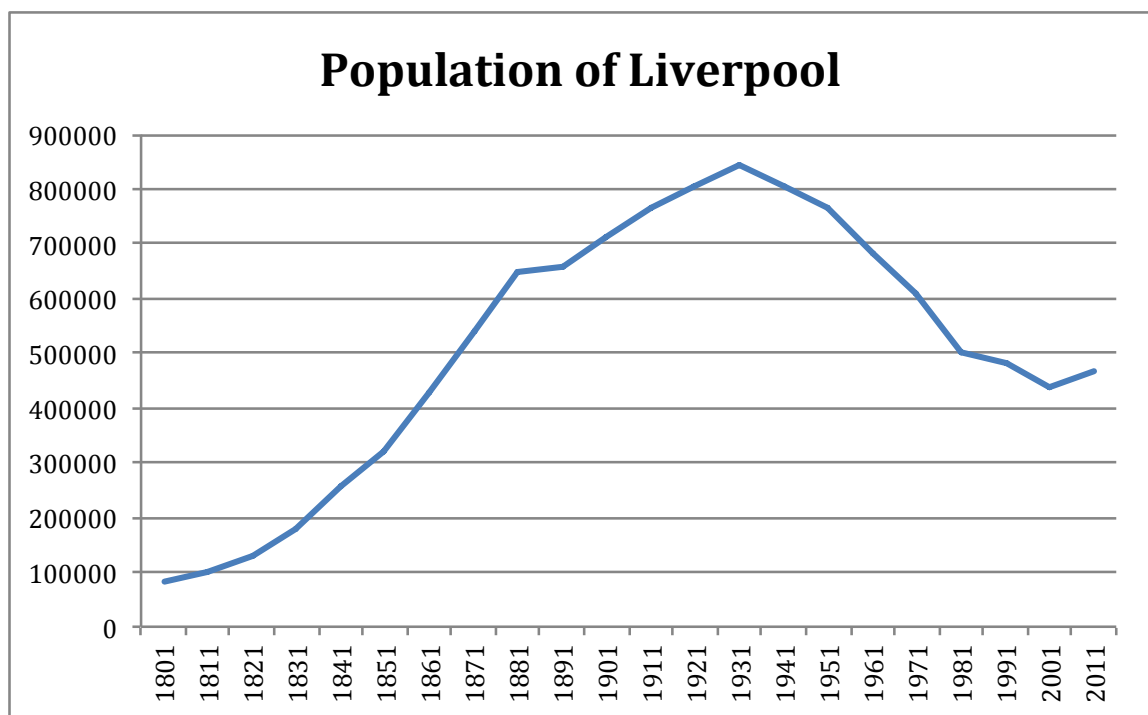


Figure 47. Population of Liverpool for the years 1801 to 2011 (Source: Vision of Britain. [www.visionofbritain.org.uk](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk))

As residents left the city to live elsewhere, the surplus housing stock meant that remaining residents had a wider choice of accommodation. Households were able to reject the least popular housing, such as dwellings in poor, inner city locations, homes that were of poor quality or construction, with poor amenities or in a poor state of repair (Couch 2003, 23), including the tenements of Vauxhall, and so further depopulating the inner city.

A programme of improvement works was carried out at the Eldon Grove tenements and the cottages in Bevington Street and Summer Seat during the early 1970s (Liverpool Planning and Building Control C33224 and D38255). Houses were altered to convert the existing pantries to bathrooms and bring outside WCs inside the home, and the electricity supplies were upgraded. The houses on the southern side of Summer Seat had their rear yards extended when the tenements in Gildarts Gardens were demolished in advance of the construction of the Wallasey Tunnel; the construction of the tunnel created a barrier (albeit one crossed by the area's main roads) between the city centre and the inner-city districts to the north, including Vauxhall and the Bevington Street area.

The Limekiln Lane and three northernmost Eldon Grove blocks were demolished, as the accommodation was no longer needed. The demographic profile of the area changed as more people moved away from inner city Liverpool during the decades after the Second World War; employment in docks and associated industries declined, and newly constructed suburban estates offered families a more attractive place to live. At Eldon Grove the remaining tenement blocks were converted to form 60 one-bedroom and 24 two-bedroom flats, reflecting the reduction in the number of families living in Vauxhall.

With the popularity of the 'Right to Buy' scheme, which was expanded and heavily promoted during the early 1980s, houses in Bevington Street and Summer Seat were further altered, moving bathrooms upstairs in some cases, creating a larger kitchen with room to dine, and so creating a more formal 'front parlour'. Former housing officer (now Chief Executive of the Eldonian Housing Association) George Evans spoke

of the popularity of the scheme in the Bevington Street area; as so many of the tenants had lived in their homes for many years, the discounts on the house purchase prices that they received were very high. As the population of Vauxhall was dropping through factory closures and job losses, the impact of the Right to Buy and the associated reduction in Local Authority housing stock was not as great as it was in other areas. Tenants did, however, buy many of the Bevington Street and Summer Seat cottages, as well as the post-war houses constructed on the site of cleared flats in Portland Gardens and Eldon Street; this was all well-built, high quality housing; ‘... some of them made a killing on it, some of them still live here’ (George Evans).

According to George Evans, those who exercised the Right to Buy looked after their properties; ‘You could physically see the difference as you walked down the street, people had done a lot of work to their own properties’. The compact nature of the terraces meant that structural alterations such as extensions could not be carried out, but former tenants did make internal changes, such as moving the bathroom upstairs and installing a new bathroom suite or redecorating and removing some of the houses’ older features, such as the large fireplaces and fitted cupboards. ‘You could compare them with the other houses in the street that the council hadn’t painted for 15 years’.

Those tenants who did not purchase their homes were still house proud, due in part, in George’s view, to the area’s ageing population, and that those who moved to the Bevington Street Area likely had friends and family in the area already. Younger people, who might be more economically and geographically mobile, were more likely to move to a new home in the suburbs ‘with a front and back garden, rather than a door onto the street’ – like those in Norris Green, a council estate constructed in Liverpool’s north-eastern suburbs during the 1920s. George Evans stated that:

‘Residents expectations have changed; today the houses face on to the cutting of the Kingsway Tunnel, they do not have gardens, only a back yard, the front doors open on to the street, and residents have problems disposing of their rubbish, with only a cobbled lane at the back of the houses providing access to the rear yards. Nevertheless, there is a waiting list for them.’

With respect to works carried out by the city council to its properties in the Bevington Street Area, 'while I was there, the only thing that was done was that the doors were painted'. Despite the carrying out of work to municipal housing being heavily regulated by the City Council, tenants undertook a lot of work to their homes themselves, and the terraced houses in Bevington Street and Summer Seat were very popular housing for those looking to buy their own home, offering privacy that the tenements did not.

The Right to Buy left mostly lower-quality flats, like the Eldon Grove tenements, for those in need of social housing. After their conversion to one and two-bedroom flats, the three remaining Eldon Grove blocks were used by Liverpool University's School of Tropical Medicine for student accommodation, and by the local authority as short term accommodation. Alterations and improvements to the buildings and its facilities had been minimal, however, and the buildings have stood empty since the mid 1990s. The electric street lamps and drinking fountains standing outside the dwellings were Grade II listed in March 1975, and the playground railings and three remaining tenement blocks were also Grade II listed in September 1993. During the early 2000s attempts by private developers to refurbish the Eldon Grove tenements failed, and the buildings stand empty, awaiting a further attempt to repair the buildings. As George Evans said, 'they've had to put up with a lot, with that derelict site next to them'.

The Eldon Grove tenements were recognised as being of importance by former residents, in part due to their listed status, despite on-going concerns over the lack of facilities. Angela Whittaker moved to Eldon Grove in 1988 and her sister lived in a neighbouring flat; the rest of Angela's block was used for students' accommodation. While Angela felt safe living in the block, it became increasingly run-down, the only source of heating being a gas heater, and the building suffering from damp. Despite this, given Eldon Grove's current dilapidated state, Angela wanted it to be turned into a museum 'so that people can appreciate what a nice place it was to live in,' suggesting that Eldon Grove's value to residents transcended its decrepit state.



## Vauxhall and the Eldonian Village

The success of a densely populated area like Bevington Street depended on large-scale, local employment. Bevington Street was designed according to assumptions made in the 1900s, which are now out of place; the development of the neighbouring Eldonian Village has become the popular response of residents to local housing needs.

Much of the area around Bevington Street was again condemned as 'slums' in the 1970s and 1980s, and partially demolished; the population of Vauxhall was in decline as the role of the Port of Liverpool as a major employer declined. The clearance and redevelopment of neighbouring Eldon Street met with local opposition, and residents felt excluded from the decision-making process relating to its redevelopment. The residents of Portland Gardens set up their own housing co-operative in 1978, when the city council proposed to demolish their tenements and disperse the residents throughout Merseyside; the residents wished to stay in the area. Five sites were redeveloped to create 130 new homes and 36 sheltered accommodation homes, making a small contribution to the continuation of the community.

The Tate & Lyle sugar refinery on Vauxhall Road, straddling the Leeds Liverpool Canal, closed in 1981. This and the closure of other local factories led to the loss of 3000 jobs in the area and large tracts of derelict land near the centre of Liverpool. Local resident Sheila Sullivan said that around 1984 'it was a bad time to live round here, and in the city, but in this area particularly, because we had Tate and Lyle shutting down, we had the miners' strike, we had the occupation of the Cammell Laird [ship yard in Birkenhead] and a lot of the lads who were occupying that were from Scotland Road, and a few Birkenhead lads as well, but they were predominantly Scousers, and they all went to prison... *Boys from the Blackstuff* says it all, how bad it was round here'. The development of the Eldonian Village and other housing co-operatives in Liverpool were reactions against Liverpool's downturn.

In 1983, when their homes were threatened with demolition, the residents of Eldon Street and Burlington Street established their own housing co-operative (The Eldonian

Community Based Housing Association), and developed the Eldonian Village on the site of the former Tate & Lyle refinery. The Eldonians focused on what they needed, namely new housing, and were helped to achieve this by the Roman Catholic church in the city, which had an interest in retaining a viable congregation in Vauxhall and keeping the local primary school open. It 'came about through conflict – people [the local authority] saying “you’re going” [and local residents objecting] (George Evans).

The Eldonian Village formed part of a wider co-operative housing movement in Liverpool in the 1970s and 80s, another example being Weller Street, Toxteth, which is explored further below; the streets of terraced housing around Weller Street were condemned as 'slums' in the 1970s, and demolished. Wishing to retain their community, the residents set up a housing co-operative, found a vacant site nearby and worked with architects to design new housing, and crucially – the street layout and landscaping. The preservation of the community was taken literally and expressed in the plan form design and architecture, with the resulting small estate being screened with trees and low walls, and the houses faced inwards, away from the main roads. On a larger scale, the Eldonian Village has followed the same model, with a limited number of entry points to the estate, and only a few houses facing onto Vauxhall Road, the area's main arterial route. In Chisenhale Street, the southern boundary of the village, the houses turn their backs to the street, bounded a brick wall that runs the length of the street, forming a boundary wall for the back gardens of the houses in cul-de-sacs – and so an inward-looking community is created and preserved.

The Eldonian Village and Weller Street housing were reactions to a particular kind of imposed transformation in the city; so how do changes to the built environment change the way that residents perceive that environment? In the East End of London, Willmott and Young found that 'the working class neighbourhood was a culturally and physically bounded environment... the area that people personally identified with was often very small – no more than a few streets... people were acutely aware of their own territory and the visible or invisible boundaries that hemmed them in' (Young and Willmott 1957, 164).

## **Eldonian Village and TMCs**

By 1976 Liverpool City Council had identified 57 slum clearance areas, including the tenements around Burlington and Eldon Streets, home to 1500 people, and the Bevington Street Area, where the blocks in Limekiln Lane and three of the Eldon Grove blocks had been demolished (McBane 2008, 73). The perception during the 1970s and 1980s was that as there were few opportunities for employment in inner city Liverpool, there was little need for inner city housing; it could be cleared and residents moved to the peripheral estates (Roberts 2007, 124). As we have seen, clearance and redevelopment of the area around Eldon Street and Bevington Street met with local opposition, as the residents had been excluded from decisions relating to development, and did not want to move away from the area. The opposition challenged the assumptions on which housing policies had been based (ibid 125). Tenants in the condemned tenements on Burlington Street and Eldon Street campaigned to remain in the area, and each of the 145 houses in the initial stage of the Eldonian Village development was for those who lived in the condemned tenements on Burlington and Eldon Streets. Each house and garden was designed according to the requirements of the initial occupants (McBane 2008, 8).

The Eldonians wanted to regenerate the entire neighbourhood, leading to sustainable provision of facilities and employment in the area (McBane 2008, 13) – a contrast to the redevelopment of the 1900s and 1910s, which reduced and relocated small-scale industry and commerce in the Bevington Street area. The Eldonian Village's reach extended further than the former Tate & Lyle refinery, and the Eldonians established housing projects in adjacent areas, including the sites of demolished tenements in Eldon Street, Burlington Street and the Portland Gardens Co-op scheme (ibid, 7; Figure 49). The clearances of high density 'slum' housing, and later tenements, and their replacement with much lower density housing in cul-de-sacs with front and back gardens transformed the environment.

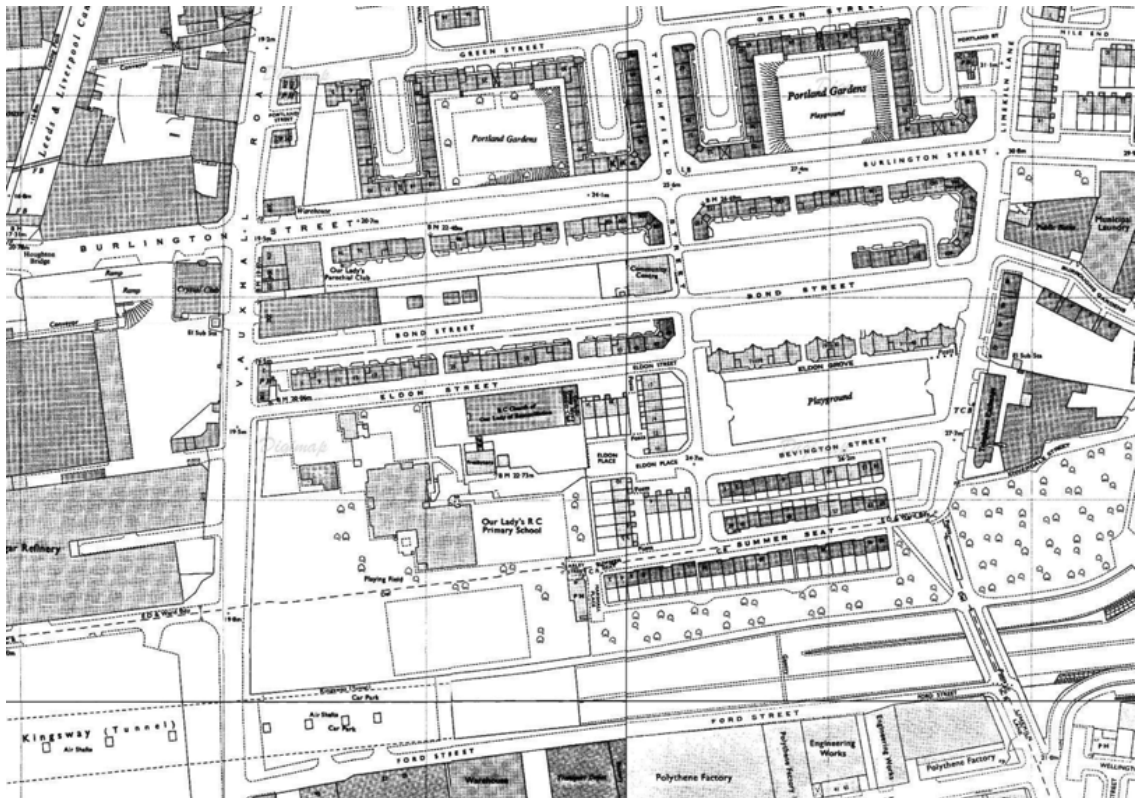
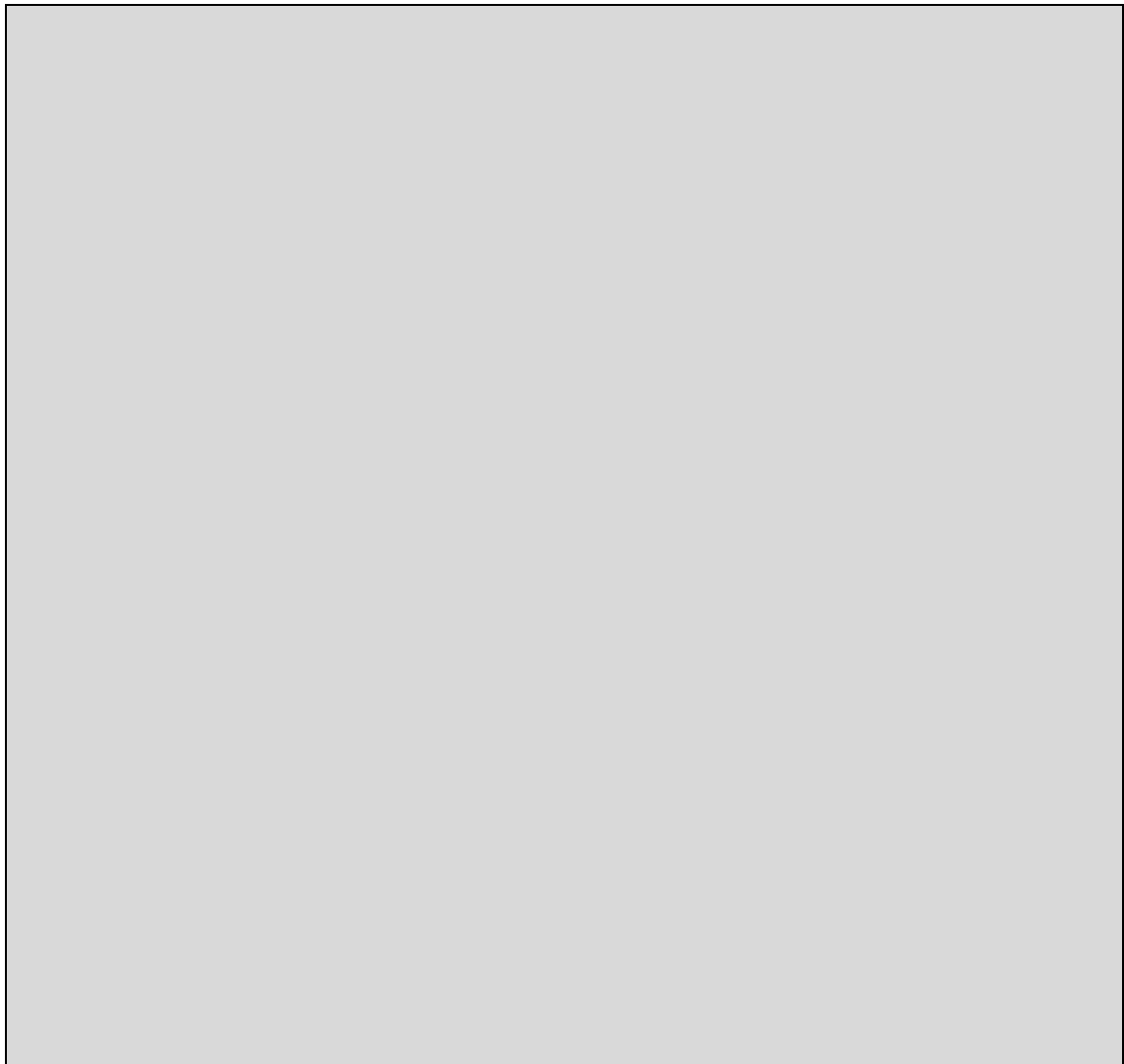


Figure 48. Vauxhall on the 1:1250 Ordnance Survey map of 1976 (not to scale) © Landmark Information Group Ltd.



- |                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Phase 1 Eldonian Village      | 9. Our Lady's School  |
| 2. Phase 2 Eldonian Village      | 10. Robert Lynch House  |
| 3. Portland Gardens Co-op Scheme | 11. Portland Gardens Conversion                                 |
| 4. Elaine Norris Sports Centre   | 12. Site of former Eldon Street and Burlington Street tenements |
| 5. Eldonian Village Hall         | 13. Hopwood Ashfield Development                                |
| 6. Tony McGann Centre            | 14. Mersey Tunnel Kingsway (Wallasey Tunnel)                    |
| 7. Kids Unlimited Nursery        | 15. Eldonian House  |
| 8. Our Lady's Church             | 16. Private Sector Development                                  |

Figure 49. Key sites in and around the Eldonian Village, including those developed by the Eldonians. The Bevington Street Area is shaded in red, east of Eldon Street. From McBane 2008, 7.

The way in which the Eldonians created their village both illustrated and reinforced their sense of community identity and belonging (McBane 2008, 21). The Eldonian Village was part of a wider phenomenon from the 1970s onwards of Tenant

Management Co-operatives (TMCs), organisations that gave tenants the right to run their own estates (Ravetz 2001, 209). TMCs coincided with the Community Architecture movement, which had its roots in community action of the 1960s and 1970s (Wates and Knevitt 1987, 27). The movement emerged ‘from a growing realisation that mismanagement of the built environment is a major contributor to the nation’s social and economic ills, and that there are better ways of going about planning and design’ (ibid, 17). Community Architecture advocated communities playing a greater role in decision-making as it affected their built environment, and placed tenants in control of the design process. In the case of the Eldonian Village, tenants chose the architects, site, form and layout, and ran the resulting housing scheme. One of the main concerns that tenants had for new co-operative schemes was that it should not look like ‘Corpy’ (corporation) housing, so resulting schemes instead often comprised small brick houses in suburban-style cul-de-sacs (Hall 1988, 291–2) like Weller Court and the Eldonian Village.



Figure 50. The Eldonian Village, on the site of the former Tate & Lyle sugar refinery.

## Comparison with Weller Street

The area around Weller Street in Toxteth, to the south of the centre of Liverpool, was a 'slum' clearance area, of two-up two-down terraced houses constructed in the 1860s, let out to tenants by the city council. The city corporation had been slow to improve and update the properties; the Weller Street housing (like most of the Bevington Street and Summer Seat cottages) did not have electrical supplies installed until after the Second World War. This older housing was not regarded as flexible, or able to change according to residents' needs; by the 1970s residents were commenting that new appliances seemed out of place in the old houses; there was no room for them, or for new functions (McDonald 1986, 25–6).

With the demolition of the terraces and the eventual redevelopment of the site, it was decided that residents would be dispersed throughout the city. The local authority's decision was unpopular with tenants, who like those in Vauxhall, preferred to remain in the area, close to existing social and familial networks. The tenants formed a group to campaign to remain together, and established their own housing co-operative. McDonald points to the gendered nature of housing action in the Weller Street area; the forming of committees, joining evening meetings and talking about politics was seen as the male domain, an extension of work and trade union activity. But it was the women of Weller Street who mostly took action with regard to housing quality (McDonald 1986, 30, 39–40) and consistently forming the majority of those at meetings, involved with designing the new housing. As one Weller Street tenant named Kitty reported, 'The men don't understand, it's the women who are in the house all the time' (McDonald 1986, 100).

Eventually a new site was obtained half a mile away from Weller Street, and a new estate of houses constructed, in groups of six and seven houses set around ten L-shaped courtyards; the resulting small estate was named 'Weller Way' (McDonald 1986, 13–14). In previous housing co-ops 'choice' had often been restricted to decisions about bathroom style and kitchen arrangements, rather than the site location, planning, layout, and structure (McDonald 1986, 82). The tenants' design

committee undertook their own questionnaires of the wider tenant community in order to inform the design of the new scheme. The residents did not want to live in flats or terraced blocks, which were equated with the slums that the residents wished to move from. Instead, they wanted houses arranged around courtyards. The rooms contained within the new homes were not significantly larger than those in the old housing, but there was more of them, and they were arranged to suit a contemporary lifestyle; there was an entrance hall, more kitchen-dining space, more bedrooms, toilets and bathrooms (ibid, 92–3). The new scheme included several different housing types, with differing arrangements of the kitchen, dining and living spaces. Constructing several different types of housing rather than a single plan increased the costs of construction.

The tenants' design committee and architect considered ways of making the scheme uninviting to outsiders without constructing a perimeter wall (McDonald 1986, 96). The scheme was instead screened with trees, and low walls, resulting in an inward looking environment. 'You don't quite feel you can wander in through the pathways, but you don't quite feel excluded either' (ibid, 14).

## **Displacement**

The demolition of large areas of housing and the displacement of almost half of Liverpool's residents between the 1930s and 1980s had a major impact on the city. Chester Hartman (1984) has written about the experiences of those displaced through urban renewal, and has found that studies of displacement arrive at a similar conclusion – those displaced are poor, a disproportionate number of non-whites, elderly, and larger households. In seeking a new place to live, the displaced tend to move as short a distance as possible, in order to retain existing ties (Hartman 1984, 533).



## **‘Parochialism’**

A prominent feature of Vauxhall is the local sense of identity and pride, and how this has been expressed through time; attitudes towards the past persist in the present. Local resident Sheila Sullivan and her mother Marie were interviewed for this project, and Sheila reflected on the strong allegiances felt by many residents to the area’s Roman Catholic parishes (of which there were originally eleven in Vauxhall). A common theme voiced by Sheila and Marie (and also by George Evans) was what they called ‘parochialism’; a local sense of identity, but one that was problematic; ‘They still ask “what parish are you from?” round here’. Marie Sullivan was from St Silvester’s parish, to the north of Bevington Street, her husband came from Our Lady’s, near Eldon Grove. ‘You didn’t get many people crossing boundaries’ (parish, let alone religious). When a secondary school dedicated to one parish was amalgamated with four other parishes ‘it was absolute murder’.

When Sheila was growing up, the Sullivans lived in the relatively new suburban estate of Norris Green (constructed in the 1920s, four miles north-west of the city centre) for one year in the early 1960s; the family was living in a two-bedroom flat in Vauxhall, but as the three children (two girls and one boy) grew up, the brother had to move his bed in to his parents’ room, and as Sheila reported ‘they couldn’t have [sexual] relations then’. The family took the opportunity to move to Norris Green, where they had their own garden, with fruit trees. The move from the inner city to a suburban estate epitomised what Young and Willmott referred to as moving from ‘a people-centred to a house-centred existence’ (1957, 154), and while living in Norris Green the Sullivans returned to Vauxhall each day for school and work. When the Norris Green houses were refurbished a year later and the Sullivans had to move out, they took the opportunity to return to familial and social networks in Vauxhall, taking a newly built three-bedroom house on Stanley Road (to the north of the Bevington Street area) in 1962.

Many families, like the Sullivans, have been drawn back to the familiarity of the neighbourhood, returning when flats and houses have come up for sale, but Sheila

thought that despite the population movements to and from the area, Vauxhall was ‘a bit too insular for its own good, too parochial’. Speaking of Vauxhall in the decades after the Second World War, Sheila Sullivan said: ‘There were people who didn’t like you if you were a little bit different’. ‘If you tried to be different, or a little cleaner, or tried to do something to your Corporation flat, depending on who you lived around, it was either applauded or they’d go “what are you doing?” or you’d get your windows smashed’.

What George and other interviewees described as ‘parochialism’, having a narrow outlook that is based around the home and its immediate environs, a characterisation that was mostly attributed to life in older housing, still played a part in everyday life, as worshipers, born in the parish, travelled from outside the city to attend weekly mass at St Anthony’s RC church in Scotland Road, near Bevington Street. The Catholic Church in Liverpool had played a major campaigning role in supporting the creation of the Eldonian Village project, retaining parishioners in the process (McBain 2008, 40).

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

In the East End of London, Willmott and Young found that ‘the working class neighbourhood was a culturally and physically bounded environment... the area that people personally identified with was often very small – no more than a few streets... people were acutely aware of their own territory and the visible or invisible boundaries that hemmed them in’ (Young and Willmott 1957, 164).

Mark Crinson (2005) discusses the concept of the city as a physical landscape and collection of objects and practices that both enable recollections of the past and embody the past through traces of the city’s sequential building and rebuilding. How have residents in Vauxhall related to their pasts and their environment’s pasts? The oral history interviews have indicated that the relationship one has with an environment can be problematic – the notion of Parochialism as expressed by Sheila and George was both a positive expression of pride and a restrictive, narrow mind-set. Vauxhall is a palimpsest, visible through churches, streets, the canal, and other

landmarks that have persisted across decades, landmarks by which current and former residents still orientate themselves. Residents returning to the area – for mass, or to visit family – allow older objects and practices to persist.

The Eldonian Village and Weller Way were reactions to a particular form of transformation taking place in Liverpool (and other towns and cities) in the 1970s and 1980s, which faced the demolition of neighbourhoods, breaking up established communities. In the case of the Eldonian Village, as a concerted effort was made to maintain a community with deep roots in the area, earlier ideas and values have been fixed onto the new surroundings of the village, old and new ways of living ostensibly sitting alongside each other in a dynamic environment.

The concept of a transformed landscape and experience for a local community that has been 'dispossessed' has been a powerful one in this Liverpool case study, and for the following Peabody Trust housing case study in Bethnal Green, London. The Kingstanding case study has had a different focus, as individuals and families moved there, leaving existing social and familial networks, having to create new ones.

# **Chapter Six: Peabody Trust Estate, Bethnal Green, London**

## **Introduction**

This chapter examines the Peabody Trust that, along with a number of similar philanthropic and semi-philanthropic institutions, was a major provider of housing in inner city London, from the 1860s to the present day. The Peabody Trust provided a response to a particular set of local housing conditions, just as the city corporations in Liverpool and Birmingham had with the construction of the Bevington Street area and Kingstanding estates.

This chapter focuses on the Peabody Trust's estate in Bethnal Green, which opened in 1910 but followed a model of housing that the Trust had developed for more than 40 years. Analysis of the estate's buildings and of the oral testimonies of Peabody Trust residents and former staff has provided insight into the use and development of the estate. As the Peabody Trust has changed from a top-down landlord-led organisation to one that seeks to involve tenants in the running of estates, so these changes have been manifested in the form of the estate, and how tenants perceive and use the spaces around them.

## **The Peabody Trust**

The American banker George Peabody founded the Peabody Trust in 1862; Peabody gave £500,000 for the establishment of tenement buildings, containing flats that would be let out to the 'working classes', providing good quality accommodation and helping to ease overcrowding. The Peabody Trust was originally run along the lines of the concept of 'five per cent philanthropy', whereby the rents were set at a level that would ensure a 5% annual return on the initial capital expenditure; money collected in rent, along with interest generated by Peabody's original £500,000 gift would then be spent on maintaining the tenement building, and constructing new flats (Datta 2006,

792), protecting Peabody's gift. This particular funding model was used by other philanthropic and semi-philanthropic housing organisations, such as the Four Per Cent Industrial Dwellings Company, which was formed in 1885 by a board including the banker Nathan Mayer Rothschild and a number of other philanthropists to provide 'the industrial classes with more commodious and healthy lodgings and dwellings than those which they now inhabit, giving them the maximum of accommodation for the minimum rent' (White 2003 p20). Homes were provided in the inner city areas of the East End and south London, while generating a modest four per cent annual return from rents for the investors.

The clearance of housing condemned as 'slums', and the construction of new streets to relieve congestion, and improve sanitation and communication between disparate parts of London, was initiated by the Commissioners of Woods and Forests, a predecessor of the British Government's Office of Works during the 1830s and 1840s. As part of the Commissioners' works, Commercial Street was cut through a previously heavily congested part of Spitalfields, immediately to the east of the City of London, between 1843 and 1845. Such clearance schemes were a source of relatively cheap land for philanthropic and commercial developers of dwellings, and so the first Peabody Buildings were opened on the corner of Commercial Street and White Lion Street (later renamed Folgate Street) in Spitalfields in March 1864 (Sheppard 1957, 256).

The five-storey buildings at Commercial Street (Figure 51) were constructed of brick, and comprised two ranges forming an acute 'L' shape, with a yard at the rear. The ground floor of the range facing Commercial Street contained shops with storerooms, and the remainder of the building contained 57 flats. There were 47 dwellings of two rooms (a living room with cooking facilities, and a bedroom), seven dwellings of three rooms, and three one-room 'bed-sit' dwellings, intended for the widowed, or couples without children. It was hoped that 'higher-status tenants, who could afford to occupy three rooms, would set an example to poorer one-room tenants' (Dennis 2008, 228), suggesting that the allocation of dwellings depended on the ability to pay rent, rather

than the need for additional space, conflicting with the dwellings' purpose of alleviating overcrowding.



Figure 51. The former Peabody Trust dwellings in Commercial Street

The fourth floor of the building (visible in the right-hand photograph above, with rows of narrow windows) contained communal laundries, drying areas, and baths; an article in the *Illustrated Times* (Anon 1864, 169) stated that in wet weather children could also use this space as a playroom. Each dwelling was provided with 'large and well-lighted cupboards, cooking range, oven, boiler, hot plate etc.', although no fireplaces for heating were provided in the bedrooms. Dust chutes extended from the roof down to the basement, where they emptied into large bins, which could also be accessed from the rear yard.

The flats were 'associated dwellings', where WCs and washing facilities were provided on each floor, each one to be shared between the occupants of two dwellings. By placing the lavatories within a relatively more public domain, the Peabody Trust and its architect Henry Darbishire argued they could be more easily supervised by the residents and caretakers, and would make for a more healthy living environment by separating the lavatories from the living room and bedrooms. Such shared facilities continued to be a feature of Peabody Trust dwellings constructed into the twentieth century, only being removed as part of refurbishment programmes undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s, and some communal bathrooms remained at the Bethnal Green estate into the early 1990s. There was a separate five-room dwelling for the porter and

his family, as well as an office (Anon 1864, 169). A contemporary illustration of the Spitalfields dwellings stressed the progressive purpose and form of the block, and its innovative nature, by portraying the block 'like the bow of a ship ploughing through the waves' (Dennis 2008, 35).

Charles Booth's late nineteenth century maps of London poverty, and the accompanying notebooks compiled by his assistants, with the help of police officers and school board visitors, mention Spitalfields fleetingly, in contrast to the extended descriptions of poverty in the common lodging houses of the neighbouring streets (Booth 1889). The Peabody Trust's buildings provided homes for the 'respectable working class'; many tenants were skilled workers. The tenants' register for the Peabody Buildings at Herbrand Street in Bloomsbury indicate that the late nineteenth century tenants of the buildings held a variety of occupations, from un-skilled labouring to white-collar clerical workers (Dennis 2008, 250). Rents were set at a level that was beyond the means of the very poorest; five shillings per week for a flat with a living room and two bedrooms in the Commercial Street dwellings when they first opened (Anon 1864, 169); at this time the estimated average weekly wage for a man was 13 shillings 10d (Levi 1867, 9). Those who needed assistance the most were often not helped directly, unless they took to living in unsuitably small accommodation. Mrs Myers, who was interviewed by the British Library for the *Family Life and Work Experience Before 1918* project in 1971, had grown up in the 1900s in a one-room flat in the Peabody Buildings at Blackfriars, near the south bank of the River Thames, with her father, brother, and two sisters. The family was very poor; like most Peabody dwellings, the flat contained an alcove for a bed, but the family could not afford a mattress, and so slept on couches and wooden chairs (BLSA C707/401/1-3 C1, 1971). Despite the original intentions of the Peabody Trust, to provide better facilities than those that were ordinarily available to the poor, the changing situations of families conspired to go against that.

The Commercial Street buildings, with some alteration, provided a model for Peabody Trust dwellings across London, although no others were built with shops on the ground floor. Perhaps unintentionally, the ground floor shops at the Commercial Street

buildings had helped to integrate the dwellings with their surroundings; other tenement blocks were criticised for having the appearance of faceless, looming, undecorated barracks.

The Trust's other buildings were mostly five-storey blocks, facing central courtyards, as at Bethnal Green, and Wild Street, or in rows separated by narrow courtyards, as at the Trust's buildings in Camberwell. This form of construction was also used by other philanthropic trusts established during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, such as the Guinness Trust, founded in 1890 by Sir Edward Cecil Guinness, the great grandson of the founder of the Guinness Brewery. The Snowsfields estate in Bermondsey, south London, was opened in 1897–8, providing 355 tenements (Malpass 2000, 21; Figure 52).

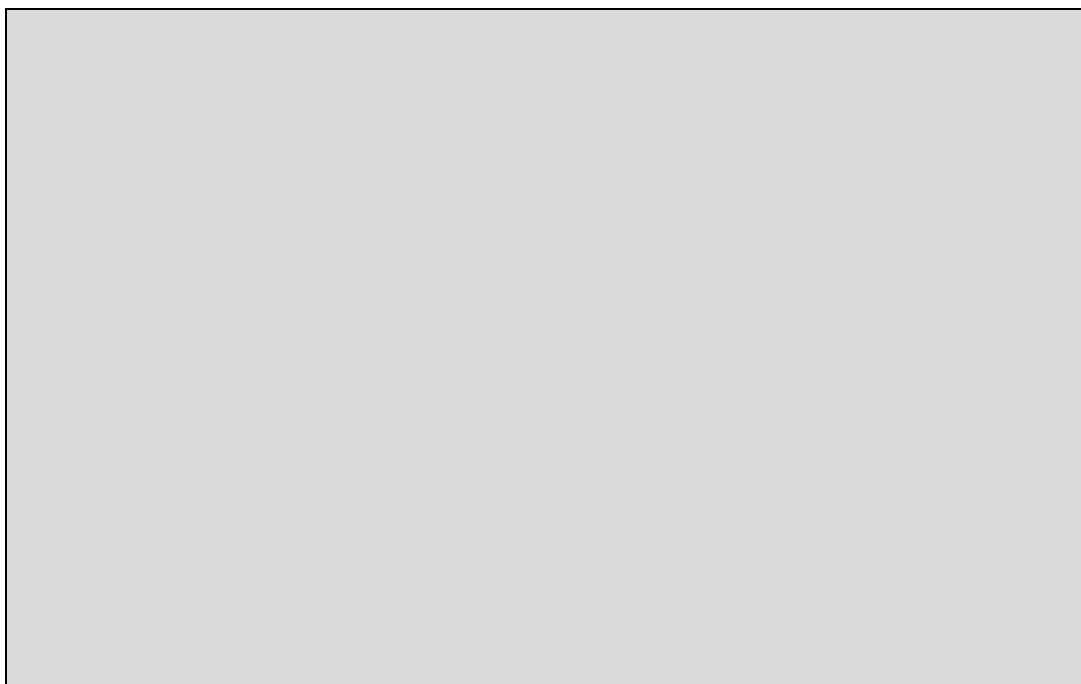


Figure 52. The Guinness Trust's Snowsfields Housing Estate, Bermondsey, opened in 1897–8. © The Guinness Partnership, 2008.

The Peabody Trust dwellings built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were all associated flats, like those at Commercial Street, where the sanitary facilities were shared and subject to the scrutiny of neighbours and resident caretakers. The



Peabody Trust required that tenants wash the lavatories and communal areas on a weekly basis, and the laundries and baths were available to tenants on a rota.

Following the death of George Peabody in 1869, a critique of the facilities provided by the Peabody Trust was published in *The Times* newspaper (Anon 1869, 4). The walls of the Trust's dwellings were un-plastered bare brick walls, and wallpaper was forbidden, in order to reduce the risk of vermin building nests in the walls; the bare walls looked and felt cold, however, and could not be washed, and the rooms in the dwellings were criticised as being too small for the families living there. The anonymous writer of the piece suggested that the bare walls should be painted or varnished, acknowledging the fact that some Peabody residents flouted the rules in any case, by hanging wallpaper in their dwellings. The article also suggested that an entrance lobby should be provided for each dwelling, where a scullery with sink and water supply could be placed, offering the tenants greater privacy and comfort. Some of these additions to the standard plan of the Peabody dwelling became commonplace, but the reading rooms and communal halls that the writer recommended for each estate never became a feature of this kind of housing.

Placing so many people in relatively close proximity with each other required the Peabody Trust to set rules regarding the behaviour that was expected from tenants and their families, rules that stretched into many areas of the residents' lives. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the element of control exerted by the Peabody Trust over its tenants included control over their social lives. The oral testimony of Peabody Trust tenant Mr William East, gathered as part of a British Library project to collect evidence relating to family life and work experience before 1918, relates that bicycles could not be ridden in the yard of the Peabody Dwellings in John Fisher Street, Whitechapel, nor ball games played. Any parties held in the dwellings had to be over by 11pm, and Mr East remembered his parents' tales of climbing over the tenement block's gates once they were locked at 11pm, although the restricted hours had been relaxed by the time of his birth in 1897 (BL C707/365/1-4 C1). Washing could not be taken in, nor could any businesses be run from the home, and lodgers were also not allowed. Such rules conflicted with the ways of life that had

been experienced by tenants before they arrived at the Peabody Trust's dwellings, and along with the form of the new dwellings, set to enforce a particular way of living.

The paternalistic, controlling nature of the Peabody Trust's supervision of its tenants extended well into the twentieth century. Cyril Mould, a porter at several Peabody Trust estates during the 1930s and 1940s, stated that the children of tenants received preference for available flats, and the estate superintendents maintained their own waiting lists into the 1960s, after which a central lettings department was established. The Superintendents' Instruction Book (LMA ACC/3445/PT/06/051) for 1976 outlined the qualifications that potential tenants were required to meet, namely that they should be Londoners by birth or by 'established residence' (taken to mean that they had resided in the city for at least 10 years). Relatively recent arrivals to London, whether they had moved from another city or another country, would not be considered. Potential tenants were also to be at least 21 years of age, due to what the Peabody Trust perceived as the high failure rate of teenage marriages. Housing provision was not necessarily based on need, but rather on having 'good tenants' who were not in rent arrears, and had not received notice to quit their previous home. Estate staff carried out the evictions of those who were not 'good tenants', but there was flexibility for those in hardship. The Peabody Trust undertook an annual census of tenants and their families and occupations; former porter Harry Jenkins suggested this census was felt to be an unpopular intrusion among tenants, especially "Policemen and civil servants who knew their rights!"

By the late twentieth century the Peabody Trust became a more hands-off landlord, and tenants maintained a certain amount of freedom over the decoration, and even structure of their homes; rule D5(g) stated that the Trust had no objection to the removal of solid fuel fireplaces and their tiled surrounds, as long as the fireplace was bricked up to the satisfaction of the Trust's own surveyor. By this time interior decorations were the responsibility of the tenant. When Bethnal Green resident Elizabeth Harris was interviewed for this project, she said 'they [Peabody Trust] don't come round, they trust you to look after the place. I wouldn't make a mess anyway, it's too much bother having to clear things up'. The estate no longer has a resident

caretaker, 'we haven't had one for a long time. Someone comes in that cleans—washes the stairs down once a week. It doesn't sound much, but when you think there's seven blocks and he's got to do all of them. And he sweeps outside and tidies out there. So he does a good job'. The resident caretaker 'would do odd jobs, perhaps change the light in the kitchen, because it's a strip ... I don't like admitting I can't do things ... so if it goes again I'll have to get someone to do it' (Elizabeth Harris).

## **The Bethnal Green Estate**

### **Origins**

Bethnal Green had been a suburb on the edge of the expanding city of London, before being subsumed into the city in the early to mid-nineteenth century. The area in which the Peabody Trust's estate is now located had been occupied by rows of terraced houses, as depicted on ordnance survey mapping from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; an aerial photograph of Bethnal Green from 1936, after the Bethnal Green estate was constructed but before the mass clearance of terraced housing during after the Second World War, suggest that these were mostly two-up two-down houses, with rear outshots for kitchens. Charles Booth's map of London poverty, compiled in c1900 (ten years before the construction of the Bethnal Green estate) depicts the socio-economic groups (as classified by Booth) who lived on the future site of the estate and the surrounding streets as 'mixed; some comfortable, others poor' and 'poor'. Slightly wealthier households were focused along the main route into the city, Hackney Road. Census returns indicate that the population of Bethnal Green had increased steadily during the nineteenth century, and high-density, good quality housing was a necessity.

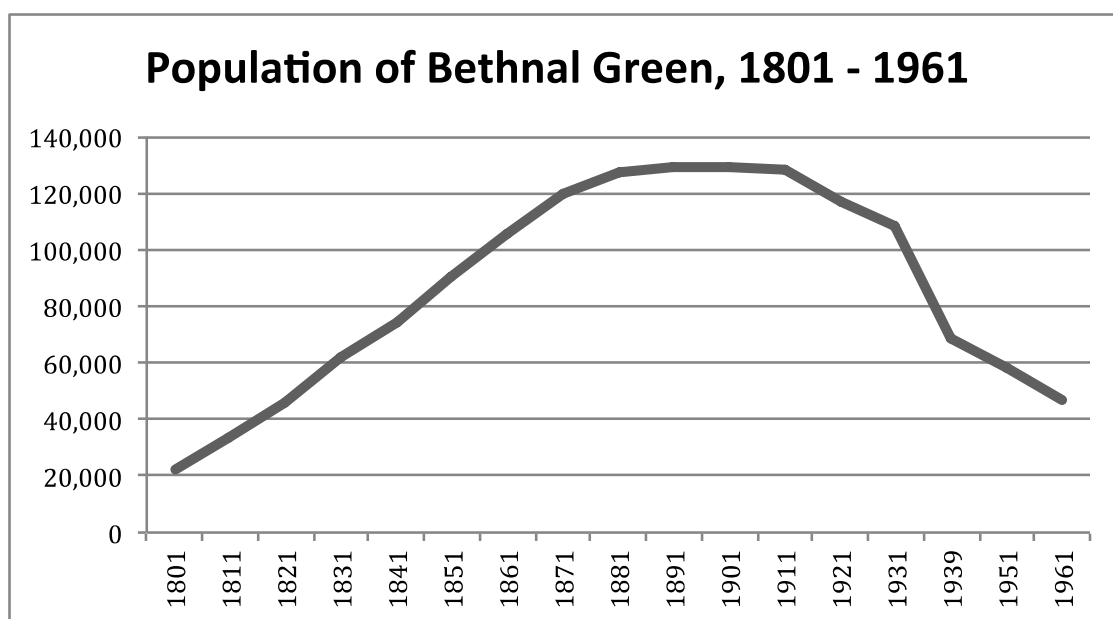


Figure 53. The population of Bethnal Green between 1801 and 1961 (Source: Vision of Britain. [www.visionofbritain.org.uk](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk)).

When originally constructed the Bethnal Green estate contained 119 flats varying in size from single room bed-sits up to three bedroom flats housed in eight five-storey blocks positioned around a central courtyard on a triangular site, fronting Minerva Street to the west, Centre Street to the south and Cambridge Crescent to the north-east. Seven of the blocks (A to G inclusive) are architecturally very similar; they form the original tenement blocks built in 1910 and were designed by W E Wallis. Block H was built in 1916, and designed by Victor Wilkins, Architect and Surveyor to the Peabody Trust. The construction of the Bethnal Green Estate necessitated the demolition of 42 two and three-storey terraced houses, of which nine incorporated shops, set out in three streets (for the construction of blocks A to G), and a furniture factory on the corner of Cambridge Circus (later Cambridge Crescent) and Minerva Street, which had been the Olive Branch public house (Block H).

Along with much of the East End of London, Bethnal Green was severely damaged by aerial bombing during the Second World War; the area lies close to the docks along the River Thames, and to areas of industrial production. The Bethnal Green estate sustained minor bomb damage during the war, and air raid shelters for 350 people

were constructed within the estate. High explosive bombs were dropped on neighbouring streets, particularly during the Blitz of October 1940 to June 1941, but also during other bombing campaigns that took place throughout the war. As a result, large areas of the small-scale terraced housing in the streets surrounding the Bethnal Green estate were demolished, and were replaced by the Minerva Estate, four-storey tall blocks of walk-up flats constructed between 1946 and 1948. When originally built, the Bethnal Green estate would have been a distinctive type of housing; within fifty years the surrounding area had been transformed. London continued to expand, and suburban development, like that highlighted by Michael Young and Peter Willmott (1957) in their sociological study of working class communities in Bethnal Green moving to a new housing estate in Essex, continued to shape Bethnal Green.

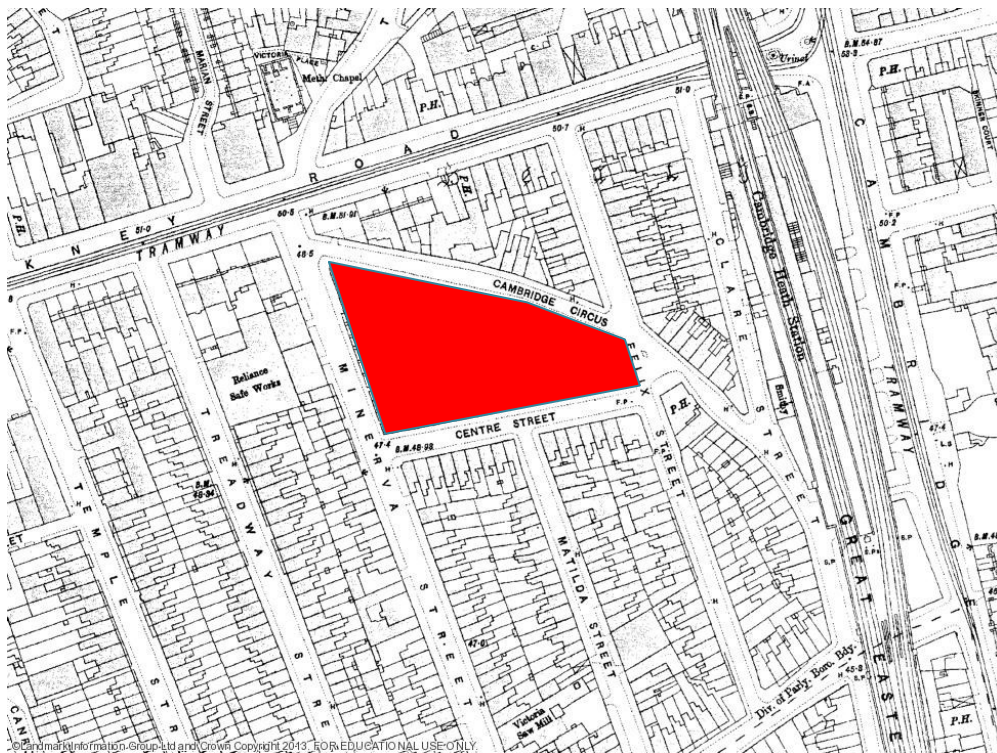


Figure 54. The site of the Bethnal Green estate and surrounding area on the 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map of 1895 (not to scale) © Landmark Information Group.



Figure 55. Charles Booth's Map of London Poverty (1898–99) shows the triangular site of the Bethnal Green estate at the centre.

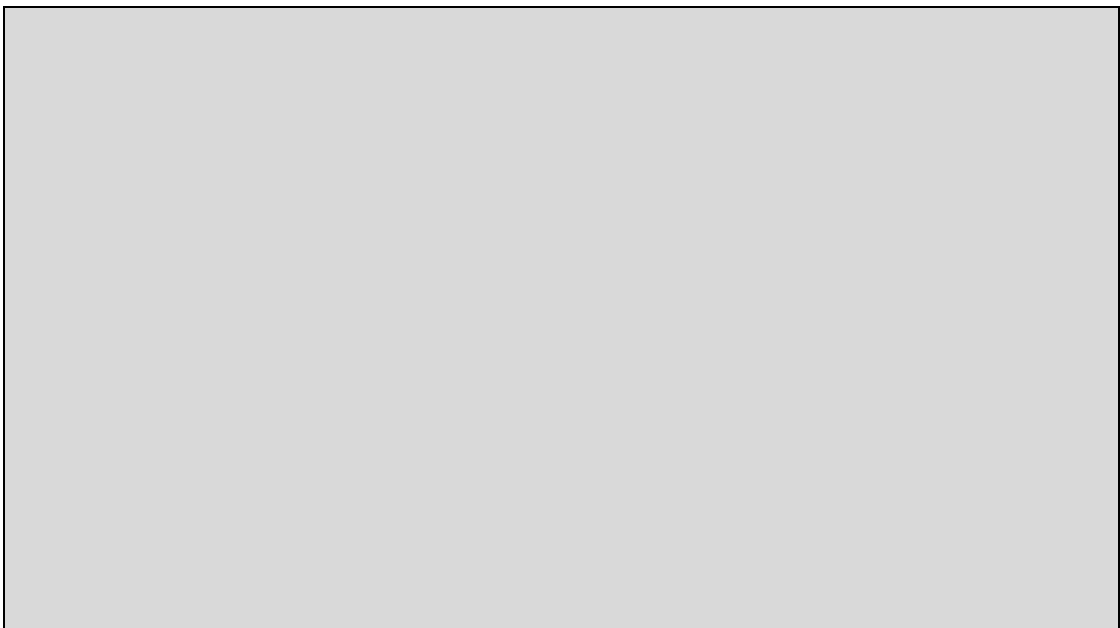


Figure 56. The Bethnal Green Estate (n.d., early twentieth century). Peabody Trust Collection.

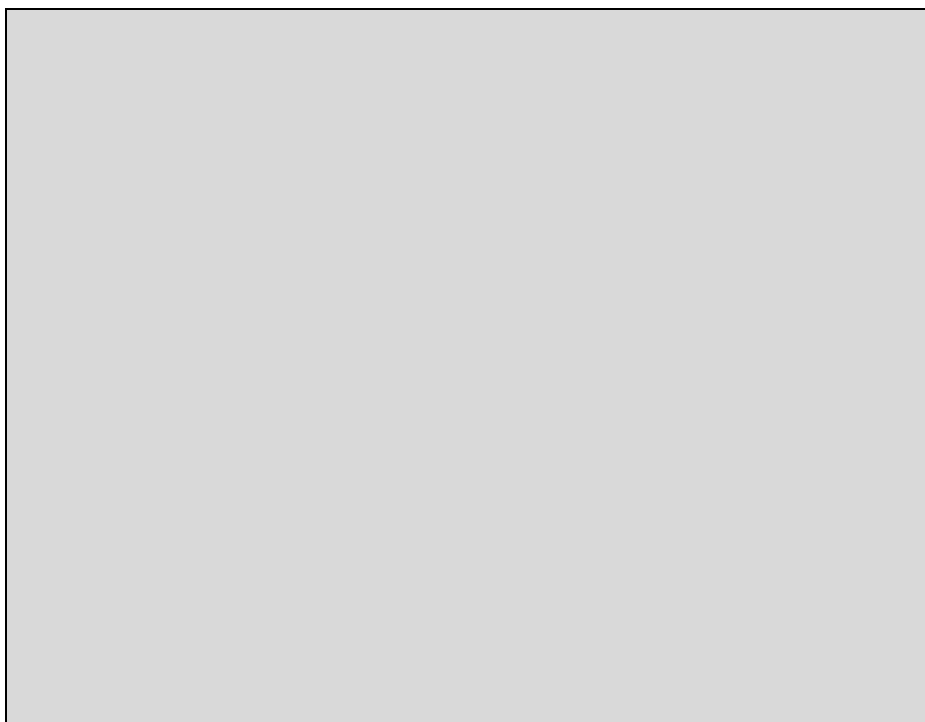


Figure 57. Aerial photograph of Bethnal Green, 1936. The Bethnal Green estate is located to the left of the railway line, below the gasholders. © English Heritage



Figure 58. The Bethnal Green estate and surrounding area on the 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map of 1955 (not to scale) © Landmark Information Group.



## Description of the estate

Blocks A to G were completed in 1910, and each of the seven blocks contains five storeys with a smaller sixth storey that originally housed a communal bathhouse and laundry (the sixth storeys were converted in the 1950s and 1960s so they each contained a one- or two-bedroom flat); Blocks A to G do not have basements. Each block is entered through a rusticated and arched brick portico and a short corridor leading to the main staircase, which backs on to the rear (street side) of the building. Storage areas are located under each staircase, accessed from the rear of the building; these accommodate electrical plant and waste bins. All of the flats on the first floor and above are accessed from the staircase. The blocks are constructed with load-bearing brick walls, with red brick facades with horizontal bands and window arches picked out in yellow brick, and pitched hipped and slate covered roofs. The floors were constructed of timber except for the staircases and landings, which were built of concrete. The original timber sash windows sat on concrete sills with iron window box restraints; these have been replaced with UPVC double glazed windows.



Figure 59. The central courtyard and playground at the Bethnal Green estate



Block H is the only block on the estate with a half basement, which contains workshops, furniture storerooms and a communal bank of laundry drying horses (Figure 60). The flats are all situated on the five storeys above the basement. The block is entered through an arched stucco portico that leads directly onto the staircase, and because of the half basement the ground floor is up half a flight of stairs. The block is constructed of load bearing brick, faced with red brick and stone quoins (corner blocks), and the fifth storey is located mostly under the slated mansard roof, and partly in a turret on the corner of Cambridge Crescent and Minerva Street. As with Blocks A–G, the floors were constructed of timber, and the landings and stairs of reinforced concrete. The original timber sash windows sat on concrete sills with iron window box restraints; these have been replaced by UPV double glazed windows.



Figure 60. Laundry drying horses in the basement of Block H in 1989 (Peabody Trust 1989, ACC/3445/PT/08/032 London Metropolitan Archive).

The refurbishment programmes of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1990s have altered the internal appearance of the blocks; although they each still follow the same basic plan, of a central staircase with landings, and flats located to either side of the staircase, the internal arrangement of individual flats and their rooms has changed (visible from the exterior of the blocks, where redundant windows have been blocked with brick) and

internal fixtures, such as cooking ranges, open fireplaces and built-in cupboards removed.

When they were first built, each block contained four or five tenements to a floor for a total of 140 flats in the original seven blocks. Block H added another 20 units. Facilities like lavatories, washing, and laundry were shared between tenants. In the courtyard there was a coal store capable of accommodating 25 tons of fuel, and 14 pram sheds.

The estate is surrounded by a low brick walls, rendered with cement and topped with steel railings, with breaks to access the under stair storage areas; until the 1990s tenants disposed of their rubbish by tipping it down chutes built into the stairwell, which emptied into bins contained in the storage areas. The present railings were installed during the early 1990s to replace iron railings removed during the Second World War (Peabody Trust 1989). Tall gate piers and steel entrance gates are located on the northern side of the estate, fronting onto Cambridge Crescent, to the east of Block G, and a second pedestrian gate is located adjacent to Block H, also in Cambridge Crescent. A community hall with estate offices was constructed next to the pedestrian gate in the 1990s, replacing a set of workshops for use by tenants and the Peabody Trust's Works Department. An electrical substation (built in 1952 when an electricity supply was first introduced to the estate) and several 'pram sheds' abut Block G. The sheds were originally constructed for the storage of prams, but were generally used by tenants for storage or as workshops; Harry Jenkins, a porter and later supervisor at the Peabody Trust's Spitalfields and Hammersmith estates remembered one man who grew plants in a pram shed, another used one to mend shoes.

A third entrance gate is located between Blocks C and F on the southern side of the estate, accessed from Centre Street; this gate does not have the brick piers of the gates in Cambridge Crescent, suggesting that this gate was a later insertion, perhaps to better facilitate exit from the estate in an emergency. When the estate was first constructed, and for the first few decades of its use, the two gates in Cambridge Crescent would have been the only means of entry and exit from the estate, and the

wider gated entry adjacent to Block G could be monitored from the original Supervisor's office on the ground floor of Block A.



Figure 61. Entrance gates to the Bethnal Green Estate, Cambridge Crescent

The internal courtyard was described in 1989 as an 'area of black Tarmac relieved by no feature or landscaping other than a narrow strip of planting along Blocks F and G' (Peabody Trust 1989). As a result of the refurbishment programme that took place during the 1990s, additional flowerbeds and benches were introduced, as well as a children's playground.

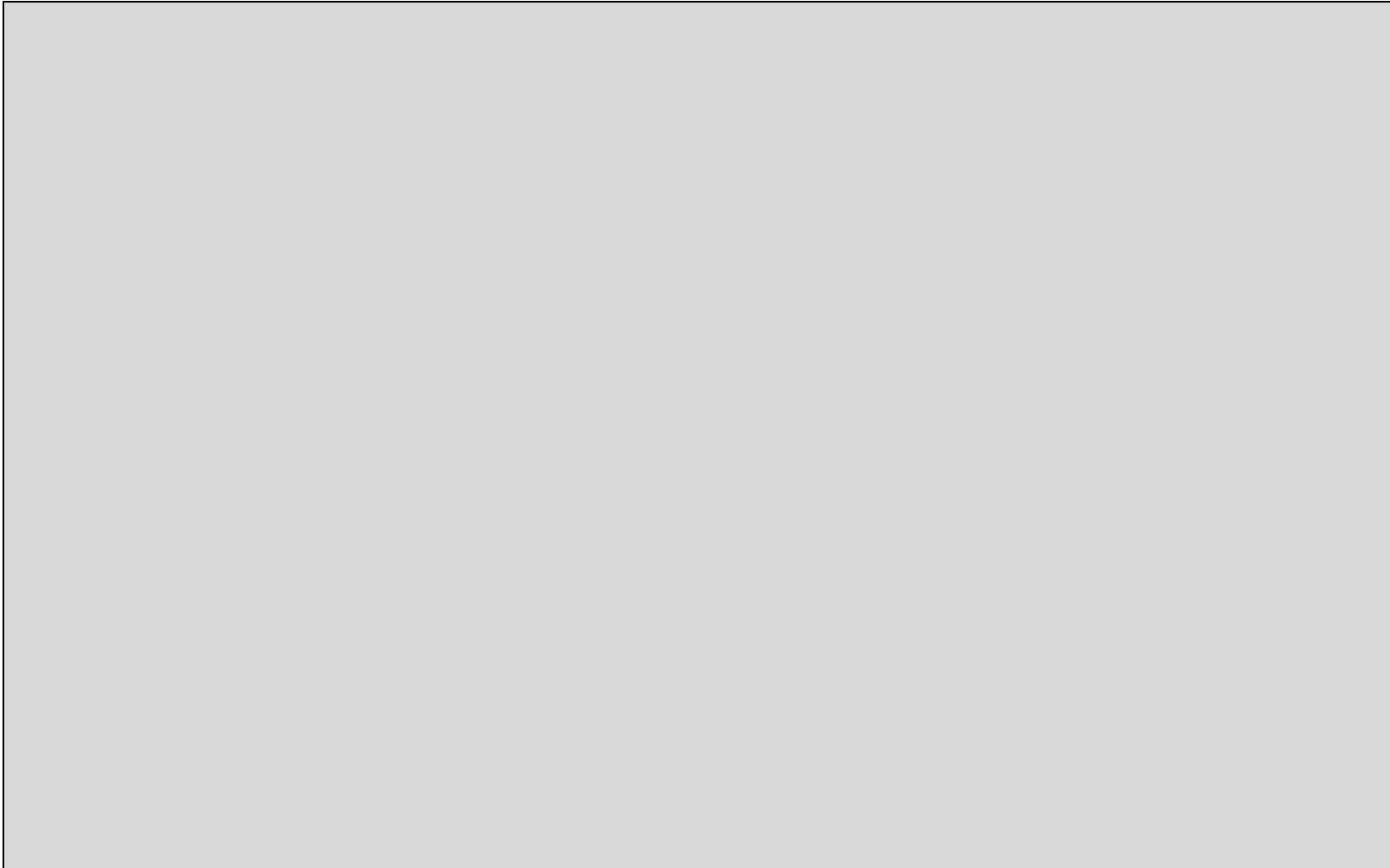


Figure 62. Plan of the Bethnal Green Estate in 1989 (ACC/3445/PT/08/032 Peabody Trust Collection, London Metropolitan Archive).

## Development of the Bethnal Green Estate

Plans of the interior layout of the Bethnal Green estate prior to the 1960s do not exist in the Peabody Trust's own archive, or in the Trust archives kept at the London Metropolitan Archive, but the formulaic cell-like design of Peabody Trust tenement buildings means that examination of the plan form and development of other Peabody estates built at the same time provides an insight into the development of the Bethnal Green estate. One such estate is the Camberwell Green estate in south London, completed by the Peabody Trust in 1911, one year after Bethnal Green.



Figure 63. The exterior of Block C of the Peabody Trust estate at Camberwell Green.

The external appearance of the blocks at Camberwell Green is different to that of Blocks A–G at Bethnal Green, with the central bays of the blocks constructed of dark brown brick, in contrast to the red brick outer bays, and the upper storey of each block is accommodated under a slate mansard roof. The internal layout of the blocks, as depicted in the construction plans (Figure 64 and Figure 65) is identical between the two estates. Each block was built with a central staircase, and on each floor were four

flats, two with a living room (which was also used for cooking) and two bedrooms, and two flats each with a living room and one bedroom. Each room had a fireplace, and storage cupboards were built in to every room. Each flat had a coal bunker just inside the flat's front door, but tenants had to share washing facilities; two sculleries, each containing a sink and a dust chute, and two lavatories were located on each floor. The top floor of each block contained a communal laundry and drying room.



Figure 64. Architect's plans of the ground, first and second floors of a tenement block at Camberwell Green (ACC/3445/PT/08/006 Peabody Trust Collection, London Metropolitan Archive).



Figure 65. Architect's plans of the third, fourth and fifth floors of a tenement block at Camberwell Green (ACC/3445/PT/08/006 Peabody Trust Collection, London Metropolitan Archive).



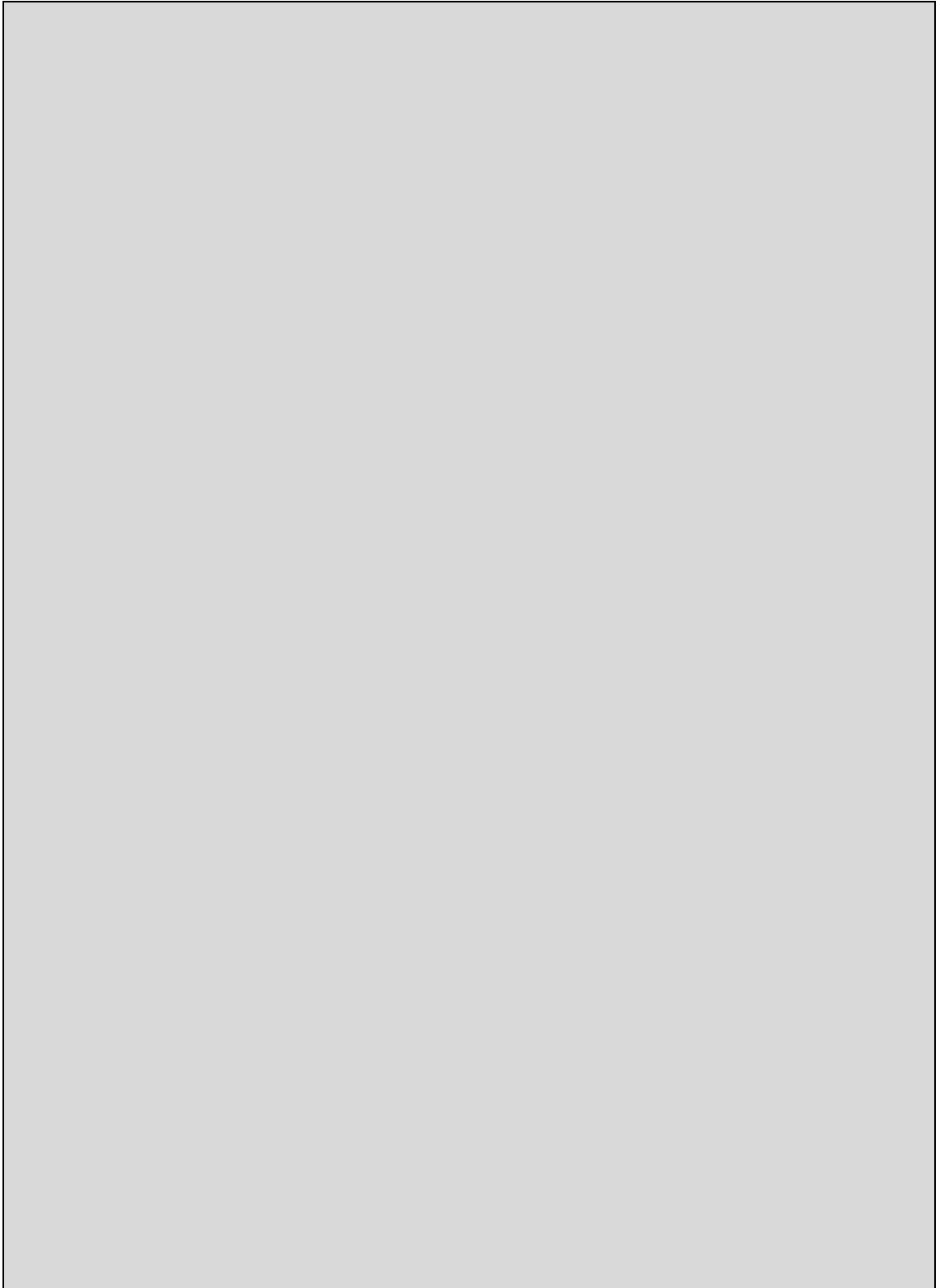


Figure 66. Details of the typical fittings of the tenement blocks at Camberwell Green  
(ACC/3445/PT/08/006 Peabody Trust Collection, London Metropolitan Archive).

A prominent feature of the internal layout of the flats at Camberwell Green was the storage cupboards built in to every room, usually located to one side of the chimneybreast. The living rooms each featured a ventilated larder with built-in meat hook, and drawers, racks and shelves for plates and crockery, hooks for cups. A hinged fanlight over the front door of each flat aided cross ventilation through the rooms. The cupboards, like those also installed in houses in the Bevington Street area in Liverpool, and the Warren Farm estate in Kingstanding, were a manifestation of the contemporary concern for cleanliness, health and welfare, which had been institutionalised through the Public Health Act of 1875. Physical and moral cleanliness were intertwined, and the Peabody Trust maintained that tenants should comply with the Vaccinations Act, report cases of infectious diseases, only undertake washing in the communal laundry, not the private home, and keep communal areas, namely the corridors, stairs and lavatories clean.

The Bethnal Green estate remained largely unchanged until the 1950s when the Peabody Trust undertook a modernisation programme, at a time when the London County Council and individual boroughs were taking an even greater interest in housing, and were planning and constructing more of their own housing estates. When the tenements were constructed, they included shared lavatories and communal bathrooms; baths were undertaken on a rotation system, with separate nights for men, women, and male and female children (Figure 67). Cooking facilities took the form of ranges in the living rooms of flats, and small sculleries. A modernisation programme was therefore undertaken at Bethnal Green between 1950 and 1965, resulting in the re-ordering of flats and the creation of private bathrooms in the flats, replacing the shared lavatories. Blocks D and E were modernised between 1950 and 1953 by the architects John Grey & Partners using the Peabody Trust's own funds. Blocks F and G were modernised between 1960 and 1961 by architects Duckett Rix & Scott with funds from Discretionary Improvement Grants given by the Greater London Council (GLC). Blocks A, B and C were modernised between 1962 and 1965 by the Peabody Trust's own Surveyors Department with Discretionary Improvement Grants from the GLC. Block H was not modernised at all at this time.

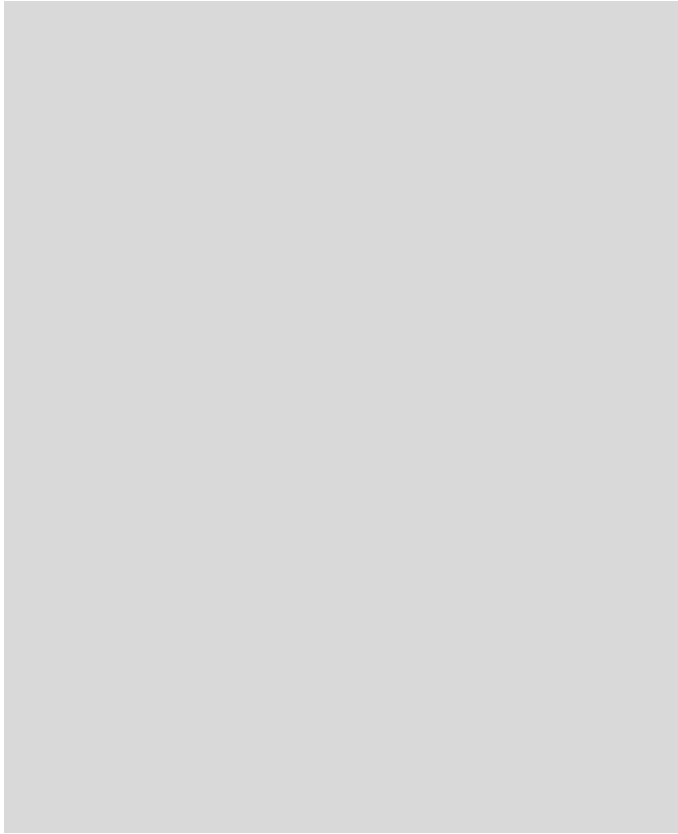


Figure 67. Opening times for the communal bathrooms at a Peabody Trust estate (London Metropolitan Archive)

Flats were modernised at several other Peabody Trust estates during the 1960s. The thirteen six-storey tenement blocks at Wild Street in Covent Garden were constructed in 1881, and contained two, three, and four-roomed associated flats, where the lavatory and laundry facilities were shared between tenants. In 1963 the blocks were refurbished to convert the associated flats into self-contained flats.



Figure 68. Typical upper floor plan of Block C, Wild Street Estate, Covent Garden, as constructed in 1881 (ACC/3445/PT/08/023 Peabody Trust Collection, London Metropolitan Archive).

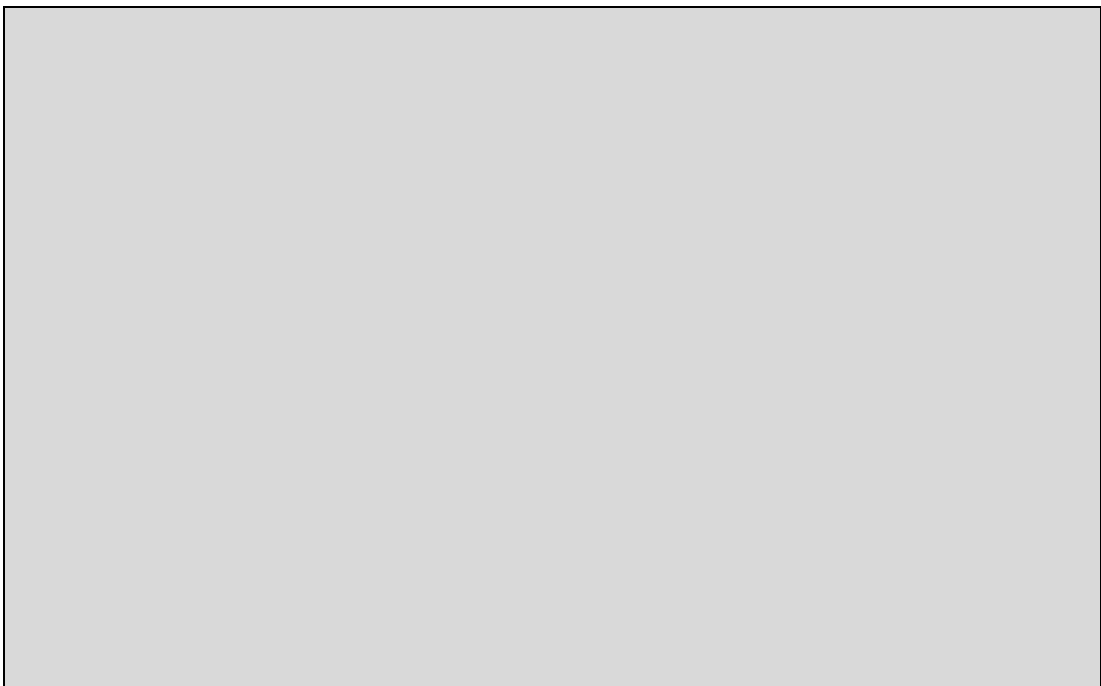


Figure 69. Typical upper floor plan of Block C, Wild Street Estate, Covent Garden, as refurbished in 1963 (ACC/3445/PT/08/023 Peabody Trust Collection, London Metropolitan Archive).

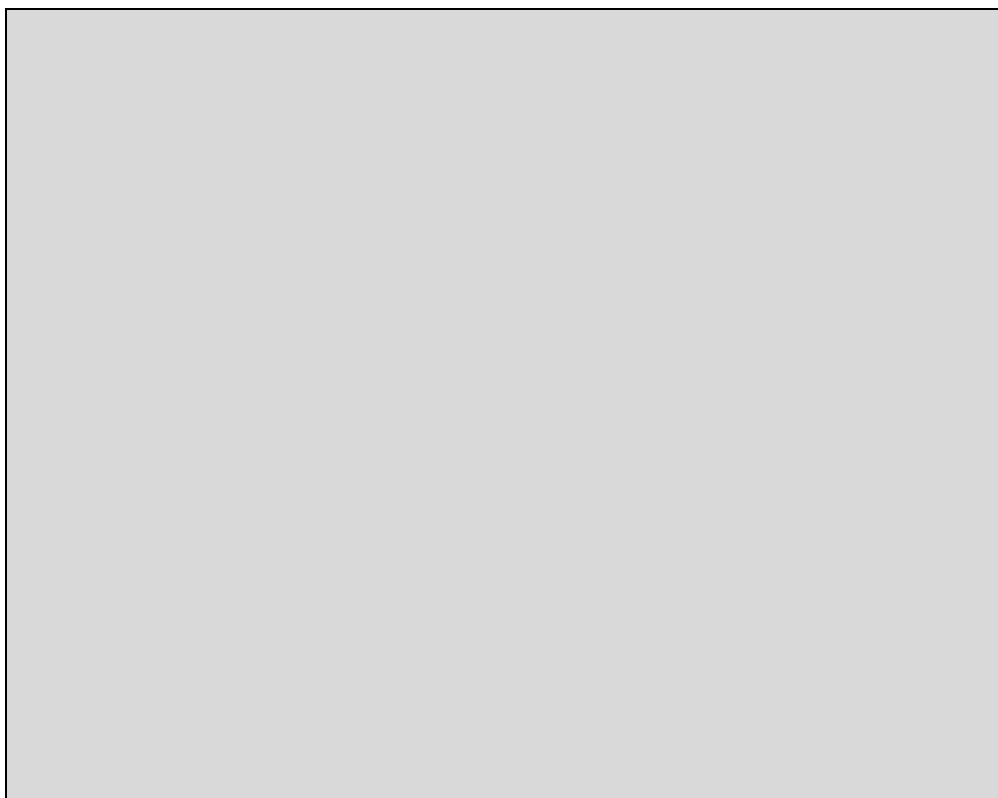


Figure 70. The living room of a flat converted from a communal laundry at Wild Street, Covent Garden, 1964 (Peabody Trust Collection, London Metropolitan Archive).

Elizabeth Harris, a long-standing tenant at the Bethnal Green estate, was born in Canterbury in 1932. She trained and worked as a nurse in London, living in nurses' accommodation, but moved to the Bethnal Green estate when she left her nursing job due to ill health in c. 1983. Elizabeth moved to an office job before retiring in the late 1980s. Initially Elizabeth lived in one of the bedsits in Block A; as well as a bed-sitting room, her home contained a kitchen and bathroom. In 1993, when the estate was modernised, Elizabeth moved to a one-bedroom flat (containing a living room, kitchen, bedroom and bathroom) on the first floor of Block C, where she remains today. 'The bedsit was all right when I was working, but it was—after I had to give up work, it was very closed-in ... it was very claustrophobic living in a bedsit. And when they offered me this one, oh! ... As I say, coming from a bedsit to this, it's out of this world!'

The piecemeal modernisation carried out at Bethnal Green and Wild Street, using funds from different sources and carried out by different architectural and building

firms at different times resulted in a complex range of block layouts, and flats which tenants found difficult to live in, particularly bedsits, where small kitchens and bathrooms were squeezed into the living space. Elizabeth Harris commented on how her current living room was larger than the single bed-sitting room she had previously occupied. No lifts were installed as part of the initial modernisation work at Bethnal Green, and the refuse disposal system remained as a basic system of chutes accessed from the communal staircases.

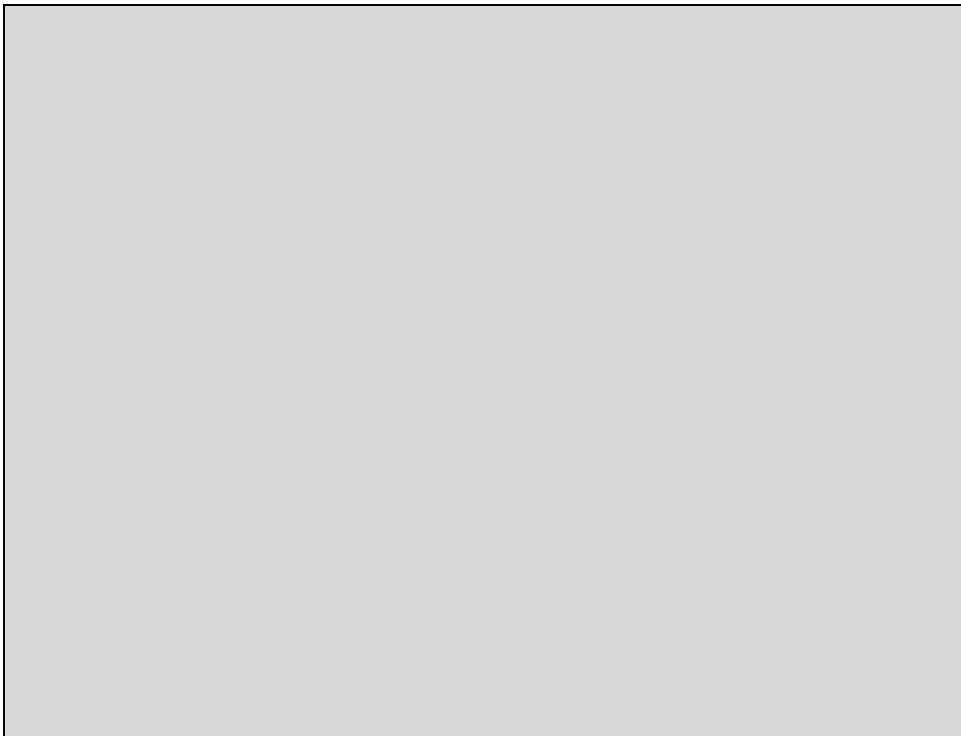


Figure 71. A modernised bedsitting room at the Wild Street estate, Covent Garden (Peabody Trust Collection, London Metropolitan Archive).

By 1989 it was concluded that the tenements in Bethnal Green should be completely refurbished; redevelopment of the estate had been proposed in 1980, but at the time the Peabody Trust had not wished to put any more of its own funds into the improvement of the buildings. With the appointment of George Barlow as the Trust's new Director in 1987, this situation changed. In 1989 a study of the estate was compiled, collating background information about the estate, and its facilities and condition, and explaining options for refurbishment.

The refurbishment works were carried out between 1990 and 1997, leading to a change of use of many areas and rooms. A programme of tenant consultation was carried out (Datta 2006, 790), with some residents having significant involvement in the management of the consultation process for modernisation, - and others challenging it. Datta's interviews with Bethnal Green residents shortly after the completion of the modernisation works found some unease with the removal of familiar features such as the large storage cupboards in the alcoves of the kitchen, living room and bedrooms:

‘And the cupboards, lovely cupboards. It was all built into the flats, and in the passage, two lovely cupboards, and then in the kitchen we had one, and it went right the way back till the door there, and I call that plenty of cupboard space. I used to keep all me linen in that one, and one was like working cupboards and that. But now I got to put them all in the wardrobe. To me, I have not got enough storage’ (Mrs Ellis, in Datta 2006, 798).

Unease with the transformations performed on residents' homes by the Peabody Trust was not new; during the modernisation programme at the Wild Street estate in the 1960s, new tiled fireplaces were installed, replacing the older hearths. Cyril Mould, who had worked at the estate reported that ‘One old couple with a new fireplace kept the black iron fender with brass tops and brass irons on top of the new tiled hearth’. Harry Jenkins, who was born in 1913 and was interviewed by the Museum of London in 1985, worked at the Peabody Trust estate in Hammersmith, which was built in 1926. The estate was constructed with communal bathhouses, and a bathroom was subsequently installed in each flat in 1964. Tenants welcomed the removal of the communal bathhouses, but elderly tenants found the installation works difficult, as they had to move out while the work was carried out.

The specifications of the refurbishment works carried out on the estate after 1989 were based on the Peabody Trust's own ‘Design Criteria’ manual, a regularly updated document which set out standards for new and refurbished properties owned and

managed by the Trust. The 1989 assessment report highlighted the following problems with the estate's housing and facilities:

- The estate office on the ground floor of Block A, which was adjacent to and communicated with the resident estate caretaker's flat, was cramped
- There was inadequate means of escape in case of a fire
- There were inadequate facilities for refuse disposal – the hoppers for the rubbish chutes on the half landings of the tenement blocks were mostly sealed up, so rubbish could only be disposed of at the first half landing level
- Ten of the flats in Block H had no bathing facilities, and the tenants had to use the three baths in the communal bathhouse on the ground floor
- The bedsits were cramped, particularly their bathrooms and kitchens
- There was no security provision to restrict access to individual blocks, and the windows of the flats were not secure, especially at ground floor level
- The old gas boilers for hot water were unreliable, as the pilot lights would blow out in windy weather
- None of the blocks were served by lifts
- There was no children's play area, and the only enhancement that had been made the environment of the estate were narrow flower beds in front of Blocks F and G
- The external appearance of the tenement blocks had been marred by inserted pipes
- There were no flats suitable for wheelchair users or those with mobility problems. The Peabody Trust's records indicated that in 1989 the Bethnal Green estate was home to seven tenants with mobility issues, but only one of these tenants was housed in a ground floor flat, and one tenant who was a wheelchair user was housed in a flat on the first floor.

Following the Design Criteria, the Peabody Trust wished to undertake the following works at Bethnal Green:

- Eliminate bedsit flats



- Provide lifts and improved refuse disposal
- Improve fire escapes
- Upgrade security, lighting, and the external areas
- Relocate the estate office from a single room on the ground floor of Block A
- Make the flats wheelchair accessible

All of the flats on the estate are now self-contained, with no shared laundry or bathing facilities. Each block has one ground-floor mobility flat for a disabled tenant, ramped access and keypad entry. 'Peabody prides itself in its efficient maintenance and management strategies which empower their tenants through regular tenant meetings and satisfaction surveys' (Datta 2006, 794–5).

Residents also took the opportunity to remodel their living space, and undertook a fundraising event to campaign for more CCTV cameras to be installed on the estate (one of the few instances Elizabeth Harris could remember of residents gathering under their own initiative for a community event). The refurbishment works at the Bethnal Green estate were completed in 1997.

The two-storey block between Blocks F and H was constructed on the former site of the coal store and workshops in the early 1990s as part of the estate refurbishment programme to house the estate office and a small function room. This was the first dedicated community space at the Bethnal Green estate; only a few other Peabody Trust estates contained such spaces, and former Peabody Trust porter Cyril Mould reported that 'there was very little organised [community] activity' on estates. The Abbey Community Centre was constructed in Marsham Street, Westminster, to serve several Peabody Trust estates in the vicinity, and in 1913 a hall was added to the Rosendale Road estate in Herne Hill in south London (a mixed estate of houses and flats constructed between 1902 and 1908).

Since the estate office and function room block at Bethnal Green was later converted into a single house, residents '[haven't] got anywhere inside to meet. There used to be meetings now and again there, but of course now we haven't got anywhere. If there

were going to be any changes someone from Head Office would come across, and we'd meet in there, or those that were interested. They had a kitchen in there and so they could do drinks. A couple of rooms upstairs and downstairs, it was the office downstairs, where we used to pay our rent. They used to be a help sometimes, if you'd got a problem' (Elizabeth Harris).



Figure 72. Ground and first floor plans of Block A, Bethnal Green estate, as existing in 1989 (ACC/3445/PT/08/032 Peabody Trust Collection, London Metropolitan Archive).

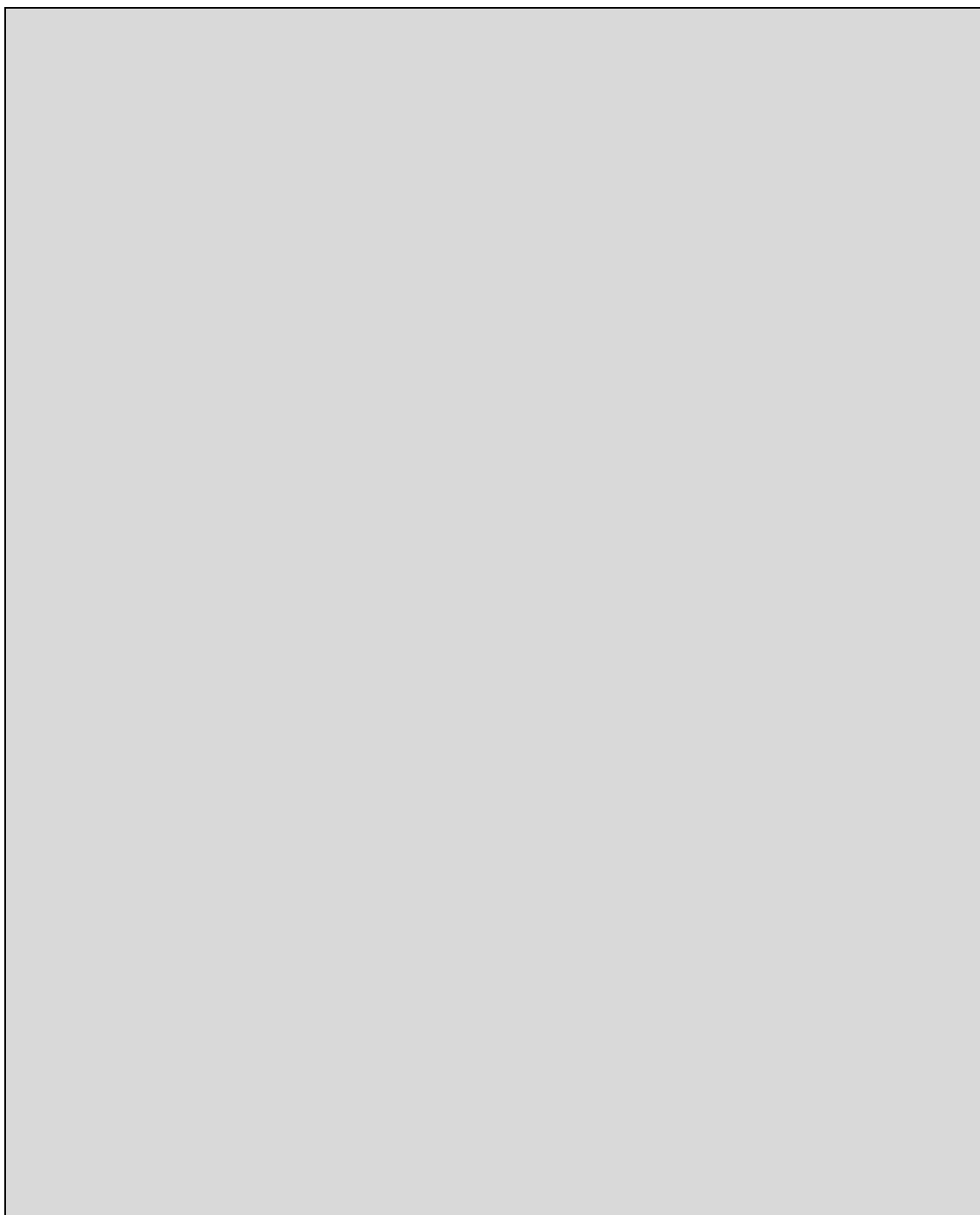


Figure 73. Plans of the second to fifth floors of Block A, Bethnal Green estate, as existing in 1989 (ACC/3445/PT/08/032 Peabody Trust Collection, London Metropolitan Archive).

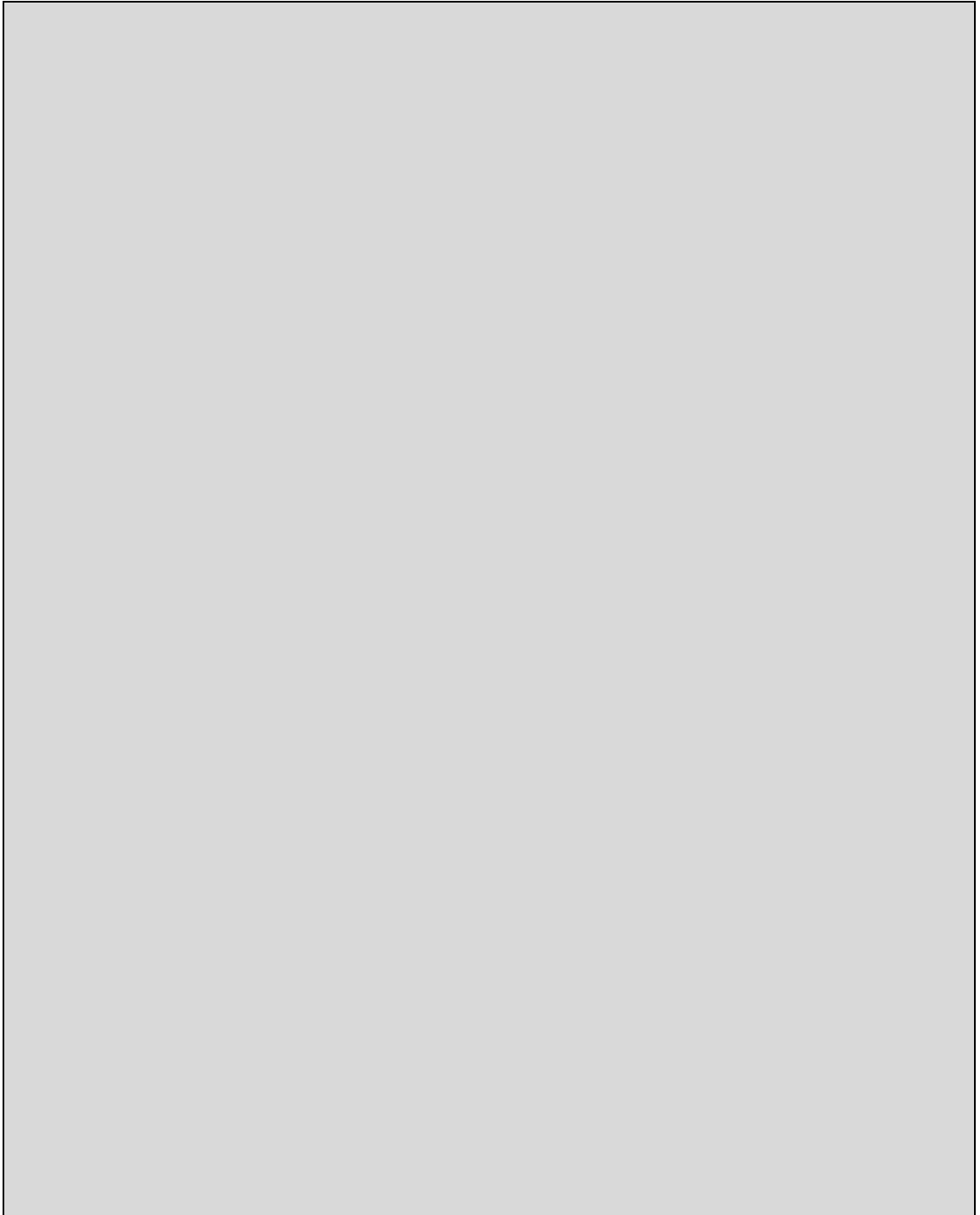


Figure 74. Plans of the ground and first to fourth floors of Blocks A–G, as modernised in 1990–97 (ACC/3445/PT/08/032 Peabody Trust Collection, London Metropolitan Archive).

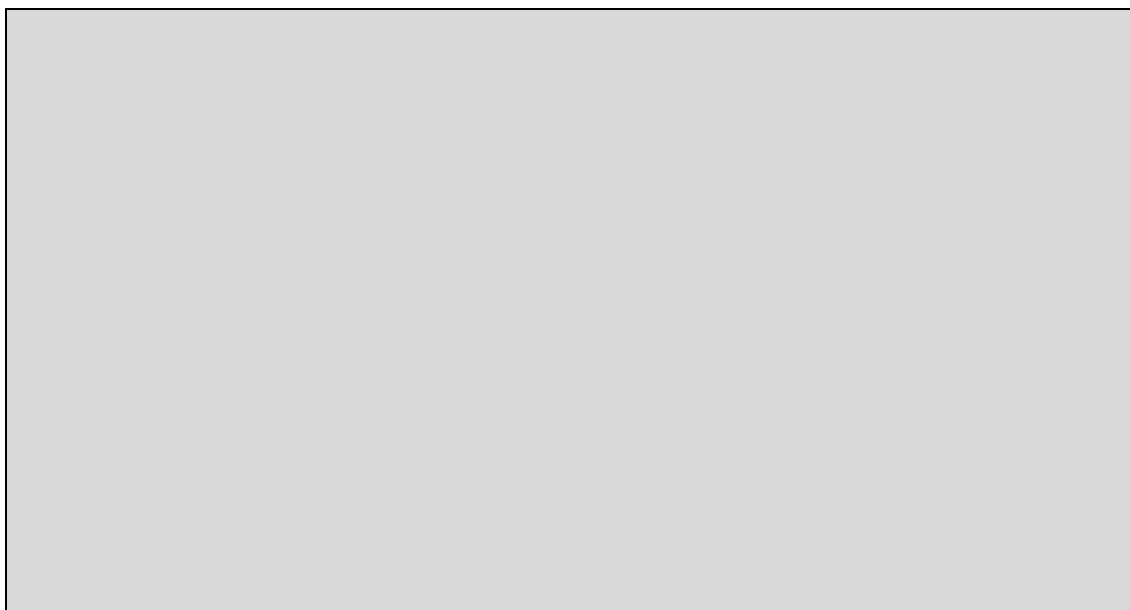


Figure 75. Plan of the fifth floor of Blocks A–G, as modernised in 1990–97 (ACC/3445/PT/08/032 Peabody Trust Collection, London Metropolitan Archive).

## **Controlling and negotiating spaces**

### **Making safe spaces**

Talmadge Wright's (1997, 106–9) concept of 'refuse space', i.e. space that is physically, socially, politically and economically marginalised, has been discussed in Chapter Two; academic and public (often journalistic) accounts that focus on the problems within social housing often overshadow residents' own efforts to create a meaningful place and community. A number of scholars have worked within the gap between public perceptions and lived realities; as has been previously discussed in Chapter Two, Kevin Fox Gotham and Krista Brumley (2002) have explored how the urban poor living in a housing project in a southern United States city have attempted to construct a meaningful living space, and sense of self-worth and dignity in their lives from their homes in a public housing development. Gotham and Brumley's study examined how tenants assigned 'safe spaces' – where they could act with dignity, independence and autonomy, and 'hot spaces' that were no-go areas. Tenants made use of language and

behaviour through identity ‘embrace’ and ‘distancing’ to affirm their attachment to a place or dissociate themselves from negative images of their public housing space.

The strategies for coping with living in conditions of poverty that were identified by Gotham and Brumley conflict with the strategies that were adopted during the early years of the Peabody Trust; at that time strategies were paternalistic, top-down, and initiated by Peabody Trust in order to house many people in a single place. During the early twentieth century, former porter Cyril Mould reported, ‘There were two porters on gate duty from six o’clock to half past nine at night to clear the square’ after which the estate gates would be locked. The porters also listened out for late night music coming from flats, and would warn tenants if they were too loud. Other nuisances such as pets were forbidden; William East, who was born in 1897 and interviewed in 1972 lived in the Peabody Trust estate in John Fisher Street, Wapping, two miles from the Bethnal Green estate: ‘No pets, no dogs. Well years gone by, you see the children now—well I love to hear them, but you see the children riding bikes around, that was never allowed. Cricket, football we had ... but—you was never allowed.’

Misbehaving tenants could be reported to the superintendent, with transgressions ‘put in the book’ – recorded in the estate’s register of tenants. Registers were kept at each estate, recording the character of each tenant, any misdemeanours, and where they had been ejected from the estate, the reasons for doing so.

While there was still a resident caretaker, the Peabody Trust’s tenants were expected to keep communal areas clean, and the caretaker was perceived as being strict; ‘over in A Block we used to have to do the stairs, scrub them down every week, there were three on our floor, so we did it every third week. And they were stone, so we did have to [scrub]... But I mean years ago, before that, the caretaker, if he thought they hadn’t been done, apparently, would go and knock on the doors and say ‘you haven’t done your stairs’. The caretaker going round and knocking on doors was before my time, but I had been told about it by other people, the older ones who’ve now passed on’ (Elizabeth Harris).

As the Peabody Trust has become a more hands-off landlord, the safety of the estate is now monitored through a combination of CCTV cameras installed by the Peabody Trust, and natural surveillance by tenants, with access to individual blocks restricted by keypad entry. Residents have also used their own strategies to manage security.

Ayona Datta's examination of changing perceptions of the Bethnal Green estate after the modernisation works of the 1990s shows how residents saw and experienced the staircases and the new lifts as different kinds of safe spaces; the installation of lifts enabled older residents and those who are disabled to get out of their flat and the estate, but other residents missed meeting their neighbours on the stairs and considered the communal areas to be less safe without this element of natural surveillance. Safe and protective (or otherwise) spaces are not permanent and perceptions of space changed with each resident and through time. Bethnal Green resident Elizabeth Harris had conflicting experiences and perceptions of the safety of the neighbourhood, feeling uneasy 'sometimes, even in daylight, especially when you've got men shouting. Though I must admit there are—sometimes, just under the bridge along the end of Hackney Road, there is several men who gather there, and you'd think "oh dear, be wary of them". But it's surprising, if they move out of your way, they'll say "sorry" and you don't expect them to do things like that. I'm not sure whether they're drinkers, or druggies, it doesn't matter, they act better than you'd expect' (Elizabeth Harris).

## **Making a home your own**

From the mid twentieth century onwards, tenants of Peabody Trust dwellings had greater freedom to reshape their homes, a process which was formalised by the 1990s, when a process of resident consultation was undertaken at Bethnal Green as part of the modernisation and refurbishment of the estate. The process of resident consultation gave tenants a formal opportunity to comment and help shape the future form of the estate – albeit restricted by the existing cellular plan form of the tenement blocks. Oversight of the condition of flats by the Peabody Trust has declined in recent decades, and tenants are now free to make changes to their homes 'as long as you

don't knock walls down, but who'd want to?' (Elizabeth Harris). The refurbishment of the estate coincided with a change in the management of the Peabody Trust's estates, as resident superintendents were replaced by caretakers who visited the estate on a regular basis, and external contractors appointed to clean the windows, service the fire alarms, and carry out other maintenance.

Residents accepted some of the limitations provided by flats and adapted to the type of life that they were expected to live there, looking for other ways to domesticate spaces within the limits imposed by the Peabody Trust. Residents most often did this through decoration and by being flexible about how space was organised and used. Mrs Craig, a Peabody Trust resident who was born in 1900 and interviewed in 1968, grew up in a one bedroom flat, but with a 'put-you-up' bed in the living room. Mrs Craig saw her younger self as living in a time of transition; during her youth 'a lot of children slept in the same room as their parents and all that sort of thing'. Despite the crowded conditions Mrs Craig saw Peabody Trust as pioneers of model dwellings, each flat had 'got their own little, very tiny little bedroom... from there it has gone on until now you see these vast flats, which is very nice indeed'.

Most Peabody flats intended for families had two rooms (a living room and a bedroom), until the mid to late twentieth century, when estates such as Bethnal Green and Wild Street were remodelled and could provide three bedrooms in some flats. A home with three bedrooms that allowed male and female children to sleep separately from each other and from adults had long been a moral ideal, but it took until the post-war period for existing older housing stock, such as the Peabody Trust estates, to catch up with such planning ideals – and either be remodelled or demolished. The housing conditions offered by the Peabody Trust until the mid-twentieth century perhaps indicate some contradictory ideas in its housing policy; it wished to provide for the moral good of tenants, and supported the small, nuclear family as the ideal type in which to live, encouraging that family model by providing housing that was just big enough for a few people to live in – but then didn't provide a sufficient amount of space for individuals to live in privacy. During the early years of the Spitalfields estate,



children were reported as using the communal laundries as an indoor playground in wet weather, and the creative use of space on estates continued.

Before moving to the Bethnal Green estate Elizabeth Harris worked as a Night Sister at Queen Adelaide's Dispensary in Pollard Row, Bethnal Green (originally founded in 1849 to provide care to the district following a cholera outbreak), and lived with other nursing staff in the associated accommodation, where 'we all had a bedroom, the bathrooms and washing cubicles were separate, and there were a couple of kitchens we could use ... there was always someone around. Sometimes we would do a meal together and things like that. Whereas here, you're sort of on your own, because a lot of people who were here have moved on, they've gone elsewhere'. Both Elizabeth's nurses' accommodation and the Bethnal Green estate had elements of communal living, and were ostensibly similar, but this was not necessarily a view shared by Elizabeth. Elizabeth's testimony did, however, bring out instances where she helped, and was helped by, her neighbours. 'There are people around I can talk to when I go out, and one or two people in the block. Melanie next door, we sort of help each other, if we're going on holiday we give each other keys, and if she's—the gas man needs to check her boiler, I deal with that while she's at work, things like that. And George up in number 12 has been a great help to me when I had my bedroom flooded twice'.

Elizabeth Harris's kitchen is not used by visitors to her flat, even though it is large enough to accommodate a table and chairs. Instead, she uses a gatefold table in the living room and fetches chairs from the kitchen and other rooms to create a formal space:

'I think the kitchen [is my favourite room in the flat]. It's more of a living room than a kitchen... It's warmer over that side, because we get all the sun. I do spend a lot of time in the kitchen. I've got a—they call it a kitchen-diner, though I wouldn't have visitors in there for eating, not if I've been cooking and have got pots and pans around, that's why I have got that [points to table] because if there are only two people I can just put one flap up, if there are

more than that they will help me get the table up, we put both sides up, and I've got chairs, one in the bedroom, two in the cupboard, inside the main door, and there's two in the kitchen' (Elizabeth Harris).

As tenants had their flats updated, or in the case of those like Elizabeth Harris who were moving from a bedsit to a flat, opportunities arose for residents to transform their living environment. Ayona Datta interviewed Victoria, an elderly resident who had lived on the estate since 1974, after the estate refurbishment:

'Oh it's lovely. When they proposed to do all these alterations and said I would have a one bedroom flat I looked forward to it. Because I was only in a tiny bedsitter. I had to buy new furniture and things and I thoroughly enjoyed myself going down shops and deciding what I had' (Victoria, in Datta 2006, 795); this recalls the 1939 survey of new residents in Kingstanding who took on large amounts of debt from Hire Purchase agreements to furnish new houses (Soutar et al 1942); see Chapter Four for further discussion.

Cyril Mould, interviewed by the Museum of London in 1985, was born in 1912, and as a baby moved with his family to the Peabody Trust estate at Blackfriars when his father became a porter there in 1913. Cyril stated that Peabody Trust Porters were often ex-servicemen, as the job was not well paid and supplementary income was required from a services pension. The porters' own families were also involved in running the tenements; in many Trust properties during the early twentieth century the porter's wife had responsibility for 'bath duty', making sure that the communal bathrooms were kept clean and that the tenants did not stay in them too long, and receiving three shillings per week pay in return. Bathing was undertaken on a rotation system, restricted to particular days of the week for men, women, and male and female children. The communal laundries in the Peabody Trust's buildings closed at 7.30pm, and each floor of the dwellings would be assigned a specific day of the week on which washing could be carried out. Such restrictions might make obtaining work outside the home difficult, and so reinforcing the Peabody Trust's idea of how a nuclear family unit should operate.

The means by which housing providers such as the Peabody Trust could influence the form of the family unit through architecture, a process which could perhaps be seen as paternalistic and top-down, has been explored by Sebastian Ureta (2007) who has studied Chilean low-income families' expression of individuality through the personalisation of their living spaces in Santiago. Ureta's work was discussed further in Chapter Two.

The weakening of extended familial networks could have the effect of making individuals and families feel exposed and vulnerable (Ureta 2007, 320) although in the case of the Peabody Trust Buildings, with flats arranged around communal staircases, an element of surveillance by, and on behalf of, neighbours could be accommodated.

## **Conclusions**

As seen through analysis of the buildings and development of the Bethnal Green estate, and from the oral testimonies of residents and former porters, the Peabody Trust built the concerns and expectations they held for their tenants into the design and fabric of their estates. Tenants were managed through organised control over who lived on the estate, and who came and went, e.g. single entrances to the tenement blocks, controlling movement on the estate, closing the estate gates at night, rules over noise and use of the bathrooms, but also natural surveillance of shared facilities and cleaning responsibilities by the residents. The Peabody Trust provided sufficient room (according to the expectations of the time) for tenants to live in comfortable uncrowded conditions; perhaps this can be seen as a kind of exchange, a negotiation that ensured the housing estate would work as a home for a large number of people.

The Peabody Trust estates (and those of similar philanthropic and commercial organisations) were a new kind of built environment, but perhaps shared characteristics with existing forms of housing; while individual tenants were not permitted to take paying lodgers themselves, the element of communal living – whether as lodgers or in boarding houses – was a familiar feature of urban life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Peabody Trust could accommodate

the frequent movement of people, as the availability of work and finances changed, as tenants could (and did) move between larger and smaller flats as dictated by household finances.

Peabody Trust estates were criticised for their barrack-like appearance, but their apparent insularity – inward-looking and self-contained – was perhaps not part of the everyday experience of those living there, interacting with the world outside the estate through work, school, shopping and extended family.

The Bethnal Green estate has evolved as social concerns have changed – although catching up with concerns, rather than anticipating them. The elimination of bedsits and communal facilities, creating flats with a greater number of bedrooms and separate living rooms and kitchens, has generated greater privacy for tenants and individuals within families. Residents have historically had limited means to shape their own environments, but they have done so through adaptation and coping strategies. The tenant consultation and involvement in the refurbishment of the Bethnal Green estate resulted in the moulding of spaces through design and perception, and residents actively campaigned to reinstall entrance gates that had been removed during the Second World War, and campaigned and fundraised for the introduction of CCTV cameras. As Gotham and Brumley (2002) have illustrated, the creation of ‘safe spaces’ does not necessarily require the introduction of physical changes, but rather a change in perception of the potential of spaces in the vicinity of the home.



Figure 76. The rear of Blocks A–C of the Bethnal Green estate, Centre Street.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusions

This thesis has used building recording techniques, documentary research and oral history testimonies to explore how concepts of the modern and new between the 1870s and 1930s shaped the urban built environment, through the study of a particular kind of infrastructure that was developed to meet the needs of expanding cities at this time – social (or municipal) housing – and how social housing was perceived and experienced as a new kind of built environment, by planners, architects, local government, residents, and those living in the vicinity. This thesis also addressed how the concepts and priorities of the Victorian and Edwardian periods, and the decisions made by those in authority regarding the form of social housing continue to shape the urban built environment and impact on the lived experience of social housing today.

In order to address this, two research questions were devised:

- How can changing attitudes and responses to the nature of modern life between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries be seen in the built environment, specifically in the form and use of social housing?
- Can contradictions between these earlier notions of the modern and new, and our own be seen in the responses of official authority and residents to the built environment?

This concluding chapter will discuss each of the case study areas, relating the empirical findings to the two research questions. It will then discuss the theoretical and methodological implications of the research, before introducing themes for future research.

## **Empirical findings**

The main empirical findings of this thesis were summarised within the respective chapters. This section will synthesise the findings to answer the study's two research questions.

### **Warren Farm Estate, Kingstanding, Birmingham**

Tenants of the Warren Farm Estate shaped their environment by making their home their own, subverting the intentions of architects and planners. Sometimes this was done out of necessity, as extended families lived in homes that were intended for a smaller nuclear family of two adults and two or three children, and negotiations were made within the home in order to accommodate uses of space that were counter to the intentions of the architects and planners.

Tenants also took possession of the spaces that had been created for them, reproducing them in ways that were more personal to them. Such an approach acknowledges the agency and status of the residents in the reproduction of their space, in contrast to many modern architects, who took a 'year zero' approach to the planning of homes, which left little room for existing social practices.

The progressive values of municipal housing provision were expressed in a number of ways during the 1930s. Birmingham City Corporation's interest initially lay in one particular expression – the estates of modernist apartments with communal facilities constructed in continental Europe. The desire to construct such estates in Birmingham not shared by the city's residents, who preferred a different expression – one that seemingly evoked a bucolic rural past, but was just as modern in its execution.

The present environment of the Warren Farm Estate, and the lived experience of its residents has in part been formed by the decisions made during the planning of the estate; plans for a wider variety of facilities did not come to fruition, and the estate was not well connected with the city when first constructed. Some of the facilities

planned for the estate were never constructed, the estate was initially not well connected with the city by public transport, and opportunities for employment not located on the estate, but some distance away. While some of the problems have been addressed during the twentieth century, others remain and many as a consequence of decisions made during the planning and construction of this estate, and several others on the outskirts of Birmingham, during the 1930s.

### **Bevington Street Area, Liverpool**

Oral history interviews with residents of the Bevington Street area and Eldonian Village highlighted the sometimes-problematic relationship that residents had with the environment in which they lived. This was ostensibly an area of repeated demolition and rebuilding related to successive waves of 'slum' clearance, but also a palimpsest, visible through churches, streets, the canal, and other landmarks that have persisted across decades, landmarks by which current and former residents still orientate themselves. Michael Young and Peter Willmott's study of communities in the East End of London in the post-war period found that 'the working class neighbourhood was a culturally and physically bounded environment... the area that people personally identified with was often very small – no more than a few streets... people were acutely aware of their own territory and the visible or invisible boundaries that hemmed them in' (Young and Willmott 1957, 164), and this was also the case for the residents of Vauxhall.

The notion of Parochialism as expressed by Sheila and George was both a positive expression of pride and a restrictive, narrow mind-set, by which residents orientated themselves with their surroundings. Vauxhall is a palimpsest, visible through churches, streets, the canal, and other landmarks that have persisted across decades, landmarks by which current and former residents still orientate themselves. The concept of a transformed landscape and experience for a local community that has been 'dispossessed' has been a powerful one in this Liverpool case study. New housing (whenever it was built) was presented as a modern and forward-looking solution to



the problems of the previous 'slums' – and which in turn would be condemned as slums within a generation or two.

The Eldonian Village and Weller Way were reactions to a particular form of transformation taking place in Liverpool (and other towns and cities) in the 1970s and 1980s, which faced the demolition of neighbourhoods, breaking up established communities. In the case of the Eldonian Village, as a concerted effort was made to maintain a community with deep roots in the area, earlier ideas and values have been fixed onto the new surroundings of the village, old and new ways of living ostensibly sitting alongside each other in a dynamic environment.

The design and construction of the Eldonian Village was one example of a community-led design movement in Liverpool that aimed to involve communities in the construction of their own homes. The resulting housing was arranged in cul-de-sacs, and was inward-looking – a physical manifestation of the notion of 'parochialism' as expressed by the interviewees, which was both a positive expression of pride in the immediate locality, and a restrictive, narrow mind-set.

### **Peabody Trust Estate, Bethnal Green, London**

As seen through analysis of the buildings and development of the Bethnal Green estate, and from the oral testimonies of residents and former porters, the Peabody Trust built the concerns and expectations they held for their tenants into the design and fabric of their estates.

Tenants were managed through organised control over who lived on the estate, but there was also natural surveillance of shared facilities and cleaning responsibilities by the residents. The Peabody Trust provided sufficient room (according to the expectations of the time) for tenants to live in comfortable uncrowded conditions; perhaps this can be seen as a kind of exchange, a negotiation that ensured the housing estate would work as a home for a large number of people. The Peabody Trust was primarily concerned with providing healthy places to live in a crowded city, and the

formula of their housing provision did not change substantially as the Trust entered the twentieth century. Local authorities were playing a greater role in the provision of housing during the early decades of the twentieth century, and providing space and facilities that new Peabody Trust estates constructed in the 1920s and 1930s did not. There have been fewer opportunities for tenants to individually take control of their homes, but collectively tenants now have a greater say in the form and organisation of their estates.

## **Methodological findings**

Barb Voss has stated that archaeologies of the contemporary past call into question the methods and fundamental assumptions that archaeologists make about the relationship that people have with society and the material world, but also suggesting that we are at risk of undertaking an archaeology of 'us'. This thesis has made use of methods that reflect the collaborative nature of contemporary archaeology, borrowing methods and approaches from the humanities and social sciences.

The collection of oral testimonies from residents of social housing and incorporation of these in the study of the built environment in particular has added a significant new dimension to the study of social housing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Interviews were undertaken in the home, enabling participants to explain the significance of rooms and events that had taken place in them – sometimes many decades before, in the case of interviewees on the Warren Farm estate. In her interview Elsie Judd, who was born in her home in Kingstanding in 1932, explained how her living room had been laid out as a child – whilst sat in the same room, and gestured to where items of furniture had stood:

Elsie Judd: 'We had a carpet square, a big square carpet in the middle. And when we couldn't afford a carpet square we used to have a peg rug on the hearth. It was good. And we had a three-piece suite, oh and we had a polished table, and we had it in that window there, so everybody could see it [laughs].

We had a polished table there, and that had dining room chairs round it, with leather seats and fancy backs on’.

Emma Dwyer: ‘Was that for special occasions?’

Elsie: ‘Oh yes, it used to have a chenille cloth on it, so you wasn’t allowed to put anything on it. And then when it was Christmas time that table used to be stuck in the middle here, and we all had our dinner in here, ooh it was a luxury, we had our dinner in the living room’.

The study has demonstrated the importance of a contextual approach when studying the built environment, one that considers buildings as material existing in the present, the changing biography of a building, and of those living in it.

## **Recommendations and themes for future research**

During the course of this project one particular area for possible future research has arisen: how new environments are created and experienced, and this can be investigated through material evidence. Transition and transformation were significant experiences for residents in all three case study areas. In Bethnal Green, residents at the Peabody Trust estate were living in surroundings that were already familiar, but in Kingstanding, residents had moved, for the most part, to the suburban estate from Birmingham’s inner city districts. Existing familial and social networks were broken down, and residents had to contend with new technologies and new kinds of living spaces in the home. Many residents seized on these new opportunities with enthusiasm, while also contending with adapting and negotiating their new surroundings.

The Bevington Street area of Vauxhall, Liverpool has undergone the most dramatic change, one that has been experienced by generations of residents as Vauxhall has undergone successive waves of housing renewal, while older elements of the built environment, such as shops, churches and pubs, have been retained. Residents’

relationship with their environment has found expression in a number of ways; in what the local residents call 'parochialism', by which they mean a sense of local pride (to the exclusion of others), expressed by a loyalty to the few streets that make up each parish, and in the development of local housing cooperatives, which have allowed residents to take control of their own neighbourhoods, removing top-down decision-making by the local authority.

The introduction of tenants' Right to Buy their local authority-controlled home brought about immense change to the fabric of social housing estates, privatising the experience of living in social housing, as can be seen in the Kingstanding case study. Not all those who exercised their Right to Buy immediately transformed their homes, however, and not all of those who remained as tenants took no interest in improving a home that didn't legally belong to them, as Daniel Miller (1990) has also explored.

Two further questions that relate to the theme of how new kinds of environments are created and experienced are explored below:

- How people approach living in new environments.
- How ideas move from one context to another.

### **Living in a new environment**

Whether residents were living in an environment that was undergoing transition and change, like the Bevington Street area of Liverpool, an inner-city district that underwent successive periods of housing renewal, or residents were moving to a new environment, such as the Warren Farm estate in Kingstanding, they had to negotiate the changes to their domestic environment.

Residents might have undertaken such negotiation by continuing to undertake practices and social relationships in the same way as they had before, adapting older ways of life to new surroundings, valuing the continuity of experience. Marshall Berman had characterised such behaviour as an 'inner dichotomy' (1982, 17), the state

of being simultaneously traditional and modern. Berman believed that this awareness of following traditional traits in a modernising world was a transitional phase on a linear track from a traditional way of life to the pinnacle of urbanised modernity, yet this could instead be seen as a pragmatic means by which to cope with the new situation of a rapidly changing environment.

Informal employment and informal economies, such as the taking in of laundry or lodgers had been a characteristic of what Berman might have seen as a traditional form of life, when compared the modern surroundings of a social housing estate. The maintenance of social networks became a different kind of activity on suburban estates, where there were fewer shops and social amenities, and those that were available were not as integrated with the estate housing.

The residents of housing estates could also negotiate their relationship with a new environment through making modifications to their actions and their environment; a new identity expressed through consumer behaviour, and the availability and choice of goods, furniture, decorations and social activities changed and expanded. The creation of new communities, remodelled old communities, and new relationships with neighbours enabled residents to manipulate, protect, sustain, or negotiate their specific place within the community.

## **Movement of ideas**

As architects, planners and charitable institutions set about constructing large-scale urban and suburban estates of housing for rent, ideas around what constituted best practice in housing design were expressed in architectural journals such as *The Builder* (first published in 1843) and *The Architects' Journal* (first edition 1896), and further thought around the movement of ideas – whether a concept still has currency and still works when transposed from one context to another – has potential for further research.

In Chapter Four the journey made by a deputation of representatives from Birmingham City Corporation's Estates and Public Works Committees was outlined; the group visited examples of newly-constructed flats and tenements in Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia in 1930, in order to see examples of new housing schemes, which might be transplanted to Birmingham, for themselves. The deputation concluded that such modernist housing schemes, which incorporated communal social and welfare facilities, would be the ideal solution to Birmingham's housing shortage. For Birmingham's residents these European-style flats were associated with the tenements seen in other cities, and with the close-proximity living conditions of Birmingham's courts of back-to-back housing. For Birmingham's residents the pull of an alternative narrative – relating to the semi-rural idyll of the garden city, was much stronger, and enabled residents to embrace another kind of modern and new lifestyle.

## **Conclusion**

This research has been able to make a contribution to the greater understanding of the development of social housing as a distinct type of urban and suburban built environment during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, how concepts of what was the modern and new at the time shaped those environments, and how these Victorian and Edwardian concepts continue to shape the built environment now. This thesis has also considered how residents and tenants have negotiated homes and spaces undergoing transition and transformation, and has done so through oral history recording and documentary research, as well as more traditional building recording.

# Appendices

Oral History Interview Briefing and Consent Form and selections of some of the oral history interviews undertaken for this research.

## Appendix One: Oral History Briefing and Consent Form

### **An introduction to my research project**

My name is Emma Dwyer and I am a PhD research student at Leicester University. I am looking at the history of social housing estates, and the people who have lived in them, in London, Birmingham and Liverpool, from the 1870s to the present day.

When the estates were built, they were a new kind of place for people to live in – many of the new residents experienced new technologies and different kinds of living spaces that they might not have had in their previous homes. For some of the people who moved into this new kind housing, it was an exciting change and a new start; for others, it might have been confusing to move away from old friends, family and neighbours. For many people, it was probably a combination of the two.

As part of my research I would like to talk to people who have lived on the estate for a long time, and I would be very grateful if you would agree to being interviewed informally in your home about your life on the estate. This should take between 1 and 2 hours, and our conversation will be recorded using a digital audio recorder. I would also like to photograph the inside and outside of your house and garden and see any old photos you might have of your home and the estate, and take photos of them, if you agree.

The questions that I will ask you during the interview include:

- Where you lived before moving onto the estate, and what it was like.
- What your present home was like when you moved in, and what you thought of it.
- What did you do on your first day living on the estate?
- What are the homes of your family and friends who live nearby like?
- Describe a typical day on the estate now – what do you do from when you get up until you go to bed?
- What happens when friends and family come to visit?
- What is your favourite room in your home?

I hope that participating in my research project will be an enjoyable experience. When I have finished my research I will write to all of the people who have been interviewed, to tell them the results of my research, and will give you a recording of our conversation on a CD, along with copies of any photographs of your home and the estate that I have taken with my camera during the project, and that you would like to keep.

### Consent Form for Oral History Recordings

The purpose of this consent form is to enable Emma Dwyer to make recordings of oral history interviews and use these recorded recollections as part of her PhD research. On completion of the research, it is intended that recordings will be deposited with the British Library Sound Archive. If you do not want your interview to be part of the British Library collections for other researchers to use, please indicate this at the end of this form.

As the researcher, Emma will hold copyright of the recordings and transcripts, but I, as the interviewee, remain the author of my recorded words in the interview, and I will be acknowledged as such in all uses of the recording, as set out below.

I understand that the content of the recordings will not be used in a derogatory manner and I will be correctly identified as the author of the contribution in all uses of it. I understand that no payment is due to me for this consent. I understand that I am giving Emma Dwyer the right to use and make available the content of the recorded interview in the following ways:

- use in schools, universities, colleges and other educational establishments, including use in a thesis, dissertation or similar research
- public performance, lectures or talks
- use in publications, including print, audio or video cassettes or CD ROM
- use on radio or television
- publication worldwide on the internet

I confirm that I have freely agreed to participate in this research project. I have been briefed on what this involves and I agree to the use of the recordings and findings as described above.

Your name:

Your address:

In regard to the recorded interview(s) which took place on (date):

Signed by the Interviewee:

Date:

Signed in the presence of the interviewer:

Name:

Date:

**Do you agree to the recording of your interview and a written summary being deposited with the British Library Sound Archive, for other researchers to use?**



**Yes/No (delete as applicable).**

If 'Yes', a separate British Library Sound Archive copyright form will need to be filled out and signed.

If you have any questions about the project, please feel free to contact me:

Emma Dwyer  
School of Archaeology and Ancient History  
University of Leicester  
University Road  
Leicester LE2 2BB

Tel: 07974 972809

Email: [ed108@le.ac.uk](mailto:ed108@le.ac.uk)

## **Appendix Two: Interview with Elizabeth Harris (Bethnal Green)**

Emma Dwyer: You've been here since 1993, in this flat. But you said you were living in A Block here?

Elizabeth Harris: Yes, since they've re-done all the flats, and they got rid of all the bed-sits, and some of the flats they turned into three and four bedroom, so we've all got plenty of space. But as I say, coming from a bed-sit to this, it's out of this world!

ED: It was a big change in the...

EH: Yes, the bedsit was all right when I was working, but it was—after I had to give up work, it was very closed-in. So moving across here...

ED: How long were you living in the bedsit for?

EH: It must have been ten years.

ED: That would have been the early 80s then? When you moved in?

EH: Sometime—I mean it's difficult to remember when it goes on for years.

ED: So moving in to the bedsit in A Block, that was where you first lived on this estate? Where did you live before that?

EH: At the time, I had been nursing at the Children's Hospital down the way, and I had to give it up, because I got a right grotty back, that was getting worse. I was in hospital property, so I had to get out, and I wrote to so many places, and the only people that replied were Peabody.

ED: I see, right.

2m 50s. EH: And someone had died in A Block, and I was offered that, and of course I took it, because I had to have somewhere, otherwise I'd have been on the streets, sort of thing. But after I'd finished up there I had a lowly office job for a while, because I couldn't bear the thought of being unemployed. I had to have something to do. It must be more than—oh it doesn't matter how many years, it was a long time anyway. But I couldn't carry on with the office job, so I just had to give up, and as I say it was very claustrophobic living in a bedsit. And when they offered me this one, oh!

3m 42s. ED: So your bedsit was over in A Block, of course they've done away with them now, but can you describe to me how that would have been set out? What rooms would you have had, and what sort of things in each room?

EH: A small kitchen, a bathroom, and the bedsit.

ED: And so comparing that with this flat now—

EH: Well this room [living room] is bigger than the bedsit.

ED: So it would have been quite closed in, and you wouldn't want to spend all your time there. So what have you got now in this flat?

EH: This room [living room], bedroom, kitchen, and there's a bathroom.

5m 10s. ED: To go back to earlier times, you were working at the Children's Hospital for quite a long time, was that since you left school?

EH: No, I did my general training, I did my children's training up at the Queen Elizabeth, I did a spell down at Banstead, a convalescent home for the children down there, and then I came back here as Night Sister at the children's hospital, and I did that for 15 years. And it wasn't—we didn't just have one ward, we had to cover several wards, and any casualties that came in, and we did get a lot sometimes, occasionally we'd have three ambulances sitting outside, where you wouldn't think a children's hospital would have that much at night, but it did. And we used to look after the

children, they got proper nursing too. I mean, you'd listen to the, some of things that are broadcast now, and I'm absolutely horrified. Terrible.

6m 33s. ED: What sort of contrasts ere there between living in nurses' accommodation and then coming to live at Peabody? Because thinking about it, you've got lots of people here living in one building, so it sounds like it might be something similar—

EH: Do you know the—down Pollard Row, Queen Adelaide Dispensary?

ED: I think I do yes, that's rather derelict and—

EH: Oh it's been done up—opposite the Workmen's Club, we all had a bedroom, the bathrooms and washing cubicles were separate, and there were a couple of kitchens we could use.

7m 28s. ED: So was that—it would be quite communal, wouldn't it, and would you get to chat to your colleagues?

EH: Oh yes, there was always someone around. Sometimes we would do a meal together and things like that. Whereas here, you're sort of on your own, because a lot of people who were here have moved on, they've gone elsewhere. There are people around I can talk to when I go out, and one or two people in the block. Melanie next door, we sort of help each other if we're going on holiday we give each other keys, and if she's—the gas man needs to check her boiler, I deal with that while she's at work, things like that. And George up in number 12 has been a great help to me when I had my bedroom flooded twice.

ED: Is that from upstairs neighbours? Overflowing bathtubs, or--

EH: The first time was bad enough, but when it happened again earlier this year—oh I didn't know what to do. But anyway, it took a long time, and we managed to get it sorted out, and they put some new piping upstairs. Please don't let it happen again, because it was a right old mess with water pouring through the ceiling and down the

walls, and of course everything had to be painted again. And it had to be done again this year when it—

10m 05s. ED: Were the Peabody Trust very helpful with getting that tidied up?

EH: Oh no, we got on with it.

ED: You had to do it yourselves?

EH: We haven't got a caretaker on the estate, we haven't had one for a long time. Someone comes in that cleans—washes the stairs down once a week. It doesn't sound much, but when you think there's seven blocks and he's got to do all of them. And he sweeps outside and tidies out there. So he does a good job—he's on holiday at the moment, so the man who's been helping out has got his own job to do, but he does a bit out of the goodness of his heart. So it's not so clean and tidy out there as it would be if Francesco was here, and he's away for five weeks, so what it'll be like when he comes back I don't know.

ED: All mud up the stairs.

EH: No, because the stairs are done, and they wash out the lift every morning, because, you know, sometimes someone from upstairs can't wait to get in his flat.

ED: Oh!

EH: I said to someone one day when they were coming, the lift will be a bit smelly, she said 'I've never been in a lift in buildings before now that aren't smelly'. So, it's not every day that you smell it, but you know, now and again it lingers, even when they've washed it out.

12m 02s. ED: But you say there used to be a resident caretaker, who would have—

EH: And he would do odd jobs, perhaps change the light in the kitchen, because it's a strip, he did that for me once, because I don't like admitting I can't do things, but I can't cope with—I can get the shade down, but I can't stay with my hands up trying to get the strip light off. So if it goes again someone will, I'll have to get someone to do it. It's the same, we've got a fire alarm, and I happened to say to the man when he came, I don't know why I said it, I can't check it. Because of getting up, I mean I've got steps, but it's having my hands up and trying to do things with arms stretched out, and he said 'oh I'll go and get something from my van, will you let me in again?' so I said 'yes of course I will'. He came back and he'd put the controls and check things up on the wall there, so I could check it from there.

14m 0s. ED: oh that's good. I was going to start off, I was going to ask you whereabouts you were born and brought up and about your family, parents and brothers and sisters?

EH: I no longer have a family. My father died about 40 years ago, my mother about 20, and my brother, the younger brother four and a half years ago. So there's just me now... [Talks about her Funeral Plan arrangements].

15, 28s. ED: well that 's good. When you were a child and growing up, whereabouts did you live?

EH: Canterbury.

ED: So what brought you to—was it nursing training that brought you to London?

EH: Yes, over at Clapham. And Brixton. Years ago you thought nothing of living in places like that. We used to have a small branch of the hospital down at Shadwell, and sometimes I had to go down and relieve the Sister down there. And I thought nothing of walking through the back streets, but I wouldn't do it now. Would you?

ED: I'd be very careful. [talks about living and working in London].

EH: Sometimes, even in daylight, especially when you've got men shouting. Though I must admit there are—sometimes, just under the bridge along the end of Hackney Road, there is several men who gather there, and you'd think 'oh dear, be wary of them'. But it's surprising, if they move out of your way, they'll say 'sorry', and you don't expect them to do things like that. I'm not sure whether they're drinkers, or druggies, it doesn't matter, they act better than you'd expect.

ED: There's manners and respect there... What was this flat like when you moved in, twenty years ago?

19m 03s. EH: It was just bare.

ED: But it had all been newly refurbished, you were saying?

EH: We'd have to get our own furniture, the Trust don't supply furniture

ED: I meant in terms of the decorating and...

EH: We weren't to decorate for six months, when we moved in, because it was newly plastered and things like that. But it's been done two or three times since then.

ED: Does the Peabody Trust do that for you...

EH: No, we have to sort that out ourself. Though, a couple of times, the last caretaker that we had had got a friend who was a decorator, because I didn't know where to go, or who to ask when I first wanted the decorating done, so I said to Paul, could he recommend anyone. And he said he'd got a friend who was a decorator, so they came and had a look, they got the paint themselves for me, and Danny did the whole lot.

20m 27s. ED: That would be the same for everyone here, then? They'd have to make their own decorating arrangements. And does the Peabody Trust check that work's been done properly, or are you free to put up fluorescent pink paint and things like that if you want to?

EH: No they don't come round, they trust you to look after the place, I wouldn't make a mess anyway, it's too much bother having to clear things up.

ED: What are they like as landlords then, are they—you've got a caretaker who comes by and a cleaner for the communal areas, do you feel looked after?

EH: If there's a job to be done, like my shower packed up a couple of years ago, I'd got water running down the back, and they've got companies that do the outside work, like when they did the pipes upstairs, and they did my shower, and they don't take long, and they are usually pretty good.

22m 05s. ED: You told me how brilliant it was to move into this flat and what a change it was from the old bedsit. In terms of decoration what was that old bedsit like? I've come across some plans and photos of what this estate used to be like in the 60s.

EH: I had paper on the walls, because there was paper on the walls when I moved in, and there again I had to get someone to do it for me, because it was a bit too much.

ED: In terms of the other people who live on the estate, do you have many friends here, that you might have round for a cup of tea?

EH: No, because so many people, as I say, have moved out, and at my age I wouldn't want—I mean I'd love to go somewhere else but I really couldn't be doing with it now.

ED: If you could move, where would you want to go?

EH: I don't know. You don't think about your age, but suddenly last December, I got a letter from the pension people, I was getting an extra £1 a month because of my age! And it sort of hit me, to think I'd reached 80. I mean, a pound a month. It doesn't go far! But still, I suppose grateful for any extra helps. I mean, we're waiting now to see how much the rent's going up. We know how much the valuation office has put on it, but whether Peabody will say all of it or a bit less or a bit more, I don't know. So we're just waiting for that.



24m 35s. ED: What do you like most about the estate, what's your favourite thing about living here?

EH: Well I don't know, I suppose I'm used to it. It's usually quiet.

ED: And what do you dislike the most about living here?

EH: About the estate, nothing, but just one or two of the residents. And I'm not saying more than that!

25m 29s. ED: That's fine! Would you be able to describe a typical day in the life of Elizabeth on the Peabody Trust estate? What sort of things do you do, from getting up in the morning, to going to bed at night?

EH: I go out every day. Sometimes—depends what I'm—how well I can move, sometimes it's just going to the paper shop over the road to get my paper and milk, other times I will go down to Sainsbury's to do my shopping, twice a week usually. I do go out every day somewhere, not far but I can't—I'm not going to be one of those people who sits indoors and moans that they never see anyone or talks to anyone, because, even in the morning, when I go for the paper, there are one or two people I see, and we'll often stop and have a chat, it makes my day. I spend a lot of time doing crosswords! And I knit children's clothes for St Joseph Hospice and another charity, to sell. Depending on the colours and how much, I will do ribbed hats or gloves. I've started doing those because I can't do a lot all at one go, it's too much having to stop and keep sewing up. And then any bits left, it's blankets.

ED: [looks at blanket squares].

EH: It's not something I sit and do for hours on end, it's just a bit now and again. It's the same with the squares, when my bag gets a bit too full I will do perhaps two or three squares, but it's surprising how much I get through. I don't sit and twiddle my thumbs all day.

ED: One of my questions was what do you do for fun, so I can see that you've got your knitting and crocheting on the go there and...

EH: And have you ever seen the Colossus crossword books?

ED: I think I have in the newsagents, great big books... [talk about crosswords]

31m 44s. ED: We've already talked a little bit about responsibility for communal areas, doing some of the research for this project, and looking at the Peabody Trust archives, something that I found from when the estate was first opened, probably up until the 1960s, 1970s, was that the caretakers would be very strict—

EH: Oh yes, at one point we used to—over in A Block we used to have to do the stairs, scrub them down every week, there were three on our floor, so we did it every third week. And they were stone, so we did have to...

ED: Scrub hard!

EH: But I mean years ago, before that, the caretaker, if he thought they hadn't been done, apparently, would go and knock on the doors and say 'you haven't done your stairs'.

ED: Yes, I thought about that, especially when you mentioned the chap who wees in the lift, that that's not something that would have been allowed...

EH: The caretaker going round and knocking on doors was before my time, but I had been told about it by other people, the older ones who've now passed on.

ED: But there isn't really anything like that now in terms of people sharing out work?

EH: We don't have to do it.

33m 50s. ED: So you're really quite free to make whatever changes you like to the flat?

EH: As long as you don't knock walls down, but who'd want to? I do wish they had put in—they were supposed to put in windows that you could pull down instead of the sash ones, but they did put sash ones in, so I don't clean the outside. In fact the window cleaner came this morning, he does the outside and I do the inside. But he's been doing it for years, I mean he used to do it when I was in A Block. He can only do up to the first floor because he's got no assistant, therefore he's got no-one to hang on to the ladder if he goes up high.

ED: You would need very long ladders wouldn't you, or something on the end of a long pole.

EH: At one time he had a brother who used to help, and they could do the second floor then, but his brother stopped doing it several years ago, so he only does the first floor, but it's a great help, Because there's no way I'm attempting to clean the outside of the windows. I've seen people sitting on the windowsill before now, doing the outside. I couldn't do that. I sometimes wonder what will happen when he finishes, because, I mean, he's no spring chicken.

ED: My last question that I've got written down, although some more might come up, my very last question is going to be can you tell me about your favourite room in the flat?

EH: I think the kitchen. It's more of a living room than a kitchen.

ED: Is it quite a decent sized kitchen?

EH: It's warmer over that side, because we get all the sun. It's not too bad here today as regards the light, but often it's quite dim in here, and even with lights on it can be difficult to see. But I do spend a lot of time in the kitchen.

ED: Is it quite big then, how big is it compared with this living room?

36m 49s. EH: You can have a look at it before you go.

ED: But it's big enough to sit in?

EH: Yes, I've got a—they call it a kitchen-diner, though I wouldn't have visitors in there for eating, not if I've been cooking and have got pots and pans around, that's why I have got that [points to table] because if there are only two people I can just put one flap up, if there are more than that they will help me get the table up, we put both sides up, and I've got chairs, one in the bedroom, two in the cupboard, inside the main door, and there's two in the kitchen.

ED: So this is for your visitors, this room, 'for best', and the kitchen is...

EH: I do sit in here to watch the news, and there aren't many programmes I want to watch these days, I do like University Challenge which has just started again, and Time Team.

ED: [talks about archaeology and Time Team]

EH: I know they are re-doing some of the programmes, but so often if you've seen it once, even though you enjoyed it, you don't necessarily want to watch it all again. But I did used to enjoy it. I can't be doing with all these soaps. If I hadn't got my radio I really would be lost. For the amount of time I watch that [the TV] it wouldn't really be missed, but take my radio away...

ED: So which stations do you like listening to most?

EH: I've got two in the kitchen, one Classic FM for the music, and Radio 4 for the various things, that goes on first thing in the morning. I mean, I'm not lonely, but if you've got the radio on, you don't feel that the place is empty.

41m 32s. ED: Have you ever been to any of the other Peabody estates?

EH: No. I mean I know that there are some down the way, but they're not the sort of places you go to unless you have to, to meet someone.

ED: Do the Trust run many events and things like that? Summer events and...

EH: No, if you want to arrange it you do it yourself. I mean years ago we had something out there to raise money for the cameras out there, on the estate. But it was a case of do-it-yourself.

ED: What about when there are things like the royal wedding and the jubilee, it rained a lot, didn't it, but are there many festivities here?

EH: Nothing like that here.

Ed: It's just a case of everyone watching it on their own separate TVs?

EH: You see when they turned the office, you know, the small block, into a house, we hadn't got anywhere inside to meet. There used to be meetings now and again there, but of course now we haven't got anywhere. If there were going to be any changes someone from Head Office would come across, and we'd meet in there, or those that were interested. They had a kitchen in there and so they could do drinks.

43m 35s. ED: And were there clubs and things like that that might be held in there? Or was it just really a hall for people...

EH: A couple of rooms upstairs and downstairs, it was the office downstairs, where we used to pay our rent. They used to be a help sometimes, if you'd got a problem...  
[continues to talk about an elderly neighbour who became unwell and was eventually moved to a care home].

51m 50s. ED: It is quite quiet round here

EH: The children during school holidays, they don't go out. I can see over on the Minerva estate, and there are a lot of children over there, but often you don't see them out there. Maybe in the evening they'll come out for a while. But out here, very seldom. And there are quite a few children on the estate, I wouldn't like to say how

many, but... not in this block, because this block, downstairs is two bedrooms, the rest of them are all one bedroom, so we've got no children in here.

Interview ends.

### **Appendix Three: Interview with Elsie Judd (Kingstanding)**

Elsie May Judd: My full name is Elsie May Judd, I was named Forty before marriage, and I was born in this house in 1932. I've lived here all my life, and when my parents passed on my—the Council gave me this house, and I rented it off them, and then as time's gone on, I brought it off them, so it's my own property now.

1m 04s Emma Dwyer: So you've lived around here all your life—

EMJ: Yes, I've never lived anywhere else

ED: Where did you go to school?

EMJ: That school there – if you look past that house you can see a building, that's a school, that was our school, and it was called then Cranbourne Road, but now it's called, ooh it's got another name now, I don't know what the other name is, but it was Cranbourne Road when I went there. That was like an infants and juniors, and then when we graduated from there, I went to Peckham Road School, that's up Sidcup Road way, and I stayed there until I was 14.

1m 55s ED: After you left school, what was your first job?

EMJ: It was in Six Ways Aston, and it was where they made garments, children's dresses and everything, I was a machinist there, in the first place, made children's clothes. I stopped there for five or six years, and then I left from there because there was more money going in the factories, they was getting more money, so I went to the GEC in Witton, and learned to be a armature winder, most things have an armature thing, you used to have to put all the wires in and connect them up, and wind them. But nowadays it's all done different.

ED: Was that for a particular kind of machinery?

EMJ: It was—it used to be for machinery, and we used to make big combines, and my main job was—they used to make big ones, about like that, and they were for—you know the horns you have on a ship? That was what it was for. And they used to come from London, to see that you were putting the right things in and... because people's lives depended on them.

3m 55s ED: Just to go back a bit, when did your parents move into this house?

EMJ: I was born in this house, they lived here I think two years before they had me. There was another sister, an older sister. My oldest sister was nine years older than me, my brother was two years older than me, she went a long while, my mom, between my sister and my brother, and then me and my brother she had quite close together. There were three of us. She had four but the first one passed away, died when she was seven. I didn't know her, but I knew I had another sister.

4m 45s ED: And where did your parents live before they moved here?

EMJ: Aston, they lived down Aston, in Park Lane in one of them little back houses. My mother's mother lived with them, which a lot of grandmas did. I don't know whether they lived with me mom or me mom lived with me grandma, do you know what I mean? But when my mom got this house, my mom and dad, they brought Grandma, like Grandma came as well. They all moved together.

5m 30s ED: what did father do? For a job?

EMJ: He worked in—he was a glazier, but during the War he worked in a factory. Because he was—he'd been in the First World War, and he was too old to be in the Second World War.

6m 00s ED: And did your mother work in a job?



EMJ: Yes, my mother went in a factory during the War, and Nan who lived here used to look after us while Mom was at work. She worked at a place called Tweeks in Perry Barr. I don't know what they did, but it was something towards the war effort.

6m 25s ED: And did your mum and dad tell you about how they came to come and live here?

EMJ: Well, my Dad hadn't got a job, there was a lot of men out of work. And my Mom used to see a lady, like you might meet to say hello, she got talking to this lady, and she worked for the housing department. That's how my mom got this job, because she said how they wanted another house, because they wasn't really enough room, there was only two bedrooms, and there was about five or six of us, so there wasn't enough room at the old house. And she told her about it, and she says to my mom 'would you like a job?' So my Mom says yes, because women didn't work like now, and my mom went to work at this salvage place in Montague Street, doing the—in the kitchens, cooking the breakfasts and that for the men, when they came in, the dust men. Well my Dad hadn't got a job, and Mom got dad a job on the dustcarts. Mom said you had to take anything then, it was essential that you had a job to get money, because you didn't get a lot of money. And when they came in this house, they got this house by knowing this lady, and the jobs, more or less. It wasn't what you knew, it was who you knew, in them days. Anyway my Dad, he got a job, and my mom then was able not to go to work, because of us, we were only little. So that was that. But when the War broke out my mom went and got a job, straight away. That's what happened, that's how they got the job, because things was all different then to how they are now, and they had to share toilets and everything then—our mom thought she was a millionaire, she'd got a bathroom, and she'd got a toilet of her own. They thought they was somebody to have got one of these houses. And they wasn't finished, when my mom came, so they tell me, they wasn't finished, they hadn't got no electrics—they got electrics but they wasn't put in—they hadn't finished putting them in. But they was putting the people in them, and my Mom was the first one to come up here, with another lady that lived a door away, but she's gone now, but they both came up from

the same area, they was moving them out of that area, and started building all this area.

10m 09s ED: Did that happen a lot, people who knew each other, and neighbours moving to the estate together?

EMJ: Yes, a lot of people who knew one another moved up here. My Mom didn't like it, she wasn't very keen when she came, she liked the house but didn't like where it was because it was all fields and nothing was finished. And my Dad, he used to have to go to Montague Street to work, and that was on the other side of town and they couldn't afford the bus fare so he had to get a bike and he used to bike it all the way to there every day and bike back, so it must have been a hard life. When he first come here they used to pay, like, dole money, on the labour, and he used to have to go to town to pick this money up. He used to take my elder sister to town, and they used to walk to pick this money up, and went towards the rent which was 50p, 10s 6d per week. The 6d was extra, it came about because they came around asking who wanted hot water, because they'd only got cold water taps. This was just before the War broke out. My mum and dad had to have a discussion whether they could afford the 6d to have the hot water put in. Anyway, they decided yes, they could find the 6d to have the hot water put in, and it was put in, and we had black leaded grates with an oven on that you could cook your meat in and all that, and at the back of the oven, they took that grate out and put a boiler, a hot water boiler at the back, and the coal, and put the grate back in with the coal fire, and that was what heated the water. When we lit the coal fire we had hot water. So we had to have a coal fire if we wanted hot water. When it was hot in the summer we used to have the copper on, what Mom boiled the clothes in, and we used to have to get the water out of the copper into the bath, carry it in buckets and tip it in the bath so our mom could bath us. You only had one bath a week, because you had to have a sponge down. The coalhouse used to be in the kitchen, and when the coal man used to come, you used to have to wipe after him, you had to wipe all the kitchen walls down. When we went down—where New Heights is now, at the back of there used to be a coal yard, and we used to have to go down there and take a pram down to get the coal. Everyone used to congregate there.

15m 25s ED: Can you remember any other shops on the estate?

EMJ: There used to be—the first one down the bottom was a fish shop. Then the next shop to that was a grocery shop, it was called Bakers, and we used to go there, to the grocery shop, for bread, and then there was the gap, like there is still a gap now, and then it used to be the butchers, Poxon's. And then next to that, where New Heights is, that was a greengrocers, and it was called Balls, Mr and Mrs Balls used to run it. Where the little hairdressers is, and the paper shop is, was a paper shop run by the Miss Browns, they was two spinster sisters, and they kept that paper shop. We used to go there with our ration book, with our sweet coupons in, to have our two ounce of sweets. Next door to that, where the fish shop is now, that was called the Home and Colonial, and that was a big company, and that was where we were registered for our groceries during the war. Where the next shop is, used to be a haberdashery, and she took in laundry, some people would take their laundry there because they didn't have the facilities to do it themselves. And then the next shop belonged to the church, and it was their house, for Father Burns and the other priests... There were big families in these houses, they'd come in with six or seven children, there was only three bedrooms, so they all had to double up. No-one had a lot, but what they'd got they'd share with you. I can remember people coming here to see if mum had a cup of sugar she could lend them, or—they'd bring it back. Or a penny for the gas, there used to be a meter you'd put it in. They were friendly days, no-one was better off than anyone else. A lot of the mothers didn't work. When the war broke out they all went and got a job... and some of them, with these big families, the Dads used to drink, and come home and throw his dinner up the walls! Some of them, My Dad, I was lucky, my dad was never like that, he always looked after us. I mean, he used to go and have a drink, but he wasn't a man that drank, he was a good dad. And as long as we'd done what we was told, he was all right.

21m 45s ED: I'm just thinking about other things that were on the estate, things to do for fun, like pubs for the grown ups and the cinema, and things like that...

EMJ: We had two picture houses, we had the Odeon, Kingstanding on the Circle, we used to go there, and we used to have the Mayfair on Perry Common. We used to go there to the 2d crush on Saturday. And we used to have ha'penny to go in the shop and you could have broken biscuits. And we used to think it was a lovely day out, we all went together. We used to wander about or go to Sutton Park together. As long as your parents knew where you were. We used to get inside Sutton Park and it seemed like we'd gone miles. We used to walk to there, and I can remember when it's been Bank Holidays, our Mom used to take us there for a picnic. We'd be there for the day, paddling in the water. We couldn't go on our holidays, so I suppose that was our holiday. And another place that we used to go was the Lickey Hills.

24m 25s ED: Is there anywhere where you played on the estate?

EMJ: We used to go to the park, Finchley Road Park, they'd got a big pond, when it was hot all the kids would be down there, all crowds of us in the pond, you could only just get your feet in sometimes. And then there was clubs, the 6-10 club up the road, it used to be called The Settlement, and we used to go there. And they'd organise games for us, and things like that. We used to have some good times. We always went to clubs, and I would be in the Brownies, and when they had Brownie troop it was round there at the school.

25m 40s ED: Coming back to the house, can you describe each room to me, in turn, as it was?

EMJ: Upstairs we had three bedrooms. The front bedroom was a big bedroom, and my mom and dad slept in there. In the big back bedroom, there was me, my sister and my brother, we all slept in there. One slept at the bottom and the other two slept at the top. And then in the next bedroom was my grandma, that was her room. And then there was the stairs down into the hall. This living room was like the same shape it is now. That there was a pantry [points to cupboard under stairs] and it's got meter cupboards in. And then we had the kitchen. In the kitchen, it was very small. We can go in and have a look [moves into kitchen]. It's different now to what it was. Up to

here, there used to be a bathroom, this part was the bathroom. We had a sink there, and you'd have the bath along there, and there'd a door here. And then there was another door next to it, and that was a place where you hung your clothes, and kept whatever you'd got, it wouldn't be a vacuum cleaner and that, more mop and bucket, we used to keep in there, and it was to here. And of course, we had it knocked through when we bought it. And the back door was here. And there, by that door there [door in rear wall], was a cooker, right by the door, as you'd come through there'd be a black cooker there, we used to have to black lead that, to keep it clean. And here, this part here, was a coalhouse. This was the coalhouse, and you'd come in the back door here and the coal was dropped in this little place here. And that door [side door] wasn't there, of course, we've had that door and had a conservatory built onto it.

ED: So this would have—so the kitchen would have been really quite small for—

EMJ: Oh yes! The kitchen was from here to there, we didn't have a table there like that, because there was a door there, but the kitchen sink was here, and then the table would be here, stuck in the middle of the floor, and mom would dish the dinner up there, and put it onto the table there, and that was it, it was very poky.

ED: So there would have been six of you—

EMJ: all round the table, yes. And you had to sit up at the table, because we hadn't got a—we'd got a three-piece suite, and what else had we got in there [living room] – we'd got a wireless, as we called it. We used to have a big cupboard there [moves back into living room], that was a cupboard to the ceiling, but that was in when we came to the house. And that was a cupboard, and our mom had glass doors put on it, and we used to have the best cups and saucers in there. So if anybody came they'd have a flash cup, a china cup.

ED: so it was just plain wooden doors, was it? That the council had put on?

EMJ: Yes

ED: And then your mum and dad had the glass doors put on?

EMJ: Yes, we had glass doors. And then it was just a black leaded grate, mom used to have to black lead that every week. And the floor, it was wooden and it would be varnished all round, about to there.

ED: Right, so about a foot from the wall.

EMJ: And we had a carpet square, a big square carpet in the middle. And when we couldn't afford a carpet square we used to have a peg rug on the hearth. It was good. And we had a three-piece suite, oh and we had a polished table, and we had it in that window there, so everybody could see it [laughs]. We had a polished table there, and that had dining room chairs round it, with leather seats and fancy backs on.

ED: Was that for special occasions?

EMJ: Oh yes, it used to have a chenille cloth on it, so you wasn't allowed to put anything on it. And then when it was Christmas time that table used to be stuck in the middle here, and we all had our dinner in here, ooh it was a luxury, we had our dinner in the living room. We even had the milk in a jug at Christmas time, other than that it was in a bottle on the table. But yeah, we had some good times. And then we got on a bit, like everybody else did, I suppose. And my dad used to play the piano, and we had a piano there, in that corner, our mom's pride and joy, she used to polish it, till it shone. And what else did we have – we had a sideboard, there. So with a sideboard and a polished table and four dining room chairs, and a piano, we weren't well off you know! And then, as she got on a bit, she—she had to go up to town to get a permit to say she could take the council grate out and have a new modern grate put in, but she had to buy it herself. And we went to the—a place called the Unique on Snow Hill. And they done the grate, and they come and took the black lead one away, and they put this new modern grate in. And we still had the boiler at the back to heat the water, because it was a coal fire. And it was tiled.

ED: So when would that have been?

33m 40s EMJ: It was just after the War, we had all that done, and we had this three-piece suite, and we got on a bit, and as I say we had a sideboard, and things like that. And in the kitchen we just had—they were red quarry tiles, polished with Cardinal, and we scrubbed the table, and the legs all wiped down, and that was done on washing day. You'd go to school in the morning, and mom was washing. You'd come home in the afternoon, mom was still messing with the washing, it would take all day [talks about washing].

ED: So the only fire in the house, there was one down here – were there any fireplaces upstairs?

35m 30s EMJ: Oh yes, one in the bedroom I sleep in, there was a fireplace there, and then in the front it was a gas fire, that's still in, that is. And a metal grate—and then, oh years after, we had our own gas fire put in it. But when anybody was bad in these houses, they'd—when a mom give birth to a baby or anything like that, they'd have the middle bedroom to have the baby in, and there was this coal fire, and what they used to do, it was a dangerous procedure actually, they used to take a shove full of hot coal off there, carry it up the stairs, put it in that grate up there and then build it up, and then that was for when the baby—you know, when they was in labour and they was going to give birth, so the room would be warm for when the baby was born. It was a dangerous thing to do!

37m 15s ED: And what about the garden, the front and the back garden, what was that like?

EMJ: Well, it's only a small garden out the front, as you can see. I had it slabbed down not that many years ago, because it got too much. But my brother-in-law lives here, he's always lived with me since I got married... [talks about her husband's family's living arrangements after their parents died].

ED: So did you have anything planted in the garden?

EMJ: oh yes, we used to have a lawn, two lawns like, it was like we've got now, and a wall round, but that was my brother-in-law done that, because my brother in law—oh you're going to laugh now—there was ten of us then, we kept getting bigger—my brother-in-law loved the garden, that was his hobby, and he built a York stone wall round, and it was two lawns and then all shrubs and trees, and outside the conservatory door, that was like a big bank, with a wall round, and we removed the wall and moved all the soil out so it was on a level, and then had it like it is now, I don't think we had a shed then, and we used to grow things as well, on this one side, beans and—oh we kept fowl, we had a fowl pen with fowl in and they were up the top there, because our garden was quite large, it goes right across. And we had the fowl there – and because you had fowl, you couldn't register to have eggs, because you had to register to get the corn and stuff for the fowl from the—from Miles's up the road—

ED: this would have been during the war?

EMJ: During the war. We were on rations after the war, we didn't just go back to normal. And we had fowl for years. And I used to think they were pets. We used to have a fowl at Christmas time, my dad could never kill one, but his mate used to come and do it for him, so we used to have to rear two cockerels for the pot, as mom used to call it, you'd rear them from pullets, and at Christmas he used to come and kill them, and we'd give him one for killing them, so they got their Christmas dinner and we had ours.

ED: So before your brother-in-law came to live with you, was it your dad who looked after the garden, or was it shared out—

EMJ: Dad—my dad wasn't a gardener. He'd keep it tidy but it wasn't nothing spectacular. But when my brother-in-law had it, it was beautiful, flowers and everything. But now it's just lawns and shrubs, because it got too—we used to have a glasshouse at the back, a greenhouse, and it was for Bernard, my brother-in-law, my husband brought it for him, and they used to raise the plants from seed, and he spent hours in there. My husband had a bad stroke, he was took ill, and we had to nurse him,



and then I had a heart attack, so Bernard hadn't got time to do that and look after him and me, so we got rid of the glasshouse. My nephew put some slabs down and done it as a patio for me, so I could go and sit up there if I wanted to.

43m 00s ED: How did come about to buying the house?

EMJ: That's a long story. When I first—when my dad died, my mom died first and then my dad lived some years after my mom, and I stopped here and looked after him. And when my dad died the council wanted the house back. And I didn't want to give them—I wanted the house because Peter and I—that was my husband—we were courting then, and he'd got an old house in Erdington. And we wanted this house. And I had to go up the council and tell them that my dad had passed away and all that, and they took my rent book off me, and give me a temporary one, which they shouldn't have done. But I was still paying the full rent. So they went on for a long while, to get this house off me, and they were offering me different places, they offered me a flat in Soho Road—and well, he went mad, says 'you're not going to live down there, it's too rough'. So we couldn't go down there. And it was different places we couldn't go to. And at the finish, the neighbours got a petition up, and sent it to the council, to say I was a good tenant and I was no trouble. And I went to see Jeff Rooker, he was our Labour Councillor [actually Labour MP for Perry Barr 1974–2001], and he put me on to a man from the church, because he was something to do with the Council. And I told Jeff Rooker the story, and that I'd always lived there, and I've got all mom's old rent books to show we never missed paying the rent. He says 'that'll go in your favour'. He says 'leave it with me, I'll go and see the councillor, and the councillor will get in touch with you, but you must get in touch with us if you have any more letters' – I took the letters they sent me to tell me I'd got to go from here, and they sent one to say that I was going to be evicted, and I came home—we were married then. I told Jeff Rooker we were getting married, and my brother-in-law was also coming to live with me, and they'd offered me one big room, you see. And I'd said we've got have at least two bedrooms, no matter what they give us we've got to have two bedrooms. Anyway, he says 'I'll see, I'll go and sort it out for you'. Well, I had a letter to say that I'd got to go to court. And we were home from work one night, and Peter went to the door, and I

heard him say 'well you'd better come in', and when this man come in, he said 'I'm the bailiff from the court, Mrs Judd I've come to have a talk with you'. Anyway, he came in and sat there, and he said 'they're trying to get you out' and I said yes, I said the council wanted to convert the house to two flats, one up and one down. So, he says yes, I see all that. Anyway, he says 'the councillor is coming to court for you, but if it's true, which I do believe what you've told me, they'll throw it out, it'll never get through the court, because it's a waste of time, because they'll give you the house anyway'. He was ever such a nice man. But of course, it was upsetting. But at the time, the house that Peter lived in, we still kept that on, and I used to have to pay the rent for that house, because it was cheaper than the rent on this house, and I was paying the rent on two houses. Maybe it was a lot then, I'm going back years, but we had to do that to keep the other house so I'd have somewhere to go if they did finally throw me out. And it was Peter's mate who owned the other house, so we were lucky there, because he was a nice chap, and he said you can have it as long as you like. We used to go down to see that it was all right, but we didn't live in it for a few months. At the finish, they threw it out of court as they'd told me they would, and they came and told me I'd got my house. So, happy all round. No sooner had we got the house, it was coming up then, the chance to buy. So Peter says 'I think we'd best buy it' because if anything happened to me, they'd be out on their ear, because they wouldn't change the name again. So we decided to buy, and that's what we did.

50m 45s ED: What year would that have been?

EMJ: 70s, 80s. I'd say it was the late 70s when we brought it. And I got it cheap because I'd always lived in it, they allowed me to have it at a reduced rate. Anybody else who lived in a house and they brought it, they got it a reduced rate. And I think we had it for £4,000. Because that was a lot of money then, we had to have a mortgage off the council, and I used to have to go in town and pay the mortgage every month, and at the time I was working at Lucas's, but it was the one in College Road, and I used to work six in the morning until two. And once a month I used to have to go to town to go and pay this mortgage off. We took this mortgage over so long, I think we had ours on about 18 years, and we paid it off in better time than that. And I had it [the house]

altered just after I brought it. It cost a couple of thousand to have it altered, to have it all knocked through, and we had new windows, which weren't these windows there, they were wooden, and we had that knocked through. And the first kitchen I had was one we brought from the DIY, and Pete put that one in, and we had to pay the gas to come and move the cooker. It took about six weeks to alter it, and it was just before the Christmas, and it was terrible work, it froze, everywhere was frozen. And the bathroom went completely, so I had that put in the little back bedroom, which is a nice big bathroom now, and Bernard, my brother-in-law, he's got a room, and we had the other room. It was just right for us. About a fortnight before Christmas it was finished. And I brought a new gas fire, and that [the wall] was all plastered over [talks about buying and installing new kitchen themselves]. I thought I was somebody because I'd got a new kitchen. It was nice, how he'd done it for me. And then when he'd done that and we moved all the stuff back in the kitchen, and I went and cleaned upstairs, and we decided what carpet we wanted. And we'd got carpet down the stairs, and in here. [talks about washing the walls and curtains after the work].

1h 01m ED: You mentioned earlier having to get a permit from the council to put in the grate, or your mother had to, so was that something that you always had to do if you wanted to make alterations?

EMJ: Yes, you couldn't do alterations to the house. They did, loads of people did, but you weren't supposed—because the rent man used to come to the door, and he'd just walk in and have a look around. And if he didn't like what he'd seen, I don't know what would happen. I suppose he would report it if anything wasn't right. They used to have a lady come round all the houses, you didn't know when she was coming, and she would go upstairs and turn all your beds up to see whether you'd got any bugs or fleas or anything like that. And then you always knew who'd got the bugs because they used to have the lorry come outside the house to fumigate the house. You used to say 'oh Mrs so-and-so has got bugs!'

1h 02m 45s ED: So once you'd bought the house you didn't have to deal with the council?

EMJ: Oh I did when I had it altered, because you'd have to take the plans in order to get permission, because taking the toilet up there for starters, every time we'd done so much we'd have to wait for someone to come and view it to see if it was to their liking. They offered me a grant, to have it done, there was loads having it done, but there was a catch in the grant, because we were both working, so that meant you weren't entitled to as much as somebody who'd only got their husband working. So they'd just give you a small grant. But some got the full grant, about £8,000 or something like that, it was a lot of money. And they offered me £300 to have my toilet turned round! And I told them I didn't want that done, we wanted done what I wanted done, I'm wanted it put upstairs.

ED: So the grant would have just been to keep it on the ground floor?

EMJ: Yes, to just turn the toilet round, and I told them not to bother. Peter said 'we want what we want, we're paying to have it done'.

1h 05m 30s ED: Do you have any other family or close friends who live nearby on the estate?

EMJ: Now, I've not got anyone who lives here, all my family live in Cannock.

ED: And how about in the past, your brother and sister, did they—

EMJ: My brother lived at West Bromwich, and my sister, she went—she lived here, that was when we developed a lot of people! My sister and her husband and her first little boy, they lived here, they slept in the back bedroom, there was the double bed and they had a cot in there. And I slept in the front bedroom, up the alcove on a single size bed, and my mom and dad were in that room, and grandma slept in the little room, and my brother slept on a bed down here, that you used to have to fold up and put it away every day. Because my sister couldn't get a house, there were no houses and she had to live—first of all they got rooms in a house down Witton, but when she was having the baby the lady didn't want children there, so she had to come out and she came to live with us. We all had to move round, but we couldn't leave her without

a roof over her head. And they lived here for a good few years, until he was nine, they couldn't get a house. And then they had a letter come to say they'd got a flat. And they had a flat at Quinton, three bedrooms, nice spacious place overlooking the golf course, and the people who lived in the same block were nice, decent, clean people. And she had twins, she'd been married for some time then, on the day the lad was ten, she had the other two, all their birthdays on the same day. They couldn't get the pram up and down the stairs, there wasn't a lift so she went to see the council and the council says 'we can give you a house, but it'll be on the overspill, Cannock. We've been looking it up and your husband works at such-and-such, there's a bus that runs to where he works every day, so he'd be able to get to work'. So they moved out to there, my sister hated it because it was a village, you had to live there twenty years before they spoke to you! She wanted to come back and she said, 'if you hear of anybody who wants to come and live out here, our Elsie, I'll take their house on', in Kingstanding. But of course, we never heard of anybody. And then when the lad was 14, I heard of somebody who wanted to move, and I told her about it, and the lad said he didn't want to go, because he'd got his friends. They talked it over and decided they didn't want to go. And they had their children, and they all live out there now.

1h11.45 ED: Is there anything that you particularly like about this house?

EMJ: Anything I particularly like? No, I think it's just grown on me! I've always been very lucky and had good neighbours, and that's a big part of your life. That one next door is a schoolteacher and her husband's a plumber. This one, it's a man and a lady, nice people, and they've got two grown up children and a little granddaughter. I've seen big changes, sometimes you come up this grove and there's loads of children, and then them children will grow up, and they move out, and it would go for so many years with only two or three kids in the grove, and then it comes back with children again. At the moment we've only got six or seven little ones. And then they grow up, and they meet me sometimes, and I don't know who they are [talks about meeting a neighbour's grand-daughter in Sutton Coldfield].

1h 15.24. ED: Is there anything you don't like about living here on the estate?

EMJ: Some times it gets a bit rough – you go up some roads and you’re ashamed when you see how—like up Cranbourne Road, I have two friends who lived up Cranbourne, and they’re both gone now, but they were so particular with their houses, it would break their hearts if they could see the gardens and that now. They put people in, young couples in them, they don’t care some of them. Not all of them, there’s some good and bad. I feel sorry for the people who live next door to them, they’re decent people, and it don’t seem fair. The Council don’t stop to think, how they give the houses out. They seem to think that if they put you, if you’ve got no idea, which a lot of young girls haven’t, how to run houses, they put you amongst people who are decent, that you’re going to go the same way, but they don’t always, do they. They stay as they are, they’re still in the gutters they’ve been brought up in, they don’t want to get on, even if you try to help them.

1h 17m 40. ED: So could you describe a typical day now, a day in the life of Elsie, what do you do tomorrow?

EMJ: Tomorrow is Wednesday, I go and fetch my groceries, I usually go to ASDA or I go to Tesco’s, I cook a meal and clean up, or whatever it is I’ve got to do, I do little jobs. If anybody rings and says ‘do you want to go out’ I say yes, I’ll come with you. And we go and toddle off for the day, to Sutton.

1h 18m 40. ED: Do you find that you do more things off the estate now than you might have done when you were younger? Were there more things to do here in the past?

EMJ: There’s more things to do now than there was when I was younger, we used to make ourselves contented, but today you can go in the—like I’ll go down the Catholic church on a Thursday, and that’s lovely, we all meet together and talk, and have our lunch, or if I was a bit fed up I’d go down to New Heights and have a cup of coffee.

1h 19m 48. ED: Can you tell me about your favourite room in this house?

EMJ: I think it’s the one we’re sitting in now! Just sitting here, and making myself contented, I’ll read a book or something like that.

ED: Why is it your favourite room?

EMJ: Because I can relax in here. If you sit in the kitchen—I sit in the kitchen a lot, but it's sitting on hard chairs, but if you come in the living room you can relax. It's a funny thing, if any of my mates come they always go into the kitchen, and that's where we stay.

1h 20m 45. ED: How does that compare with how your mother had visitors in the house? Would she have put them in the kitchen?

EMJ: Oh you couldn't sit in the kitchen because there wasn't room to sit too many people, you used to have to sit in here. And the kids used to have to sit on the floor, and then mom's aunties, mom's friends and that used to sit on the settee.

End of interview.

## **Appendix Four: Interview with Kathleen McCarthy (Kingstanding)**

Kathleen, Sheila McCarty, 110 Danesbury Crescent, Kingstanding, Birmingham and my date of birth is 26 November 1929, and I was born in Aston.

ED: where was your first home?

KM: In Aston, as a baby. My parents, that was their first house. They didn't stay long there because when my brothers came along we moved to Kingstanding, a house in Rivington Crescent. And then when this school [across the road] was built they moved here because it was so near. So we moved here in 1936.

ED: In 1936 and that was to this house?

KM: yes.

ED: And so where did you go to school? Did you go—

KM: to Christ the King primary school, across the road.

ED: And where did you go after that?

KM: St Paul's High School, in Edgbaston.

ED: And how long did you stay there?

KM: At the High School? Until I was 15, then I left there and I went to secretarial college.

2m 15s. ED: After secretarial college, where was your first job?



KM: I worked in the council offices in Broad Street; it was the department that looked after the parks and allotments in the city. And then I moved on to an insurance company.

ED: And were you living in this house—

KM: Yes, I've lived here most of my life.

ED: And can you remember—I suppose you were quite small when you lived in Aston?

KM: I can't really remember, it's just that it's on my birth certificate. I can't remember the address; I must have been quite young when we moved to Rivington Crescent.

ED: What was the house in Rivington Crescent like?

3m 30s. KM: It's similar to this but with only one room – it used to be called parlour-type, because you got an extra room, and just the kitchen and the living room in those—well, they're mixed, you can get that anywhere, they made different types of houses in the whole estate. Some have got four bedrooms, some have got three bedrooms. I just think they make a variety of houses on this estate. I can't remember much about that house or Rivington because I was quite young when I came here, about four. I think we moved just before the school, so I was about four.

4m 45s. ED: and what are your earliest memories of this house, and what it was like when you were a child?

KM: This house? It hasn't changed much, really. The kitchen has been updated, with—because in those days there were no washing machines. And we did have an electric cooker. And there were no fridges of course. So all those have been updated through the years. But structurally the house is more or less the same.

ED: So could you, just while we're sat here, take me through the house, room by room, what it's like? Starting on this floor, the ground floor?

KM: There is a sitting room in the front. This room [dining room, also used as sitting room, with tv, at the back] and that's a little, what we used to call the pantry [cupboard under the stairs]—I still use it to store the food, and the meter is through there, the gas and electric meter are in there. And then that's the kitchen. There is one difference, there is a side cupboard where the coal was delivered – they used to come in and deliver the coal, because they were coal fires in those days, so the delivery of coal was put into there. So that was all. When we had the gas fires installed we didn't need the coal, so that was cleared and we used for storage of garden tools and anything that we didn't use, and the ironing board and washing basket, anything that we needed just to be stored away. Upstairs there are three bedrooms. Two are of a good size bedroom, and then there's a smaller room, and there's the bathroom upstairs. We have had the toilet – we used to have those with the tanks high up, and we had it more modern, low flushing toilet, and there was always a basin, but we had a new basin there, but it hasn't changed very much. And that's the house.

ED: Was the bathroom always upstairs?

KM: Yes, it can vary, sometimes they're downstairs, near the front door, but with the entry it had to be a different layout. So it's a block of four [houses] you see, some houses are blocks of two, semi-detached, but this is a group of four houses.

ED: Could we go back to when you lived here as a child, and was that with your mother and father?

9m 10s. KM: Yes, and two brothers.

ED: And are they older or younger?

KM: One's older and one's younger.

ED: So you're in the middle! And did you have any family living nearby when you moved here? Was there anyone that you knew in your family, or close friends who also came to live on the estate?

KM: No.

ED: And your brothers, when they moved out of—did they move out of the home?

KM: Yes, they married and had families, and they moved out. One's in Walmley, and one has a house in Four Oaks.

10m 20s. ED: Could you describe a typical day from when you were a child; what are the sort of things you did, from getting up in the morning to going to bed at night?

KM: Shall I say a school day? We used to wait until nearly nine o'clock, and we could hear the bell ringing, and we'd run over there. And then there were lessons until 12 o'clock, and because we didn't stay for lunch, there were no dinners provided at school, so we'd come home at lunchtime, until it was two o'clock, we had two hours, because of travelling, some people had quite a bit to walk – and they'd walk! So we'd come home and have our lunch, and then we'd go back at two o'clock, and then leave at four – we stayed a bit longer then. We'd come home, and before tea, I suppose we'd play in the garden, or skipping rope or a ball, or something like that. Then we'd have our tea, and we used to go to bed early.

ED: And were there any jobs that you would have to help out with?

12m 05s. KM: We all had little jobs to do, tidying our rooms, help with the washing up and help my mother to prepare things, what we could cope with. She used to like us to dust, I can remember when we had linoleum on the floor, when she put polish on the floor, we used to put dusters on our slippers and we used to rub up and down [laughs]. It was fun really; I think things were made to be fun, more than it is now. I can remember doing that. And if she was making pastry, she'd always let me do some little pieces to make some tarts with. I think that's how you learn to do cookery, isn't it.

13m 40s. ED: Is there anything that you would help your father with? Helping out in the garden?

KM: A little bit, yes, dad would let us do a little bit, we did plant seeds, but he had a shed, and he used to do jobs like repair jobs, and we could always watch, but he didn't like us using tools. Until—well, I was never very interested in tools and things like that, but when my brothers had cycles, they were keen cyclists, it was used for repairing and dismantling their bikes.

ED: Did your dad enjoy doing the gardening?

KM: Oh yes, we had a lovely garden, there was always flowers and vegetables. We used to have vegetables and lettuces for the salads, and we could go and pick them, and there was always rhubarb, with the big leaves—it sounds funny now, but we used to go and pull them up and we'd walk down with them like an umbrella, because they had big leaves, I can picture myself doing that. Little things were fun. And with the washing, my mother let me bring in the washing on a frosty day the shirts would stand out, and I'd bring them down, they'd be stiff with the frost if they'd been left to the evening and it had gone cold. And the shirts would have arms art, and you could carry them down. I've thought of this since, the little things we used to make fun of. I used to like seeing the sheets blowing out in the wind. We used to go to the park, there was a recreation park, in Hommerton Road, but we'd walk there. It's not far, I suppose, a ten-minute walk. We used to go there and play on the roundabout, swings. But in those days there was a park-keeper who would keep his eye on the children. And there was room to play football for the boys, and you met up with other children in the park. And then on Bank Holidays we'd go out with out with our mum and dad to Sutton Park, or sometimes if there was a group of us going we'd all go together, and we'd spend the day at Sutton Park, that's immense.

18m. ED: Are there other things that you would do here on the estate for fun, going to the cinema or--

KM: Oh the cinema, Saturday afternoon for us it was, and you would meet up on your way with friends in a group. There'd be a crowd going in about two o'clock. And the usual thing, shouting, and a funny atmosphere when you think about it, cheering and

booing and all that went on, the good ones and the bad ones, especially the cowboys and the Indians... [talks about going to the cinema]. And the boys would come back home replaying the film. Then the war came, and I was evacuated to Nottingham, I was there about twelve months, because of the bombing here [talks about evacuation]. My younger brother was with me but my older brother was at another school and they went to Hereford. And I think from then, the war changed a lot of things.

21m 25s. ED: Just thinking about other things on the estate, as well, like shops. Did your mum and dad do most of their food shopping and things like that on the estate and nearby?

KM: Yes, not far, there was quite a good, by the church, just round that circle, there was a good number of shops there, there was a grocery shop, a hairdressers, a fish and chip shop, a baby-wear and ladies-wear shop, sweet shop and newsagents, a shoe repairers. But there was no butchers, so my mother used to further up the hill where there's another big shopping area, and there was a number of butchers round there, and there was big stores, like a Woolworths and a Peacocks there. And there was a big store, Lathams, which had haberdashery and curtains, and socks and underwear and that sort of thing, so we were pretty well catered for, but for coats you'd have to go into town, the popular one was Lewis's and C&A, that was another good shop. Sometimes we'd go into Erdington or Sutton, just for a change to see other shops. But there was none of these—there's so many building societies now and charity shops, and takeaways, and you didn't have any of those sort of things, and fast food shops, I think people did cook for themselves, they didn't go and buy it. When the war was on we had an air raid shelter in the back garden. And we did have the alarms go quite often. We did have some incendiary bombs, that was all fields you see, and another thing we used to play on. There was some allotments on there, but most people—we had a gate so we could go through onto the field, and that's where a lot of children used to play, from all round. But in recent years they've put that new estate on there. It was good fun in the winter, when we had the snow, because it's on a hill, and you could have slides and toboggan races.

25m 10s. ED: What about DIY and making improvements to the house, is that something that your mum and dad did very often? Did they redecorate the house?

KM: They did decorate, yes, every so often.

ED: And out of the front room, this room, and the kitchen, what would you do when you had visitors, people coming round for a cup of tea – would they sit in the front room, or come in here?

KM: I think come in here, really, because we'd sit round the table. Because this was used as a dining room as well.

ED: Was this where most of the family things went on?

KM: I think so, yes,

ED: The front room, would that be for special occasions?

KM: I suppose so, yes

ED: What sort of things?

KM: If we had any parties, birthdays or Christmas and we had visitors. And weddings, one of my brothers had his reception here, I think we used to do that more, it was in—you didn't go and hire a hall, you had a family get-together, really. Maybe that's it, they have more people to their weddings these days, so they go outside to bigger restaurants or halls, and when I was young they used to have it more in the house, and family celebrations.

ED: And so it was a council house?

KM: At first, yes.

27m 35s. ED: So did your mum and dad buy it?

KM: Yes

ED: so when did they do that.

KM: must be about—the council offered that people could buy them, the right to buy, when that came in, so... it was in the 70s.

ED: Can you remember why they decided to buy the house?

KM: I just think they thought to take up the option, it's security isn't it, if you have a house that you own.

ED: Did they know many other people on the estate who brought their own house from the council?

KM: There are a number of houses that are brought; I think a lot of people did take up this option.

ED: So when they—I'm trying to think about what it might have been like for them to finally own their own home that they could do as they pleased with.

KM: And that's another thing, I suppose, if it was still a council house you are restricted in what you can do, and I don't know whether they do encourage you to decorate, perhaps they do now because at one time the council was short of money, and they didn't ever do decorating or repairs that—or it took a long time for any repairs to be done, but when its your own you can get it done. It was encouraged because they were finding they couldn't get all the repairs done, because it had been left for a long time, and when it did need—there'd be a backlog of repairs to be done, and so I think that's why, in a way, the council disposed of this property, so that people would look after them.

ED: So did your mum and dad—once they'd brought the house, did they do anything to update it that they couldn't have done before, or repairs? I know that at Elsie's

house, although I think it was before the right to buy, her mother had had to go to the council for permission to replace a fire grate, and then later on once she'd been able to buy the house, she could then make lots of changes to it, updating the electrics and the gas fires and things like that. Did your mum and dad do anything like that?

KM: We did have it done, yes, all the electrics were done. And I've since had it done because father died, and my mother had died earlier on, we had the electrics done when the kitchen was updated, because by then—there's a limit on, you have to have them done after so long, and the switches were all on the skirting board, and that's not right, apparently you have to have them and they bring them up a bit higher for when you're older, it's easier than having them so low down. And my dad used to decorate. But I suppose we hadn't altered this, some people have made it into one room, but we kept them two rooms. I didn't think it needs adapting at all! It's what people want to do, isn't it.

ED: This house is different to some of the others, that had the bathroom downstairs, and that's not always how people want them.

KM: And yet that's useful to other people, if it's all on one level. I think its individual needs and wishes, isn't it.

ED: So when you were young, what was your favourite room in the house.

KM: I suppose this was, really, because we were all together. And then in the winter evenings we used to sit round and play games. Or I'd do handicrafts, I liked to do embroidery and knitting, all the things that have gone out of fashion! But I used to love to do that. And my dad used to like to do wood carving, and my brothers used to like to do modelling. So we'd all be sitting around doing our own hobbies in the evening when you can't go out because of bad weather.

ED: And did you have to share your bedroom with your brothers?

KM: No, I always had my own, I had the smaller room and they had the bigger room.



34m 20s. ED: And how did you have that furnished when you were a girl?

KM: A bed, and dressing table and wardrobe. And I used to keep my toys in there.

ED: And when your brothers got married, did they move out of the home then? They didn't bring their wives to live here?

KM: No, no.

ED: So did that then free up their room for you to move into?

KM: Yes, I have moved in to the big room, yes. More space.

ED: What is the thing that you like most about this house?

KM: I find it convenient for me, and for my interest, because I attend the church that's across the way, it's very handy for the bus route, which I can pick up a bus at the bottom of the road, and then I can be connected to the city or go out to Sutton. There are a few shops that are handy, or I can get to the bigger stores. I like the garden, and I like to do some gardening, and I've got friends and I'm friendly with the neighbours, they're nice neighbours. And my doctor is where I can get to easily.

38m 30s. ED: Is there anything that you don't like about the neighbourhood, or...

KM: Well it has changed since I was a child, because some people, different people have come into the area. There seems to be more problem people, and problem families, and I think the council just move them from estate to estate, and I don't like the fact that they've built—I don't know whether you can look at those houses, can you see? They're very unattractive houses, that's why I'm glad I've got a few trees to hide—because we didn't have that before – we had trees, and a lovely field that we could—and also there were garages built for those houses, just a block of garages, and what do they do? Youths climb up, and what do they do with a few stones? Stand on the flat roof and they were forever throwing stones, and they did break some

windows, and my neighbour had windows—and the police said I was lucky because I had trees, they hadn't got a clear view. It's not as bad as it was because they demolished all these garages, because they were not safe for people's cars, really. And when they were empty they used to go in and use them for drug dens. And so most people now park in front of their house on the road. There is a service road there, but it wasn't safe for people coming in with their cars, it was dark and you didn't know who might be there. And there are little alleyways, so the police can never catch anyone, because they can escape. It's very badly planned. And they tend to congregate round—when I was a child there was very few shops that sold alcohol, there were a number of public houses, but we didn't have any here, it would be on the College Road. But you see there's two shops now that sell alcohol, and they sit on that bit of ground there. So I don't go round that way at night because you find there are gangs waiting round by the shops. And then they stay open much later now. The area itself is still good, but it's the people that are in now, and the idea of the council at one time, why they bring problem families in, they said they bring them in to a good area to try and change them, but what I say, is you put a bad apple in a barrel, it just makes them worse, and you get a bad group. They seem to move them around from different areas. They don't seem to take any pride in the area – and the properties are good, the facilities are good round here, but they don't appreciate anything, somehow.

45m. ED: Thinking back to the past, what would have happened if there had been a problem family in the street when you were younger?

KM: When the state was set up, it was all council-owned property, and we used to have the rent collector come round, so—and they used to look round and mention to you if you needed to keep your garden cared for, and I think – I can remember my mother saying he was asking about—and they probably came in and saw how things were being kept and that the property wasn't being destroyed, and you're caring for it. But I suppose if you were persistently damaging the property and you didn't care for your garden, you were probably removed. But I wouldn't know about that, but—and they encouraged you to look after your garden, because they used to have garden

competitions. Yes, we had a number of houses where there were people who had prize gardens.

ED: Is that the sort of thing you ever took part in?

KM: We kept it nice, but the people who did it were—they did more to their garden! But we kept ours nice with lots of flowers and things, but—my dad belonged to the ex-servicemen's club and they used to have a gardening club and I remember dad used to go to their meetings and bring back flowers, seeds and all that. And one day we did win on something, because dad took some lovely petunias, and he got a prize for that. So in those days they encouraged you to do things [continues to talk about litter].

50m. ED: When did you retire, was it the council you worked for before—

KM: No, it was the insurance company, I retired when I was 62. And I go to choir at the church, and we have luncheon club on Thursdays, and I go to coffee morning on Tuesday at the church and the centre. And we have exercises or bingo, or a talk, things of interest.

ED: Could you tell me about your favourite room in this house, what is your favourite room?

KM: Well I think I like this room, there's nothing wrong with my front room, but I think its handy for the kitchen, and it's got memories of everything went on, centred around this room, our meals, and I like to look out at the garden and the trees.

53m 30s. ED: Is there anything that your parents were really proud of about the house?

KM: My dad was—my mother liked the garden as well, and used to like to sit out there in the good weather, but my dad did like his garden, and we had privet hedges all the way round, and at the front, and he used to spend a lot of time doing patterns on it, it was all up and down, and then in the front he used to do some designs, like vases, so

he spent a lot of time—he did sort of do topiary, isn't it, he used to like to do that. So I think he took pride and joy in the hedge and the rest of the garden, growing the vegetables and the flowers. Although the house must have been something to them, my mum and dad, because we'd all been a family here, it must have been their pride really. Although nobody ever said that, but you just assume that they were happy here. Dad used to go to the ex-servicemen's club once or twice a week, my mother belonged to groups in the church, and having the church handy.

ED: I'm really interested in your cupboard in the corner, I've noticed this with houses that are built by the council, they always put fitted cupboards in, or they used to, so people could tidy things away. I was wondering – so you've got that one there, do you have any others in the house?

KM: Actually, that was installed by—it never had—my dad put the doors on, it was open shelves, just the cupboards at the bottom and then the shelves.

ED: And then your dad added the glass cupboard doors?

KM: Yes.

ED: And then your mum would be able to display things in it?

KM: Yes [Talks about redecorating recently and putting ornaments in boxes; pets].

1h 2m 10s KM: The estate hasn't really changed much from – I suppose things have been updated, better street lighting, because of the increase in traffic. Because nobody had a car when I was a child. That's why these houses haven't got garages. Where you will get one is a corner house, where there's a bit of land, but you see they never provided for people having cars. That has created problems in some of the narrow roads.

End of interview.

## **Appendix Five: Interview with George Evans (Bevington Street)**

Chief Executive of Eldonian Community Trust Ltd. Former Housing Officer with Liverpool City Council.

ED: The houses in Bevington Street and Summer Seat – they were built, as you were saying, as family houses with three bedrooms, but can you remember any works that were carried out during your time at the council, to bring them up to—

GE: There was very little work that the council did. I worked for the council from the early 70s for 13 years, so that took me into the 80s when it was handed over to a housing association, and while I was there, I think the only thing that got done was the doors were painted. So there wasn't a lot of work, but people in the area done a lot of work themselves. It was very popular, both of the terraced streets were very popular, not just housing, but shops there as well, so it was very innovative in its day. I suppose today you're facing on to a main road, you haven't really got a garden at the back, there's the problems getting rid of your rubbish at the back, they've put alley gates on now, they're all cobbled at the back, so—people still found them very popular, and there was still a waiting list for them when I was there. We were told they were originally built for dockworkers, and I remember during my time at the council, we had a visit from the Mayor of Shanghai. And he wanted to see where typical dockworkers lived. For some reason the powers above decided that they wanted to show him Bevington Street and Summer Seat. Which were hardly typical of the properties in the area, most people lived in the tenements, called the walk-up flats. And because it was my area they asked me if I could arrange for them to go inside one of the properties. I knew all the tenants and I managed to get one of the women whose husband did work in the docks, so that he could see. We managed to arrange access and there was a Granada reporter and everything down on the day. And I said to her 'look, it's nothing special, just coming along with the camera, if your husband's home for dinner, we'll just sit down there, give him something to eat, and we'll see how a typical British couple lives in the house'. No problem at all. So he arrives on the day with the cameras—I'll never forget this—and there she was in a full evening dress, all her

jewellery on, must have borrowed the jewellery from somewhere. The table had a candelabra on [laughs] so obviously the Mayor of Shanghai must have come in and thought 'well the dock workers live quite well'. She said 'you've got to keep the face of Liverpool up'. So they were very proud of where they lived—she was smiling, and all the neighbours must have clubbed round and lent the jewellery. Took it out the pawnshop probably. And they're still very proud of living there. And they've had to put up with a lot, with that derelict site next to them. So I have fond memories of Summer Seat and Bevington.

ED: You must have been working at the council around the time that the Right to Buy was brought in, was that something that was very popular in the area?

GE: It was, it was popular, it wasn't cost effective for us as a landlord, because the discounts were very high, and you also lost property, and you had no chance of rebuilding that property. I suppose it affected us less in this area than other areas because we didn't need as much property. But we did need high quality property and they tended to be the ones that were brought, so the newer houses, or some of the terraced houses were purchased with very large discounts, and it affected the suburbs more, because they'd been built post-war, probably 50s to 60s, front and back gardens, terraced or semi-detached. And the ones in the more affluent areas were lost because of the Right to Buy. Some of them made a killing on it, some of them still live there, good luck to those who do still live there. But in this area, some of the ones in Summer Seat, some of the newer builds in the 60s and 70s houses. Obviously none of the tenements were affected by the Right to Buy. But, even when I worked for the council it was evident that the people who did have the right to buy and exercised their right to buy looked after their properties, you could physically see the difference as you walked down the street, people had done a lot of work to their own properties. I'm not against the right to buy, just that we can replenish the social housing stock.

ED: So people were really taking pride in owning their own property, and doing new works to their houses; what kind of things were they doing – new windows and...

GE: Well you've got to be careful, because you can't do—especially in those ones on Bevington, you can't actually do a lot of change, but you can change internally, new bathroom suites, maybe re-flag the back garden, give it a lick of paint, because the council were now not painting properties for many years, so its more internal, but you could tell, it had been spruced up. Especially when you compared it to the ones in the rest of the street where the council had failed to paint for 15 years, the paint was flaking off.

ED: Thinking about what kinds of work tenants would do to houses that weren't technically speaking theirs, but they live in them for decades – were people still quite house proud?

GE: Yes, very much so, and we still – it wasn't that far away from people coming out and cleaning their steps, you know. It was an aging population, so people were very house-proud in the main, you still got a few who weren't. And they also tended to be very parochial as well, so the people who moved in there were likely to have relatives there already, because if you had a two or three-bedroom house and you were looking at something in the suburbs which had a front and back garden, or something in the middle of Vauxhall, which had a front door onto a street and then a back yard – the younger ones were more economically mobile, so they'd move out to the suburbs. Some of them moved to New Towns, although a lot of them moved back from the New Towns, because you've got to remember as we come out of the 60s and into the 70s, you've got the likes of Skelmersdale, Runcorn, all of those were being developed. There was also employment initially in both of those, massive government grants for the likes of Dunlop and Pretty Polly to move up there, so people moved there and got employment, which they lacked in this area – and good housing. But then as soon as the subsidies ran out they were left with fairly good housing but no jobs. And the problem with that is, unfortunately they didn't build the other infrastructure until later than the houses. So if you have a look at the—especially Skelmersdale, there's shops come many years after, the concourse come many years after the houses were built, and what people tend to forget is that you can break up a community very easily, it's ten, twenty years to build up a community. So there were no facilities in Skelmersdale

and a lot of people trying to get back to the area. You still see people coming back to the area now, I mean if you went to the church, especially St Anthony's on Scotland Road when they do the Mass on a Sunday, you'd be surprised how far people come to attend that Mass.

ED: It's where their friends and family are going as well—

GE: It's their born parish, it's the parish they were baptised in or christened in or whatever it is they do. I haven't got those glossy glasses that other people have. There's a book that was written recently that we contributed to, which was called *The Lost Tribe of Everton*. There's two books, the other one was *The History of Everton*. And it's done by a local journalist from the Echo, and he come down to compare the Eldonian Village with what had happened in the Protestant area of Liverpool, because this area was divided into two, and it was divided by a road, and anything towards the river was Catholic, and then up on the hill was Protestant, and it was only until the demolition in the 70s really, and 80s, that that sort of ceased. But he'd done the interview, people have a different memory than me, sometimes, I lived in an area close to here, when I was born in the 50s until the early 60s, and they were derelict houses, there was nothing romantic about them. They should have been pulled down many years ago, and you couldn't—all this playing in the streets—if you were playing in the street you were playing with rats. It was a main road, it wasn't kickball up and down Scotland Road. You did have good neighbours, that was one of the few good things, but the housing itself was nothing to romanticise about. The housing was very poor and needed pulling down, and I have some very fond memories of moving up to the suburbs and going into a house that had a front and back garden, and a field at the end of the road, and having a newly-built school. So I've got a different point of view, which doesn't romanticise the physical side of living in an area in decline. But some people forget that and just remember 'oh we had a great neighbour, everyone got out and scrubbed the...' maybe because it needed scrubbing. But if you read that book there's a chapter there on the Eldonians... and I think I agree with him in some respects, if the people would have grouped together like the Eldonians did, then they may have been able to build their dream in the area that they lived, rather than move



out. Which is slightly different, we were more focused, in the fact that we were helped a lot by the church who had a vested interest some would say, in keeping a population here and so keeping the school open, the local school, but the vast majority of people wanted to stay, it was only when they believed that they could that they harmonised. And it come about through conflict, with people saying 'you're going'. So yeah, our story is different – it's not unique, there's other stories out there, but it's different from other stories in Liverpool.

End of interview.

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