

“The foundations of the national glory are in the
homes of the people”: The Addison Act, the First
World War, and British housing policy



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Short Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between the First World War and housing conditions in Britain. The Housing, Town Planning, &c. Act, 1919 – passed immediately after the war following years of investigation and formulation by Christopher Addison and the Ministry of Reconstruction – completely changed the face of British state housing policy. The importance of the war in engendering the first major foray of the state in to the provision of dwellings for the working classes is widely acknowledged, yet the importance of the specific conditions which engendered the policy has not previously been explored.

This thesis enriches our scholarly understandings of both the Addison Act and state housing in Britain more widely by closely examining the reciprocal relationship between housing and the First World War in Britain. It builds a more comprehensive picture of the deterioration of housing conditions during the war, and tracks the specific impact they had both on war policy and the plans for reconstruction; in particular, it demonstrates that the Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915, was the single most important element in determining the scale of the post-war housing programme. In doing so, it elucidates the myriad challenges the Addison Act faced, and highlights the approaches the Ministry of Reconstruction considered and implemented in an attempt to address them. It draws attention to the hitherto neglected importance of women in the creation of the post-war programme and highlights the influence of pronatalism and the ideas of a healthier future nation on the planning process. Furthermore, closer investigation highlights that for policy-makers in the Ministry of Reconstruction, the housing programme was a ‘silver bullet’: not only did they seek to repair a market irreparably broken by the 1915 Rent Act, but they saw the post-war housing programme as an opportunity through which to fix a wide number of societal problems.

Extended Abstract

The scale and duration of the First World War presented participant nations with many new challenges, both during and after the war. By straining the capacities of production and manpower, the conflict exacerbated existing societal maladies and brought problems which had historically been neglected to the surface. Foremost of these was housing conditions in Britain which, by the outbreak of the war, were approaching a critical condition in some areas. This thesis examines the mutually informing relationship between the war and housing in Britain, and the influence of those developments on the formulation and implementation of the post-war housing programme. The Housing, Town Planning, &c., Act, 1919 – popularly known as the ‘Addison Act’ after the Minister of Reconstruction, Christopher Addison, who drove its creation – represented the first significant state intervention in the provision of housing for the working classes. Developed during the war and enacted in the months after the guns on the Western Front fell silent, the Addison Act promised a massive programme of housing construction, aiming to produce half a million new homes and completely rectify the shortage of accommodation causing overcrowding and scarcity rents.

Historians have previously viewed the relationship between the war and the housing programme more ideologically. Through this lens, the Addison Act is either a well-earned reward for a nation’s sacrifice or a panacea for discontent at a time when revolution seemed ready to sweep through Europe. This thesis challenges that interpretation, demonstrating that the housing programme was far better developed and more ambitious than previously understood. By developing a better understanding of the relationship between the conflict and housing conditions, this thesis demonstrates why the post-war housing programme was urgently necessary, and the reasons it took the form it did. At a time when material and

manpower shortages made any building programme difficult, the structure of the new houses reveal the deeper aspirations of the policy-makers, and highlights that the Addison Act was attempting to utilise a remedy for the housing shortage to create other positive change in society.

By the time the Ministry of Reconstruction was formed in 1917, policy-makers were emboldened by the experience of administering the war, and the merits of a state-led housing programme appealed in a way which would have been untenable before the conflict. The thesis therefore contends with both the physical and the imagined, and the important relationship between the two. First, the material and pragmatic necessity for the housing programme is established by charting the specific ways the war altered conditions and caused the housing situation to deteriorate. In particular, the influence of the Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915, is highlighted: having restricted rents to pre-war levels at a time of rising prices, the government broke the market and was compelled to take action to restore it. Given this necessity, the imagined elements took hold. The need to take action appeared to provide policy-makers with an opportunity and the housing programme became their ‘silver bullet’: a vehicle through which to drive a myriad of social improvements.

To incorporate and analyse these real and imagined elements, the thesis is split thematically, with each chapter crucially informing and informed by the others. The first establishes the importance of the war. It concludes that the First World War had a profound effect on housing conditions and the necessary ameliorative action required, but not always in the specific ways the literature has assumed. For example, it is often commented that the war caused the government to prohibit all building work not deemed to be of national importance. Closer investigation of the actual legislative interference the government made, however,

reveals that it was not legislative prohibition which prevented the cessation of construction, but rather market economics during wartime – in short, the government had no need to prohibit construction as it had taken place naturally.

The chapter then examines the specific ways the war exacerbated housing conditions if cessation of construction was not the primary driver of the deterioration. It charts population movements against the numbers of unoccupied houses to demonstrate that the demands of war not only led to an influx of population in already crowded districts, but that the nature of the workers and their reasons for moving reversed pre-war trends of improvement and caused rapid deterioration in already overcrowded areas. This is used to interrogate claims that political entitlement and the fear of revolution was a primary motivator for policy or change, and in particular the changing language of protest in wartime is given close examination. The chapter also seeks to broaden our understandings of where pressure came from; whilst working-class activism and industrial action were undoubtedly a key agent of change, the middle classes also furthered agendas and advocated for action, and given their established networks of influence and organisation this deserves greater attention than has typically been accorded by the literature.

Placing the pressure surrounding rent and housing conditions in the wider wartime context, capitulation from the government in the form of the 1915 Rent Act can be viewed as a war cost; it was the necessary price to pay for the implementation of conscription. The impact of the war is therefore considered from a variety of angles: physically and materially, legislatively, politically, and intellectually. This demonstrates the multifaceted impact the war had on both housing conditions and popular attitudes towards housing. Whilst the emotional impact of the war has received more historiographical attention from historians eager to

ascribe deeper meaning to actions within a wider context, this chapter also serves as a reminder that the war created rapid and significant population and demographic changes, and the pragmatic realities of these changes must be understood and incorporated in to our understandings of the need for a housing programme at the conflict's conclusion.

The second chapter of the thesis focusses in more detail on the causes and effects of the government's capitulation in the 1915 'Rent Crisis', and the Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915, is examined in detail. The conclusion of this thesis – elucidated particularly by this chapter – is that it is one of the most important pieces of legislation in the history of housing policy in Britain, and that without it the Addison Act in 1919 would not exist, nor would state intervention in housing policy have been undertaken to the extent it was. This chapter details the reasons rent rose and assesses whether rent increases were a peculiarly Glaswegian – or even British – problem. The rising costs are tied to the material increases detailed in Chapter One, and the contention that higher wages meant a higher rent could be afforded is tested. The chapter ultimately concludes that in the political climate of the war, the complete repeal of the Rent Act would be impossible in the ways envisaged at the time of its enactment. This in turn led to the creation of new pressures for the government, from property owners and middle-class landlords and mortgagees, as well as the wider effect on capital investment in property and the construction industry as a whole. Closer investigation shows that their concerns were often legitimate, with the war offering some of the middle classes the opportunity for material gain, whilst proving costly for others. Housing was of critical importance for this latter group, and as a result the government found itself under significant pressure from both the landlord and the tenant.

The conditions which the Rent Act created led to the first meaningful considerations of the permanent state subsidy of housing and forced the government to accept that in light of the fact that their legislation created these conditions, there was a moral obligation, as well as a pragmatically financial one, to remedy the situation. In the end, their plans were predicated on avoiding a permanent state interest in housing provision for the working classes, and in part the scale of their response was an attempt to repair the situation significantly enough that state involvement was not necessary. Given the inevitability of these costs, the housing programme had to justify itself as a remedy not just for housing, but for other problems facing the nation at the conclusion of war, such as unemployment.

The first two chapters therefore concentrate on establishing the effects of the war, and the absolute necessity for significant governmental intervention in the housing problem after the conflict's conclusion. Given the imperative necessity for action, the rest of the thesis details the evolution of the housing programme, and witnesses how policy-makers sought to turn costly necessity into opportunity. Chapter Three builds on these chapters to demonstrate the ways in which housing grew in prominence throughout the course of the war. The Addison Act was the result of an extended investigation and development of thought; charting that evolution is of critical importance to any effective understanding of the form the Act took or the problems it sought to rectify. In particular, it seeks to address the reasons why direct state involvement became a necessity. Building on the analysis of Chapter Two, the desire to avoid the state taking action itself is explored in detail through the government's interactions with private enterprise, and also through their extensive exploration of the possibility of utilising public utility societies to enact their programme, ultimately highlighting the inescapability of direct state action. This is emphasised by elucidating in further detail the impact of the war first drawn out in the first chapter, particularly through the focus on war shortages. It is not

enough to note that the war placed a strain on resources and that this in turn affected house production. Instead, the specific impact of the war on the production or importation of materials critical to the production of houses – particularly timber, and clay for bricks – is examined in detail. As investigation of the housing problem became more detailed through the course of the war, so did the scale of the estimated work required. As the scale of material shortages and the reluctance of non-governmental entities to take on the work in any serious way became increasingly apparent, the form of the housing programme – and the houses it would hope to build - also began to change, as the burden of direct responsibility shifted to a sense of opportunity to create positive change.

Chapter Four seeks to relocate the importance of women in this process by highlighting their involvement in both the information-gathering and decision-making stages of the Addison Act by examining in closer detail the work of the Women's Housing Subcommittee. Well established networks of women's activism and philanthropy were influential in changing the scope and form of the Addison Act, and their advocacy was typically more fervent than male counterparts; they engaged more heatedly with the Local Government Board and pushed for significant governmental involvement from the outset. It is impossible to properly consider the homes the Addison Act proposed without assessing who they were for, and the primacy of the domesticity of the housewife was a central concern in the assessment of proposed new homes – for both men and women. The ideas posited for the 'convenience of the housewife' and the dissonance with the views of working-class women they held provides an early indication of the rejection of more prescriptive ideals about moral or idealised living which the housing programme could later be accused of. This is especially evident in suggestions for the benefits of communal living. Working-class women's insistence that communal kitchens and laundries were not wanted confounded policy-makers, who viewed the ideas as

an ingenious way to minimise the housewife's labour. Their view of what women wanted remained relatively narrow, and in much of the discussion 'woman' could easily be substituted with 'mother'. This closer investigation of the role of women in policy formulation, and their attitudes towards the new housing programme, highlights the increasing interest in utilising the need to construct new houses to stimulate other developments in the social realities of living.

The final chapter most clearly elucidates the sense of opportunity and the importance of these changing attitudes towards state intervention in the housing situation. In particular, it contends that the experience of the administration of war in particular both empowered and emboldened policy-makers by making them increasingly believe that the state taking greater responsibility and control facilitated better results. Emphasis is shifted away from historically famous housing reformers, such as Edwin Chadwick, and placed back on to primary decision-makers, and Addison in particular. By examining the constructed 'deserving poor' which the Addison Act sought to aid, a more sophisticated understanding of the aspirations of the policy is developed. What emerges is the optimism and urgency of a sense of unique opportunity from policy-makers and housing reformers who had well-established views about wider societal problems, and which they believed could be remedied by the implementation of a housing programme which focussed not just on the construction of new homes, but also an improved national health and moral character. This ideal is considered from a variety of perspectives: eugenics and the exposition of the virility of the nation in wartime; the evils and detriment caused to productivity by intemperance; and from an economically focussed view of public health. Examination of moralistically driven attitudes towards housing also highlight the importance of attitudes towards non-house building. As outlined earlier in the thesis, material shortages created problematic bottlenecks for governmental plans to remedy

the housing programme in a rapid fashion; this chapter explores attitudes towards the competition for those limited resources and outlines what this can tell us about popular attitudes towards housing construction more generally. In the case of cinemas – ‘picture palaces’ – criticisms centred on the unnecessary nature of the new buildings, utilising wartime narrative frameworks surrounding profiteering to condemn financiers. For necessary accompanying infrastructure, and particularly intraurban transport networks, however, this paucity of capacity for additional construction was more problematic for the housing programme as a whole. This chapter demonstrates that the housing programme was about far more than bricks and mortar: it was a moralistic, prescriptive, and opportunistic attempt to enact much wider and impactful changes to the nation and its peoples.

The conclusion of the thesis examines the success of this attempt, and focusses on the legacy of Addison with the new perspective of its aspirations and the conditions it was responding to in mind. On the face of it, the Addison Act was a failure: it sought to construct half a million new homes in two years after the war and managed less than half that in a decade after its enactment. Where it deserves more credit, however, is in the detail: the Addison Act was about much more than the number of homes it built, and the conclusion reassesses its efficacy and its legacy in light of this new perspective. The First World War created a myriad of challenges which the Act was responding to. By better understanding the problems it sought to address, as well as the ambitious goals it aspired to, the post-war housing programme is shown in a new, more positive light: instead of castigating its failure to build all the houses it hoped it, we should instead laud the Addison Act as an unprecedentedly positive step, laden with good intentions grounded in solid logic, which changed the face of housing provision in Britain forever.

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Introduction

Why the Addison Act?

The houses which the Addison Act built after the First World War stand as a physical testament to a moment of hope at the end of a long and costly conflict. Between their four walls lies the nexus of wartime and post-war aspirations, problems, realities, and agendas. Often built as idyllic cottages with gardens, they epitomised the move away from the slum, and the creation of a healthier nation and people; the building of a new start for Britain. This thesis thus brings to the fore a critical juncture in the history of housing in Britain, and locates that development within the context of the tumult and change of the First World War. The Addison Act profoundly changed the course of housing in Britain, and remains one of the most important pieces of legislation ever enacted in regard to the provision of housing for the working classes. It permanently changed the relationship between the state and its peoples. Although the importance of the Addison Act has received good scholarly attention, this thesis offers the first comprehensive explanation of how, and why, it came to be. In particular, it addresses the specific impacts of the First World War in close detail and concludes that whilst the war did indeed hold a deep emotional and political significance, the specific material strains and how they impacted housing policy have been hitherto underappreciated.

This research first emerged as a continuation of my Master's thesis, which investigated societal discontent in Britain after the First World War.¹ That research demonstrated that, instead of a wave of Bolshevik or otherwise revolutionary fervour sweeping the nation, or a

¹ Calum W. White, 'Governmental perceptions of, and reactions to, radical political discontent in Britain in the immediate aftermath of the First World War', M.St thesis, University of Oxford 2013.

radical political awakening engendered by the experience of the trenches, discontent in British society after the war was deeply rooted as a response to conditions which pre-existed the conflict and which had been exacerbated by it. The starting point of this thesis was thus the refutation of Mark Swenarton's explanation of the housing programme after the war: 'The housing programme of 1919 was an insurance against revolution: its purpose was to ensure the survival of the status quo.'² There is no desire to straw-man Swenarton's argument here, and his investigation of the Addison Act remains an excellent example of how we can read architecture as a historical source; his work on the built form of the houses the Addison Act took is particularly excellent, and remains the starting point for any architectural investigation of the post-war housing programme. What has not been effectively understood until this point, however, is *why* the programme came in to existence at all. Reducing its formulation and aspirations to the prevention of revolutionary activity is to fundamentally misunderstand the prevailing conditions, policy-makers, and effects of the war on both conditions and attitudes. The confluence of these factors created a cocktail of conditions from which the Addison Act emerged. It was not a reactionary policy, and it was not symbolic; instead, this thesis shows that the state's first foray in to the production of housing for the working classes was a well-developed, ambitious attempt to enact serious and lasting change, created over an extended period of policy formulation. This research demonstrates that it was a genuine attempt to combat the housing shortage, as well as a material and pragmatic necessity.

² Mark Swenarton, *Homes fit for heroes: the politics and architecture of early state housing in Britain* (Suffolk, 1981), p91.

Contentions of the thesis

This thesis thus demonstrates that the aspirations of the housing programme in 1919 were genuine rather than political obfuscation, and the claim that the Addison Act was an immediately necessary piece of legislation which was the conclusion of a lengthy period of investigation is supported throughout. In particular, it seeks to recast the importance of the First World War. Scholars of the conflict have a tendency to dramatize its importance, subscribing to George F. Kennan's description of the conflict as the 'seminal catastrophe of the twentieth century'.³ In histories of housing, the specific impacts of the war are largely absent. Scholars point to legislation in the prior period – the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890; the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1909 – and fold in the post-Addison legislation in 1921, 1924, 1925, and 1927, making the war one factor amidst an extended period of flux in housing developments. Understanding the evolution of this legislation is vital for our understandings of housing in Britain more generally, which has been materially shaped by Acts such as the Greenwood Act in 1930 at least as much as by Addison.⁴ This thesis seeks to explain the rationale for the beginning of that cycle in greater detail, however, by drawing closer attention to the importance of the profound *discontinuity* which the First World War created. The simple contention of this thesis is that the Addison Act would not have come in to existence without the First World War; in itself, this is not necessarily a bold claim. However, closer investigation elucidates the myriad ways in which the war affected the housing situation, the actions of policy-makers, and the attitudes to housing provision more widely. This thesis details exactly how and why that process took place, and ultimately

³ George F. Kennan, *The decline of Bismarck's European order: Franco-Russian relations, 1875-1890* (Princeton, 1981), p. 4.

⁴ John Burnett, *A social history of housing, 1815-1985: 2nd ed.* (London, 1986), p. 242-4; Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture: The History of a Social Experiment* (London, 2001).

concludes that the material and political ramifications of the First World War were central to the housing situation in Britain in ways which have hitherto been entirely neglected or unconsidered.

Of central importance to this is the Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915. By artificially pinning rents to pre-war levels, the government took a market which was struggling to function effectively and broke it entirely. This thesis details the ways in which this break occurred, and tracks the legacy of the policy; ultimately, as the ones responsible for the collapse of the rental market in 1915, the government had no choice but to fix it through huge state action in 1919. The size of that action was determined by a desire to avoid permanent involvement in state housing, either in terms of subsidies or the construction of housing themselves. Having broken the market, the government found itself morally and pragmatically obligated to rectify it. Given the inevitability of intervention, their plan was to intervene in such a pronounced way as to restore market conditions to a level whereby scarcity no longer drove up rents to problematic levels, at which point they could completely remove state involvement from the housing sector and restore it entirely to private enterprise. In short, the largest ever state intervention in housing was undertaken with the desire to avoid state involvement.

Introduction to the chapters

Many of the themes of this thesis intersect and have mutually reciprocal relationships. Indeed, one of the central contentions of this thesis is that a multitude of conditions – some pre-existing and some newly created as a result of the war – combined to necessitate the housing programme in 1919. The thesis is thus arranged thematically, although many of these

themes overlap and reoccur: the first chapter combats in detail the impact of the First World War; the second offers an in-depth investigation of the importance of rent and finance; the third chapter focusses on the work of the Ministry of Reconstruction and the formulation of the housing programme at a policy level; the fourth chapter emphasises the hitherto largely neglected importance of women in the planning and decision-making process; and the fifth chapter combats the more idealised vision of the house, town-planning, and the aspirational aspects of the housing programme.

Chapter One - The First World War and housing conditions

The first chapter of this thesis interrogates some of the assumptions prevailing in the literature surrounding the housing programme immediately after the war. This is not necessarily to argue that they are wrong, but to ensure they are correct and to offer some more detail and nuance. The chapter concludes that the First World War had a profound effect on housing conditions and the necessary ameliorative action required, but not always in the specific ways the literature has assumed. For example, it is often commented that the war caused the government to prohibit all building work not deemed to be of national importance (which is often read to mean not directly related to the production of munitions). This chapter investigates the actual legislative interference the government made, and concludes that it was not legislative prohibition which prevented the cessation of construction, but rather market economics during wartime – in short, the government had no need to prohibit construction as it had taken place naturally.

The chapter then goes on to examine how the war exacerbated the situation if cessation of construction was not the primary driver of the deterioration of the housing conditions. It

charts population movements against the numbers of unoccupied houses to demonstrate that the demands of war not only led to an influx of population in already crowded districts, but that the nature of the workers and their reasons for moving reversed pre-war trends of improvement and caused rapid deterioration in some districts. This is used to interrogate claims that political entitlement and the fear of revolution was a primary motivator for policy or change, and in particular the changing language of protest in wartime is given close examination. The chapter also seeks to broaden our understandings of where pressure came from; whilst working-class activism and industrial action were undoubtedly a key agent of change, the middle classes also furthered agendas and advocated for action, and given their established networks of influence and organisation this deserves greater attention than has typically been accorded by the literature.

Finally, the chapter places the pressure surrounding rent and housing conditions in important wartime context, noting that capitulation from the government in housing conditions was in many respects a necessary price to pay for the implementation of conscription. The impact of the war is therefore considered from a variety of angles: physically and materially, legislatively, politically, and intellectually. This demonstrates the multifaceted impact the war had on both housing conditions and popular attitudes towards housing. Whilst the emotional impact of the war has received more historiographical attention from historians eager to ascribe deeper meaning to actions within a wider context, this chapter also serves as a reminder that the war created rapid and significant population and demographic changes, and the pragmatic realities of these changes must be understood and incorporated in to our understandings of the need for a housing programme at the conflict's conclusion.

Chapter Two - Rent and finance

The second chapter of the thesis details the impact of the government's capitulation in the 1915 'Rent Crisis', and the Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915, is examined in detail. The conclusion of this thesis – elucidated particularly by this chapter – is that it is one of the most important pieces of legislation in the history of housing policy in Britain, and that without it the Addison Act in 1919 would not exist, nor would state intervention in housing policy have been undertaken to the extent it was. This chapter details the reasons rent rose, and assesses whether rent increases were a peculiarly Glaswegian – or even British – problem. The rising costs are tied to the material increases detailed in Chapter One, and the contention that higher wages meant a higher rent could be afforded is tested. The chapter ultimately concludes that in the political climate of the war, the complete repeal of the Rent Act would be impossible in the ways envisaged at the time of its enactment. This in turn led to the creation of new pressures for the government, from property owners and middle-class landlords and mortgagees, as well as the wider effect on capital investment in property and the construction industry as a whole. Closer investigation shows that their concerns were often legitimate, lending support to the argument advanced by Jon Lawrence, who has commented that 'for the middle classes, the lottery of the wartime economy offered the prospects of great riches for some alongside crippling losses for many others.'⁵ Housing was of critical importance for this latter group, and as a result the government found itself under significant pressure from all sides of the housing problem.

⁵ Jon Lawrence, 'Material pressures on the middle classes', in Winter, Jay (ed.), *Capital cities at war: Paris, London, Berlin, 1914-1919* (Cambridge, 1997), 229-255, p. 229.

The conditions which the Rent Act created led to the first meaningful considerations of the permanent state subsidy of housing, and forced the government to accept that in light of the fact that their legislation created these conditions, there was a moral obligation, as well as a pragmatically financial one, to remedy the situation. In the end, their plans were predicated on avoiding a permanent state interest in housing provision for the working classes, and in part the scale of their response was an attempt to repair the situation significantly enough that state involvement was not necessary. Given the inevitability of these costs, the housing programme had to justify itself as a remedy not just for housing, but for other problems facing the nation at the conclusion of war, such as unemployment. With the groundwork for the necessity of action established in the first two chapters, the rest of the thesis details its evolution and formulation, and how policy-makers sought to turn necessity into opportunity.

Chapter Three – The Ministry of Reconstruction and the construction of the housing programme

The establishment of a Ministry of Reconstruction in 1917 was not the first move towards the remedying of wartime conditions in the immediate post-war period. Reconstruction had presented a cause for concern for the majority of the war, and in the case of housing from at least the middle of 1915. Chapter Three builds on the first two chapters to demonstrate the ways in which housing grew in prominence throughout the course of the war. The decision policy-makers came to after the war with the Addison Act was the result of an extended investigation and development of thought; charting that evolution is of critical importance to any effective understanding of the form the Act took or the problems it sought to rectify.

In particular, it seeks to address the reasons why direct state involvement became a necessity. Building on the analysis of Chapter Two, the desire to avoid the state taking action itself is explored in detail through the government's interactions with private enterprise, and also through their extensive exploration of the possibility of utilising public utility societies to enact their programme. By looking closely at the interactions between the government and the primary agents responsible for building prior to the outbreak of war, the increasing sense of the inescapability of direct state action is highlighted. This is emphasised by elucidating in further detail the impact of the war first drawn out in the first chapter, particularly through the focus on war shortages. It is not enough to note that the war placed a strain on resources and that this in turn affected house production. Instead, the specific impact of the war on the production or importation of materials critical to the production of houses – particularly timber, and clay for bricks – is examined in detail.

As investigation of the housing problem became more detailed through the course of the war, so did the scale of the estimated work required. As the scale of material shortages and the reluctance of non-governmental entities to take on the work in any serious way became increasingly apparent, the form of the housing programme – and the houses it would hope to build - also began to change, as the burden of direct responsibility shifted to a feeling of opportunity to create positive change.

Chapter Four – Women and the Addison Act: the Women's Housing Subcommittee

Chapter Four seeks to explore in greater detail the importance of women in both the information-gathering and decision-making stages of the Addison Act. By highlighting the plurality of backgrounds women in the Women's Housing Advisory Subcommittee had, it

draws attention to the interest and activism from a wide section of women in society. Well-established networks of women's activism and philanthropy were influential in changing the scope and form of the Addison Act, and their advocacy was typically more fervent than male counterparts; they engaged more heatedly with the Local Government Board and pushed for significant governmental involvement from the outset. It is impossible to properly consider the homes the Addison Act proposed without assessing who they were for, and the primacy of the domesticity of the housewife was a central concern in the assessment of proposed new homes – for both men and women.

The ideas posited for the 'convenience of the housewife' and the dissonance with the views of working-class women they held provides an early indication of the rejection of more prescriptive ideals about moral or idealised living which the housing programme could later be accused of. This is especially evident in suggestions as to the benefits of communal living. Working-class women's insistence that communal kitchens and laundries were not wanted confounded policy-makers, who viewed the ideas as an ingenious way to minimise the housewife's labour. Their view of what women wanted remained relatively narrow, and in much of the discussion 'woman' could easily be substituted with 'mother'. This closer investigation of the role of women in policy formulation, and their attitudes towards the new housing programme, highlights the increasing interest in utilising the need to construct new houses to stimulate other developments in the social realities of living. This is explored fully in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five – Health, morality, and temperance

The final chapter most clearly elucidates changing attitudes towards state intervention in the housing situation. In particular, it contends that the experience of the administration of war in particular both empowered and emboldened policy-makers by making them increasingly believe that the state taking greater responsibility and control facilitated better results. Emphasis is shifted away from historically famous housing reformers, such as Edwin Chadwick, and placed back on to primary decision-makers, and Addison in particular.

By examining the constructed ‘deserving poor’ which the Addison Act sought to aid, a more sophisticated understanding of the aspirations of the policy is developed. What emerges is the optimism and urgency of a sense of opportunity from policy-makers and housing reformers who had well-established views about societal problems, and which they believed could be remedied by the implementation of a housing programme which focussed not just on the construction of new homes, but also a national health and moral character. This ideal is considered from a variety of perspectives: eugenics and the exposition of the virility of the nation in wartime; the evils and detriment caused to productivity by intemperance; and from an economically-focussed view of public health. The Addison Act sought not just to build better houses for people but, through doing so, hoped to build better people.

Examination of moralistically driven attitudes towards housing also highlight the importance of attitudes towards non-house building. As outlined earlier in the thesis, material shortages created problematic bottlenecks for governmental plans to remedy the housing programme in a rapid fashion; this chapter explores attitudes towards the competition for those limited resources and outlines what this can tell us about popular attitudes towards housing construction more generally. In the case of cinemas – ‘picture palaces’ – criticisms centred on the unnecessary nature of the new buildings, utilising wartime narrative frameworks

surrounding profiteering to condemn financiers. For necessary accompanying infrastructure, and particularly intraurban transport networks, however, this paucity of capacity for additional construction was more problematic for the housing programme as a whole.

The conclusion of the thesis focusses on the legacy of Addison with the new perspective of its aspirations and the conditions it was responding to in mind. On the face of it, the Addison Act was a failure: it sought to construct half a million new homes in two years after the war, and managed less than half that in a decade after its enactment. Where it deserves more credit, however, is in the detail: the Addison Act was about much more than the number of homes it built, and the conclusion reassesses its efficacy and its legacy in light of this new perspective.

Literature review

By focussing on both the war and housing, this thesis straddles two vast historiographies, each rich with subdivisions. As a result, depending on your specialism, it may not pay nearly enough attention to an aspect which unquestionably deserves greater investigation. This shortcoming is justified, but is also a comment on the subject matters in question: housing is so central to the lives of individuals and in society that it touches elements of nearly aspect of the lived experience. It has physical importance, emotional importance, economic importance, and political and cultural importance, all of which command their own deservedly rich literatures. The First World War is similarly an event which has occasioned and continues to inspire deep historical investigation, with the tendrils of the war extending far and wide throughout society, and the impact of the conflict dominating the historiography of the twentieth century. This thesis thus meets at the confluence of two well-developed

literatures, and draws deeply on both whilst also benefitting from wider literature on the social and cultural history of modern Britain, economic history, and gender history. Whilst attention is drawn to the wider historiographical debate throughout, it is worth taking a moment to explore the importance of some of that literature which has helped to make the ideas of this thesis possible.

First World War

As vast as the First World War was – a conflict which Jay Winter has described as ‘an unfolding catastrophe, growing year by year in scale and in destructive power far beyond what anyone had anticipated in 1914’⁶ – the historiography to describe the conflict has grown concomitantly vast. As a result, the literature which has influenced this work has not always at first glance appeared to be directly related to housing; yet, as the thesis demonstrates, the war and the Addison Act are deeply interconnected. To understand the housing programme in 1919, it is first necessary to gain a strong understanding of the complexities of the conflict. The ways in which the First World War profoundly altered British society have been detailed by some wonderful works of history, none more so than Adrian Gregory’s *Last Great War?*, which delves deep in to the complexities of organisation – structurally and administratively, as well as social and culturally – the war required.⁷ Gregory’s work replaced Arthur Marwick as the starting point for any understanding of British society and the First World War, and served as the logical inheritance from Jay Winter’s excellent *The Great War and the British*

⁶ Jay Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge history of the First World War, vol. 1: global war* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 11.

⁷ Adrian Gregory, *The last Great War: British society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008).

People.⁸ What these historians showed is that the ramifications of the First World War were more complex than the post-war, war poets' inspired representation of the war as a tragedy endured by a public which served heroically, naively, and largely passively as actors working under the machinations of politicians and state machinery. Particular emphasis on working-class activism and consciousness is essential to pushing beyond reductionist histories of British society in this period. This extends in to the immediate post-war period, with analyses such as those offered by Jon Lawrence and Helen McCarthy demonstrating the need for historians to start rewriting histories of the British peoples during and after the war with the working classes as an actor for change, rather than representing them merely as recipients.⁹

In building its contention that the First World War materially altered the conditions which the housing programme sought to address, this thesis draws on histories concerning the logistics of the war. Chickering and Förster's edited collection *Great War, Total War* provides a good starting point, yet a thorough investigation of the relationship between the war, materials, and material shortages is peculiarly absent.¹⁰ Concentration on people, rather than things, has led to a richer literature. Keith Grieves' *The politics of manpower* provides an excellent start to understanding the developing relationship between the British state and its peoples, particularly as the protraction of the war made the question of conscription more pressing.¹¹ The relationship between war and labour is at the heart of the exacerbation of housing conditions, and the government's need to placate concerns, and then ultimately to ameliorate

⁸ Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British society and the First World War* (London, 1973); Jay M. Winter, *The Great War and the British people* (London, 1985).

⁹ Jon Lawrence, "'Forging a peaceable kingdom': war, violence, and fear of brutalization in post-First World War Britain", *Journal of Modern History*, 75 (2003), 557-589; Helen McCarthy, 'Whose democracy? Histories of British political culture between the wars', *Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), 221-238.

¹⁰ Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (eds.), *Great war, total war: combat and mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918* (Washington, 2000).

¹¹ Keith Grieves, *The politics of manpower, 1914-18* (Manchester, 1988).

conditions. On this, John Horne's *Labour at War* remains a testament to the enduring legacy of good scholarship.¹² Regarding industrial relations more specifically, James Hinton's analysis of the Shop Steward's Movement provides an invaluable insight in to the relationship between employers and employees, particularly in reference to some of the new challenges the war created, such as dilution and women's labour.¹³ This thesis furthers our understandings of the importance of the war in particular through its concentration on the material element. Chapter Three highlights the way in which the war impacted the logistical ability of the government to enact their housing policy, and the way in which wartime shortages or emphases on production affected post-war plans.

War is a costly thing, as the second chapter of this thesis shows. The historiography of the economics of war is carefully elucidated by Stephen Broadberry and Mark Harrison in their 1998 work.¹⁴ The cost of mobilization more specifically has been wonderfully illuminated by Gerald Feldman,¹⁵ and more widely in Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert's *Capital cities at war*.¹⁶ The volumes of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace remain a rich and largely untapped resource and are utilised frequently throughout this thesis. On economics in particular they provide an often exhaustive ream of data and analysis. The rural aspect is covered in the peerless work by Avner Offer, which highlights the flaws to which urban-centric analyses are at times exposed to, and to which this thesis at times is also subject to.¹⁷

¹² John Horne, *Labour at war: France and Britain, 1914-1918* (Oxford, 1991).

¹³ James Hinton, *The first Shop Steward's movement* (London, 1973); see also, Alistair Reid, 'Dilution, trade unionism and the state in Britain during the First World War', in Tolliday, Steven and Jonathan Zeitlin (eds.), *Shop floor bargaining and the state* (Cambridge, 1985), 46-74; Laura Lee Downs, *Manufacturing inequality: gender division in the French and British metalworking industries, 1914-39* (New York, 1995).

¹⁴ Stephen Broadberry and Mark Harrison, *Economics of World War I* (Cambridge, 1998).

¹⁵ Gerald Feldman, 'Mobilizing economies for war' in Winter, Jay, Geoffrey Parker, and Mary R. Halbeck (eds.), *The Great War and the twentieth century* (New Haven, 2000).

¹⁶ Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, *Capital cities at war: Paris, London, Berlin, 1914-1919* (Cambridge, 1997).

¹⁷ Avner Offer, *The First World War: an agrarian interpretation* (Oxford, 1989).

On the question of finance more specifically, there are surprisingly few studies, and in the case of Britain the work of Hew Strachan has been complemented recently by Hans-Peter Ullmann, yet the historiography would undoubtedly benefit from further fresh scholarship in this important area.¹⁸ This thesis demonstrates that the area of government concerned with the implementation of reconstruction had become decoupled from a sense of fiscal responsibility during the war in their spending plans, but this originated from a sense of the inevitability of expenditure which was grounded in more traditional, liberal free market economics.

The fourth chapter in particular draws on a literature which has recast our historical interpretations of the war in new ways by looking at the conflict through the lens of gender, and the experiences of women. Susan Grayzel and Tommy Proctors's recent collection draws together a number of important themes on this area,¹⁹ particularly Karen Hunt's contribution on the relationship between gender and everyday life during wartime, and Deborah Thom's exploration of the relationship between gender and work. At an organisational level the importance of the contribution of women has been well demonstrated by Maggie Andrews, in the case of the Women's Institute,²⁰ the work of scholars such as Alison Fell and Ingrid Sharp has documented the political importance of the war to the development of the Women's Movement.²¹ In attempting to reattribute agency, it is important not to focus simply on the working classes, but also to note the importance of women in this process too. By acknowledging their actions, advocacy, and contributions, the conclusions of decision-

¹⁸ Hew Strachan, *Financing the First World War* (Oxford, 2007); Hans-Peter Ullmann, 'Finance' in Winter, Jay (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War, vol. 2: the state* (Cambridge, 2014), 408-434.

¹⁹ Susan Grayzel and Tammy Proctor (eds.), *Gender and the Great War* (Oxford, 2018).

²⁰ Maggie Andrews, *The acceptable face of feminism: the Women's Institute as a social movement* (London, 1997).

²¹ Alison S. Fell and Ingrid Sharp (eds.), *The women's movement in wartime: international perspectives, 1914-1919* (Basingstoke, 2007).

makers are reassessed within the light of contributions from women, the working class, and working-class women.

Ultimately, the First World War profoundly affected people and things. Houses are built with physical materials – which the war limited; using labour – which the war limited; and they are constructed for and experienced by their occupants. The history of the war is thus deeply intrinsic to the history of housing; not only did it deeply affect the form and level of construction, but also how the buildings were then perceived of as homes. As a result, understanding the Addison Act and the homes of the post-war housing programme would be impossible without a sophisticated understanding of the First World War.

Histories of housing

Housing is usually viewed in a much longer historical perspective than in this thesis. There are good and obvious reasons for this: the reach of housing policies and programmes often outlive their ostensible reigns. Houses take time: to be planned, designed, have land secured, resources sourced, labour contracted and made available, foundations to be laid, and to finally be built. This is, indeed, a huge element of the problem which the government faced during the First World War; a critical problem needed to be rectified urgently, whilst the process of remedying that issue was, typically, very slow. The historiography of housing is similarly impressive to that of the First World War, with some topics commanding large amounts of scholarship and others relatively little. This thesis has benefitted more widely from an urban history scholarship which has flourished in the past thirty years, although the historical investigation of the period surrounding the Addison Act more specifically has

received little attention since the first half of the 1980s. Writing in 2000, Martin Daunton commented that,

This is a good time for a systematic historical investigation of the rise of British cities and towns over the *longue durée*. Not just because understanding urban society is too important a task to be left to contemporary sociologists, geographers and planners, but because of the flourishing state of British urban history. Though earlier scholarly works existed, the last thirty years have seen a revolution in our understanding of the complexity of the social, political and other functions of towns in the past.²²

This thesis bucks the trend somewhat in this respect, and makes the case that – for the Addison Act, at least – the ‘*longue durée*’ approach minimizes the importance of some critical points. To do this would be impossible without first comprehensively understanding the longer lineage of housing history; the peculiarities of the First World War and the Addison Act can only be understood in the context of housing before and after the war.

Most importantly, two books dominate the history of the Addison Act more specifically. Mark Swenarton’s *Homes fit for heroes* (1981) serves as an excellent introduction on the built form of the new houses, yet frequently misunderstands or glosses over policy formulation.²³ It retains significant use as an architectural investigation, yet it should perhaps be regarded more as an insight in to the significance of the recommendations of the Tudor Walters Report more than as a political history. Swenarton is primarily interested in the form of houses, and starts from the position of architectural history and infers political meaning from those buildings; as this thesis demonstrates, practical considerations engendered by the war were at least as important as ideological ones, and the fixation on Raymond Unwin in particular discounts the importance of Addison and senior figures in the Ministry of Reconstruction, the government, and the Local Government Board. Unwin, whilst unquestionably influential, was not as influential as he has at times been represented. This

²² Martin Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge urban history of Britain: vol. 3, 1840-1950* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 11.

²³ Swenarton, *Homes fit for heroes* (Suffolk, 1981).

thesis redresses that balance by bringing other, more critical decision-makers back to the fore. Martin Daunton's *Councillors and tenants* (1984) supplemented Swenarton's work by providing a diligently researched collection of case studies.²⁴ It is enlightening as an investigation of social policy at a more local level, yet it takes as its starting point the end of the war and pays little attention to the significant developments of the previous four years. It is an excellent interrogation in to the implementation of the policy; the historiography has, however, lacked any authoritative explanation for the formulation of that initial policy in the first instance. Revisiting both these works in light of the new research which this thesis provides helps to illuminate some of their insights in to local authority housing provision, particularly in the case of Daunton.

The scope of the war, and the discontinuity it created, has prompted many housing histories to take the First World War as either their starting or ending point. Avner Offer's *Property and politics* (1981) provides a detailed insight in to national housing ownership and property structures before the outbreak of war, but does not detail the changes the war engendered.²⁵ David Englander's influential work *Landlord and tenant* (1983) goes slightly further, tracking the impact of the war until its conclusion, but does not carry this analysis through to the changing post-war period and the creation and implementation of the Addison Act.²⁶ That they did not is not a surprise; as this thesis demonstrates, sufficiently exploring the First World War and the housing situation requires a book to itself, and would not have been possible in the wider chronological scope of Offer and Englander's works. It is hoped,

²⁴ Martin Daunton, *Councillors and tenants: local authority housing in English cities, 1919-1939* (Leicester, 1984).

²⁵ Avner Offer, *Property and politics, 1870-1914: landownership, law, ideology and urban development in England* (Cambridge, 1981).

²⁶ David Englander, *Landlord and tenant in urban Britain, 1838-1918* (Oxford, 1983).

however, that closer analysis of the specific impact of the war – on material conditions, attitudes, and policy formulation – can help supplement these analyses.

Just as the outbreak of war marks the end-point for many analyses of housing in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century,²⁷ the end of the conflict frequently serves as the beginning of more modern housing histories. Given the way in which the Addison Act created significant state involvement in housing, many housing histories are interested in the whole interwar period or post-war period with the 1919 Act as the starting point.²⁸ This focus makes sense considering the developing lineage of the housing problem, yet frequently results in a lack of sufficient attention being devoted to the peculiarities which created the initial state involvement.

A few longer-duration histories do brave the bridge of the First World War. John Burnett's history of social housing remains the starting point for any scholarly investigation of housing in Britain.²⁹ More regionally specific investigations have detailed the discontinuity of the First World War, particularly P. J. Waller's exhaustive examination of Liverpool.³⁰ Peter Shapely's *Politics of housing* (2009) provides an excellent examination of the use of housing, and the experiences of home, as a political phenomenon.³¹ Alison Ravetz's investigation of the construction of the 'home' helped to transform this thesis in its most embryonic stages

²⁷ There are still some excellent histories within this. See R. J. Morris and Richard Rodger (eds.), *The Victorian city: a reader in British Urban History, 1820-1914* (New York, 1993); Asa Briggs, *Victorian cities* (London, 1963); S. Martin Gaskell, 'Housing and the lower middle class, 1870-1914' in Crossick, Geoffrey (ed.), *The lower middle class in Britain* (New York, 1977); Enid Gaudie, *Cruel habitations: a history of working-class housing, 1780-1914* (London, 1973).

²⁸ See Stephen Merrett, *State housing in Britain* (London, 1979);

²⁹ John Burnett, *A social history of housing, 1815-1985: 2nd ed.* (London, 1986). See also Joseph Melling (ed.), *Housing, social policy and the State* (London, 1980).

³⁰ P. J. Waller, 'Democracy and sectarianism: a political and social history of Liverpool, 1868-1939' (Liverpool, 1981).

³¹ Peter Shapely, *The politics of housing: power, consumers and urban culture* (Manchester, 2007).

with its thoughtfully elucidated ideas on the multitude of important and contested meanings and spaces which homes represent and occupy.³² In this sense the spatial turn underlines some areas of this research,³³ and it is indebted to the scholarship of authors such as Katrina Navikas who have helped to demonstrate in recent years the important relationship between space and place.³⁴ This thesis is built on the backs of this exceptional scholarship, and hopes to contribute to the increasingly vibrant field of urban history by shedding new light on the real reasons for the ‘turning point’ in the history of British social housing.

Health, eugenics, and temperance

In shifting attention to the attitudes of policy-makers to the working classes, and in particular the construction of the idea of the deserving poor, this thesis draws on a vibrant historiography of class in Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³⁵ In particular, it highlights the restrictive nature of middle-class understandings of the working classes, working-class culture, and their moralistic and utilitarian ideas of what improvements to conditions could mean for the nation as a whole. Whilst earlier chapters highlight the importance of working-class desires, and the impact of action and political agitation on

³² Alison Ravetz, *The place of home: the making of English domestic environments, 1914-2000* (London, 1995); Alison Ravetz, *Council housing and culture: the history of a social experiment* (London, 2001).

³³ See Jürgen Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* (Cambridge, 1989); Henri Lefebvre, *The production of space* (Oxford, 1991); Ralph Kingston, ‘Mind Over Matter? History and the Spatial Turn’, *Cultural and Social History*, 7 (2010), 111-122.

³⁴ Katrina Navikas, *Protest and the politics of space and place, 1789-1848* (Manchester, 2016). See also James Vernon, *Politics and the People: a study in English political culture, c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge, 1993); Patrick Joyce, *The rule of freedom: liberalism and the modern city* (Manchester, 2004).

³⁵ Ross McKibbin, *The ideologies of class: social relations in Britain, 1880-1950* (Oxford, 1990); Ross McKibbin, *Classes and cultures: England, 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998); Selina Todd, *The people: the rise and fall of the working class* (London, 2015); Joanna Bourke, *Working-class cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: gender, class and ethnicity* (London, 1994). More politically, see Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the people: party, language and popular politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge, 1998); Bernard Waites, *A class society at war: England, 1914-18* (Leamington Spa, 1987), pp. 92-114.

policy, the final chapter demonstrates the ways in which the middle and upper classes continued to use pre-war notions of class to shape their agenda.

A spirited attempt has been made to address the history of the alcohol question in Britain. As Brian Harrison has documented, support for temperance reform and prohibition grew through the nineteenth century and on the eve of war the ‘drink question’ was a matter of pressing societal concern.³⁶ The relationship between drink and working-class culture has also received important scholarly attention, both contemporarily and historiographically. One of the decision-makers behind the Addison Act, Seebohm Rowntree, later devoted a great deal of time to investigating the effects of alcohol on the community.³⁷ John Burnett has written an important history of drink in modern Britain,³⁸ whilst alcohol in the First World War more specifically is the subject of an excellent monograph by Robert Duncan.³⁹ This scholarship is of great importance in establishing the groundwork which this chapter of the thesis contributes to: in particular, showing how moralistic ideals could inflect the interpretations of behaviours and therefore inspire policies which would ostensibly promote change towards a more ‘desirable’ populace. Whilst the relationship between poor housing and intemperance was a broadly established principle by 1914, what the historiography of the ‘drink question’ in Britain has at times failed to appreciate is the extent to which the Addison Act and the housing programme of 1919 was a hopeful attempt to combat this in a meaningful way.⁴⁰

³⁶ Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: the temperance question in England, 1815-1872*: 2nd ed. (Keele, 1994). See also, Norman Longmate, *The Waterdrinkers: a history of temperance* (London, 1968); Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Crusade against drink in Victorian England* (London, 1988); A. E. Dingle, *The campaign for prohibition in Victorian England: the United Kingdom Alliance, 1872-1895* (New Brunswick, 1980).

³⁷ B. Seebohm Rowntree and G. R. Lavers, *English life and leisure: a social study* (London, 1951).

³⁸ John Burnett, *Liquid pleasures: a social history of drinks in Modern Britain* (London, 1999).

³⁹ Robert Duncan, *Pubs and patriots: the drink crisis in Britain during World War One* (Liverpool, 2013). For a contemporary account, see also Henry Carter, *The control of the liquor trade in Britain: a contribution to national efficiency during the Great War, 1915-1918* (London, 1919).

⁴⁰ The lack of public houses on new estates has received attention, for example in Andrzej Olechnowicz, *Working-class housing in England between the wars: the Becontree Estate* (Oxford, 1997). The *conscious*

The public health aspect of housing reform has received more scholarly attention, particularly given the historiography's unrelenting interest in the garden cities movement. Ebenezer Howard's now well-read *Garden cities of to-morrow* (1902) helped to foster an idealism which attracted contemporary planners and the interest of urban historians since.⁴¹ This thesis places the perceived merits of the garden cities movement in the suddenly more convincing context of the First World War. By examining the ways in which the health of the nation under the trial of combat and the pursuit of national efficiency occupied the minds of central governmental planners, it becomes clear that the war created significant changes which made the aspirations of the garden cities movement suddenly a meaningful hallmark of governmental policy, rather than an idealised vision of contemporary society.⁴² This afforded new credence to ideas of eugenics, and quasi-scientific understandings of the relationship between surroundings, development, and behaviours.

Scholarly discussion of morality has often centred around religious behaviours and attitudes. Douglas Reid has commented that, 'in the nineteenth century conflict and competition were more important themes than cooperation, and the estrangement of leisure and religion was symbolised, above all, by the temperance movement and Sabbatarianism. Similarities and differences the religious and the recreational are numerous, hence the observation in 1886 that Good Friday "was spent by the minority in the solemnities of ecclesiastical observance, but by the majority as an opportunity of pleasurable open-air enjoyment."' ⁴³ Whilst religion is

attempt to utilize the housing programme to meaningfully combat intemperance has, however, received little scholarly attention.

⁴¹ Ebenezer Howard, *Garden cities of to-morrow* (London, 1902); Stanley Bruder, *Visionaries and planners: the garden city movement and the modern community* (Oxford, 1990).

⁴² See Alice Coleman, *Utopia on trial: vision and reality in planned housing* (London, 1985).

⁴³ Douglas A. Reid, 'Playing and praying' in Daunton, Martin (ed.), *The Cambridge urban history of Britain: vol. 3, 1840-1950* (Cambridge, 2000), 745-811, p. 745.

not overtly present throughout the thesis it obviously played an important historical cultural framework for the pursuit of good behaviours.⁴⁴ The individual religiosity of decision-makers is in this respect less important than the moralistic, religiously underpinned, ideas stimulating their behaviours.⁴⁵

The lack of attention paid to religious tensions by the Addison Act could be criticised, although this criticism might more astutely be directed towards the local authorities. In Glasgow, for example, tensions began to rise when new housing programmes were perceived to proffer preferential treatment to protestants. This criticism was partly true, but was also the result of the process of clearance and relocation – the attempt to improve a district seen as more predominantly protestant occasioned protest, and the same cries could emerge from different areas of the community when a more catholic area was targeted. Sectarianism does not, therefore, constitute a large part of the thesis discussion, in large part because it does not constitute a large part of the policy's formulation. As was often the case in early twentieth century housing programmes, sectarian troubles were just around the corner.

Conclusion

The scope of this thesis, whilst temporally relatively narrow, is ambitious. In this it matches the policy it investigates. It is the first comprehensive examination of the effects of the First World War on housing conditions in Britain. As a result, it is able to analyse the relationship

⁴⁴ It is hard to know where to start with a history of religion. In the First World War period specifically see Adrian Gregory, 'Beliefs and religion' in Winter, Jay (ed.), *The Cambridge history of the First World War, vol. 3: civil society* (Cambridge, 2014), 418-445; Sarah Williams, *Popular culture and religious belief: Southwark, 1880-1939* (Oxford, 1999);

⁴⁵ On religiosity and secularism, see Jeffrey Cox, *The English churches in a secular society: Lambeth, 1870-1930* (Oxford, 1982); Alan D. Gilbert, *The making of post-Christian Britain: a history of the secularization of modern society* (London, 1980).

between the experience and conditions of war and the formulation of the post-war housing programme to a new level of detail. What it reveals is that the Addison Act represents far more than the number of new houses anticipated to rectify a shortage of houses: it was a complex policy designed to respond to the myriad problems the war had engendered. But it also signifies the hope, optimism, and near-boundless ambition for society in the wake of the war to end all wars. Read in those terms, the Addison Act should not be viewed as a failure – as it has often been portrayed – but as a beacon of hope that many of the great problems afflicting society before the war were finally going to be addressed in a meaningful way at its conclusion. This promise irrevocably changed the future of housing policy for the century which followed.

Chapter One

The First World War and Housing Conditions

Scholars of the First World War and scholars of the development of social housing have often viewed housing conditions and the war – and the relationship between the two - through significantly different analytical lenses. Those more concerned with the development of housing in a longer context tend to adopt the broad view that the Great War made housing in Britain worse. Yet whilst there is a general appreciation that the conflict exacerbated pre-existing conditions, there is not yet a sufficient scholarly understanding of how the physical and material demands of the war specifically facilitated that deterioration. Similarly, it is necessary to locate the peculiarities of the conflict in the wider history of housing reform. Scholars of housing have traditionally focussed on ideological motivations, suggesting that the Housing, Town Planning &c. Act, 1919, popularly known as the ‘Addison Act’,⁴⁶ was the product of a longer political approach and aspiration more than an immediate response to conditions or attitudes engendered by the war.⁴⁷ Closer examination of the specific impacts of the war on the housing conditions and shortages reveals, however, that such a focus neglects the importance of the short-term conditions and policies which impacted subsequent policy.

Studies of the First World War which do reference the importance of housing during the conflict have typically neglected the importance of the material element. Instead, they have focussed on the impact of housing conditions on popular politics during the war. Given that deteriorating housing conditions played a central role in industrial relations during this time, and that war engendered heavily interventionary governmental – both during and

⁴⁶ 9&10 Geo V, c35; Housing (Additional Powers) Act, 1919.

⁴⁷ See S. D. Chapman (ed.), *the History of Working Class Housing* (Newton Abbot, 1971); John Burnett, *A social history of housing, 1815-1985* (London, 1986).

immediately after the conflict – at a hitherto unprecedented level, an examination of the mutually informing relationship between housing conditions and the demands of the war can help to shed new light on our understandings of the realities of the conditions which apparently engendered that protest or political unrest. In short, whilst the impact of the conflict on changing popular political mentalities has received significant scholarly attention, we currently have an insufficient understanding of the extent to which changes in the physical conditions themselves may have engendered those activities. To seek to overcome these challenges, it is first necessary to examine in closer detail the ways in which the policies and legislative changes and controls impacted the conditions and scope of the problem. This encompasses the impact of the conflict on the labour force in the building industries, as well as the housing of the labour force required for other essential industries, both of which will be examined in turn. It also requires a closer investigation of the practical and imagined elements at play here and how they fit in to our wider narratives of wartime discontent and industrial action relating to the housing ‘crisis’, and how those understandings have subsequently impacted our interpretation of post-war policies. The rent protests of 1915 serve as a window through which to assess the impact of the war both practically and emotionally, as well as providing some insight in to the impact of the experience of war on attitudes towards housing and the threat that such discontent posed to wider society. Ultimately, by examining the reciprocal relationship between the conditions of the conflict and housing conditions, we can further our understandings of the way in which housing affected and was affected by the First World War, and the implications that has on our understandings of not just political mentalities, but housing reform and development through the course of the twentieth century.

Legislation and the prohibition of building

The war presented a great number of challenges in terms of the organisation of its peoples. The British people's first truly 'total war', the protracted and all-encompassing nature of the conflict required a significantly increased level of legislative. In order to fully understand the ways in which the war impacted housing conditions - and in particular to explain the government's attempts to remedy the situation at the conflict's conclusion - it is necessary to examine how these policy shifts altered prevailing conditions. Whilst the war period witnessed some legislation formed in direct response to housing conditions and prices, it is equally important to take some time to assess the impact of legislation which impacted construction and letting in a less direct and unintentional way.

When discussing housing during the First World War, historians have often noted that all building not 'deemed of national importance' was prohibited.⁴⁸ Whilst it may be true that the government generally desired a drive towards war-oriented production, the legislative controls for this absolute prohibition are less clear. The Defence of the Realm Act (DORA), including its many subsequent revisions, would appear to be the natural control mechanism for unwanted construction. Where it has been examined, historians of the war have highlighted DORA as a step towards a more authoritarian control – a momentary setback for the Whig narrative. As Barton Ingraham remarked, 'what is surprising – if not shocking – to the foreign observer in the light of English history in the preceding century is the alacrity with which the English surrendered practically the totality of their cherished liberties to the discretion of Government officials during an emergency.'⁴⁹ Such emphasis on DORA as

⁴⁸ This term seems to start with Marian Bowley, *Housing and the State, 1919-1944* (London, 1945).

⁴⁹ Quoted in Charles Townshend, *Making the peace: public order and public security in modern Britain* (Oxford, 1993), p. 56.

evidence of the ‘erosion of executive accountability and the growth of state power in wartime Britain’ has perhaps led to misplaced assumptions of the level of control exerted by the state over its industries during the war.⁵⁰ In terms of the building trade, no such prohibition exists in the 520 pages of the Defence of the Realm Act or its subsequent amendments.⁵¹ Similarly, the Munitions of War Acts – which embody the policies of Lloyd George moving towards a ‘more coercive, legally backed wartime industrial relations strategy’⁵² - contain no mention of exerting controls on the building trades to limit constructions.⁵³ The limited reach of the legislative arm was in fact a cause for criticism at the time given that the regulations contained in the Acts did not apply to employers not engaged on munitions work.⁵⁴

This is not necessarily to argue that the government would have been hesitant to issue such a prohibition had the overt prohibition of construction works during the war posed a serious problem. For some contemporary commentators, DORA represented the ‘violent disregard of traditional and hitherto respected civil rights’,⁵⁵ and it seems unlikely that the framework for control it presented would have been disregarded if required for the restriction of the building industry. Instead, the impact of other initiatives and legislation served to limit the productivity of the building trades enough to render such direct prohibitions unnecessary. Furthermore, it should be recognised that housing conditions were already deteriorating prior to the war in large part due to a lack of activity from a private building sector that was

⁵⁰ Andrew G. Bone, ‘Beyond the rule of law: Aspects of the Defence of Realm Acts and Regulations, 1914-1918’ (PhD thesis, McMaster University, 1994), p. 3.

⁵¹ Alexander Pulling, *Defence of the Realm Manual* (London, 1918).

⁵² Gerry R. Rubin, ‘Explanations for law reform: the case of wartime labour legislation in Britain, 1915-1916’, *International Review of Social History*, 32 (1987), 250-270, p251.

⁵³ Thomas Alexander Fyfe, *Employers and workmen under the Munitions of War Acts, 1915-17*. 3rd Ed. (London, 1918).

⁵⁴ M. B. Hammond, *British labor conditions and legislation during the war* (Oxford, 1919), p101. See also Howard L. Gray, *War time control of industry: the experience of England* (New York, 1919); E. M. H. Lloyd, *Experiments in state control* (Oxford, 1924).

⁵⁵ L. Rogers, ‘The war and the English constitution’, *The Forum*, July 1915, p. 27.

proving increasingly reluctant to construct homes of an acceptable quality that were affordable by the working classes.⁵⁶ The government thus had no need to directly prevent the construction of housing in Britain during the First World War. Instead, the real impact of the First World War on the housing can be found in the indirect effects of other policies and material factors, and which we will now examine in closer detail.

Population movements

Perhaps the most important of these changes was the shift in concentrations of population, particularly in industrial centres. The First World War was responsible for drastic changes to the population throughout the country, altering the dynamics of workplaces, families, and – later – generations.⁵⁷ Much of this attention has often focussed on the impact of the many men who failed to return from the trenches and battlefields across the continents. What has received less study, however, are the ways in which the demands of the war required shifts in the population which accentuated pre-existing housing problems. As industry responded to the ‘national effort’, the areas of the country where those efforts concentrated struggled with a new influx of population. This was key in exacerbating an existing problem, pushing it to a potentially critical level.

How these changes occurred is an area which requires more examination. Keith Grieves’ investigation of the Ministry of National Service offers an excellent initial illustration of the difficulties the government experienced in coping with an emergent crisis of manpower.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ See Avner Offer, *Property and politics, 1870-1914: landownership, law, ideology and urban development in England* (Cambridge, 1981).

⁵⁷ See Jay Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge history of the First World War, vol.3* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 5; Richard Wall and Jay Winter (eds.), *The upheaval of war: family, work and welfare in Europe, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1988).

⁵⁸ Keith Grieves, *The politics of manpower, 1914-18* (Manchester, 1988), Ch. 4-6.

Yet despite historians noting that the war effort demanded a concentration of industry in certain areas, far less attention has been paid to the impact that such movements had on the local housing conditions. Whilst the Munitions of War Acts (1915-1917) sought to promote industrial discipline in factories and shipyards, and to minimize interruptions to the production of war materials, they did not compel men to work in new trades or to change locations.⁵⁹ Instead, one of the principal tools for the relocation and organisation of the labour force came through Labour Exchanges. In June 1915, the Ministry of Munitions – acting in cooperation with the National Advisory Committee of the Trade Unions – invited ‘all skilled workers in the engineering, shipbuilding and allied trades, not already engaged on war contracts’ to register themselves at munitions bureaus open for this purpose at over 400 locations throughout the United Kingdom’.⁶⁰ Their role during the war, under the supervision of the Ministry of Munitions, was to reallocate labour to essential war works. In July 1915, Lloyd George spoke of the success of this effort to the House of Commons, noting that, ‘through the helpful co-operation of the Labour Exchanges... we have succeeded during the past month in adding to the labour available in works connected with armaments in the country 40,000 men and women, nearly half of them skilled men, and we are still pouring in fresh labour supplies for the purpose.’⁶¹ In the context of housing conditions, we must consider how many of these workers were being relocated from other industries located locally, and how local areas of dense population which surrounded industry were being affected in particular by this drive towards industrial productivity. Furthermore, there was a more direct effect taking place: the increasingly stagnant building industry lost part of its workforce to supply this demand.

⁵⁹ See Gerry R. Rubin, *War, law, and labour: the Munitions Acts, state regulation, and the unions, 1915-1921* (Oxford, 1987).

⁶⁰ *Labour Gazette*, July 1915.

⁶¹ HC Deb 28 July 1915, vol. 73, cc2357-95.

This decline in the building trade can be observed through the employment figures at a national level, but unfortunately many local Labour Exchange figures do not appear to exist. Nevertheless, it appears fairly clear that the building trade suffered through competition with munitions work – which was more secure and lucrative - and through the work of the Labour Exchanges manipulating labour away from professions or industries not deemed essential for the war. Instead of using DORA as a coercive legislative framework to outlaw unessential construction, it appears that the government relied on basic free market economics to incentivise workers to more desirable trades through more secure employment and better wages. The Minister of Munitions did ultimately issue an order on July 14, 1916, to ‘prohibit, in all cases involving an outlay of over £500, the construction, alteration, repair, decoration, or demolition of buildings, or the construction, re-construction or alteration of railroads, docks, harbours, canals and other works of construction or engineering except under licence from the Minister of Munitions.’⁶²

	DWELLING HOUSES	FACTORIES AND WORKSHOPS	SHOPS AND OTHER BUSINESS PREMISES	CHURCHES, SCHOOLS AND PUBLIC BUILDINGS	OTHER BUILDINGS, ADDITIONS AND ALTERATIONS	ALL CLASSES OF BUILDING
1911	6,284,506	2,176,037	1,578,818	2,586,245	2,056,731	14,682,337
1912	5,486,249	3,422,239	1,378,402	1,918,818	2,249,463	14,455,174
1913	5,662,032	3,266,278	1,699,469	2,612,331	2,494,064	15,734,174
1914	5,647,551	2,712,265	1,899,521	2,220,382	2,113,120	14,592,839
1915	2,515,825	3,700,724	1,266,053	958,087	1,634,663	10,075,352
1916	866,127	3,595,669	677,456	261,934	1,817,142	7,218,328
1917	409,691	3,883,964	696,450	112,686	1,790,184	6,892,975

Figure 1. Total value of building plans approved by Local Authorities in Britain, 1911-1917. This prohibition

needs to be viewed in context, however. The above table (Figure 1) shows the estimated

⁶² MUN 4/6653. Trade control: control of building materials.

value of building plans approved by the Local Authorities of 93 urban areas, with a total population of over 12 million.⁶³

This highlights the contraction of the building industry during the war years, especially regarding the construction of dwellings. The building industry remained propped up by the increased construction of factories and workshops due to war demands, meaning that whilst there was a decline of around 56 per cent across the industry as a whole between the years 1913 and 1917, the construction of churches, schools and public buildings, and of dwelling-houses, saw a decrease of 96 per cent and 93 per cent respectively. If we take the aggregate of the years 1911-1913 and compare it to the declining rate through the course of the war, by the beginning of 1918 the demands of war created an approximate drop in investment in dwelling houses of over thirteen and a half million pounds.

This decline can be seen in practice by looking in more detail at the labour present in the industries, and the work of the labour exchanges in practice. In the spring of 1914 - prior to the outbreak of war – the building industry was employing 996,224 men.⁶⁴ By June 1916, this number had slipped to 640,668,⁶⁵ and by June 1918 to 576,056.⁶⁶ Furthermore, it is important to note that whilst the trade frequently reported a labour shortage, with unemployment rates typically below half a per cent through this period, many of these trade workers such as plumbers and carpenters were employed by the government on war work through this period, and private building work ‘continued slack’ throughout the war.⁶⁷

⁶³ *Labour Gazette*, February 1918, p. 50.

⁶⁴ *Labour Gazette*, July 1914, p.221

⁶⁵ *Labour Gazette*, July 1916, p.250.

⁶⁶ *Labour Gazette*, July 1918, p.273.

⁶⁷ *Labour Gazette*, July 1917, p.245.

A Board of Trade report made in December, 1914 estimated the industrial population of the building trade at 1,023,000, with 12.2 per cent of this number having joined the forces.⁶⁸

Whilst it is difficult to calculate the exact number of building trade workers (skilled and unskilled) who joined the military effort, it is important to observe that the lack of protection they were afforded relative to other professions consequently made workers in the trade more vulnerable to enlistment.⁶⁹ The National Registration Act, passed in July 1915, began the process of ascertaining the number of men of ages eighteen to sixty-five employed in each trade.⁷⁰ Regardless of if it was perhaps intended to facilitate an informed debate about manpower,⁷¹ the process of ‘starring’ or ‘badging’ the jobs of those in essential industries created debate about the roles industries played in the conflict.⁷² With the building trade not easily falling under this category, this may have gone some way to pushing men to move to more overtly war-oriented professions. As the *Labour Gazette* observed in 1916, ‘large numbers of building trade operatives joined the Forces, while many others left the trade for other work in which their services were more urgently required in the national interests.’⁷³

Whilst at a basic level this highlights the impact that the manpower demands of the war had on the housing industry during the war, it also demonstrates the ways in which the increasing prioritisation away from the construction industry set the scene for a crisis after the war. In July 1914, there were 80,000 men employed in the production of bricks. Two years later, in

⁶⁸ TNA BT 5/120. This number is likely a conservative estimate as they appear to have taken the 1911 census as a starting point.

⁶⁹ This is largely due to incomplete statistics. See P.E. Dewey, ‘Military Recruiting and the British Labour Force During the First World War’, *Historical Journal*, 27 (1984), 199-223.

⁷⁰ TNA RG 28/1/1. Preparation for, and administration of the National Registration Acts, 1915-1918.

⁷¹ Keith Grieves, *The politics of manpower, 1914-18* (Manchester, 1985).

⁷² See Rosemary Elliot, ‘An Early Experiment in National Identity Cards: The Battle Over Registration in the First World War’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 17 (2006), pp. 145-176; Juliette Pattinson, ‘“Shirkers”, “Scrimjacks” and “Scrimshanks”? British civilian masculinity and reserved occupations, 1914-1945’, *Gender and History*, 28 (2016), 709-727.

⁷³ *Labour Gazette*, November 1916, p.405.

July 1916, this number had fallen to 37,600, with 25 per cent of these joining the forces and 28.7 per cent displaced to other industries.⁷⁴ We will examine the impact of the material element in greater detail later in Chapter Three, but for now it is important to remember that the manpower demands of the war affected the building trade in ways which went beyond the simple contraction of the industry itself; with prioritisation of labour increasingly moving towards war-centred industries, production in areas tangential to, but essential for, the building of new houses also steeply declined, and this affected both the form and the efficacy of post-war plans.

It is also possible that the manpower situation, and the deficit produced by shifts towards wartime production, affected the housing industry disproportionately strongly relative to other professions as a result of the limitations of the substitution of female labour in this area. On one level, this is perhaps a result of the resistance to women's entry in to new trades. Susan Grayzel's analysis of women's work through the lens of pronatalism exposed a conflict in British society, torn between acknowledging wartime female factory workers' vital contributions to the present war effort and agonizing over their essential role in preserving the nation's future population.⁷⁵ This influence on the housing programme is closely examined in Chapter Four. When examining population movements and production, the labour shortfall which industrial relocation and focus created was not balanced by the introduction of female labour in the same way as some other industries as the building sector was not a priority in the same way. Once again, the neglect of housing helped to create inevitable future problems.

⁷⁴ H.M.S.O., *The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions*, vol. 4 (London, 1922), p. 144.

⁷⁵ Susan Grayzel, *Gender, motherhood, and politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill, 1999), p. 119.

It is not clear the extent to which this industrial relocation was a fully conceived policy, and whether or not the concurrent conditions such actions would create were anticipated. If this were the case, it would make sense that the government would simultaneously seek to provide additional accommodation in those areas already saturated to the point of overcrowding; whilst they did erect some temporary accommodation, which is examined later in this chapter, the huts built by the armed forces were never made with industrial productivity in mind. If the population relocation was an accidental result of market forces at work, however, did these changes and their impacts on local housing conditions catch authorities – at both local and national level – by surprise? By examining the ways in which the changes in population engendered by the demands of the national war effort impacted on the housing shortages in Glasgow and Liverpool – two cities central to the war's industrial efforts – we can better understand how this phenomenon occurred and assess its impact during and after the war.

Changing populations in Glasgow and Liverpool

We can examine this change in a few ways: by looking at the population statistics themselves, and by looking at the number of unoccupied houses. The population statistics themselves do not tell the whole story. The First World War stimulated a high level of relocation, as men left for military service at the same time as others arrived to work. For this reason, increases in population were accompanied by a disproportionate increase in new households. As men departed to fulfil their roles in the war, women frequently moved back in with families, letting out their households to newly arriving workers. Despite this, simply assessing the numbers can be illuminating in itself.

In 1913, the estimated population of Glasgow was 1,032,228, with the number of inhabited houses 216,952. This represented an increase in population of 17,063 on the previous year – or a rate of 1.68 per cent – and an increase of 3,696 occupied houses.⁷⁶ On the eve of war, then, the rate of increase was already slightly on the rise.⁷⁷ This moderate growth in the population is mostly attributable to a concurrent drop in the death-rate, and significant growths of population and occupied households are mostly recorded outside the city centre.

NUMBER OF APARTMENTS	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919
ONE	4,169	3,566	2,943	1,884	957	587	319
TWO	9,762	7,399	4,791	1,892	807	344	181
THREE	2,731	1,429	768	179	64	30	21
FOUR	954	404	239	55	23	16	13
FIVE OR MORE	1,094	678	536	495	283	132	103
	18,710	13,476	9,277	4,505	2,134	1,109	637

Figure 2. Number of Unoccupied houses in Glasgow, 1913-1919. Mitchell Library, Glasgow. D-HE 1/1/21/1914-1919.

The war changed these trends in the population, as the ‘Report of an Enquiry Into House Pressure’ in 1919 noted: ‘The area of the increase was even more remarkable than its volume, for it indicated a reflux of population to districts which for years had shown an uninterrupted decrease.’⁷⁸ Relocation for war purposes thus not only meant that the population of the city increased in real terms, but that it shifted the trend in population of districts most

⁷⁶ Mitchell Library, Glasgow. D-HE 1/1/21/1913.

⁷⁷ This number is difficult to accurately assess due to the impact of the 1912 extension of the city boundaries. Between 1901-11, the population occupying the total area now encompassed by the city increased by 54,687 – or 0.57 per cent annually – but this was composed of an interest equal to 0.12 per cent within the old area, and 3.13 per cent in the area added in 1913.

⁷⁸ Mitchell Library, Glasgow. D-HE 1/1/21/1914-19.

overcrowded from gradual decline to sudden increase. This is shown to a greater extent when we examine the number of occupied and unoccupied houses across Glasgow.

As the above table (Figure 2) detailing the number of unoccupied houses in Glasgow illustrates, the number of available apartments of all sizes decreased constantly and significantly throughout the duration of the war.⁷⁹ This meant that by 1919 only 0.27% of housing stock remained unoccupied, the lowest recorded since the Census of 1871.⁸⁰

Furthermore, it is important to note that the numbers here do not tell the whole story. In response to the escalating crisis, the work undertaken by the Committee on Health - which had previously worked to remove overcrowded dwellings and 'backlands' under the Housing of the Working Classes Acts of 1870 and 1909 - changed in its scope and leniency. From zero in 1913, the department worked to render houses 'reasonably fit for habitation' during the war, doing so for 3,180 dwellings between 1914 and 1919. Such a change in remit and activities is enlightening for the mentalities of those working at the Corporation charged with combating the housing shortage and deplorable conditions. Before the war, attentions were directed to the demolition of housing of an unacceptable condition. As the conflict continued, and the construction of new housing was impossible, they had to 'make-do and mend' as best as they could. The result was that by the end of the war, Glasgow was suffering from an acute housing shortage that had never been worse.

The exceptionality of the plight of Glasgow was certainly emphasised by those seeking to exploit worsening conditions for political gain. In a paper delivered in Cardiff in 1916, and

⁷⁹ Mitchell Library, Glasgow. D-HE 1/1/21/1914-19.

⁸⁰ National Records of Scotland. 1871 Census, 33&34 Vict, c. 108. 'Glasgow'.

later circulated as a pamphlet, Bailie J. Stewart argued that, ‘Glasgow has a population of nearly 1,100,000 people dwelling within an area of 19,000 acres, the average density per acre being 54. This is in excess of any other town or city in the kingdom.’⁸¹ Local politics, and in particular the Labour Party Housing Association, sought to highlight to the Corporation the undue burden the districts were bearing; at times, this was even in opposition to one another, as individual district branches petitioned to highlight their plights separately.⁸²

This is a vital political narrative. Far from representing a ‘shared burden’ – a working class united in their response to the demands of the conflict – the reports demonstrate the belief that local conditions were worse than those faced in other parts of the country, or even of the same city. The political element of these developments will be observed in more detail later in the chapter, but first it is necessary to compare the experience of Glasgow to that of Liverpool to assess the extent to which such experiences were indeed exceptional.

The story in Liverpool is broadly comparable to that of Glasgow. The population of Liverpool in 1913 was estimated at 756,553.⁸³ Of these, only 10,223 – or 1.35 per cent - lived in properties operated by the Corporation.⁸⁴ Looking at the number of unoccupied houses in the City by district and in total also tells a similar story to that of Glasgow, and which is illustrated in the following table (Figure 3):⁸⁵

⁸¹ Mitchell Library, Glasgow. PA 11/1/11, ‘Health and Housing’ by Bailie J. Stewart, September 1916, p2.

⁸² Whilst this may be evidence of sectarianism, the emphasis appears to be on the locality in opposition to all others, and there is little evidence of sectarian sentiment from the depositions. See, for example, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. CI 3/52, ‘Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, Apr-Nov 1914’, p. 2029; CI 3/53, ‘Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, Apr-Nov 1915’, p. 2476; CI 3/55, ‘Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, Apr-Nov 1916’, pp. 1342, 1450.

⁸³ Central Library Archives, Liverpool. 352 COU 1913-14, p. 2465.

⁸⁴ Central Library Archives, Liverpool. H653 HOU, ‘Report of the Housing Committee, 1915’, p. 50.

⁸⁵ Central Library Archives, Liverpool. H653 HOU, ‘Report of the Housing Committee, 1917’, p. 50. Note on the Police Divisions: ‘A’ Great Crosshall St. to Duke St. and Gill St. to Docks; ‘B’ – Gill St. to Sheil Road, and Salisbury Road to Spekeland Road; ‘C’ – Duke St. to Park Hill Road, and Mulgrave St. to Docks; ‘D’ – Great Crosshall St. to Boundary St., and Netherfield Road to Docks; ‘E’ – Boundary St. to

POLICE DIVISION	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917
A (CENTRE)	122	80	77	45	14
B	664	398	156	208	56
C	353	449	160	123	67
D	207	195	239	69	19
E	207	169	35	26	24
F	592	464	340	331	199
G	593	515	351	224	170
<u>TOTAL</u>	2738	2270	1358	1026	549

Figure 3. Unoccupied houses in Liverpool, 1913-1917. Central Library Archives, Liverpool. H653 HOU, 'Report of the Housing Committee, 1917, p. 50.'

By the end of 1917, Liverpool's number of unoccupied houses decreased by 80 per cent, with Glasgow's stock decreasing by 88.6 per cent over the same period. Similar to Glasgow, the decrease in the number of unoccupied houses nearest to the centres of industry (A; D; E) saw a sharp decline relative to the rest of the city after a period of relative stagnation. This was, to some extent, likely a reflection of a declining standard of inter-urban transport through the war, and the problem of commuting from the outer city in to the centre – where the industry was concentrated – perpetuated through this period, and this problem reoccurs throughout this thesis.

This was accompanied by a concurrent and related trend, seen both in Glasgow and nationally, of a cessation of construction. As the table below (Figure 4) demonstrates, the

Bootle Boundary, and Fazakerley to Docks; 'F' – Sefton Park, Aigburth, and Garston; 'G' West Derby, Wavertree, Woolton, and Gateacre.

construction of new dwelling houses declined sharply through the course of the war, particularly in the cheaper brackets.

	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	TOTAL
UNDER £12	-	68	37	-	6	-	111
£12 TO £18	41	92	38	21	49	1	242
£18 TO £25	717	537	539	303	99	16	2,211
£25 TO £35	64	43	147	96	18	2	370
£35 AND UPWARDS	56	27	74	48	14	3	222
TOTAL	878	767	835	468	186	22	3,156

Figure 4. Houses according to rentals. Central Library Archives, Liverpool. 352 MIN/HOU 1/6.

Of the above figures, all the houses erected under a rental of £18 per annum were provided by the Corporation.⁸⁶ To put in to context how this lack of construction affected existing stock, of the 152,477 dwelling houses in Liverpool in 1916, 113,127 – or 74.2 per cent – were let at a rental not exceeding £13. It is also perhaps noteworthy that through this period, construction of houses valued at £25 and above constituted 18.8 per cent of new dwelling housing stock, yet this value bracket accounted for only 11.25 per cent of the total housing stock of the City.

Where Liverpool's policy differed somewhat from that of Glasgow, however, was in their treatment of houses deemed insanitary or otherwise unsuitable for human habitation. In terms of their ability to close or demolish, the Treatment of Unhealthy Areas Committee in

⁸⁶ Central Library Archives, Liverpool. H653 HOU, 'Report of the Housing Committee, 1917'.

Liverpool was inhibited in a similar way to Glasgow, with the Medical Officer of Health and his subordinates restricted in the actions they were permitted to undertake. The Council frequently reminded them to ‘have regard for to the difficulty which any considerable displacement of the population would occasion.’⁸⁷ However, instead of working to improve existing stock and make it more habitable – as the Glasgow Corporation sought to do – Liverpool’s department entirely shut down operations, as the following tables demonstrate:⁸⁸

YEAR	TOTAL NO. HOUSES DEALT WITH	DEMOLISHED	RENDERED SANITARY	CLOSED
1912	87	28	-	21
1913	20	15	5	-
1914	61	45	10	6
1915	20	7	4	9
1916	-	-	-	-
1917	-	-	-	-

Figure 5. Front houses. Central Library Archives, Liverpool. H653 HOU, ‘Report of the Housing Committee, 1917’p. 43.

YEAR	TOTAL NO. HOUSES DEALT WITH	DEMOLISHED	RENDERED SANITARY	CLOSED
1912	595	232	4	232
1913	148	131	17	-
1914	175	135	11	29
1915	40	38	-	2
1916	-	-	-	-
1917	-	-	-	-

Figure 6. Court houses. Central Library Archives, Liverpool. H653 HOU, ‘Report of the Housing Committee, 1917’, p. 43

⁸⁷ Central Library Archives, Liverpool. 352 MIN/HOU 1/6. Report on Unfit and Insanitary Areas, p481.

⁸⁸ Central Library Archives, Liverpool. H653 HOU, ‘Report of the Housing Committee, 1917’, p. 43.

Looking in the even longer term, over the twelve years from 1906 to 1917 inclusive, the Corporation demolished 2,652 insanitary dwellings, and closed 430 further pending demolition or reconstruction. Further, 687 were reconstructed and made sanitary, making the total number of dwellings addressed 3,769. Of this number, only 60 were addressed in 1915, and none from that point until the end of the war.⁸⁹

There are therefore clear commonalities to the experience of both cities. Both witnessed a steady and marked increase in population, and as a result the small numbers of unoccupied houses decreased sharply. In both instances the concentration of this newly increasing population took place in the centre of the cities, nearer to the dock areas, and reversed a slight pre-war decline in population concentrations in these areas which were already amongst the most overcrowded in the country. Construction of new housing stock sharply declined in both areas, and local authorities in both cities struggled with the demands and restrictions of war, despite Glasgow taking a more proactive approach regarding making insanitary properties more habitable. With a more comprehensive understanding of how the war altered the housing situation on the ground, then, it is possible to reassess our understandings of the political impact of these conditions. This similarly challenges a more romanticised notion of the gains made by the working classes during the war years, and highlights the importance of disaggregating national trends.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Central Library Archives, Liverpool. H653 HOU. Report of the Housing Committee, 1917, p. 44.

⁹⁰ See Bernard Waites, *A class society at war* (Leamington, 1987); Robert Roberts, *The classic slum: Salford life in the first quarter of the century* (Manchester, 1971).

Rent controls

Where scholars of housing have examined the importance of the relationship between housing conditions and the First World War, they have tended to focus on the rent strikes in 1915 and the subsequent legislation.⁹¹ These accounts have largely discounted the agency and activities of the working class, focussing instead on the immediate economic pressures and the bureaucratic and administrative forces which shaped the 1919 Acts. Our appreciation of the impact of these actions and the government's response, however, has been limited by an insufficient understanding of the contributing issues, or of the full extent of the impact of the Act which followed. Looking in closer detail at the shifting populations in industrial centres helps to illuminate the context of these actions more clearly.

Instead of assessing the impact of the realities on the ground in greater detail, however, historians have primarily examined the rent strikes from an ideological and political perspective. This has often proven enlightening for our understandings of events, particularly where scholars relocating the importance of working-class activism has highlighted the responses to the crisis. David Englander has argued that, 'The social and political impact of the war upon the working classes remains problematical. In regard to housing reform, however, it did not denote a sharp discontinuity. What had altered was not the aspiration but the intensity of the demand for improved housing. It reflected a heightened consciousness of social injustice.'⁹² Indeed, this apparently heightened consciousness has at times dominated

⁹¹ Marian Bowley, *Housing and the state, 1919-1944* (London, 1945); Paul Barton Johnson, *Land fit for heroes: the planning of British reconstruction, 1916-1919* (Chicago, 1968); Paul Wilding, 'The Housing and Town Planning Act, 1919: A study in the making of social policy', *Journal of Social Policy*, 4 (1973), 317-334.

⁹² David Englander, *Landlord and tenant in urban Britain, 1838-1918* (Oxford, 1983), p. 193.

as an explanatory tool in the literature.⁹³ To an extent, this interpretation relies on the disillusionment school of thought advanced most notably by Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*.⁹⁴ Whilst subsequent scholarship has challenged this primarily negative interpretation of the war experience,⁹⁵ it is important to remember that such a fixation on interpreting the ideological subscription to the conflict can almost obviate the underlying causes and their importance. Instead of viewing the rent crisis as an indicator of a heightened political awareness - or as an expression of wider discontent at the conflict - it is important to remember that the rent strikes fundamentally remained about rents.⁹⁶ This perhaps explains why the legislation designed to ameliorate the concern was successful in preventing further widespread action despite agitators continuing to attempt to utilise rents to further future protests. As the report of the government-appointed commission on unrest later concluded, 'All of the war-time official reports and commentaries agreed that on Clydeside the housing situation – the generally dreadful conditions, the extra pressure on an already overstretched supply, and the opportunity taken by landlords to push up rents – was one of, if not the, major sources of discontent.'⁹⁷ Similarly, it is important to remember that despite a concentration by some scholars on the importance of the contentious issue of dilution, this presented a less natural unifying force in the context of protests regarding rents than some scholars have

⁹³ For the most convincing accounts, see Jay Winter, *Socialism and the challenge of war: ideas and politics in Britain, 1912-1918* (London, 1974), and Waites, *A class society at war*. For an important contrary to this, however, see Ross McKibbin, *The evolution of the Labour Party, 1910-1924* (London, 1974), who has convincingly argued that political ideas were of less importance than the changing structure of the trade union movement, as well as the extension of the franchise.

⁹⁴ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and modern memory* (Oxford, 1975).

⁹⁵ Adrian Gregory, *The last Great War British society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008), convincingly debunks the myth of 'war enthusiasm' whilst the work of Samuel Hynes, *A war imagined: the First World War and English culture* (London, 1990) and Rosa Maria Bracco, *Merchants of hope: British middlebrow writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* (Oxford, 1993) have emphasised the important multitude of interpretations and representations present in contemporary literature. See also the important recent work by Catriona Pennell, *A kingdom united: popular responses to the outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2012).

⁹⁶ See P. J. Dollan, *The Clyde rent war* (Glasgow, 1925); William Gallagher, *Revolt on the Clyde* (London, 1936).

⁹⁷ PP1917 XIV, 'Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial population of Scotland Rural and Urban, Ch 34, 'Bad housing as a factor in industrial unrest'.

perhaps assumed.⁹⁸ As J. J. Smyth has observed, ‘Housing was an issue more capable of uniting people than the struggle over dilution; the latter was inherently sectional as skilled men sought to guard their privileges against unskilled and female workers.’⁹⁹ The emphasis should be that the rent strikes – whilst undoubtedly influenced by a myriad of factors – were fundamentally informed by rent in the context of total war, and therefore deserve examination distinct from the struggles over dilution which they preceded.¹⁰⁰

It is possible that instead of a heightened consciousness regarding social justice, agitators for change demonstrated a heightened consciousness regarding *leverage*. Housing histories are correct to note that the war did not represent the start of discontent at the deplorable conditions witnessed there. It did, however, represent the first occasion that those affected could force the government’s hand to action through strikes. The tendency of many historians, as Jay Winter and Antoine Prost have noted, ‘to account for the social explosion at the end of the war and in the immediate post-war period through the analysis of trade-union organisation’ perhaps explains the overrepresentation of this line of thought in the literature.¹⁰¹ To argue this, however, would require evidence of organisation and planning which simply did not exist. As Peter Shapely has astutely observed, ‘Despite examples of early protests, before the late 1960s tenants remained a largely passive group.’¹⁰² Instead,

⁹⁸ James Hinton, *The first shop stewards’ movement* (London, 1973). See also R. J. Morris, ‘Skilled workers and the politics of the “Red Clydeside”’, *Journal of Scottish Labour History Society*, 18 (1983), 6-17. For an effective rebuttal of the importance of dilution in practice, see Keith Burgess, ‘The political economy of British engineering workers during the First World War’ in Haimson, Leopold and Tilly, Charles (eds.), *Strikes, wars, and revolutions in an international perspective* (Cambridge, 1989), 289-320; Alastair Reid, ‘Dilution, trade unionism and the state in Britain during the First World War’ in Tolliday, Steven and Zeithin, Jonathan (eds.), *Shop floor bargaining and the state: historical and comparative perspectives* (Cambridge, 1985), 221-233.

⁹⁹ J. J. Smyth, *Labour in Glasgow, 1896-1936: socialism, suffrage, sectarianism* (East Linton, 2000), p. 81.

¹⁰⁰ See also Englander, *Landlord and tenant*, p. 234.

¹⁰¹ Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *Debates and controversies, 1914 to the present* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 143.

¹⁰² Peter Shapely, *The politics of housing: power, consumers and urban culture* (Manchester, 2007), p.72.

examination of the demands of the conflict and the steady increase of population in already critically overpopulated industrial centres, when viewed as part of a longer history of protest at deplorable housing conditions, mean that local actors protesting local conditions could take place at a national scale, and therefore impact national policy. Nor did this action represent a significant departure from pre-war actions. The 360 disputes, involving 136,636 workers and causing an aggregate loss of 951,000 working days during the first six months of 1915 compares to 663 disputes involving 361,860 workers and a loss of 7,761,800 working days in the corresponding months of 1914 predating the war.¹⁰³

Although protests took place nationwide, coordination between these regions was fragmented at best, and no effective national body emerged. The War Rents League, the National Labour Housing Association, and the War Emergency Workers' National Committee all organised and agitated at varying levels of co-ordination.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps ironically, the War Rents League was shunned by the militant Clydesiders over disagreements at the level of cooperation they had with landlords. This multiplicity of regions acting at varying levels of independence is important for two reasons: firstly, it offers a more convincing explanation of why the government responded in such an intrusive form. Secondly, it helped to promote the local narratives that the concessions had been won by the actions in that locality. There is also a danger in retrospectively reading the actions of local groups working under a collective auspice of reform as evidence of organisation. As John Horne has argued in his excellent study of labour during the war, 'the legacy of labour reformism in France and Britain would become evident not after the First but after the Second World War'.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ M. B. Hammond, *British labor conditions and legislation during the war* (Oxford, 1919), p. 231.

¹⁰⁴ See Royden Harrison, 'The War Emergency Workers' National Committee, 1914-1920' in Briggs, Asa and John Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History, 1886-1923* (London, 1971), 211-259.

¹⁰⁵ John Horne, *Labour at war: France and Britain, 1914-1918* (Oxford, 1991), p. 394-5.

This is not to argue that the pressure was not tangible. The government was ultimately forced to reply with the Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915.¹⁰⁶

Whilst this suspended rent at pre-war levels and therefore served as an effective panacea to alleviate discord amongst the working classes, as Joseph Melling has noted, 'Direct action in rent strikes and housing resistance was as great a challenge to propertied rights, as the rank and file militancy of these years.'¹⁰⁷ The ramifications of the passing of this emergency Act deeply affected reconstruction and the housing situation for the rest of the war and the entire period which followed it, and is explored in depth in the next chapter.

Just as housing problems served as a unifying force despite the potentially contentious issue of dilution, attitudes towards landlords and rent increases often transcended sectarian rivalries. The pragmatic realities of steadily increased rent and the rising cost of living thus allowed housing, and more specifically rent, to take precedence over more religious and cultural tensions – in the short term, at least.¹⁰⁸ Despite this, the Addison Act deserves some criticism for not anticipating the sectarian problems which the *implementation* of social housing programmes created. Although Glasgow's councillors, especially the politically more radical Labour contingent, were not religiously homogenous, putting policy in to practice occasioned more sectarian division after the war.¹⁰⁹ During the war, rent legislation commanded popular support. After the conflict, the process of slum clearance and allegations as to the preferential treatment of some groups allowed sectarianism to re-emerge in the

¹⁰⁶ 5&6 Geo V, c335. Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest Restriction (War Restrictions) Act, 1915.

¹⁰⁷ Joseph Melling 'Introduction' in Melling (ed.), *Housing, social policy and the State* (London, 1980), p. 31.

¹⁰⁸ See Joan Smith, 'Labour tradition in Glasgow and Liverpool', *History Workshop Journal*, 17 (1984), 32-56; Joan Smith, 'Class, skill and sectarianism in Glasgow and Liverpool, 1880-1914' in R. J. Morris (ed.), *Class, power and social structure in British nineteenth century cities* (Leicester, 1986).

¹⁰⁹ This was also the case to an extent in Liverpool. See Sam Davies, *Liverpool Labour: social and political influences of the Labour party in Liverpool, 1900-1939* (Keele, 1996); Philip J. Waller, *Democracy and sectarianism: a political and social history of Liverpool, 1868-1939* (Liverpool, 1981); Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the people: party, language and popular politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), 234-238.

housing debate. As a result, whilst sectarianism neither stimulated or informed the creation of the housing programme, its lack of effective consideration – especially given the plan for local authorities to administer the implementation of the policy – represents a major shortcoming. Too often discussion centred around who the homes were for along class and wealth lines, and not enough along religious and cultural lines.

Changing language of protest

The efficacy of the unifying issue of housing problems which helped to transcend divisions of dilutions or religion was in part due to the mobilisation of the image of a shared enemy. In addition to a changing degree of leverage at a practical level, the war afforded housing protesters a new linguistic framework in which to operate. By identifying their protests in terms of the war effort, the housing debate became more than a question of the ethics of capitalism; instead, those who raised rent in a time of crisis could be represented as unpatriotic and anti-war, and the language used to condemn them offered a new level of legitimacy to the arguments of the protesters.

In October 1915 in Scotland, a deputation marched to demand that the council took action ‘to restrain the extravagant increases that are being demanded’, and to do so they employed the language of the war for their own ends. As the *Manchester Guardian* reported, the procession accompanying the deputation consisted of ‘about 1,500 people, mostly women, from the six different districts affected. The women from Partick carried a banner bearing the legend, “Our husbands, sons, and brothers are fighting the Prussians of Germany. We are fighting the Prussians of Partick.”’¹¹⁰ The importance of anti-profiteering sentiment is central to the

¹¹⁰ *The Manchester Guardian*, 8 October 1915, ‘Strike against higher rents at Glasgow’, p. 8.

popular representation of housing conditions and will receive greater attention later in this thesis, but what is important to note from the perspective of the increased leverage and pressure the war created is the rhetorical importance of the vilification of unpatriotic landlords raising rents, and betraying the troops waging the war.

This is crucial for two key factors: firstly, the ability to represent landlords as unpatriotically betraying the common man and undermining the apparently great unifying national effort allowed protesters to adopt a position that garnered easy popular support and was difficult to oppose. Secondly, it presented the government with a rhetorical narrative for intervention. At a time when increased mobilization across class boundaries and society was a pragmatic military necessity, the ability to represent the landlords as the enemy presented those protesting housing conditions with a new, more compelling language with which to garner support.¹¹¹ Charles McCurdy – a Liberal MP and one of the authors of the Profiteering Act, 1919 – represented the profiteer as the rat that the soldier at the front had to endure, writing in *The Times* that, ‘while some of the minor horrors infest the trenches, the profiteer preys on the civilian’.¹¹²

This rhetoric becomes particularly potent where representations of the landlord as a deplorable, war-shirking despot are juxtaposed by the emerging ideal of the soldier, the paradigm of national sacrifice and citizenship. This complex moral language of the home front is grounded in the notion that the war necessitated mutual national sacrifices, and the greedy landlord seeking profit from war-created scarcity could be painted as the antithesis of this ideal. This is not to overstate the case: representations of landlords as the enemy hold

¹¹¹ National mobilization, especially the state control of opinion and morale, is a complicated subject. See in particular the introduction to John Horne (ed.), *State, society and mobilization in the First World War* (Cambridge, 1997), 1-19.

¹¹² *The Times*, 16 September 1919, p. 4.

limited value without other evidence; government action was informed by pragmatic reality more than ideological representation. However, such language should also not be discounted. By rhetorically making the disputes around housing an extension of the war, the conflict served to emphasise its importance rather than diminish it. As Jean-Louis Robert noted in his work on the image of the profiteer, 'Representations are no substitute for other kinds of evidence or analysis, but social history without them is likely to be incomplete. Representations provided a framework of meaning for sacrifice, for material hardships and the redistribution of wealth.'¹¹³ This has been described by Bernard Waites as a 'moral economy', who has argued that whilst profiteering did not engender strikes on its own, it did significantly increase the propensity for strike action.¹¹⁴

The idealised construction of the home seems to offer a particularly susceptible case for this idea to take hold. As propaganda encouraged the war as a defence of the 'home', and to 'keep the home fires burning', attacks on the home itself were particularly open to exploitation by those campaigning against deplorable housing conditions. Just as the Germans were depicted as ultimately waging war against those on what has come to be described as the 'home front',¹¹⁵ the profiteering landlords could be incorporated in to this national narrative. In the case of housing, and the deplorable conditions and rapidly rising rents which scarcity created, it enabled the lens of public opinion to empower the arguments of tenants.

¹¹³ Jean-Louis Robert, 'The image of the profiteer' in Winter, Jay and Robert, Jean-Louis (eds.), *Capital cities at war: London, Paris, Berlin, 1914-1919* (Cambridge, 1997), 104-132, p. 105.

¹¹⁴ Bernard Waites, 'Moral economy in wartime' in Liddle, Peter (ed.), *Home fires and foreign fields* (London, 1985).

¹¹⁵ John Horne, 'Inventing the "front": cognition and reality in the Great War', Keynote lecture, Globalising and Localising the Great War, University of Oxford, 2017.

Pressure from the middle classes

In response, the government faced new pressure from another direction: for the rest of the war, and immediately after, property owners began to lobby for the repeal of the Act, and the private enterprise expressed its dismay at every opportunity. As one report to the Ministry of Reconstruction expressed:

Great dissatisfaction prevails among bondholders affected by the Act, and it is impossible to obtain new loans except at a prohibitive rate of interest. It is well known to the legal profession that many bodies of trustees have left instructions with their agents that when the restrictions are removed, all bonds are to be called up and the moneys placed in other forms of trust investment. ... Should a wholesale calling up of bonds take place when the restrictions are removed, the effect on the property market will be disastrous. It will be impossible to replace the loans, with the result that properties will be thrown on the market, and innumerable proprietors ruined.¹¹⁶

Despite attempts to mitigate this threat before the rent acts were even passed in 1915, chiefly through the Courts (Emergency Powers) Bill, 1915, this threat to the Bonds market was frequently repeated and presented a real threat.¹¹⁷ For example, a property company in Glasgow wrote in 1917, warning that, ‘Another matter, serious to all holders of property, is the calling up of Bonds after the war. As you well know, Bonds on real estate were favourite investments of Trustees, and much approved of by the Auditor of the Court of Session; but this is almost at an end, and it is scarcely possible to get any money lent on property except at a ruinous rate of interest.’¹¹⁸ The validity of these claims is interrogated in closer detail in Chapter Two.

From a popular perspective, however, by interfering in the market and artificially controlling prices at a level below the ‘natural’ value, the government adopted the position of both

¹¹⁶ TNA RECO 1/644. Letter from the Memorial of the Incorporated Society of Law Agents in Scotland. January, 1918.

¹¹⁷ Courts (Emergency Powers) Bill, 1915. Clause 1 – Provisions as to Mortgagees in Possession. See also *HC Deb 21 July 1915 vol 73 cc1619-23*.

¹¹⁸ TNA RECO 1/644. Letter from St. Mungo Property Company Ltd., Glasgow. 3 October, 1917.

architect and saviour, a role which engendered significant public criticism. *The Spectator* noted the quandary that intervention had brought: ‘the political danger lies in giving too much power to uncontrolled Cabinet authority and in making the making the people rely more and more on the government for action in order to remedy conditions which can best be met through the exercise of private initiative and through the operation of economic laws.’¹¹⁹ It was argued that ‘people are made to believe that high prices are the result of artificial manipulations removable at will, and not an inevitable consequence of the world conditions brought about by the war: they clamour for stricter measures of control and for more price regulation.’¹²⁰ To an extent, then, this helped to create dissatisfaction at profiteering, which will be examined in greater detail later.

Of course, such criticisms and arguments by property owners and private enterprise tend to neglect the obvious: prior to governmental action, the private sector had proven reluctant to build housing for the working classes at prices which would be affordable. Furthermore, increasing populations in city centres meant they had an increasing demand with a decreasing addition of stock. There is little evidence to suggest that any improvement in the situation would have been found without the action that was taken, as the case studies of Liverpool and Glasgow emphasise. The attitudes of private enterprise are revealed in particular by a deputation of representatives of private enterprise in housing to Lord Rhondda on 22 May 1917. Mr M. Chervton Brown stated that, ‘We cannot deal with the poorest. They have always been an unmitigated nuisance and there will be no objection to the municipality

¹¹⁹ *The Spectator*, 23 January 1917, p. 692.

¹²⁰ Simon Litman, *Prices and price control in Great Britain and the United States During the World War* (New York, 1920), p. 160; See also I. Hilton, ‘The foundation of food policy’, *The Edinburgh Review*, July 1917, p. 50; A. Hurd, ‘Wages, Prices and Supplies – a vicious circle’, *Fortnightly Review*, January 1918, p. 45.

dealing with that section.’¹²¹ His comments are typical, with the summary of the meeting unsurprisingly concluding that, ‘Shortly, the view of the builders was that restricting legislation should be done away with, substantial loans at market rates granted to private builders, no restriction imposed on rents, and no further restriction given to municipalities than to private enterprise.’¹²²

Conscription

Whilst earlier discussion highlighted the increased leverage – both political and rhetorical – displayed during the war, this platform was afforded greater opportunity due to the specificity of its timing, and the protests and governmental response must be viewed in a wider context of prevailing political circumstances and concerns. Despite a tendency to focus on the introduction as an intellectual debate rather than a pragmatic political reality, even Adams and Poirier noted that, ‘The issue of compulsory service in virtually any form was politically dangerous... It did not become law until the Great War was eighteen months old.’¹²³ This timing was crucial. To understand the importance of these competing pressures, it is necessary to examine in greater detail the conflation of other factors at the time that agitation at the housing situation was escalating.

As 1915 progressed, the scale of the conflict – or at least a comprehension of the extended resources required – grew. The changing emphasis of the scale and industrial nature of the conflict had become increasingly apparent and was initially epitomised by the ‘Shell Crisis’

¹²¹ RECO 1/580. Summary of the proceedings of a deputation to Lord Rhondda on May 22nd 1917, of representatives of private enterprise in housing, p. 4. Brown was a past President of the National Federation of Property Owners/Ratepayers.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ R. J. Q. Adams and Philip Poirier, *The conscription controversy in Great Britain, 1900-18* (Basingstoke, 1987), p. 17.

of May 1915.¹²⁴ By the end of the summer, the allied offensives had demonstrated clearly the resource and manpower demands of the war would require some organisation or attention. Putting to one side for the moment the internal debate about the nature and extent of the introduction of compulsion, by August 1915 an enquiry in to the organisation of recruiting had been established by Asquith, and the War Policy Cabinet Committee was facing a shortfall of manpower and attempting to address it.¹²⁵ Even with the cabinet divided, David Lloyd George was arguing that, ‘every man and woman was bound to render the services that the State required of them, and which in the opinion of the State they could best render.’¹²⁶ Indeed, he wrote to his wife on 27 December 1915 that the, ‘P.M. & his gang trying to sneak out of their pledges. If they do I wash my hands of the poltroons & come out.’ He even threatened to resign unless all unmarried men were conscripted at once.¹²⁷

This highlights the important distinction between enlistment and state compulsion for war purposes. The inability to produce shells and munitions for the war at a sufficient rate was believed by some policy-makers to be partly a product of the enlistment of men during the initial voluntary recruitment phase. According to one author who had worked in the Labour Department at the Ministry of Munitions during the war, a total of 18.8 per cent of the workforce in iron and steel, 21.8 per cent of the mining industry, 19.5 per cent in the engineering trades, 16 per cent of small arms craftsmen, and 23.8 per cent of the explosives trade had left their employment to enter the military.¹²⁸ Even if we view the accuracy of these figures with a level of scepticism, they expose a prevailing view that the ability of the state to

¹²⁴ David French, ‘The Military Background to the “Shell Crisis” of May 1915’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2 (1979), 192-205.

¹²⁵ TNA CAB 37/134/23.

¹²⁶ TNA CAB 37/132/28.

¹²⁷ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Lloyd George: family letters, 1885-1936* (London, 1973), p. 180. It is noteworthy that Lloyd George’s obsession with intemperance, especially as a hindrance to productivity, coloured his approach to the housing question and industrial organisation in general. See pp. 176-177.

¹²⁸ Humbert Wolfe, *Labour supply and regulation* (London, 1923), p. 14.

wage industrial warfare had been compromised by the uncontrolled manpower requirements of the conflict. Attempts to increase output through this period thus generated their own problems.¹²⁹

Now consider this information as the background conditions for the rent protests. Whether or not we can argue with any certainty that conscription was an inevitability in the Autumn of 1915 – even as late as 15 September 1915 in the House of Commons, Liberals MPs were emphasising the Prime Minister's repeated opposition to conscription¹³⁰ - it does seem clear that an increased level of state coercion and organisation was an inevitability accepted by most of the cabinet. Disagreement was centred not on the necessity, but the form and direction. With the pending restriction of certain freedoms forthcoming, the maintenance of public order was accorded a new level of importance, and the goodwill capital expended by failing to act in the case of dissatisfaction at rents was politically untenable.

Stories of the eviction of wives and families of soldiers serving certainly did not help matters. As volunteerism declined, and compulsory service loomed, governmental intervention became more necessary for the protection of families. The narrative of sacrifice and bravery being stabbed in the back at home provided a strong rhetorical platform. In a debate on the 'Eviction of Soldiers' Wives' in the House of Commons on 23 February 1915, politicians such as the ILP MP William Anderson drew on examples of soldiers' families being evicted to highlight the betrayal.

A case occurred at Castle Bromwich, in Warwickshire. The wife was of a former-Guardsman who, when the War broke out, re-enlisted in the Dorsets. He was getting 17s. a week as an agricultural labourer. An eviction order was obtained. Ejectment proceedings were also taken against Frederick Tysoe, a labourer, now fighting in France, in respect of a cottage at Havershain. I will read the

¹²⁹ This is perhaps evidenced most clearly by the clashes between the Clyde Workers' Committee and the Ministry of Munitions, and detailed in Adrian Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 189.

¹³⁰ *HC Deb 15 September 1915 vol 74 cc51-133. 'Compulsory National Service'*

following report from the "Bucks Standard" of 13th February:—"Mrs. Tysoe, a young woman, who wept bitterly, said she had three little children, and her family would be shortly increased. She could not get any Voltage. Where am I to go?' she asked the magistrates pitifully. My husband is now in the trenches." An order was issued against her and she was ordered to clear out within twenty-eight days. Among the magistrates on the bench were three colonels, and this woman has actually six brothers serving with His Majesty's Forces. I take last of all, the case of a labourer, William West, who took proceedings at Dorchester for wrongful eviction under the Courts (Emergency Powers) Act. He had enlisted, and also with him a son nineteen years' old. The mother remained in the house with a daughter of seventeen, a boy of fourteen, a boy of eight, a girl of three, and a baby of fourteen months' old. She was evicted from her home. The husband took proceedings and appeared in court in khaki dress. Counsel for the defendant said, "I quite know that it is a most admirable thing that you are going to fight for us, and of course we appreciate it." The man was not quite satisfied with the appreciation, and he brought the case and was awarded £15 damages, for wrongful eviction, by the County Court.¹³¹

This narrative was powerful and potentially damaging for the government's calls for national unity at a time when increased central coordination and compulsion seemed necessary. The War Office was forced to respond to claims that 'some people have received notice to quit their homes for no other reason than that their sons have joined the Colours'.¹³² Such protest and pressure was not solely concentrated from the more radical Left. Liberal MP Alfred Yeo's speech on the raising of rents was typical:

I know there are in every part of this country good and bad landlords. Whilst I say that, I should welcome with joy the privilege of signing an order to-night to commit one or two of those that I know to the Tower of London. I warn the landlords in this House that their action in raising rents at a time when this country is engaged in a life and death struggle, when the noblest and best of her sons are giving their life's blood to defend hearth and home from German horrors, to defend their wives and children, and also the wives and children of the landlords, is wrong. Many of the landlords, in order to show their appreciation of the excellent work that the soldiers are doing in the trenches, have sent notices saying, in effect, "We are proud of you. You are fighting to keep us from the German invasion. To show our appreciation of what you are doing at the front, we have decided in your absence to raise your rent 1s. a week, or to turn your dependents into the street." I suggest to-night to the Government that not only should a strong word come from the Front Bench, but that a small measure should be brought in to make it less possible during the War that our gallant men and their wives and children should be worried and harassed by the landlord at this stage whilst the men are away from home. I also want to warn the House and the landlords that, in my opinion, this kind of thing is going to sow industrial discontent and unrest. It will not end whilst the War is on.¹³³

Councillor P. J. Dollan stated at a meeting of the Glasgow Corporation that there 'were

¹³¹ *HC Deb 23 February 1915 vol 70 cc232-44.*

¹³² *HC Deb 16 June 1915 vol 72 cc655-656.*

¹³³ *HC Deb 14 October 1915 vol 74 cc1566-82.*

property owners in Glasgow who had not been ashamed to evict the wives and children of men at the front, and, in one case he knew, to evict a wounded soldier, who was at home on furlough.’¹³⁴ The political necessity for intervention thus seems clear. Protest at rent prices and housing shortages was accorded a new level of importance when the actions there taken by those ‘Hun’ landlords and the ‘Profiteers’ directly undermined the sacrifice of those who had bravely volunteered to fight. The *Manchester Guardian* noted that, ‘The action of those Sheffield landlords who have raised their tenants’ rents in the munitions areas is said to be seriously affecting recruiting.’¹³⁵ This was perceived in particular to be a ‘great difficulty in the way of middle-class men, who could not enlist without having their families evicted and their furniture sold up.’¹³⁶ As Alfred Yeo succinctly put it, ‘many men would not recruit until they knew what kind of treatment the old woman was going to have from the landlord.’¹³⁷ If the housing crisis and the actions of landlords undermined the volunteers’ actions - as well as willingness to volunteer in the first place - fears of evictions or exploitation whilst the men were away from home serving after the introduction of conscription presented the government with a political quandary. Again – whether by design or not – the protests in 1915 coincided perfectly with a time where the government had little choice but to intervene. It is important to note that this difference placed the British in a different position to their allied counterparts. As Susan Grayzel has noted, ‘In contrast to either France or Germany, the existence of a volunteer, rather than a conscript, army in Britain had a significant impact upon the perception and kind of separation allowances granted. The British government viewed separation allowances as an aid in recruiting; with generous allowances, men could join up and feel confident that their families would not suffer any financial or material harm

¹³⁴ *The Scotsman*, 4 Feb 1915, p. 2.

¹³⁵ *The Manchester Guardian*, 17 October 1915, ‘The Rent Raisers’, p. 14.

¹³⁶ *The Manchester Guardian*, 17 November 1915, ‘Amendment of the Munitions Act’, p. 6.

¹³⁷ *The Manchester Guardian*, 26 November 1916, ‘The Raising of Rents’, p. 10.

due to their absence.’¹³⁸ It is important to remember in our discussions of the introduction of conscription that a demonstrable security at home was a political necessity; separation allowances needed to offer a level of financial security for the partners and families left behind in order to be successful, both as a recruiting tool and an ameliorate for discontent.

Areas with a high concentration of munitions work were also those least likely to have population density alleviated by the introduction of compulsion. This is in part due to the roles these industries played in the conflict, but is also a product of inefficient state organisation. The Chairman of the Badges Committee, Sir Mortimer Durant, reported to the Local Government Board in July 1916 that under the provisions of the Military Service Act a man whose certificate of exemption was withdrawn was not considered to be enlisted until after fourteen days, and in the majority of cases involving munitions, Admiralty, and other skilled workers there was a grace period of two months. ‘During this time a large number of the men obtained employment elsewhere, and, as a matter of fact, the number that the Army recruited was quite disproportionate to the number of those whose badges had been withdrawn.’¹³⁹ Addison, then working as an Undersecretary at the Ministry of Munitions, made a frustrated note in his diary on 17 May, 1916:

I had a talk with Macready and Auckland Geddes on the arrangements for recruiting the men we release from munition work. The recruiting officers at Gretna and elsewhere have been taking up the absurd position that they can only enlist men, whom we release, who are registered in their district. Seeing that this does not apply to more than 5 per cent. Of the men released there, and leaves the remaining 95 per cent. to float about the country anywhere, it is useless for us to try to draw up lists on that basis. Both Macready and Geddes agreed as to the absurdity of this arrangement, and undertook to try and fix up something that would be really effective. These two men are beginning to get something into shape in the recruiting organisation in place of the unholy muddle that has been so maddening hitherto.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Susan Grayzel, *Women and the First World War* (Harlow, 2002), p. 23. See also, Susan Pedersen, ‘Gender, welfare and citizenship in Britain during the Great War’, *American Historical Review*, 95 (1990), 983-1006.

¹³⁹ Bodleian Library, Oxford. MSS Addison, ‘Diaries, 1914-21’, A, d. 4., 26 July 1916.

¹⁴⁰ Christopher Addison, *Politics from within, 1911-1918, including some records of a great national effort: vol. 1* (London, 1924), pp. 196-7.

Whilst it is unclear where the numbers Addison cites come from, his comments reveal an interesting picture from inside the Ministry of Munitions. Workers moving from place to place in the country, a labour shortage, and a certain lack of control over the market, which runs somewhat contrary to any perception of a coercive wartime legislative framework being exerted on the populace. Instead, it suggests that even after the introduction of conscription, and even after it became clear that the complete protection of some industry and workers was untenable in the context of the growing military manpower demands of the conflict, the logistics of extracting workers from the areas most overpopulated with war industry meant that the fewest left the areas where there were most. This experience is borne out by the evidence presented from Glasgow and Liverpool of increasing housing shortages and overcrowding.

Timing and the specific developments of the war were thus crucial in provoking and shaping the forms of governmental action. The rent strikes in Glasgow took place in June 1915, and the Rent and Mortgage Interest Restriction Act followed in November 1915.¹⁴¹ With the offensive at full tilt, and the material and manpower demands of the conflict at the time at the centre of political and public life, the conditions presented those with grievances with possibly unprecedented leverage. As Iain McLean has commented, ‘settling the rent strikes was a matter of munitions policy, not housing policy.’¹⁴² More than simply munitions policy, when one considers the imminent introduction of compulsion at hitherto unprecedented levels, settling the rent strikes was a matter of *war* policy. Whether that was consciously exploited or not, the ramifications were significant for the formulation of British social

¹⁴¹ Whilst the Bill came in to force on 22 November 1915, its restrictions were enforced retrospectively from 4 August 1914.

¹⁴² Iain McLean, *The legend of Red Clydeside* (Edinburgh, 1983), p. 17.

housing policy from that point on. Housing histories which focus on the longer view of the development of state intervention therefore need to take the importance of these peculiar circumstances presented by the war in to account.

Political entitlement and fears of revolution

The discussion of the political impact of the rent strikes - and wider dissatisfaction at housing poor housing conditions in general – requires a greater investigation of the government’s awareness of the political situation and mentalities in general. In order to effectively address the hypothesis that the actions of the government were a response influenced in no small part by the fear – real or imagined - of an increasingly politically awakened working class, it is necessary to examine that possibility in greater detail. This argument has been put forward most effectively by Mark Swenarton, who has argued that, ‘The housing programme of 1919 was an insurance against revolution: its purpose was to ensure the survival of the status quo.’¹⁴³ To assess the veracity of this argument, we must examine in greater detail the extent to which the developments of the war – rent strikes and protests included – influenced governmental responses during and after the conflict. The question is, therefore, about the extent to which the experience of the war represented a great political awakening for the working classes – and that strikes and protests are evidence of the manifestation of that – or, on the contrary, to what extent such actions were a response to the conditions and demands of the war which, if ameliorated, would dissipate.

¹⁴³ Mark Swenarton, *Homes fit for heroes: the politics and architecture of early state housing in Britain* (Suffolk, 1981), p91.

It is certainly true that during and immediately after the war poor housing conditions were a source of great ill-feeling. In a report after the war entitled 'A survey of revolutionary feeling during the year 1919', the 'insufficient and bad housing accommodation' was listed second only to profiteering and high prices in a list of 'causes which contribute to revolutionary feeling in order of their importance'.¹⁴⁴ Planning for reconstruction also frequently stressed the need to address the crisis at the conflict's cessation. In the spring of 1918, for example, a 'Memorandum by the Housing Panel on the Emergency Problem' stated that, 'it is imperative that the Government should secure within the first year after the war the building of sufficient houses for the working classes to make up the deficiency caused by the cessation of building'.¹⁴⁵

And yet, the threat of significant domestic unrest did not appear to be critical. A number of reports from around the country compiled by Basil Home Thomson and the Special Branch of the Home Office attempted to report to the Cabinet the popular mood across the country. These reports frequently demonstrate the ways in which deplorable housing served as one of the principle issues engendering the most discontent in British society. As one report commented, 'agitators in [Glasgow] are making good use of the housing question to influence audiences to whom revolutionary teaching would not appeal.'¹⁴⁶ Reports note that the problem appeared to be noticeably acute in areas where industrial relocation had resulted in a sudden influx of working families. Similarly, there are repeated mentions of the impact of the relocation of industrial workers and their families for the war effort meaning that many were living in 'temporary' accommodation; for these families and areas, this added an urgency to their demand.¹⁴⁷ This supports the earlier findings of this thesis: the physical

¹⁴⁴ TNA CAB24/96/0062.

¹⁴⁵ TNA RECO 1/268.

¹⁴⁶ TNA CAB 24/88/0044.

¹⁴⁷ Alan Holmans, *Housing policy in Britain: a history* (London, 1987).

demands of the conflict, and the legislative impact on the markets bottlenecking industries and professions, meant that the strain was felt most in those centres of production, and the highest levels of discontent manifested there as a result.

Yet isolating housing as an individual force is problematic. Housing was a contributory factor amidst a number of other perceived grievances. Whilst the historiography epitomised by Swenarton argues that the threat of revolution precipitated the housing programme that followed the war, this places an encompassing emphasis or centrality on the relationship between the housing question and anti-governmental action that simply did not exist. Profiteering and high prices - whilst not indirectly linked to the housing question - were generally agreed by Thomson's agents to be of more significance in engendering potentially revolutionary discontent.¹⁴⁸ Restrictions on alcohol provision were often discussed as a key factor provoking discontent¹⁴⁹ – and this is examined in more detail in Chapter Five – and the prospect of significant unemployment occupied the minds of many.¹⁵⁰ As such, it is methodologically difficult to justify the contention that the housing crisis was the central issue in engendering revolutionary discontent in Britain, and the assumed counterfactual that without government intervention revolution was inevitable, or even probable. Whilst it is impossible to prove the latter, we can examine the perceived threat housing shortages posed to social stability and make assessments on its influence on policy from these fears, real or imagined. Close investigation of the multitude of factors which were perceived to engender discontent shows, however, that whilst it is clear that deplorable housing conditions were certainly one of the most politically important contemporary issues, they have to be viewed

¹⁴⁸ For reports on the relationship between profiteering and discontent, see: TNA CAB24/84/0090; TNA CAB24/85/0057; TNA CAB24/92/0071.

¹⁴⁹ See TNA CAB24/79/0018; TNA CAB24/71/0025; *The Times*, 16 June 1919. For a good recent secondary account, see James Nicholls, *The politics of alcohol* (Manchester, 2009).

¹⁵⁰ Richard Wall and Jay Winter, *The upheaval of war: family, work and welfare in Europe, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1988); Niall Ferguson, *The pity of war* (London, 1998), Ch14.

as one part of a wider, mutually informing conglomeration of concerns which contributed to a more general feeling of unrest. Additionally, the examination of the importance of the rent strikes and the effectiveness of the government's response highlights the importance of costs over conditions – the argument may therefore be more effectively represented if it was *rent* fit for heroes.

Such arguments about governmental intervention being primarily motivated by a fear of the population – whether those fears were real or imagined – also rely far too heavily on the brutalization thesis.¹⁵¹ Such analysis tends to conflate the so-called 'war experience' with the experience of the trenches, as Adrian Gregory has highlighted: 'In the long term, the cultural claim of the myth of war experience has triumphed in Britain, albeit in peculiar form. The "meaning" of the war has been defined by the view from the trench parapet.'¹⁵² Taking this in to account further problematizes the notion that the men returning from the trenches would fit neatly in to the wartime dissent regarding housing conditions. This is not least due to the fact that many of the primary dissenters highlighted had little to no experience of fighting, either because they were: too old – as many leading figures in 'Red Clydeside' were; they worked in a protected or reserved occupation – a figure that was disproportionately high compared to the national average when examining the regions that were ostensibly affected *most* by the industrial and material demands of the conflict; or because they were serving away from the front lines.

¹⁵¹ George Mosse, *Fallen soldiers: reshaping the memory of the World Wars* (New York, 1990). See also the excellent article by Jon Lawrence, 'Forging a peaceable kingdom: war, violence, and fear of brutalization in post-First World War Britain', *Journal of Modern History*, 75 (2003), 557-589.

¹⁵² Gregory, *The last Great War*, p. 293. Whilst it goes beyond the scope of this thesis to detail the multiplicity of service/military experiences, it is important that we consciously problematize any simplistic notion of the 'Front' when discussing experiences. See Daniel Todman, *The Great War: myth and memory* (London, 2005); Gary Sheffield and Daniel Todman, *Command and control on the Western Front: the British Army's experience, 1914-1918* (Staplehurst, 2004); Hew Strachan, *The First World War vol. 1: to arms* (Oxford, 2001).

Temporary accommodation

One further unforeseen element of the war which impacted housing conditions in Britain was the creation of large numbers of huts, or hutments. Both the Army and Navy created large numbers of huts around areas of military importance which received significant population influx as a result of recruiting and war efforts – for example as temporary barracks for training purposes. The BEF represented the largest force that could be created from the troops left at home, and accordingly quartered there: six divisions and a cavalry division – certainly no more than 250,000 men and of these many reservists would not have required permanent accommodation.¹⁵³ By the end of the war, Stevenson estimates the Army had 4.9 million men and the navy a further half a million.¹⁵⁴ Whilst many of these men served abroad, this rapid expansion of the armed forces required the hasty erection of significant supporting infrastructure. At the heart of this effort was the mass production of huts.¹⁵⁵

The Reconstruction Committee, and later the Ministry of Reconstruction, immediately identified these temporary buildings as a key part of post-war planning. In Feb 1917 they wrote that, ‘It is improbable that the programme of 300,000 cottages can be carried out and so many houses constructed and made fit for habitation during the first year after the termination of the war. Full use will have to be made of any army huts which may become available and a prior lien should be placed on this accommodation.’¹⁵⁶ Utilising the huts as temporary accommodation in the interim whilst a major housing programme was being

¹⁵³ Strachan, *The First World War*, p. 200.

¹⁵⁴ David Stevenson, *1914-1918: the history of the First World War* (London, 2004), p. 198.

¹⁵⁵ A new project has recently been started to investigate the Huts of the war most closely, and can be found at <http://www.greatwarhuts.org> [accessed 21 August 2017].

¹⁵⁶ RECO 1/472. ‘Organisation for the disposal of land and buildings’, 14 February 1917.

prepared is more problematic than it first seems, however: the government needed the land the huts were built on, and it needed the timber they were made of.

Regardless of if they were required as accommodation or to be knocked down, the Ministry of Reconstruction was intent on securing control of these small buildings at the conflict's conclusion. Initially, however, they were left frustrated. B. B. Cubitt, writing for the Army in early 1918, informed the Ministry that 'practically all hutments will be required on demobilization and in many cases for some considerable time after.'¹⁵⁷ After lengthy dialogue, with entreaties for their immediate release from Vaughan Nash and the Minister of Reconstruction, Cubitt wrote again in late October: 'I have looked into the question of the War Office hutments and I find that the position is still the same. It is quite impossible as yet to say what hutments might be made available for other purposes, but it is probable that a large proportion will be required by us [Army] for storage on demobilisation.'¹⁵⁸

This was a source of significant frustration for those planning reconstruction. The advisory committee for the disposal of government property, working under the Minister of Reconstruction, publicly disparaged the failure of internal organisation to work together towards the common goods of reconstruction: 'We have laid emphasis on this impasse with which we have been confronted because we feel most strongly that the State action ought to have put us in a position many months ago to devote our energies to our formidable task. Time is pressing and we deplore the fact that our attention has had to be so largely diverted to combating for the right to work.'¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ RECO 1/163. 'Disposal of surplus War Department hutments'. 9 February 1918.

¹⁵⁸ RECO 1/163. 'Disposal of surplus War Department hutments'. 29 October 1918.

¹⁵⁹ RECO 1/820. 'Disposal of War Office property after the war'.

Why, then, were these small timber dwellings as important to the Ministry of Reconstruction as they were? Although their potential as displacement buffers for returning soldiers was tempting, at least as important was the material they were made from. The crucial importance of timber shortages to the housing programme is closely examined in Chapter Three. The extensive use of this material in huts provided the government with a more obvious quandary than its provision in other areas, namely that, in order to utilise it to provide new accommodation, it was forced to remove a current source of accommodation. This is the same problem which limited the ability to successfully clear slum areas: to knock down and improve existing areas required somewhere for the displacement of the population currently resident, and in overcrowded conditions with a housing shortage, this did not exist.

The Ministry of Reconstruction remained fixated on the huts, writing that: ‘At an early stage we found it was most essential that special arrangements should be made with the Admiralty, the War Office and the Ministry of Munitions, so that these hutments should be placed at our disposal... for the erection of Artisans’ cottages’.¹⁶⁰ They further estimated that property with a value of in the region of half a million pounds would need to be appropriated for new purposes or sold. The large numbers of huts provided a problem, then, but also an opportunity. With timber one of the most pressing material shortages, potentially hindering the implementation of the housing programme, the state also held unprecedented control over the supplies of this material through the wide scale production of huts for war purposes. If this control could be wrested from the army, the supply of timber at economic rates would help to undercut the inflation caused by scarcity and mitigate one expensive element of the housing programme. Ultimately, it had a partial help: the usage of huts to supply timber in local areas helped to reduce the cost of houses slightly, with Addison’s houses in 1919

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

costing less than a thousand pounds, with the number in 1922 rising by approximately three hundred pounds.¹⁶¹

However, despite the opportunity that direct control of supply offered, demolishing timber huts to facilitate new building was not always easy. The opportunity for immediate, inexpensive accommodation was not lost on local organisations. The best example of this can be found in Liverpool, where the Knotty Ash huts inspired fierce debate between local groups – in particular the Labour Party Housing Association – and the Corporation. The Knotty Ash camp was located in the east of Liverpool, three and a half miles from the centre of town, and comprised of 430 huts sized 70' x 15'. Liverpool's Corporation seized an opportunity, with the Director of Housing – F. Badger – commenting that 'From a purely building point of view there are no difficulties converting the huts into temporary dwellings. There seems to be no doubt that all the buildings would be occupied thereby alleviating the very difficult situation existing in Liverpool at the present time.'¹⁶² By Christmas 1919, they were the 'temporary' homes of over 2,000 people, and remained so for a number of years after the war. Figure 7 (below) shows these repurposed huts in use in 1920.¹⁶³



Figure 7. Repurposed Knotty Ash Huts, 1920. Central Library Archives, Liverpool. 352 MIN/HOU. Report on Knotty Ash Huts, p. 157.

¹⁶¹ Burnett, *A social history of housing, 1815-1985*, p. 227.

¹⁶² Liverpool Central Library Archives. 352 MIN/HOU 1/6. Report on Knotty Ash Huts, p. 157.

¹⁶³ Liverpool Central Library Archives. 352 MIN/HOU 1/6. Knotty Ash Hut, 1920.

A similar debate occurred in Glasgow, where the Glasgow Labour Party Housing Association and influx of new Labour councillors agitated for the opportunity to purchase huts from the Surplus Property Disposal Board in order to convert them into accommodation. As a result, they were able to procure five hundred huts in Firpark Street which housed over two and a half thousand inhabitants until 1923.¹⁶⁴ Corporations also seized the opportunity to provide other essential services using the huts – tying up their vital timber away from the housing programme. For example, Glasgow added over a hundred beds to its hospital in Stobhill by acquiring former army huts.¹⁶⁵

The temporary solution huts offered must have frustrated Addison and the decision-makers immensely, but for local authorities and many local housing reformers, they offered an immediate improvement to the overcrowded conditions many were living under. Their employment as dwellings becomes particularly problematic given the shortages of timber detailed later in this thesis. Ultimately, despite the best efforts of some policy-makers in government, these hastily-erected army huts served as homes for some families for years after the war, serving as another peculiar legacy of the First World War on British housing history.

Conclusion

The impact of the First World War on housing conditions in Britain was myriad and complicated, but has at times been fantasised. Fixation on the ideological dimensions of the

¹⁶⁴ Mitchell Library, Glasgow. CI 3/61. Corporation Minutes, Apr 1919-Nov 1919, p. 2316.

¹⁶⁵ Mitchell Library, Glasgow. D-TC 7/11/7.

conflict – and its apparent manifestation in the politicisation of the population – has led to an underappreciation of the importance of physical changes. The war created substantial changes in industry, and in population in centres, and inspired a raft of new legislation for the conduct of the conflict. Closer examination of these policies shows that housing production was not consciously halted, but instead slipped to complete stagnation as a result of its competition with other, war-centric production. That same drive exacerbated conditions in many cities central to the production of war materials, and laid the groundwork for governmental action after the war.

These conditions combined to create a profound impact on housing. On its own, this is not a bold revelation. Yet while the obvious significance of the war is relatively well recognised by scholars of housing, the vital importance of its specific and peculiar impact on housing conditions has been left underappreciated. Closer investigation of these impacts help us to better understand the way in which the experience of the conflict altered the face of the housing problem. The conditions which created the Rent Act in 1915 are especially crucial, as is the government's response; not just because of the impact this legislation had on the post-war programme as a whole – which is explored in depth in the next chapter – but in helping to understand the perception of popular mentalities and the rationale for such drastic actions to ameliorate conditions. The First World War did not create a radicalized population which required a housing programme as a form of very public appeasement; its impact on housing conditions and the Addison Act in 1919 which attempted to address them is much more nuanced and complex. Understanding this helps us to understand the complex, nuance legislation which was furthered in response, and which is explored in detail in the rest of this thesis.

Chapter Two

Rent and Finance

In his 2014 work *All That is Solid*, Danny Dorling writes that, ‘When we talk about our housing and wealth, ultimately what we are talking about is our freedom. When a great disaster looms in housing so, potentially, does a disastrous loss of freedom. We become less free of fear of the future. We become less free in our ability to choose where we live, and less free than those in countries not suffering a housing crisis.’¹⁶⁶ Whilst the war was represented as the pursuit of liberty – the Memorial Plaque was, after all, inscribed with ‘He died for freedom and honour’ – the pursuit of freedom in 1915 was multifaceted, with different meanings for different groups. Freedom from overcrowding and ill-health; freedom from extortion; freedom from governmental interference. Danny Dorling is correct when he notes that housing provision and affordability is at the heart of freedom of existence in contemporary housing, yet history shows us that the pursuit of those freedoms has a long and difficult – and ultimately, unsuccessful – history.

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915. No piece of legislation has been more important for the history of the state provision of housing in Britain than the emergency response to housing protests and industrial action in the first years of the war, and its aftereffects on the market and attitudes coloured the governmental response and the necessity for the housing programme in 1919 more than any other factor. Despite this, the legislation has received far less attention than the protests which occasioned it: this chapter seeks to redress that balance by highlighting the centrality of the Rent Act to the whole reconstruction effort.

¹⁶⁶ Danny Dorling, *All that is solid: how the great housing disaster defines our times, and what we can do about it* (London, 2014), p. 1.

Before a more in-depth exploration on the importance of the 1915 Rent Act, it is worth taking a moment to emphasise why housing more generally is at the heart of the lived experience and why that matters – why Danny Dorling conflates access to housing with our freedom. Within the physical boundaries of the walls of the house we find the socially constructed and emotionally experienced home.¹⁶⁷ It is in the home that – for most workers, families, and individuals – the day starts and ends. The home contains loves, aspirations, successes and tragedies, and relativizes every experience: feelings about a workplace are affected by the experience of journeying to and from it; the experience of raising children is impacted by distance to family and friends;¹⁶⁸ the amount and difficulty of domestic work;¹⁶⁹ and the relationships experienced within the walls are deeply impacted by the space or proximity the house can afford them.¹⁷⁰ It is not within the scope of this thesis to undertake a full sociological investigation of the experience of ‘home’, yet it must be emphasised that the cost and form of housing impacted almost every level of human existence in 1915; whilst the First World War has assumed a dominating place in the popular memory, for many of the working-classes in particular, it should be remembered that the cost of living may well have often consumed more emotional and political energy than the demands of a national global conflict. In short, protests and agitation in 1915 about rent do not have to be read as a comment on the war, a lack of patriotism, or as evidence of an increasingly radicalised populace. The home and the closely associated cost and quality of life were at the centre of the human experience, and so it is just as likely that they were entirely about rent.

¹⁶⁷ Raymond N. Morris and John Moge, *The sociology of housing: studies at Berinsfield* (London, 1965).

¹⁶⁸ Alison Ravetz, *The place of home: English domestic environments, 1914-2000* (London, 1995); Peter Willmott and Michael Young, *Family and kinship in East London* (London, 1957).

¹⁶⁹ Ann Oakley, *The sociology of housework* (London, 1974).

¹⁷⁰ Alice Coleman, *Utopia on trial: vision and reality in planned housing* (London, 1985); Caroline Davidson, *A woman's work is never done: a history of housework in the British Isles, 1650-1950* (London, 1982).

Furthermore, this agitation did not appear out of nowhere and the steady decline of the building sector and a concurrent growth of rent agitation has been well documented throughout this thesis. The problem was clearly structural, as David Englander has shown. ‘The crisis of the Edwardian property market was’, he writes, ‘the product of imperialism and social reform reacting upon an archaic system of local finance that struck at small house property with disproportionate severity.’¹⁷¹ Similarly, Avner Offer has detailed the ways in which the collapse of the property market after 1905 created a decline in housing as an investment opportunity, further escalating the problem down the line.¹⁷² By the First World War, these structural issues had had sufficient time for growth. As other chapters explore in detail, the specific material and manpower demands of the conflict catalysed deterioration of market conditions and empowered proponents for change. Yet this acceleration should not detract from the fact that when agitation for governmental action regarding rent escalated in 1915, it was the result of years of systemic failure.

¹⁷¹ David Englander, *Landlord and tenant in urban Britain, 1838-1918* (Oxford, 1983), p. 140.

¹⁷² Avner Offer, *Property and politics, 1870-1914: landownership, law, ideology and urban development in England* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 264-279.

Section One: Rent

The Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915

Rent very quickly presented a significant problem for Britain after the declaration of war, especially regarding the production of munitions and foodstuffs. The Liberal MP for Edinburgh East, James Hogge, asked in the House of Commons whether emergency legislation was being contemplated to deal with increasing rents in April 1915, and was told that the Courts (Emergency Powers) Act of 1914 offered sufficient scope for intervention.¹⁷³ Asked later whether he thought the ‘competent authority’ of the court would have been a better solution, Walker Smith – the Housing Commissioner to the Scottish Local Government Board – said that ‘he did not think a Court would have satisfied the labour unrest in 1915’.¹⁷⁴ Across the aisle, the government’s inactivity occasioned more stern interrogation. Sir Gerald Hohler – Conservative MP for Chatham – utilised the narrative of the persecuted servicemen to highlight the injustice of rising rents in June 1915. He asked:

Whether, having regard to the fact that rents have been and are being raised upon the men in His Majesty's Forces, both at sea and upon land, their wives and widows, [the Prime Minister] will at once introduce a Bill to fix these rents at the amount payable at the outbreak of the War and, in cases in which the rent was inclusive of rates, to prevent the burden of the rates being cast upon these tenants, and to prevent any steps being taken to determine such tenancies so long as the original rent is paid until after the determination of the War, and further to provide for the repayment to such tenants of any increase of rent or any rates the burden of which has been cast upon them since the outbreak of the War?¹⁷⁵

Again, however, no promise of significant legislation was forthcoming. Certainly the ‘betrayal’ of soldiers played a central rhetorical narrative, and – as the first chapter has

¹⁷³ HC Deb 29 April 1915 vol 71 cc828-9.

¹⁷⁴ RECO 1/645. Committee on the Increase of Rent Act: Minutes of meetings 4-13. Memorable, evidence, correspondence and report.

¹⁷⁵ HC Deb 24 June 1915 vol 72 c1326.

discussed – the necessity to secure the affordability of the family home was a central precursor to the introduction of compulsion in 1916. However, a more immediate and tangible motivation was the production of munitions, and the threat which strike action or chronic lack of affordable housing posed to that agenda.¹⁷⁶ This was exposed when the Liberal MP for Linlithgowshire – John Pratt – asked the Minister of Munitions in October 1915 if his attention had been called to certain property-owners making extortionate increases in the rents of working-class houses; whether he was aware that considerable industrial unrest was threatened in consequence; and whether he had any powers under the Munitions Acts to deal with this matter? Lloyd-George's response highlights how concern about munitions production was beginning to stimulate legislative interference:

I have received many representations on this subject, and I am informed that the unpatriotic course adopted by certain house-landlords in taking advantage of the national need to extort increased rents in munition areas is aggravating the labour unrest in certain districts. I have, therefore, directed my officers in these localities to make immediate inquiry into the matter and report to me. I am not sure that the Munitions Act is applicable to the case, but should the allegations of an unjustified increase of rentals of munition workers owing to war conditions prove to be substantiated, the Government will not hesitate, if necessary, to ask Parliament for any powers required to deal with the situation.¹⁷⁷

Actually, at this stage, the government had already been hesitating for some time about asking parliament for the powers required to deal with the situation and they came not long after. A memorandum from the National Housing and Town Planning Council, prior to the Act being passed, commented that 'In discussing the question of the increase of rents in war time it is of vital importance that the fundamental difficulty should be recognised to be that of a shortage of supply – except in a very few districts – On Clydeside and Tyneside, in Sheffield, in the Birmingham district, as well as in the London area, a shortage of houses are

¹⁷⁶ Martin Dauntton, *Wealth and welfare: an economic and social history of Britain, 1851-1951* (Oxford, 2007), p. 428.

¹⁷⁷ HC Deb 13 October 1915 vol 74 cc1284-5.

to be found.¹⁷⁸ The real fundamental difficulty was in fact how this shortage combined with the nexus of war-related factors – impending compulsion, material shortages, munitions productions, and their relationship to strategic operations on the fronts – which caused a shortage to create a crisis. The Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act was passed on 25 November 1915 and fixed rent at the levels they existed at on 3 August 1914, as well as limiting the interest payable on mortgages in the same way. It was subsequently slightly amended by the Courts (Emergency Powers) Act, 1917, ss. 4, 5, and 7, and by the Increase of Rent, &c., Act, 1918, but stayed in place as originally intended in its basic form until the end of the war, and the six months after its conclusion.

Rising rents were one factor amongst a wider increase in the cost of living, all of which could contribute to political unrest. Rising food prices may, in particular, affect political mentalities and engender strike action or unrest; the price of bread was of critical importance in creating political unrest in the century before,¹⁷⁹ and the prohibitive cost and shortage of food was ultimately a major factor in ending the war for the central powers.¹⁸⁰ In Britain, then, why was rent so important – especially when we consider that increases were not unrelated to rising costs elsewhere? In the first instance, as the first chapter shows, complaints about rent were not necessarily new, they simply suddenly received a great deal more leverage than in previous years. But there is also something more: for people not starving, the threat of eviction presented a more immediate concern, and the potential loss of the sanctity of the

¹⁷⁸ RECO 1/645. Committee on the Increase of Rent Act: Minutes of meetings 4-13.

¹⁷⁹ Daniel Ziblatt, 'Does landholding inequality block democratization? A test of the "bread and democracy" thesis and the case of Prussia', *World Politics*, 60 (2008), 610-641; Torben Iversen, "Democracy and Capitalism," in Wittman, Donald and Barry Weingast (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Political Economy* (Oxford, 2006), p. 618.

¹⁸⁰ C. Paul Vincent, *The politics of hunger: the allied blockade of Germany, 1915-1919* (Ohio, 1985); Belinda J. Davis, *Home fires burning: food, politics, and everyday life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, 2000); Mary E. Cox, 'Hunger in war and peace: an analysis of the nutritional status of women and children in Germany, 1914-1924' (D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 2014).

home space and the security it offered would provoke action.¹⁸¹ Meals could be made to go further, whereas rent was more binary; either it could be paid, or it could not. Maud Pember Reeves had highlighted this sacrifice in 1913, noting that, ‘the poor man, having no expenditure other than food which can be cut down, is obliged, in order to pay one-third of this income in rent, to cut down food.’¹⁸² In the context of a general increase in the cost of living, therefore, rent was the first, and most pressing, concern. Those anxieties were not necessarily decoupled from worries about the cost of food or other factors, but – especially since cost-saving had often already occurred in other areas – they combined to find expression through rent as the first port of call.

A Glaswegian problem?

One of the peculiarities of housing in the First World War and the way in which history has remembered the rent crisis in 1915 is the near absolute primacy with which Glasgow has been accredited the protest and the ‘victory’ of the 1915 Act. Demonstrations in Glasgow certainly commanded national attention, and the ‘Red Clydeside’ of 1919 was lamented as a missed moment of revolutionary potential after the fact by key figures in the movement.¹⁸³ As Joseph Melling has commented, ‘Like so much else in the “Red Clydeside” era, the Glasgow rent strikes passed into the realm of contemporary legend before the ink was dry on the biographies of its leading lights. In the struggle to assert their claims over this valuable piece of political property, many accounts blurred the finer details of this complex

¹⁸¹ Waites, Bernard. ‘Moral economy in wartime’ in Liddle, Peter (ed.), *Home fires and foreign fields* (London, 1985).

¹⁸² Maud Pember Reeves, *Round about a pound a week* (London, 1913), p. 24.

¹⁸³ William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde* (London, 1936); David Kirkwood, *My life of revolt* (London, 1935); Emanuele Shinwell, *The Britain I want* (London, 1943).

movement'.¹⁸⁴ Just as in discussion of Britain as a whole, scholars have tended to exaggerate fears of the revolutionary potential of Glasgow in the immediate post-war period.¹⁸⁵ Instead of the war engendering politicization, the centrality of the lived experience of the home inflected the response to what were genuine, relatively sharp rent increases. A report in to unrest filed by Lord Hunter – a judge – and Professor W. R. Scott – a professor of political economy at the University of Glasgow – found that from May 1914, 34% of the rents sampled had risen by up to 5%, 14.6% by 5-10%, and 7.7% had risen by 10% or more.¹⁸⁶ They concluded that 'few increases in rent which were discovered to have been made up to November 1916 which were not justified by increased outgoings'.¹⁸⁷ Whilst this evidence questions whether accusations of widespread 'profiteering' amongst landlords were justified, it also highlights that the grievances had material foundation which was grounded in the rising cost of rent – exactly what was being protested. As a result, we must not allow the events of 1919 and the post-war discussion and deluge of memoirs to obscure the underlying causes of rent agitation across the country; rent demonstrably rose during the war, and the fixation of the response to that makes particular sense in the context of the physical and emotional primacy of the home space.

Rent was not a peculiarly Glaswegian problem. The *Forward* estimated that as many as four thousand workers went on strike in Glasgow in 1915,¹⁸⁸ yet they were part of fifteen thousand workers striking nationally, primarily in industrial areas.¹⁸⁹ Glasgow was joined by

¹⁸⁴ Joseph Melling, *Rent strikes: peoples' struggles for housing in West Scotland, 1890-1916* (Edinburgh, 1983). p. 112.

¹⁸⁵ See, for example, Ian R. Mitchell, *Clydeside: red, orange and green* (Edinburgh, 2010). This viewpoint does persist despite being convincingly debunked over 25 years ago by Iain McLean, *The legend of Red Clydeside* (Edinburgh, 1983).

¹⁸⁶ Mitchell Library, Glasgow. D-HE 1/1/21/1914-19.

¹⁸⁷ H.M.S.O., *Report of the Committee on Increase of Rent and Mortgage Restriction Act* (London, 1919).

¹⁸⁸ *The Forward*, 27 November 1915, p. 1.

¹⁸⁹ HC Deb 18 December 1915 vol 76 c447

Coventry and Woolwich in 1915,¹⁹⁰ as well as the industrial heartlands of Manchester and Newcastle.¹⁹¹ Sir Noel Kershaw later reported that an investigation of the Coventry Rent Strike amounted to this: ‘that the general body of tenants placed a notice in their windows that no rent collectors need apply. There was no stoppage of work so it was not a strike in that sense.’¹⁹² Depending on historic relations with rent, some areas had embryonic networks of protest already: rent increases in Leeds in 1913 and 1914, for example, had led to the formation of a Tenants’ Defence League to resist perceived exploitation by landlords there.¹⁹³ At times these protests had clear justification. The Stoke Heath Tenants Association complained that rents on municipal houses were too high. After investigation, it was discovered that ‘this was, in fact, the case. The rents were too high because the assessment was too high. The assessments were at once reduced and there was subsequently a reduction of 1/- or more in rents.’¹⁹⁴ Glasgow was at the forefront of the national narrative, and subsequent developments have further highlighted its role, but agitation and action surrounding rent in 1915 was a national concern which was especially pronounced in industrial centres.

Action was not completely confined to the cities, however. Even the idyllic model of the nation’s future housing, Letchworth, experienced rent strikes in 1915. John Payne noted that the agitation formed ‘part of a national concern that landlords were exploiting war conditions to increase rents’.¹⁹⁵ In Letchworth, the issue was complicated by an influx of Belgian

¹⁹⁰ Martin Dauntton (ed.), *Councillors and tenants: local authority housing in English cities, 1919-1939* (Leicester, 1984), p9.

¹⁹¹ *Newcastle Journal*, 3 June 1915, p. 1.

¹⁹² RECO 1/644. Committee on the Increase of Rent Act: minutes of meetings 1-3.

¹⁹³ Robert Finnigan, ‘Council housing in Leeds 1919-39’ in Dauntton, Martin (ed.), *Councillors and tenants in local authority housing in English cities 1919-1939* (Leicester, 1984).

¹⁹⁴ RECO 1/644. Committee on the Increase of Rent Act: minutes of meetings 1-3.

¹⁹⁵ John Payne, *Co-operation and conflict in the garden city: the Letchworth rent strike of 1915* (Baldock, 1982)

munitions workers to the K and L foundry, who were used by the landlord as evidence that tenants could afford the increased rents. Again, the influx of a new population combined with national agitation about increased rents and created local activism. Across the water in Ireland, a Town Tenants' League was formed in Sligo 'to protest against the raising of rents of artisans' houses and against the threatened eviction of several tenants in Sligo for a refusal to pay the increased rent demanded'.¹⁹⁶

Housing and rent in transnational perspective

This problem was not confined to the British state either; nations both belligerent and neutral were forced to adopt rent control measures.¹⁹⁷ Chapter Three explains this international housing crisis in some more detail by detailing the ways in which war-related shortages in material supplies and production squeezed the housing market across Europe.¹⁹⁸ France introduced wartime rent controls shortly after Britain, and was forced after the war to extend them just as Britain was.¹⁹⁹ Controls there persisted until well after the end of the war, and in some forms until after the end of the Second World War.²⁰⁰ Germany introduced rent restrictions during the war, comprehensive legislation for the protection of tenants, and a programme of 'homes for heroes' [*Kriegerheimstätten*] after the war's completion.²⁰¹ Across

¹⁹⁶ HC Deb 15 July 1915 vol 73 cc1008-9.

¹⁹⁷ Rent regulations were first introduced in Britain in 1915, but were quickly followed by much of Europe. See John W. Willis, 'Short history of rent control laws', *Cornell Law Review*, 36 (1950), 54-94.

¹⁹⁸ See Clemens Zimmermann (ed.), *European housing policy in comparative perspective* (Stuttgart, 1997).

¹⁹⁹ Charles Gide (ed.), *Effects of the war upon French economic life* (Oxford, 1923), pp. 144-148; 187-191.

²⁰⁰ Tyler Stovall, *Paris and the spirit of 1919: consumer struggles, transnationalism, and revolution* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 235; Bertrand de Jouvenel, 'No vacancies' in Hayek, F.A. et al., *Verdict on rent control: essays on the economic consequences of political action to restrict rent in five countries* (London, 1972), 33-41. [Essay first printed 1948]

²⁰¹ Zimmermann, p. 1; Günther Schulz, *Wohnungspolitik im Sozialstaat: deutsche und europäische Lösungen, 1918-1960* (Dusseldorf, 1993). My deepest thanks to Jasper Theodor Kauth for helpful discussion. See also Konstantin A. Kholodilin, 'War, housing rents, and free market: Berlin's rental housing during World War I', *European Review of Economic History*, 20 (2016), 322-344.

the Atlantic, the struggles of major cities highlighted that even without war on its doorstep, unregulated construction in the age of twentieth century industry appeared destined to fail elements of society.²⁰²

Aside from the major belligerents, who all controlled rent in various ways, the war prompted rent control in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Croatia, The Netherlands, and Switzerland in 1916.²⁰³ After the war, Spain, Poland, Belgium, and Luxembourg were all forced to adopt rent control measures. They utilized different strategies for its remedy, but as the guns of the Western Front fell silent in 1918, the Spanish Flu was not the only crisis to cross borders in Europe; housing shortages and the aftereffects of wartime emergency measures afflicted much of Europe.²⁰⁴

Tenants and the politics of repeal

This highlights that the protests of tenants, in Britain and abroad, were not irrational or primarily ideological: more often than not, they had a point. Rent *was* rising rapidly, although the reasons for these increases were far more complex than the profiteering of landlords, as they have sometimes been represented to be. If the primary goal of the Rent Act in 1915 was to prevent further agitation and to secure the continued productivity of regions critical to the war industry, it was broadly successful. Hayes Fisher reported that from the passing of the

²⁰² Robert M. Fogelson, *The great rent wars: New York, 1917-1929* (New Haven, 2013).

²⁰³ Eli F. Heckscher et al., *Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland in the world war* (New Haven, 1930). See also Matthijs Korevaar, '500 Years of Housing Rents in European Cities', University of Maastricht, 2016 (unpublished MSc thesis).

²⁰⁴ More transnational history, especially of rent and its effect on the market, would be of huge benefit to the scholarship. See Colin G. Pooley (ed.), *Housing strategies in Europe, 1880-1930* (Leicester, 1992). See also the very economically-minded collection published by the Institute of Economic Affairs: Hayek, F.A. et al., *Verdict on rent control: essays on the economic consequences of political action to restrict rent in five countries* (London, 1972), 33-41.

Act until the end of the war, there were over 100 complaints relating to the ejectments of tenants, and representations were received from local authorities such as Watford and Wembley Urban District Councils, and multiple trade unions and tenants' federations.²⁰⁵ Yet whilst the frequently tempestuous relationship between landlords and tenants did not dissipate entirely, it did at least diminish to a relative tepidity when compared to the summer of 1915. In short, the Act prevented the crisis it was meant to; in doing so, it created an inevitable new crisis to be dealt with in the future. Beginning to approach this new problem, the Increase of Rent Subcommittee solicited the views of a broad range of tenants and tenants' organisations, reporting back that: 'The views expressed to us were very various. All were against restriction of rents being altogether removed at the expiration of the present Acts... all were agreed in principle that the good landlord should be justly treated. There the unanimity broke down.'²⁰⁶ Such a multiplicity of views is reflective of a concomitant multiplicity of national housing conditions and accommodation costs.

The most belligerent of those advocating for tenants' rights – including the War Emergency Workers' National Committee and the Labour Housing Association – 'considered that the restriction of rents should be continued until the shortage of houses was entirely made good. By "shortage" they meant, not the shortage caused by the war, nor the shortage in supply in relation to demand, but the number of houses necessary to replace all slums and to provide at least one room for every two of the population.'²⁰⁷ A frequent theme within this thesis thus emerges again: the working-class man should not be forced to pay for, or suffer as a result of, the costs of the war, and this was utilised to full effect. Dan Rider – the Hon. Secretary of the War Rents League – wrote to the government that, 'Any increase of rent whatever will be

²⁰⁵ HC Deb 17 April 1918 vol 105 cc491-532.

²⁰⁶ RECO 1/542. Report of the Committee on the Increase of Rent and Mortgage Restriction Act.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

greatly resisted in as much as the majority of houses are sadly out of repair and judged by the pre-war standard are not worth the rents now charged for them. Housing being a national necessity, and the shortage being accentuated solely through the exigencies of the war, any increase owing to scarcity will be strenuously opposed as an attempt of a section of the community to profit at the expense of the workers, resulting in widespread discontent and serious upheavals of extreme gravity.’²⁰⁸ Of course, the widespread discontent was in no small part fomented by the War Rents League themselves, who engaged in assisting tenants in Greater London in particular to organise themselves against what they termed ‘the unjustifiable attempt of a number of house-owners to take advantage of war conditions by raising rents’.²⁰⁹

The government was thus forced to take more than pure economic pragmatism into account when deciding whether to allow the Act to lapse at the end of six months after the termination of the war. Trade union officials warned that ‘a sudden and substantial increase in rents would mean serious discontent and industrial unrest’, and were ‘emphatic that no increase whatever should be allowed to owners of houses which did not come up to a proper minimum standard of habitability; and in particular to owners of slum houses which were only permitted to be inhabited because of the present famine of accommodation.’²¹⁰ In ideal conditions, the government would certainly have allowed the Act to lapse at the end of the war, as the Committee on the Increase of Rent and Mortgage Restrictions Act recommended:

The final solution of the housing question, so far as the working classes are concerned, is that wages should be sufficient to enable workers to pay economic (or “commercial”) rents for suitable houses. It is an unsound policy to subsidise all houses because some tenants are unable to pay an economic rent.

²⁰⁸ RECO 1/645. Suggestions from Dan Rider, Hon. Sec of the War Rents League.

²⁰⁹ RECO 1/646. Evidence of Mr. Steele, War Rents League.

²¹⁰ RECO 1/542. Report of the Committee on Increase of Rent and Mortgage Restriction Act.

Assistance should be given to those only who, for good reasons, are unable to pay for proper housing, and it is in the interests of the State that the numbers of these should be reduced to a minimum.²¹¹

This quotation demonstrates the constantly prevailing desire of the Ministry of Reconstruction – which reflected the Cabinet and government more broadly – that at the conclusion of the conflict, the market situation which preceded the war and was significantly exacerbated by the Rent Act, 1915, should be ‘made good’, and with more normal market conditions restored, governmental interference would be minimally required in the future. Unfortunately for them, the removal of restrictions did not appear to be tenable in 1918. In their final report, the Subcommittee concluded:

We are unanimously of the opinion that it would be imprudent to remove all restrictions on rent at the expiration of the present Acts, six months after the termination of the War. The Act was passed because the shortage of houses was such that the owners were in a position, if they so determined, to charge scarcity rent. There is now a far greater shortage of houses than at the date of the passing of the Act, and while this continues the risk of excessive or monopoly rents being charged is correspondingly greater.²¹²

The Rent Act therefore represented the biggest obstacle to the smooth extrication of the government from the housing market. William Wallace wrote in an internal memorandum that, ‘On the one hand, it is essential that if housing is to be continued on an economic basis after the war there should be no large gap between the rents of existing houses and of new ones... On the other hand, any large increase in existing rents will lead to serious agitation and political unrest.’²¹³

Again, this is not to suggest that the British populace was politically radicalised, and that agitation would lead to revolution, Bolshevism, or wider unrest. Yet in the climate of

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² H.M.S.O., *Report of the Committee on the Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915* (London, 1919).

²¹³ RECO 1/589. Memorandum on Rents After the War by William Wallace.

heightened industrial organisation, and at the end of a major war, disruption was better avoided if at all possible. James Steele of the Property Owners' and Factors' Association in Glasgow took a relatively blasé approach to this potential discontent, and suggested the Act should be allowed to lapse immediately. He thought this 'would cause no trouble with 90% of tenants and possible serious trouble with the remaining 10%... he admitted that it might lead to industrial unrest with this small section of 10% but he thought this must be faced. He considered that the trouble in 1915 arose not so much from an increase in rent being demanded but from several increases being made in a short period. Although the cumulative amount was not great it was these continual pin-pricks which caused the irritation.'²¹⁴ Other organisations tended to regard the potential discontent more practically. Messrs. Deakin and Leeson from the Birmingham Property Owners' Association, when asked if the Act should be simply allowed to expire and rents allowed to rise according to supply and demand, responded: 'From the standpoint of equity: Yes. In the interests of housing after the war: Yes. But in the larger interests of the country: No.'²¹⁵

The War Rents League, in its typical fashion, emphasised that 'profiteering landlords who resent this legislation are anxiously waiting to have their revenge', and traded on the soldier hero narrative heavily: 'Thousands of men returning from the Front will find themselves turned out of the homes they have fought for by people who have had remunerative jobs in munitions works and who have been able to accumulate savings whilst the soldier, the man who has borne the heat and burden of the day, has been granted a comparative pittance. That large uncomplaining body of citizens also who have been seriously affected by the war will be at the mercy of those who have made a good thing out of it.'²¹⁶ Yet whilst the

²¹⁴ RECO 1/645. Minutes of the 5th meeting, 17 September 1918.

²¹⁵ RECO 1/645. Minutes of the 6th meeting, 18 September 1918.

²¹⁶ RECO 1/645. Suggestions from Dan Rider, Sec. of the War Rents League.

representation of the landlord as a profiteer desperate to enact their ‘revenge’ was a popular and easily-constructed narrative, there is little evidence to support that position in their delegations to the government. Property Owners’ Associations were opposed to the Act, yet the majority accepted the necessity for its continuation in some form and levied for an amendment to the workings of the Act – not its removal entirely.

A fair price? Higher wages and rent affordability

Those amendments, which would enable a controlled rise in the level of rent permitted to be charged from pre-war levels, are not necessarily evidence of any sort of greed. To look at it from the landlord’s perspective instead of the tenant’s, there did appear to be a number of reasons that rent should be allowed to rise. Yet raising rent would be useless if wages did not grow at the same time – so first, it is necessary to examine if the higher wages of workers did indeed mean that a higher rent could be easily met and justified on those grounds.²¹⁷

The wages in the building trades had certainly risen significantly, despite (or perhaps, because of) building work slowing drastically, as the first chapter has shown. By January 1918, the increase of wages in London were reported as growing from pre-war levels as such:

Labourers 56%	Plasterers 38%
Bricklayers 45%	Plumbers 43%
Stonemasons 22%	Painters 59%. ²¹⁸
Carpenters and Joiners 38%	

²¹⁷ It should be noted that this is again trading heavily on the male breadwinner model discussed earlier in Chapter One, and again in Chapter Four.

²¹⁸ *The Builder*, 4 January 1918.

Nationally, according to the Board of Trade's *Statistical Abstract for the United Kingdom*, wages had risen approximately 9% in the decade preceding the war (Figure 8):

1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913
100	100	102	105	105	103	104	104	106	109

Figure 8. *Wages in the U.K., where 1904 is taken to be 100. H.M.S.O., Statistical abstract for the United Kingdom, vol. 4 (London, 1913).*

Each January, the *Labour Gazette* reported the number of workpeople whose rates of wages had changed across the nation²¹⁹ (Figure 9):

1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919
960,000	3,470,000	3,593,000	5,029,000	5,998,000	5,647,000

Figure 9. *Number of workpeople whose rate of wages had changed, 1914-1919.*

This consistent rise in wages is not surprising. What is more notable, however, is when we use those figures to calculate the total net increase in the weekly wages of those affected (Figure 10):

YEAR	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919
TOTAL	£13,000	£678,000	£637,000	£2,307,000	£2,988,000	£2,111,000
PER PERSON	0s.3d.	3s.11d.	3s.6d.	9s.2d.	9s.11½d.	7s.6d.

Figure 10. *Total increase per person of weekly wages, 1914-1919.*

²¹⁹ Calculated using multiple data from *The Labour Gazette, 1915-1920*.

What this demonstrates is that the rise in wages at the start of the war stayed relatively consistent alongside the rising price of living. This began to change in 1915 – which is commensurate with what we know about the emphasis on industrial productivity from 1915 onwards – and by the end of the war net wages, decoupled from a fixed rent, had grown significantly. Moreover, this trend continued after the war, as Ian Gazeley has demonstrated, noting that, ‘Despite the enduring description of the interwar years as a period of hardship and suffering, average real earnings grew by almost 20%.’²²⁰

At times, this presented an opportunity to vilify the working classes. In an letter on behalf of the Liverpool and District Property Owners’ Association in a local newspaper, W. O. Thomas painted tenants ‘reckless extravagance’ in a harsh light:

It is a well known fact that wages generally throughout the country have enormously increased. We who collect fair rents have a fair idea of how the money is spent. Pianos, pianolas, harmoniums, gramophones and extravagances of all descriptions are to be met with everywhere. The people have so much money that they do not know how to use it. Many of them are recklessly extravagant. Nothing shows this better than the number of clothing shops, &c., which have lately sprung up in working-class districts. Since the war began dozens of Jewish clothing shops have been opened, and all appear to be in a flourishing state. The Jew has an exceptional knowledge of where trade is to be done. Beyond doubt the working classes are well able to pay an increased rent.²²¹

This position was echoed by others. In 1918, one property owner wrote to the Ministry that, ‘Abundant proof has come from all directions showing that arbitrary and indiscriminate rent restriction was neither just, nor necessary. It has set up as much or more wrong than it righted, and has encouraged a lax code of morality by inducing the breakage of free and admittedly fair arrangements, and creating habits or tendencies to improvidence and extravagance.’²²² Certainly, Thomas represents one end of the spectrum, impressively

²²⁰ Ian Gazeley, ‘Income and living standards, 1870-2010’, in Floud, Roderick, Jane Humphries, and Paul Johnson (eds.), *The Cambridge economic history of modern Britain* (Cambridge, 2014), 151-181, p. 152.

²²¹ *Liverpool Daily Courier*, 12 January 1918, p. 6. ‘Tenants’ Reckless Extravagance’

²²² RECO 1/646. Memorandum by W. B.

managing to incorporate his anti-Semitism in to his condemnation of the apparently emerging eclectic musical tastes of the working classes, but his diatribe does represent a property owners' viewpoint that if the war brought higher wages, it is not unreasonable that it should occasion higher rents. The Increase of Rent Restriction Subcommittee investigated the claim. Conscious of the sacrifice of soldiers – and especially the bad feeling which eviction of wives or widows of servicemen occasioned publicly – they noted that 'in those cases in which the heads of families are serving their country, the increase of rents of their homes is not a course which will commend itself to landlords with a due sense of obligation to the soldiers of this country.'²²³ For munitions workers, the sense of national service was similarly stressed. They concluded that in most cases where higher wages were being earned and the members of the family are all at home, the increased wage was mostly reflective of greater exertion and longer working hours than in normal times.²²⁴ 'For example', they wrote, 'workmen in munitions factories on Tyneside are working 14 hours a day, and in many cases 7 days a week... the endeavour of the property owner as such, to secure higher rents on the ground that capacity of the workmen to pay is greater now than before the war, will inevitably produce a feeling of anger amongst the workmen themselves against what they will regard as an endeavour to levy tribute on their greater "efforts and sacrifices" in the production of munitions – efforts and sacrifices which mean in many cases that they are working almost to the limit of physical exhaustion.'²²⁵

Wages had risen but had done so as a result of large-scale collective and individual efforts. Compelling workers to put in longer hours to generate greater war productivity did not mean that taking those overtime wages for higher rents would, understandably, been poorly

²²³ RECO 1/645. Memorandum by William Wallace.

²²⁴ They were certainly correct. For comprehensive data around working hours, see Arthur Bowley, *Prices and wages in the United Kingdom* (Oxford, 1921), p. 105.

²²⁵ RECO 1/645. Memorandum by William Wallace.

received. The increasing cost of materials and general scarcity had also ensured that despite rent staying low, the cost of living in general had risen; to spend more on rent would thus potentially leave workers worse off than they were before.²²⁶ That this penalised property owners unfairly was not, frankly, the tenants' concern.

Repair costs

If we discount that higher wages automatically meant that higher rents could – and therefore should – be paid, and work on the assumption that munitions workers were not, in fact, spending lavishly on ornate musical instruments, then landlords had to find a justification for increasing rents elsewhere. The principal complaint – and the most justified one – was that despite the Act fixing rent at pre-war levels, the cost of every other aspect of property maintenance drastically increased and this burden must therefore necessarily fall on the landlord. As the Dundee Landlords' and House Factors' Association wrote to the Ministry in 1917, 'while Owners are bound by this Act to maintain the pre-war standard of rent, not only have wages of tradesmen employed in the repair of property advanced to an alarming extent, but materials have risen in price not less than 100% in some cases, and in some cases to 400%. As a consequence, Proprietors are compelled to restrict the amount of repairs as much as possible, but yet the result is that the restricted repairs are costing more than the normal amounts did in pre-war times.'²²⁷

²²⁶ See Simon Litman, *Prices and price control in Great Britain and the United States during the world war* (Oxford, 1920).

²²⁷ RECO 1/483. Memorial by the Dundee Landlords' and House Factors' Association, 22 December 1917.

Rent and Finance

TRADE	1914 INCREASE ON 1909	1917 INCREASE ON 1914	1918 INCREASE ON 1917	TOTAL INCREASE 1909- 1918
BRICKLAYER	11.2%	34.5%	32.5%	98.3%
BLINDMAKER AND GLAZIER	22%	67.25%	127%	363%
CARPENTER	36.5%	78.6%	30%	216.5%
PAINTER	40%	55.5%	21.5%	164%
PLUMBER	32.3%	48%	33.75%	162%

Figure 11. Increase in the cost of the principal materials used in the upkeep of, and minor alterations to, London house property from 1909-18. RECO 1/645.

In their Report, the Committee on the Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act highlighted that ‘all the property owners emphasised the great increase in cost of repairs, and in management generally.’²²⁸ The Scottish Housing Commission, who reported in 1917, placed the increase in the cost of building materials during the war as 90% for bricks, 180% for cement, and 200% for timber.²²⁹ As Chapter Three demonstrates in greater detail, by the time of publication those numbers were conservative at best. For London specifically, the Ministry collected closer information on increasing costs of maintenance (Figure 11 above).

In arguing for the ability to increase rent in order to maintain properties, landlords were therefore on more solid ground, and this was recognised by the committee investigating the continuation or repeal of the Act: ‘It is a truism that postponed repairs eventually cost more... we have no doubt that owners have suffered hardship from the fact that while their outgoings

²²⁸ H.M.S.O., *Report of the Committee on the Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915* (London, 1919).

²²⁹ Scottish Housing commission, 1917. Major Para 1969.

were steadily increasing their rents were kept stationary.’²³⁰ While industrial unrest and tenant agitation and strike action have received more historical attention, it must not be forgotten that the property owning classes were becoming increasingly hostile in their interactions with a government which had passed legislation that strictly limited their earnings and, in many cases, was costing them money.

Property owners and landlords

‘The effect of the Act upon property is in the circumstances of the present time very unfortunate for the Owners thereof... it has penalised the majority of property owners for the sins of a few of them’,²³¹ James Wright – former President of the National Federation of Building Trades Employers – wrote to the Ministry in 1918. His characterisation of the persecution owners felt is typical. The Aberdeen Proprietors’ & Factors’ Association, writing to the Secretary for Scotland, stated that it would be ‘wanting in candour if it did not earnestly express protest against the way in which an indispensable occupation has been treated. A roof over the head of the working man is as indispensable as the food he requires.’²³²

It was certainly poor fortune for property owners that rent restriction suspended their ability to generate additional revenue whilst the growth of other industries continued relatively unchecked. Considering this misfortune, however, they were often surprisingly understanding. The Subcommittee on the Increase of Rent and Mortgage Restriction Act

²³⁰ H.M.S.O., *Report of the Committee on the Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915* (London, 1919).

²³¹ RECO 1/645. Memorandum of evidence submitted on behalf of the National Federation of Building Trades Employers of Great Britain and Ireland, by James Wright.

²³² RECO 1/540. Memorandum for the Secretary of Scotland by the Aberdeen Proprietors’ & Factors’ Association in reference to the Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915.

interviewed and received delegations from a large number of property owners' associations from across the country, and concluded that, 'All of them are in favour of the Act coming to an end as soon as possible, but all of them recognise that *it may be necessary to continue it...* the opinion is unanimous that it should not be continued in its present form.'²³³ In fact, at a meeting in Sheffield in 1914, the United Kingdom Federation of Property Owners and Ratepayers Associations had unanimously expressed its disapproval of any attempt, on either the part of the mortgagees or the landlords, to 'gain any benefit or advantage from the abnormal conditions arising out of the War and will gladly co-operate with the Government in preventing them so doing.'²³⁴ Such apparent co-operation later helped to add to the narrative of victimhood of the responsible property owner.

Stories of their persecution stretched the bounds of sympathy, however. The Manchester and Salford Property Owners' Association furnished the Ministry with a great number of cases to emphasise the personal hardships owners were facing. These included Cornelius Briggs, a 75 year-old man: the restriction of rent on his 30 cottages caused his income to be 'greatly reduced' and left him unable to meet 'the great cost of upkeep and his personal maintenance.'²³⁵ In cases where the owner was of lesser means the case for hardship was more convincing, such as with Mary Gratrix – a widow with one property in Beswick, Manchester – who was forced to reslate her cottage and, being unable to raise the rent, was now 'actually poor'.²³⁶ The same organisation, however, claimed that, 'Rents were ridiculously low at the outbreak of the war', and told the government that they 'were not

²³³ RECO 1/645. Summary of the replies of property owners' associations. My emphasis.

²³⁴ RECO 1/645. Memorandum of the National Housing and Town Planning council on the Increase of Rents in War Time.

²³⁵ RECO 1/644. Memorandum of the Manchester, Salford and Counties Property Owners' Association, 3 August 1918.

²³⁶ Ibid.

afraid of the calling in of mortgages at the expiration of the Act'.²³⁷ Either the situation in Lancashire was markedly different from industrialised areas elsewhere in the country – and the work of historians such as Charlotte Wildman would suggest that it may have been peculiar but was not altogether atypical in these respects – or the property owners there were less reasonable.²³⁸

In general, however, the organisations representing property owners tended to accept the necessity for the Act to continue for a greater period of time, recognising that immediate repeal was not likely for all the reasons detailed earlier in this chapter. The London Association of Property Owners proposed a gradual increase of rent, suggesting that an increase of 10% on standard rents should be permitted immediately, and during the second year, a further 10%. They also advocated that mortgage interest should be permitted to be increased ½% in each of these years with a maximum of 6%. The Manchester and Hull associations urged for an immediate increase of 25% on gross rents, but all three recommended a continued restriction of mortgagee's power to call in their mortgages.²³⁹

Ultimately their entreaties had some effect. The Subcommittee on the Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act recommended that:

The present Acts should be continued with modifications for a period of three years from the termination of the war (that is to say, should be extended for a period of 2½ years). Owners should be entitled to increase their rent, at the end of six months after the termination of the war, by an amount not exceeding 10 per cent. of the rents exclusive of rates. At the end of the expiration of another twelve months they should be entitled to increase their rents further by an amount not exceeding 15 per cent. of the present rents, upon obtaining a certificate from

²³⁷ RECO 1/645. Minutes of the 5th meeting, 17 September 1918.

²³⁸ Charlotte Wildman, *Urban redevelopment and modernity in Liverpool and Manchester, 1918-1939* (London, 2016).

²³⁹ RECO 1/645. Summary of the replies of Property Owners' Associations, July 1918.

the Local Authority to the effect that the house in respect of which the increase in rent is contemplated is, at the time of the certificate, in reasonable tenantable repair and condition.²⁴⁰

In addition, they recommended that mortgagees should be entitled to an increase not exceeding ½% at the end of six months following the termination of the war, and at the end of another twelve months a further amount not exceeding ½%, up to a maximum of 5%. For property owners, it symbolised a partial recognition of hardships they have suffered. However, a raise of 10% was barely a small step towards repairing a hostile relationship between the state and private enterprise, and – given the rapidly growing cost of repairs and public vilification of the profiteering landlords – was probably the least they deserved.

Cohabiting

Aside from the increased cost of repairs, property owners had their own cause for frustration with tenants. The first chapter has detailed the specific ways in which population shifts due to industrial relocation caused specific tensions in population, especially in munitions areas. What closer investigation of the effects of the Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915, shows is that the whilst the number of houses did not increase, the number of households did, specifically due to sub-letting.

Sub-letting, which was unregulated and mostly ad-hoc, allowed existing tenants to generate revenue from the influx of population and munitions workers, whilst also allowing that rent to be generated exclusive of the restrictions which affected the real landlords.²⁴¹ The

²⁴⁰ H.M.S.O., *Report of the Committee on the Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915* (London, 1919), p. 8.

²⁴¹ This signified regression, with multiple occupancy an evil more commonly associated with the past. See, for example, James H. Treble, 'Liverpool working-class housing, 1801-51 in Chapman, Stanley D. (ed.), *The history of working-class housing* (Newton Abbot, 1971), 165-221, p. 169.

Subcommittee's Report noted that, 'since the passing of the Act, houses have been sub-let, partially let as unfurnished lodgings, or been used for the accommodation of boarders. Sub-letting of houses under the Act should be unlawful.'²⁴² This comment – made in 1918 – highlights how for the duration of the war sub-letting had legally persisted throughout the war. The *Manchester Dispatch* represented the sub-letters as 'The New Rent Profiteers':

The Rents Act of 1915, and the amendment of 1918, were passed to prevent profiteering in house rents. For a time they succeeded, but the law of supply and demand has again prevailed, and it is doubtful if profiteering in rents was ever more rampant than it is to-day. The big difference between November 1915 and the present is that the personnel of the profiteers has changed. Three years ago it was suggested that unscrupulous property owners were taking advantage of the scarcity of houses to exact exorbitant rents. To-day most of the profiteering is done by those people who let in apartments. In the large industrial centres of Yorkshire and Lancashire especially it is evident. There are hundreds of people in the big munitions centres who are paying from 6s. to 7s. a week for two rooms in a house the weekly rent for which is fixed by the Act of 1915 at 6s. 6d. These people are helpless. Their work renders it essential that they shall live in a certain district. There are no houses to be had; competition for rooms is keen, and they must either pay the amount demanded or leave the rooms for those who will.²⁴³

Sub-letting presented a problem for two main reasons: it operated unregulated in a broken market which had otherwise been artificially set at pre-war levels, and it fiscally incentivised overcrowding when the work of local authorities in the decade before the war had begun the work of breaking up these conditions. It understandably frustrated landlords a great deal. In a letter to *The Times*, a firm of estate agents in the Midlands urged that sub-letting should constitute legal grounds for the redetermination of the tenancy, pointing out that:

'1. The owner may neither sell the house nor raise the rent; 2. The tenant obtains a handsome profit by letting at "profiteering" rates; 3. The houses suffer increased wear and tear; and 4. The consequent additional cost of repairs falls entirely upon the owner.'²⁴⁴

²⁴² H.M.S.O., *Report of the Committee on the Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915* (London, 1919).

²⁴³ *The Manchester Dispatch*, 'Sub-letting at the landlord's expense', 5 October 1918.

²⁴⁴ *The Times*, 17 July 1918, 'Sub-letting', p. 4.

On the other hand, there were good reasons for tenants to sub-let their properties. In households where men were serving, the inadequate provision and administration of separation allowances led to a need to secure additional income for the maintenance of the household. Rigorous administration of sub-letting was also not in the government's interest: the drive towards the production of munitions, and the need to concentrate industry more effectively for the war effort, meant that preventing new workers from flooding towards areas where production was needed would have been detrimental to other policies in place. As a result, for the duration of the war, the government was happy to turn a blind eye to sub-letting. As the conflict began to come to a conclusion, however, it was increasingly forced to recognise that it was a justifiable point of contention with landlords, and that the Rent Act, 1915, would have to be amended to incorporate this development in future.

The effect of rent restrictions on investment and capital

The desirability to restore regular market conditions, and allow that to regulate prices, was contingent on investment in housing. As the first chapter has shown, private enterprise had proven woefully inadequate for the provision of working-class houses in particular in the lead up to the war. What the Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915 did, however, was tarnish the appeal of housing as an investment across the sector in general. The Manchester Law Society summarised the problem succinctly in their delegation to the Ministry in August 1918:

It is a fact that cannot be emphasised too much because it is apt to be lost sight of, that the same economic principles which govern other trades and industries govern the building trade also, and that unless it is profitable to the builder to build and to the purchaser of houses to buy houses, the necessary houses will not be built. Consequently, the more free from unnecessary restrictions builders and others interested in the supply of houses for the working classes are, and the more the confidence of the

investing public in this class of security is restored, the more speedily will capital flow back into a channel which was formerly much appreciated by a large class of investors.²⁴⁵

J. A. McKillop, of the Incorporated Society of Law Agents in Scotland, emphasised that ‘the grievance of Bondholders and Proprietors is that they have been singled out and unjustly penalised. Dwelling house property was, prior to the War, again coming into favour as an investment owing to the congestion caused by over-building having been to a great extent removed. It is now unsaleable.’²⁴⁶ That property for the working classes was a favourable investment prior to the war would be a difficult contention to substantiate. The Rent Act of 1915 made property an unappealing investment for all types of construction, however.

Figures within the Cabinet such as Edward Carson urged for the voice of capital to be considered as strongly as labour.²⁴⁷ In addition, some quarters suggested that those with the means to invest were holding back in the hope of profiting from war-created conditions at the conflict’s end. Editorials in the *Daily Mail* vilified the wealthy, warning that ‘People who are hoarding their savings on the chance of a “good thing” turning up on the Stock Exchange or in industry, or of peace unlocking the door to vast and profitable ventures, are in reality jeopardising all they possess. What will their bank balance and hopes be worth if we do not win. Nothing whatever.’²⁴⁸ A memorandum from William Wallace suggested that ‘many millions are being kept back in readiness to pick up “bargains”’.²⁴⁹

Whilst the inability to raise rent to economic levels – i.e. to maintain the ongoing costs of maintenance alongside the production of a profit – was enough of a disincentive for capital

²⁴⁵ RECO 1/645. Delegation from the Manchester Law Society, 22 August 1918.

²⁴⁶ RECO 1/645. Precis of the Evidence of Mr. J. A. McKillop, Glasgow, for the Incorporated Society of Law Agents in Scotland. Emphasis in original.

²⁴⁷ Bodleian Oxford, MSS Asquith. D.1. fol. 32.

²⁴⁸ *Daily Mail*, 24 July 1918, ‘Capital for Houses’. Emphasis in original.

²⁴⁹ RECO 1/589. Memorandum on Rents After the War by William Wallace.

investment on its own, it should be remembered that the restriction on mortgage interest also served as a significant disincentive. Edwin Evans – the President of the Property Owners’ Protection Association – estimated that ‘from 80% to 90% of all the working class property in this country is subject to mortgage loans’.²⁵⁰ This was affected in particular by the War Loan, which was issued at 4½%, and led to calls from investors to raise the rate of interest on mortgages to match that as a form of investment. Niall Ferguson has downplayed the cost of the war, and the arms race in particular, yet what the war loans did were not stymie investment so much as specialise it.²⁵¹ Adrian Gregory has noted that ‘war loans were aggressively sold as a good investment’,²⁵² and despite variance in the uptake they were relatively successful.²⁵³ For the conduct of the war itself, that was a positive development. Looking beyond the war, what it created was a chronic underinvestment in other historic avenues, such as property.²⁵⁴ Owners and investors contended that ‘if houses were to be treated in the same way as other producers they should be allowed a reasonable return on their capital; that it was unfair to restrict them to pre-war prices when others were unrestricted, or at the most only restricted to a price based on present day costs.’²⁵⁵

Delegations frequently complained at the harm done to the attractiveness of housing as an investment. The National Federation of Building Trades Employers of Great Britain & Ireland wrote that ‘Investments in industrial undertakings have not been handicapped like the investment in houses has. The effect therefore has been to greatly depreciate the value of real

²⁵⁰ RECO 1/644. Delegation from the London Council, 14 July 1918.

²⁵¹ Niall Ferguson, *The pity of war, 1914-1918* (London, 1998), p. 5.

²⁵² Adrian Gregory, *The last Great War: British society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 230.

²⁵³ Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and medieval memory: war, remembrance and medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. ??.

²⁵⁴ For a more in-depth insight on this, see Stephen Broadberry and Peter Howlett, ‘The United Kingdom during World War I: business as usual?’ in Stephen Broadberry and Mark Harrison (eds.), *The economics of World War I* (Cambridge, 2005), 206-235.

²⁵⁵ RECO 1/645. Report of the Committee on the Increase of Rent Act.

property and no recovery appears possible until the Act has been repealed or so amended as to give house property economic equality with other forms of investment.’²⁵⁶ The Scottish National Building Trades Federation castigated the ‘Destruction of confidence in ability to obtain any return from housebuilding’, which, ‘contributes very largely to the stoppage of private enterprise’.²⁵⁷

Ultimately, therefore, the Rent Act of 1915 set the scene for the next decade – and, arguably, the next century – of house construction in the United Kingdom. The shattering of the market, combined with inflation and the redirection of capital through the war loans, meant that as an investment, property was highly unattractive.²⁵⁸ For many of the working classes, this change meant little; the decades prior to the war had been characterised by a chronic lack of investment in housing for the working classes, and which had created the rental crisis which the 1915 Act was forced to ameliorate. But for the government, it now presented a whole sector which was in steep decline. This meant not only a deficit of houses, but potentially high unemployment in the building and associated trades, on the eve of demobilisation. Allowing the Act to lapse would cause widespread discontent; keeping it in place perpetuated the problems it was creating.

A permanent subsidy?

Governmental subsidisation of the housing market was thus widely accepted to be necessary, and seemed to be taken as inevitable by the majority of actors from all sides. However, as

²⁵⁶ RECO 1/645. Memorandum of evidence submitted on behalf of the National Federation of Building Trades Employers of Great Britain & Ireland by James Wright.

²⁵⁷ RECO 1/645. Memorandum by the Scottish National Building Trades Federation.

²⁵⁸ See T. Balderston, ‘War finance and inflation in Britain and Germany, 1914-1918’, *Economic History Review*, 42 (1989), 222-244.

couched in caveats about the desirability of the restoration of free market conditions as all governmental activity was, there was also an underlying recognition that marketplace intervention in the form of subsidisation of certain sectors may prove to be a permanent measure. In their final Report, the Committee on Increase of Rent and Mortgage Restriction Act noted that, ‘The problem on which our advice is sought is an exceedingly difficult one. The policy adopted may determine whether housing is to continue on an economic basis, or whether it is to be permanently subsidised; and thus, in effect, to become a State enterprise.’ There is little doubt that the permanent subsidisation of housing was not deemed a favourable path by decision-makers in the Ministry, as the Report goes on to discuss: ‘While we consider it would be unwise to remove all restrictions at the expiry of the present Acts... we do not think that this policy can with advantage be applied as a permanent measure to houses of small rental, and that the aim should be to return to economic conditions as soon as possible.’²⁵⁹

For many, this presented an argument against governmental intervention at all. Speaking for the National Federation of Building Trades Employers, James Wright wrote to the Ministry: ‘In the opinion of the industry I represent it is the duty of the Government to amend or to end those Acts so as to allow house building at economic rents which is the natural solution of the housing problem. Subsidy schemes will not solve the problem, only temporarily relieve it and postpone the evil day by imposing a permanent burden of debt which will have to be met eventually and will prove inimical to economic house building.’²⁶⁰ Whilst this may be true, there were strong arguments to suggest that ‘postponing the evil day’ was in many respects a worthwhile endeavour.

²⁵⁹ H.M.S.O., *Report of the Committee on the Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915* (London, 1919).

²⁶⁰ RECO 1/645. Memorandum of evidence submitted on behalf of the National Federation of Building Trades Employers of Great Britain & Ireland by James Wright.

The idea of a permanent subsidy also seemed to gather momentum through the course of the war amongst housing advocates. The Report noted that ‘Several of the bodies who favoured us with their views frankly admitted that they desired to see the abolition of private ownership in working class houses (except perhaps occupying ownership), and all building undertaken by the State, or the Local Authorities aided by State subsidies’.²⁶¹ Councillor Andrew McBride, Secretary of the Glasgow Labour Party Housing Association, told the Ministry that, ‘Private enterprise in housing cannot be tolerated any longer. A Local Authority cannot afford to build the necessary houses, and the State must build them... people must be housed whether they can pay or not, and the State must bear the deficit. The loss must be written by the State as a health investment. The essential thing is for the State to have regard to the health of the whole community, and this means decent housing.’²⁶² The idea that the financial outlay of significant state involvement in housing was financially justifiable on the grounds of the health of the nation as a whole is explored in closer detail in Chapter Five of this thesis. It is important to note, however, that by 1918 the market crisis which the Rent Act had created had already led to the idea that state investment in housing for the working classes could be justified nationally using ideas of the health, morality, and productivity of the populace. In short, the idea that the state might permanently subsidise housing for the working classes was no longer far-fetched. The Labour Party Housing Association emphasised the opportunity for the government to ‘define a National Standard of Housing... there should be no consideration or provision made for the resumption of housing building or house owning by private enterprise.’²⁶³ As later chapters in this thesis

²⁶¹ H.M.S.O., *Report of the Committee on the Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915* (London, 1919).

²⁶² RECO 1/645. Minutes of the 6th meeting of the Committee, Wednesday 18 September, 1918.

²⁶³ RECO 1/645. Memorandum from the Glasgow Labour Party Housing Association. Emphasis in original.

demonstrate, it was an opportunity which Addison and the Ministry of Reconstruction were keen to utilise.

After 1915, the government's 'opportunity to define' that 'national standard of housing' was less of a choice and more of a necessity. A delegation from a number of Property Owners' Associations summarises the quandary the Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915, posed for the government:

It should never be forgotten that the measure is an unjust one. Mr Long himself said that "he hoped that owners would accept the injustice as part of their war burden". It is therefore unjust and a war measure only, and there is nothing to gain but everything to lose by neglecting to keep these facts in mind. The two questions relating to existing houses and building new houses are closely related. Government policy should be directed in getting rid of the Act as quickly as early as possible. The goal to be striven for is the restoration of freedom of contract. This, however, can hardly come at once and it is therefore all the more necessary that the government should do everything possible not only to remove restrictions and burdens in order to make the building and owning of small houses reasonably remunerative but to restore that popularity in the investment which has, of late years, been destroyed.²⁶⁴

The cost of restoring acceptable conditions to a level where rent restrictions could be removed was going to be a heavy in every scenario. The question was therefore the form that expenditure would take: either the government had to commit to the permanent subsidisation of housing for the working classes, and allow free market principles to guide more affluent housing, or it had to put its hand in its pocket for the cost of remedying the shortage of housing enough to restore market conditions.

²⁶⁴ RECO 1/645. Minutes of the 5th meeting of the Committee, Tuesday 17 September, 1918.

Section Two: Finance

How to pay for it all: finance and subsidies

In England the outward aspect of life does not yet teach us to feel or realise in the least that an age is over. We are busy picking up the threads of our life where we dropped them, with this difference only, that many of us seem a good deal richer than we were before. Where we spent millions before the war, we have now learnt that we can spend hundreds of millions and apparently not suffer for it. Evidently we did not exploit to the utmost the possibilities of our economic life. We look, therefore, not only to return to the comforts of 1914, but to an immense broadening and intensification of them. All classes alike thus build their plans, the rich to spend more and save less, the poor to spend more and work less.²⁶⁵

John Maynard Keynes, *The economic consequences of the peace* (1919).

Having established from the outset that the permanent subsidisation of housing for the working classes was to be avoided at all costs, and concluding that the only way to do that was to remedy the shortage itself, the Ministry of Reconstruction thus faced the same problem as any administration or agency: paying for it all. At the end of the First World War, the British state was facing the ramifications of its emergency expenditure on arms and administration. Parliament had repeatedly voted to supplement the war budget with emergency votes of credit, despite no clear understandings of what the costs of the war even were. For example, Bonar Law informed the House the average daily cost of the war was £5.5million per day, then only a week later informed them the daily cost of the war was actually £7.45million.²⁶⁶ There is certainly not time for detailed discussion of Britain's financial outlay in the war,²⁶⁷ but regardless of what the actual numbers are, as the section on

²⁶⁵ John Maynard Keynes, *The economic consequences of the peace* (London, 1919), p. 2.

²⁶⁶ Quoted in Hew Strachan, *Financing the First World War* (Oxford, 2004), p. 57.

²⁶⁷ There is also surprisingly little literature addressing this topic. See Strachan, *Financing the First World War*; Martin Horn, *Britain, France, and the financing of the First World War* (Montreal, 2002); Niall Ferguson, *Pity of War, 1914-1918* (London, 1996), Chs 5+14. Additionally, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace series authored after the war deserve more attention. See, for example, Frank L. McVey, *The financial history of Great Britain, 1914-1918* (New York, 1918); Francis W. Hirst, *British war budgets* (London, 1926); Ernest L. Bogart, *Direct and indirect costs of the great world war* (New York, 1919).

material shortages demonstrates, they faced inevitable difficulties in preventing escalating costs at a time when demand was unprecedentedly high, and supply unprecedentedly low. There is room for interpretation as to how overstretched state finances were, but at the least the wartime budget deficit was 60.6 per cent of its pre-war national income, and had necessitated significant borrowing from a variety of sources including the United States.²⁶⁸

Niall Ferguson casts a fleeting aspersion on Addison's aspirations not to 'subordinate everything to paying off of debt', and his argument that the state ought to prepare itself to 'incur expenditure essential for establishing at the earliest possible moment the fullest measure of national productivity.'²⁶⁹ Ferguson writes that, 'In Britain, the proponents of debt-service and amortization won; whereas in Germany the proponents of welfare spending did. That was why inflation gave way to deflation in Britain in 1921, while in Germany the printing presses kept rolling until the currency's final collapse.'²⁷⁰ A note from the Treasury in 1918 commented that, 'Owing to the financial exigencies of the time and the number of objects for which money will be required by the State, the assistance available must, it is feared, be limited in amount as well as in time'.²⁷¹ Ferguson's focus on Addison's apparent idealism neglects the pragmatic considerations which frequently coloured Addison and the Ministry of Reconstruction's approach, however. Instead, an acute cognisance of conditions and extra-housing factors and the financial conditions of the country and its return to economic and social normality dominated thinking. This affected the scope and form of the assistance provided, and this in turn directly impacted the efficacy of the programme's implementation. However, given that in any form the housing programme *would* represent a huge expenditure, we must investigate how they expected to be able to pay for it.

²⁶⁸ Strachan, p. 61.

²⁶⁹ RECO 1/775, Addison paper, reconstruction finance, 10 Feb 1918.

²⁷⁰ Niall Ferguson, *The pity of war* (London, 1996), p. 421.

²⁷¹ RECO 1/494. Memorandum on housing by the Minister of Reconstruction, 1918.

Existing legislation

The Addison Act was not the first piece of legislation to extend the reach of the state in to housing provision, and some argued that laws passed in the decades prior to the conflict already set the stage for post-war action. The Small Dwellings Acquisition Act of 1890 allowed local authorities with a population over ten thousand to advance money to the extent of fourth-fifths of the market value for houses which did not exceed 400 pounds in value. However, the loan could not exceed 240 pounds under any circumstances, and held as a statutory condition that the proprietor must reside in the house.²⁷² As a result, the Ministry of Reconstruction held the opinion that the Act was a ‘failure’ due to these stringent conditions, as well as the difficulty in raising the remaining one-fifth of the purchase price.²⁷³ They were right: the Act did little to stimulate construction, and nothing at all to help with speculative building. For building on the scale required for the post-war programme, it was useless. In the same year, the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890, consolidated existing powers. It was focussed on areas of unfit and insanitary housing, although it did allow local authorities to build housing for general needs for the first time. Peter Malpass and Alan Murie have commented that this Act ‘provided the legislative basis for the development of local authority housing before the First World War’, arguing that it was passed, ‘at a time when the political pressures on local authorities were building up and there was in existence a coherently structured local government system capable of reflecting popular demands and carrying out the functions of a housing authority.’²⁷⁴ If this is true, it is not reflected in the production of houses – with most local authorities building none at all – nor in the mentalities

²⁷² HLG 48/763. The Small Dwellings Acquisitions Acts, 1899-1923.

²⁷³ RECO 1/583. Memorandum by W. Wallace on Loans to Private Enterprise. N.D.

²⁷⁴ Peter Malpass and Alan Murie, *Housing policy and practice: 5th ed.* (Basingstoke, 1999), p. 32.

of the decision-makers creating new legislation for 1919. This was followed by the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1909, which empowered local authorities to prepare town planning schemes but placed no obligation on them to do so. As Richard Rodger has commented, the Act ‘did little more than establish professional credentials, indicate new though limited directions, and encourage low-density suburban estates likely to have developed anyway; they barely addressed the underlying problems of working-class housing.’²⁷⁵

Addison and the Ministry of Reconstruction were certainly aware of these shortcomings, and he was fierce in his advocacy of an alteration of the status-quo. Previous legislation was ineffective primarily due to the lack of compulsion it commanded. To compel local authorities also required that when they did build, the finances to support their projects could be provided. As a result, this needed justification for the Treasury, who received entreaties from various directions. A letter from Walter Long, President of the Local Government Board, to the Treasury in October 1917 highlighted that a break from previous approaches was going to be essential, and also tried to sell the idea that expenditure was going to be limited, not ongoing.

The Panel scheme is an emergency scheme. I submit it is not a failing but a merit in that it differs fundamentally from the existing law. That the State should come forward in the greatest crisis of our history with a Housing scheme... in order to solve a great problem and to bear one more amongst many burdens which the war has thrown upon us is as an emergency measure reasonable but no one need fall into the mistake that would be repeated. But to amend the existing law by tacking on to it a free grant of 15 or 30 per cent. will be looked upon merely as a development which may fairly be treated as a precedent. What we want in order to meet an exceptional position is a remedy which is on the face of it exceptional and is hoped may be unique.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ Richard Rodger, *Housing in urban Britain, 1780-1914: Class, capitalism and construction* (Basingstoke, 1989), p. 56.

²⁷⁶ RECO 1/471. Draft letter from the President of the Local Government Board to Treasury with reference to a housing grant. 12 October 1917.

Addison also made it clear that he believed a complete break from the ethos of existing legislation was a fundamental requirement for a successful building programme, noting that the lack of an *obligation* left any legislation toothless, and commenting that, ‘I am the last to suggest that a blank cheque should be given to Local Authorities, but I am convinced that we have no right to make statements which might arouse hopes which would not be fulfilled, or to prepare schemes... which will not certainly result in the provision of houses.’²⁷⁷ Yet whilst the effectiveness of a housing programme without financial aid and compulsory intervention was in question, at a time when finances were overextended, the timing of fiscal outlay was also a key part of the financial justification for the housing programme.

Paying the cost of the war

Whilst it is difficult to assess the full costs of the war and their impact on the solvency of the British state in general, this thesis has repeatedly demonstrated the ways in which the war had major repercussions for the housing trade.²⁷⁸ The housing programme in 1919 sought to first identify and then rectify part of this debt, and in this sense the Addison Act was simply an ongoing war expenditure. In 1917, Rowntree wrote advising the Ministry that ‘at the least a grant-in-aid should represent the difference to the local authorities between the cost of building in the year after the war, and that lower cost which may reasonably be expected will prevail when conditions have again become normal. The obvious method is that aid should be

²⁷⁷ RECO 1/494. Housing: memorandum by the Minister of Reconstruction.

²⁷⁸ For general costs, see Stephen Broadberry and Mark Harrison (eds.), *The economics of World War I* (Cambridge, 2005); Robert Barro, ‘Government spending, interest rates, and budget deficits in the United Kingdom’, *Journal of Monetary Economics*, 20 (1987), 221-248; Peter Dewey, ‘The new economic warfare and economic mobilization’, in Turner, John (ed.), *Britain and the First World War* (London, 1988); Alan Milward, *The economic effects of the two world wars on Britain: 2nd ed.* (London, 1984).

given in the form of a simple out-and-out grant based on an estimate of the extra cost. This would have the advantage of simplicity.’²⁷⁹

Again, the idea that the government had created the problem through its wartime legislation and market interference – and as the ultimate propagators of the war – was at the heart of the provision of a subsidy at all. As the *Architect and Contract Reporter* wrote in January of 1918, ‘There is no doubt that subsidies in some form or other are necessary to remove the present shortage of housing accommodation, whether those subsidies are granted through local authorities, public utility societies, or private enterprise. The necessity for subsidies having arisen through the interference by the State with the ordinary operations of supply and demand in the house-building industry... it is the duty of the Government to make good the muddle it has caused in housing and therefore to find the necessary subsidies.’²⁸⁰

Yet although it has been shown that there was a genuine feeling that there was a moral necessity for the government to help fix the problems it had created or exacerbated, the proposed subsidies and grants also represent the pragmatic cost of doing business after the war. The Financial Assistance Committee summed up the multiple reasons for the use of public funds to bear the cost of building as a ‘war charge’ because ‘(a) it is just’, and ‘(b) because without it, a large contribution cannot be expected during the critical period’.²⁸¹ With markets projecting a level of uncertainty in the tumult after the war, and the costs of materials anticipated to decline after a period of heightened cost – as Chapter Three examines in detail

²⁷⁹ RECO 1/477. Memorandum on Housing in England and Wales, B.S. Rowntree, August 1917.

²⁸⁰ *The Architect & Contract Reporter*, 25 January 1918.

²⁸¹ RECO 1/532. Final report and draft 2nd report of Housing (Financial Assistance) Committee by the National Federation of Housebuilders’

– incitement to build in the years after the conflict depended on a more dynamic form of financial assistance than a flat subsidy.

Any form of definite fixed grant would under the anticipated conditions of a declining building cost be likely to set up a tendency to delay. Both the local authority and beneficial face of declining prices would naturally tend to postpone the commencement in the hope of bettering their financial position on the transaction. Such definite inducement to delay could only be removed if they might have the fixed grant as a percentage revised at frequent intervals in accordance with the realised fall in prices... It seems very desirable, therefore, that the form of grant should be such as will remove from the local authority all temptation to delay and will completely secure them against loss on their scheme owing to building immediately after the war.²⁸²

For this reason, the Housing (Financial Assistance) Committee recommended that the amount of subsidy be ‘no more and no less than the whole of the abnormal cost involved (whether in cost of building, in rate of interest, or in lowness of rents obtainable) by building immediately as desired by the Government instead of waiting until more normal conditions return.’²⁸³ The financial element therefore generated urgency, as the Ministry of Reconstruction were concerned not just with the correlation between production and housing prices, but with the necessity for accommodation. Commenting on the urgency for the production of new houses, Addison argued that ‘much additional accommodation is essential in rural districts if we are to promote the production of food on successful comprehensive lines’, and noted that, ‘it is equally necessary with regard to providing for the capacity for increased production in many of our industries’.²⁸⁴ The importance of ideas about returning to the land, and the motivations behind them, are explored in detail in Chapter Five.

²⁸² RECO 1/477. Memorandum on Housing in England and Wales, B.S. Rowntree, August 1917.’

²⁸³ RECO 1/532. Final report and draft 2nd report of Housing (Financial Assistance) Committee by the National Federation of Housebuilders’. Emphasis in original.

²⁸⁴ RECO 1/494. Housing: memorandum by the Minister of Reconstruction.

Cost versus value; direct versus indirect subsidies

Again, the ripple-effect from the Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act in 1915 came to dominate the actions the government could take. Working in an artificially preserved market meant that subsidies were problematized due to the difference between costs and projected value. In building for the renting classes, the value of property was closely correlated to the obtainable rent – yet at the war’s end, that figure remained at pre-war levels whilst the costs of construction due to material and labour shortages and price increases had continued to rise significantly. As *The Builder* commented in 1918, ‘the great point was the wages the workmen would require’, predicting that it ‘would be from eighteen months to two years after the termination of hostilities before they settled down to the ordinary routine of building work.’²⁸⁵ The National Federation of House Builders stated in a delegation to the government that the ‘chief reason’ for the decrease in house building by private enterprise was the ‘increase in the price of materials and the cost of labour.’²⁸⁶

Prior to the war, lending for construction was typically up to 80 per cent of the value of the house. However, as the Housing Banks Subcommittee realised, ‘In view of the probable difference between value and cost, in the case of houses built immediately after the war, it might well be that an advance of 80 per cent of the value to an individual builder or purchaser of a house would leave considerably more than 20 per cent of the total cost to be found by him.’²⁸⁷ The impact of the war on the government’s ability to effectively implement subsidies was therefore profound; it had created labour and material scarcity – driving up construction costs, and had broken the rental market – undermining any new construction’s value.

²⁸⁵ *The Builder*, ‘The cost of building before and after the war’, 19 April 1918.

²⁸⁶ RECO 1/571. Report of the Committee of the National Federation of House Builders on state assistance to private enterprise on house building after the war. July, 1917.

²⁸⁷ RECO 1/639. Report of the Housing Banks Sub-Committee.

This pressure, and the dynamic nature any effective financial intervention would need to take, pushed the government towards the direct subsidisation of building by private enterprise. As Chapter Three demonstrates in more detail, direct construction of houses by central or local government emerged relatively late in the planning process. In October 1917, the President of the Local Government Board – the recently appointed Hayes Fisher – wrote to the treasury to emphasise how they were ‘very desirous of avoiding any actual building by the State’ as it ‘will generally be found to be an expensive method of providing the houses required and will tend to throw a heavy and increasing burden on the taxes, as the experiment will certainly result in demands for its extension from those who have not yet shared in its results’.²⁸⁸

The assumption for the majority of the initial planning process was, therefore, that the direct subsidisation of private enterprise was likely to be the most financially efficient way to construct the nation’s new homes. Private enterprise, for their part, wanted more say. The National Federation of House Builders wrote to Addison in June 1918 to attempt to secure a representative of the building trade on the Financial Assistance Committee.

I am to point out that there is no section of the community so well qualified to judge the practical effect of proposals for financial assistance of private enterprise and housing after the war than that section which the Federation represents. House builders, who have been known as ‘speculative’ house builders, have built almost all the working class houses in the past and they are accustomed in the usual course of their business to negotiate the finances of housebuilding. They are familiar with the very special problems involved in a manner in which no one outside the particular trade can possibly be.²⁸⁹

Whilst they did, after repeated protestations, secure James Edmonson as representation, they did not secure the financial assistance they sought. Fisher and the L.G.B. were consistent in

²⁸⁸ RECO 1/471. Local Government Board request to the treasury for financial assistance for housing. October, 1917.

²⁸⁹ RECO 1/507. Letter from the National Federation of House Builders. 5 June 1918.

their advocacy of private builders, although as government proposals increasingly moved towards the subsidisation of local authorities they softened this approach. Fisher wrote just prior to the end of the war to clarify the position:

I do not think that there is anything in my recent public utterances from which it could be gathered that no direct subsidies should be given to public builders.

I have, it is true, more than once expressed my own opinion that no Parliament is likely to agree to make direct subsidies to private builders to enable them to make a profit, as they naturally expect to, out of building operations. So far however from having made any declarations of settled policy on the subject, I have frequently invited from all quarters suggestions which might enable such assistance to be given to private enterprise as would enable it to play its part in the provision of working class dwellings during the abnormal period which will follow the end of the war.²⁹⁰

Whilst ostensibly encouraging private enterprise at the same time as building themselves was the best way to secure the maximum construction from all sources, this intervention was met with hostility. The National Federation of House Builders commented that, ‘State intervention in any industry which has been conducted by private enterprise is extremely dangerous and must lead to the discouragement of those forces which have carried on the industry in the past’,²⁹¹ and Edward Gibbs wrote in *The Builder* that ‘The government proposals are prohibitive of any renewal of the great services rendered by private enterprise to the State in the housing of the people.’²⁹²

As we have seen, the reluctance of private enterprise to construct housing at an affordable rate for those most in need was a primary factor in establishing the need for an extensive housing programme in the first place. With the necessity for significant financial stimulus or investment came the need to retain a level of accountability. As Hayes Fisher wrote to the Treasury in 1917, ‘is there anything more open to criticism and condemnation than that the

²⁹⁰ RECO 1/530. Letter from Fisher to Hobhouse, 23 October 1918.

²⁹¹ RECO 1/571. Report of the Committee of the National Federation of House Builders on state assistance to private enterprise on house building after the war. July, 1917.

²⁹² *The Builder*, ‘A comment on the government’s proposals by E. Gibbs’, 25 October 1918.

people of the Country – be they ratepayers or taxpayers – should find some thirty millions of money in order to cover the Kingdom... with houses which are neither good to look at nor comfortable to live in according to the immense progress which has been made in these conditions during the last twenty years? It would be a crime.’²⁹³

For policy-makers who had increasingly identified the housing programme at the war’s conclusion as an opportunity, it would similarly be a crime not to seize the moment – and for as long as the state provided capital towards their production, that money also bought an unprecedented level of organisation and control. Writing to the Treasury in 1917, the LGB noted that ‘the opportunity afforded to the Government of raising the standard both of the design and of the lay out of the house must not be lost.’²⁹⁴ The sense of ‘opportunity’ the war created is explored in depth in Chapter Five. This impacted the financial approach: the conscious awareness of the opportunity to maintain a level of operational control, and therefore to closely guide the construction along idealised lines, made direct subsidies of private builders untenable; to get the homes they wanted, the government therefore needed to build them themselves.

Loans not grants

There was, however, pressure – from both inside and outside of government – not to overextend the financial outlay. This manifested in the difference between providing loans or grants. As Reiss noted in March 1918, ‘clearly a loan at less than market rates is merely a grant in annual form, the amount depending upon the actual difference between the rate

²⁹³ RECO 1/471. Letter from Fisher to the Treasury, 12 October 1917.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

charged and the market rate from time to time.²⁹⁵ Whilst this is true, it also bases itself on a supply/demand marketplace in which the recipient of the loan wishes to take out the loan for the promise of future profit. Given that the rental market was decoupled from the construction market, and that local authorities were presented with the possibility of being *compelled* to build, the distinction may have been lost. As we have seen, the payment of the difference between pre-war conditions and heightened prices in post-war scarcity was hardly viewed as philanthropy so much as necessity.

Financial assistance therefore needed to be provided in a more noticeably beneficial way. Asked for their advice, the National Federation of Housebuilders commented the importance that, ‘whatever subsidies are given shall be given as such, and not in a veiled form (such as, for example, by the granting of loans at less than market rates).²⁹⁶ Again, the provision of subsidies both offered a level of control and was problematized by the urgency to begin building. The Financial Assistance Subcommittee wrestled with this problem throughout its investigations, noting that for any incentivisation of building in the period immediately after the war, builders or building organisations ‘must receive some subsidy which will practically put them in the same position as they would be in if they delayed building’, pushing them to recommend that, ‘Grants should be made by the State at a capital sum equal to 75 per cent. of the difference between the approved cost and the estimated value of the houses on their completion.’²⁹⁷

The form of the financial assistance therefore proved to be more complicated than initially expected. The subsidies needed to take a form which publicly demonstrated the action taken:

²⁹⁵ RECO 1/594. Preliminary memorandum on slums by Mr. R. L. Reiss, March 1918.

²⁹⁶ RECO 1/532. Correspondence with the National Federation of Housebuilders.

²⁹⁷ RECO 1/532. Final report of Housing (Financial Assistance) Committee.

in part to stimulate building at a time when it was apparently not financially pragmatic to do so, and in part because finance at a below-market rate was viewed less sympathetically given the perception that the market was broken due to governmental interference.²⁹⁸ Furthermore, despite a flat grant being easier to administer – and far easier to keep costs under control – the conditions of the market which the war had created or exacerbated meant that there was a general belief that conditions would improve the further removed from the conflict; given that part of the logic for financial stimulus for building meant the conscious undermining of those conditions, any grant provided needed to be dynamic, with those building immediately after the war given no incentive to wait.

Conclusion

On 18 March 1918, the Government made an offer to Local Authorities who *build immediately* of a subsidy to the extent of three-quarters of their loss. Their goal was to get local authorities to begin preparing schemes so that when the conflict ended, the green light for construction could begin immediately; this was key not just for the production of new homes to begin the process of righting the market, but also to provide a sponge to soak up the demobilised men flooding back in to the labour market.

The actual finances of the Addison Act have often been given less attention than its lofty ambitions, yet without money to build the programme represented little departure from pre-

²⁹⁸ The veracity of these claims in reality is open to debate, but the widespread feeling amongst property owners and investors was that the immediate end of the war did not present an opportune time to invest, and that rewards could be reaped by waiting. See Stephen Broadberry, 'The emergence of mass unemployment: explaining macroeconomic trends in Britain during the trans-World War I period', *Economic History Review*, 37 (1990), 247-67; J.A. Dowie, 'Growth in the interwar period: some more arithmetic', *Economic History Review*, 21 (1968), 93-112; D. K. Benjamin and L. A. Kochin, 'Searching for an explanation of unemployment in interwar Britain', *Journal of Political Economy*, 87 (1979), 441-478.

existing policies. Marian Bowley's summary of the beginning of State intervention in the supply of working-class houses can, at times, equally apply to the historiography: 'the general attitude was optimistic; the man-in-the-street did not believe that the housing problem was excessively difficult or complicated. A subsidy could be used to offset high building costs and interest rates; after all subsidies had been used to keep down the price of bread during the war.'²⁹⁹ As we have seen, the creation and implementation of financial assistance was significantly more complicated than that. The Act ultimately implemented what has come to be termed 'the penny rate'. Section 7 (2a) stated that any annual payment to be made under this section shall:

In the case of a scheme carried out by a local authority, be determined on the basis of the estimated annual loss resulting from the carrying out of any scheme or schemes to which this section applies, subject to the deduction therefore of a sum not exceeding the estimated annual produce of a rate of one penny in the pound levied in the area chargeable with the expenses of such scheme of schemes.³⁰⁰

By the time of the Act's implementation, then, the government had thus decided to cover almost the entirety of the loss on schemes. That it did so was not inevitable, however, and was a decision arrived at through increasing investigation of what effective subsidisation would comprise. Given the stringent requirements of both time and form, this was the only feasible way. Finance thus served as a microcosm of the investigation of the housing problem and the solution that they ultimately proposed: initial proposals attempted to limit exposure and involvement, and keep costs neutral. Further investigation exposed the ineffectiveness of such limited intervention, however. The government, and with them the Treasury, were thus inevitably sucked in to a larger financial commitment than envisioned when the process began. That they were is a fitting continuation of the legacy of the Rent and Mortgage

²⁹⁹ Marian Bowley, *Housing and the State, 1919-1944* (London, 1945), p. 15.

³⁰⁰ Housing, Town Planning, &c. Act, 1919. [c. 35].

Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1915, which drew the government into the quagmire of working-class housing, and meant that state expenditure on the problem in some form was inevitable. Ultimately, the government hoped that by spending a lot on the housing programme, it would save money in the long run; fixing the market and extracting state involvement would cost significantly less than the permanent subsidy of housing.

Unfortunately for them, they ended up unable to carry this logic through to its conclusion, with the result that heavy expenditure on the housing programme was followed by state expenditure ever since.

Chapter Three

The Ministry of Reconstruction and the construction of the housing programme

By viewing the Addison Act as a reactionary piece of legislature, designed to preserve the status-quo and ameliorate potentially revolutionary discontent, the importance of the development of the Ministry of Reconstruction and its practices and ideas over the course of the war has been neglected. Whilst the consideration of the evolution and work of the Ministry of Reconstruction is central to the thesis as a whole, this chapter focusses in particular on the development of the ideas and plans developed by policy-makers during the war. Until we take the time to fully investigate the crucial nexus of the evolution of plans and designs, interactions with public utility societies and private enterprise, and the impact of changing marketplace dynamics, our understanding of why the housing programme took the form it did remains incomplete.

Before looking more closely at those more specific elements, however, it is important to take some time to look more generally at the formation and development of the Ministry of Reconstruction. Established formally in 1916, the Ministry of Reconstruction grew from the work of the Cabinet Committee on Reconstruction which began earlier, in 1915. After the war, the Ministry published a series of pamphlets highlighting the problems it deemed the nation to be facing at the conclusion of the conflict. The first of the series detailed the self-aware evolution of the Ministry from its conception in the relatively early stages of the war, to its roles and responsibilities at its end.

The idea of reconstruction has passed through more than one phase in the public mind. In the earlier part of the war, people looking forward to peace thought of it as a return to pre-war conditions. When the Government was asked, as it was in 1915, to prepare for the problems which would arise at the end of the war, it was assumed that the only thing required was some machinery to enable the country to slide with as little friction as possible into the familiar grooves of July

1914: to pick up the broken threads, to renew the old habits and traditions, the old prejudices and controversies, and to go back, so far as was humanly possible, to the social and industrial situation as it existed at the outbreak of the war. The practical tasks of Reconstruction seemed to centre around the two related problems of Demobilisation and Restoration: how to get men back as quickly as possible from their war stations in the Army or in industry to their old niches in civil life, and how to release employers, workmen, and others, from controls and restrictions imposed upon on them for the duration of the war, and to enable them to resume their pre-war activities and methods of work.³⁰¹

However, as the pamphlet goes on to discuss, the remit changed concurrently with a change in public and governmental attitudes through the course of the war and which became increasingly crystallised in the minds of policy-makers in the later stages of the conflict.

People have begun to doubt whether, after all, the social and industrial system of the country in pre-war days was so harmonious and so well organised as to deserve being revived in its entirety – whether it was in all respects worthy of the men and women who lived under it, or compatible with the ideals for which so many of our best have given their lives. Thus the idea of Reconstruction, of a simple return to pre-war conditions, had gradually been supplanted by the larger and worthier ideal of a better world after the war.³⁰²

The pamphlet frames the work of the Ministry as part of a moral imperative; it trades heavily on the rhetoric that the experience of the war obligated the creation of a better world for those who had fought in it. Reconstruction work is therefore represented as both practical and political, and the Ministry regarded it as such: ‘there is very much to be ashamed of when we look back to the conditions of July 1914, and that out of justice to the living and reverence to the dead, we are called to rebuild the national life on a better and more enduring foundation.’³⁰³

Justice for the living and reverence for the dead presented a strong rhetorical front for a department which was seemingly reconstructing elements of society in a new image. It sought to reframe the sacrifices of the war as an opportunity to set the ‘enduring foundation’.

³⁰¹ H.M.S.O., *Reconstruction Problems: 1. The Aims of Reconstruction* (London, 1918), p. 3.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid, p. 4.

This applied not just to the dead, but the living. Walter Long, when President of the Local Government Board, stated in a public address:

It would indeed be a crime – a black crime – if reading as we do the wonderful accounts of the sufferings which our heroes have to undergo in the trenches... we sat still now and did nothing... To let them come from horrible water-logged trenches to something little better than a pigsty here would indeed be criminal on the part of ourselves, and would be a negation of all we have said during this war, and we can never repay those men for what they have done for us.³⁰⁴

For some historians this rhetoric serves as evidence of motivation, and it is certainly possible that the desire to provide the men who fought with a ‘better world’ was a driving force, yet the weight of such words should not be taken too far. Whilst the self-promotion of the Ministry after the war was heavily adorned with the narrative of rewarding a deserving nation, its activities were far more centred on the pragmatic realities of putting back together a country ravaged by conflict.

Those working in the Ministry increasingly realised that to do that, they had to address issues which were both affected by other shortages and restrictions, and increasingly exacerbated by the conflict. As the war went on, the task of reconstruction therefore presented a quagmire for the government as the ineffectiveness of any action taken during the war became increasingly apparent. At the same time, there existed an attitude of opportunity; whilst deploying a housing programme which would eventually end the housing crisis was so untenable as to be wholly unconsidered in 1915, by 1918 it was seen both as a chance to address the problem in a meaningful systemic way, but also as the only real recourse left. The maturation of this idea and its importance to the housing programme which is ultimately deployed in 1919 is key to many elements this thesis addresses.

³⁰⁴ RECO 1/497. Notes on the urgent need for a large housing programme after the war.

It is necessary to emphasise how interconnected the issues which motivated the housing policy which followed the war were. This chapter individually addresses the practical factors which were most influential in guiding the steps that the Ministry – and as a result, the nation – took after the war. Yet despite the importance of individual elements, such as material shortages or the attitudes of private enterprise, the mutually informing relationship between all the factors influencing policy must remain central to any effective analysis.

Addison and his subordinates were thus presented with an intimidating balancing act: on the one hand, they had to assimilate and appease pre-war notions of health, morality, and housing development. On the other they had to revolutionise the approach to housing provision – which they did under extreme circumstances – if they were to have any chance of meaningfully addressing the issues. Firstly, it is important to reconstruct the problem they believed the nation to be facing.

Establishing the Ministry and assessing the problem

When the Ministry of Reconstruction was formally established on 17 July 1917, its primary goal was to ensure a smooth transition from war to peace. The all-encompassing nature of the war meant that the tendrils of government had extended far and wide, and the demilitarisation of a state honed for industrial conflict would require the careful extraction of those tendrils without the collapse of local economies or infrastructure at its conclusion.³⁰⁵ Housing was a central part of this problem. There was a general awareness of the problems that the housing

³⁰⁵ For an introduction to the extent of the war's effect on civil society, see Jay Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge history of the First World War*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, 2013).

shortage was creating prior to the war, and as it continued on, the lack of acceptable dwellings available at the end of the conflict more clearly emerged as a concern for any true attempt at successful reconstruction.

Initially, however, the Ministry viewed housing as far too great a problem to be addressed by them directly. In a memorandum by the Housing Panel, they made sure that it was ‘clearly understood’ that no attempt to deal with the permanent problem could be made.

Our task is to confront the difficulties which will confront us at the end of the war, and to propose the remedies which appear best suited to the emergency, but which may not necessarily be part of an ultimate permanent measure of reform. The attempt to create machinery for the permanent provision of an adequate supply of houses throughout the country, would raise questions of great complexity both in Parliament and outside. It is hoped that the measures now proposed will meet with general agreement, as being framed to meet a special emergency, but it is clear that inasmuch as the existing machinery for the provision of houses is defective, no step which is taken now should interfere with the adoption in the near future of a satisfactory scheme of permanent housing reform.³⁰⁶

Such a position is logical given history and circumstance. The provision of housing had not been a part of the government’s remit prior to the conflict and,³⁰⁷ charged with the already formidable task of helping a society transition from war to peace, it makes sense that the Ministry – and the government in general – would be eager to avoid overcommitting itself to a new problem as vast as housing.³⁰⁸ Yet the process of assessing the impact of the war on the housing situation led the Ministry down the rabbit hole. The conflict and the ‘crisis’ were intertwined in many ways, and in attempting to establish the war’s complicity in exacerbating the situation, the difficulty of seeing a natural resolution became more apparent.

³⁰⁶ RECO 1/268. Memorandum by the Housing Panel on the Emergency Problem. 24 May 1918.

³⁰⁷ See Avner Offer, *Property and politics, 1870-1914: landownership, law, ideology and urban development in Britain* (Cambridge, 1981); Martin Daunt, *House and home in the Victorian City: working-class housing, 1850-1914* (London, 1983); David Englander, *Landlord and tenant in urban Britain, 1838-1918* (Oxford, 1983).

³⁰⁸ Robert Colls and Richard Rodger (eds.), *Cities of ideas: civil society and urban governance in Britain, 1800-2000* (Aldershot, 2004).

In 1916, the Reconstruction Committee wrote to the Prime Minister of the difficulties in assessing the impact of the war on house building and conditions,³⁰⁹ stating the necessity for expert enquiry to estimate the extent of the arrears. Not only did war losses and population movements for the production of munitions need to be factored in, but – they argued – it was necessary to ascertain ‘how far the causes that have led to the discouragement of building are likely to remain in operation after the war, and whether any measures can be taken to stimulate private enterprise in this regard.’³¹⁰

Reconstruction in regard to housing therefore started from a position of relative ignorance. In order to establish a coherent plan for the end of the war, it was incumbent on the Ministry to establish the shortage of suitable accommodation which existed before the war, and the deficit created by a lack of construction as a result of the conflict. To that end, the Prime Minister wrote to the Housing Panel charging them to: ‘(1) get data as to the minimum indispensable additions to housing accommodation after the War, and (2) to consider methods for providing this, both public and private.’³¹¹ The latter, it was noted, required an inquiry as to whether the causes which led to diminution of building before the war were likely to remain in operation after it, and if so what steps – if any – could be taken to promote the resumption of private building.

From this starting point, they then had to calculate the deficiency due to the cessation of building. As the first chapter demonstrated, these figures are at times misleading. Regardless of their accuracy, however, the numbers the Ministry arrived at are enlightening in explaining

³⁰⁹ A position which this thesis has a great deal of sympathy with.

³¹⁰ RECO 1/463. Housing accommodation after the war. Minutes to the Prime Minister relative to departmental inquiries in to the question of, 26 July 1916.

³¹¹ Ibid.

the actions they took and the perceived necessity for policy. Initial estimates suggested that the shortage due to cessation of construction during the war would amount, by the end of 1917, to 175,000 houses. Assuming the normal annual increase of houses to be 75,000 it would be necessary to build 250,000 houses in 1918, and an additional 75,000 in addition to this figure for each year following in which the war was continued.³¹² Furthermore, there was a perceived need to satisfy the special needs of rural districts, with 50,000 added to the total to answer this emergency deficit. This figure in part reflects the belief that there would be a need to bring additional land under plough following the under-production of rural districts through the period before and during the war.³¹³ Preliminary assessment thus put the emergency figure at 300,000 new houses.

These figures, it should be noted, were not suggested to approach the full need of either urban or rural districts, but instead represented what the Ministry termed the ‘lowest limit of what should be our endeavour’.³¹⁴ Yet even with the foundations of action set with these formidable targets, the Housing Panel faced internal disagreement at the conservative nature of the figures. Leslie Scott wrote in the Minority Report that the figure was far too low, and urged the Ministry and government that, ‘it is of vital importance that we should appreciate to the full how great the need really is. It is only by realising in advance the vastness of the task imposed, that we are likely to come anywhere near to achieving our purpose.’³¹⁵

³¹² RECO 1/268. Memorandum by the Housing Panel on the Emergency Problem. 24 May 1918.

³¹³ This was a concern for unemployment, but also for preparedness for future large-scale conflicts. For contemporary discussion see Thomas Middleton, *Food production in war* (Oxford, 1923); Robert H. Rew, *Food supplies in war time* (London, 1914); Thomas B. Wood, *The national food supply in peace and war* (Cambridge, 1917). See also, Avner Offer, *The First World War: an agrarian interpretation* (Oxford, 1989); Margaret Barnett, *British food policy in the First World War* (London, 1985).

³¹⁴ RECO 1/268. Memorandum by the Housing Panel on the Emergency Problem. 24 May 1918.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

Of course, cessation of construction often disproportionately affected areas which prior to the conflict had little room for deterioration. Before the war, the problem of overcrowding was already serious. In England and Wales, the 1911 Census shows that the number of persons living more than two to a room was 3,139,472.³¹⁶ In Scotland, overcrowding was typically worse, to the point that the baseline classification of overcrowding was persons living three to a room.³¹⁷ This context is crucial: the numbers that the Ministry were producing as a shortfall of construction were additions to a situation at the point of crisis.

Calculating the impact of the war

The Ministry's attempt to assess the impact of the war was a laudable effort at a difficult task. The importance of the war is outlined in the first chapter, and at the same time is visible throughout every section of this chapter and thesis. For the Ministry of Reconstruction, however, and their attempts to implement a post-war housing policy, their calculations are important. From the outset it seems clear that despite a natural reluctance to avoid overextension, the impact of the war on housing conditions and construction was something for which there was an assumed moral obligation to rectify on the part of the state. This is visible in particular in the treatment of rent and mortgage repayments, which had been publicly addressed by the government and was foremost in their minds. As was noted by the Housing Panel, this:

May have been inevitable during the war, but unfortunately the Government will be faced with this dilemma; on the one hand on the expiry of the Act, unless prompt and effective steps are taken to remedy the shortage of houses, rents in many places will rise to scarcity prices... and on the other, its continued existence must be a hindrance to the ordinary remedy, namely building by

³¹⁶ HO 45/10592/186184. Census of population: 1911 Census.

³¹⁷ Richard Rodger, *Scottish housing in the twentieth century* (Leicester, 1989).

private enterprise, which up to the beginning of the war supplied at least 95 per cent. of the total amount of building.³¹⁸

It has already been argued in Chapter Two that the relationship between the war and rents is perhaps the single most important contributory factor to the post-war housing programme. Here again, the rental market was at the heart of the Ministry's move towards intervention; as they noted in a report, 'Anyone building in the first years after the war will consequently be faced with a reasonable certainty of loss in the capital value of their property within a few years. The universal tendency will therefore be to delay all building enterprise until prices have sunk to a normal level.'³¹⁹ Given that the war was directly complicit in creating this quandary – as it both created the increased cost of building, as well as the political necessity for drastic direct intervention in the fixing of rent costs for emergency purposes – the rectification of this was at the heart of the Ministry's remit. Added to this, the shortage of materials for building – which will be discussed in detail later in the chapter – was a further outcome of the conflict, and one which would exacerbate the certainty of loss for speculative builders after the war.

Given the clear correlation between the conflict and conditions, Addison strongly urged that 'the whole of the loss should be borne by the State' as it was 'entirely due to war conditions'.³²⁰ The moral complicity of the state in exacerbating the situation was thus a motivating factor from early in the Ministry's life, and continued to be so throughout the process of establishing the extent of the problem. It is worth noting too, that the war did not *entirely* halt the production of housing; in wartime conditions and driven by the demand for new workers or personnel in areas, the Ministry of Munitions and the Admiralty both

³¹⁸ RECO 1/268. Memorandum by the Housing Panel on the Emergency Problem. 24 May 1918.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ RECO 1/494. Housing: memorandum by the Minister of Reconstruction.

produced new homes for its workers.³²¹ Apart from the accidental ‘temporary accommodation’ – discussed in the first chapter – by 1917, National Projectile Factories at Dudley, Coventry, and Sheffield had gained 1,161 new homes for munitions workers, whilst Weethoughton, Strood, Hoo, and Weymouth saw the construction of 287 new dwellings, including 30 flat tenements.³²² This is not, of course, to argue that the deterioration of housing conditions during the war was prevented by relatively limited governmental-initiated construction, but rather to note that during the course of the war, key figures working in particular at the Ministry of Munitions – where Addison was serving under Lloyd George – began to utilise centralised power for the construction of national house building projects. In this sense, the war afforded some the opportunity for direct intervention in the crisis in a way which would perhaps have been inconceivable before the conflict.

Given all the factors which influenced the extent of the problem, one cannot help but feel a degree of sympathy for Addison and his team. Charged with investigating the scope of the problem and the minimum steps required for its amelioration was the tip of the iceberg. Their enquiry was based on the foundation of the state’s complicity in prevailing conditions; as such, the moral implications of the war completely shifted the perspective on policy. Yet not only did the tangled web of issues which lay behind the housing conditions present a formidable challenge in itself, the spectre of social and economic issues and unrest added an urgency and impetus to their actions. It is only by understanding the combination and influence of these complex competing pressures that we can understand post-war governmental housing policy.

³²¹ See R. J. Q. Adams, *Arms and the wizard: Lloyd George and the Ministry of Munitions, 1915-1916* (London, 1978). John Grigg, ‘Lloyd George and ministerial leadership in the Great War’, in Liddle, P (ed.), *Home fires and foreign fields: British social and military experience in the First World War* (London, 1985), 1-8.

³²² RECO 1/465. Appendix on grants to Local Authorities in aid of the execution of schemes for the provision of working class dwellings.

The evolution of plans and designs

Martin Dauntton has commented that, ‘The history of architectural form is more than a matter of describing and explaining the physical nature of tenements or houses. It is also necessary to inquire into the social influences of the particular housing form, by asking how it was experienced by its residents.’³²³ How it was experienced by its residents receives greater attention later in this thesis, yet when considering a moment of huge state intervention, the physical nature of the houses also offers us an insight in to the aspirations of their constructors. Housing scholars – particularly architectural historians – have regularly expounded the importance of the Tudor Walters cottages, and it is not proposed to attempt to rewrite what are already relatively effective histories.³²⁴ Indeed, the extensive scholarly examination that these cottages have received reflects the disproportionate contemporary interest shown by housing reformers and scholars in cottages as a form of housing. Early discussion in the Ministry focussed on ‘the best methods of ensuring the erection of an adequate number of houses of satisfactory type in the shortest possible space of time.’³²⁵ It is peculiar how rarely it is observed that if the goal was to create the most houses as quickly as possible, building cottages was a remarkably inefficient way to do this. A comparison of the British approach to reconstruction and housing after the First and Second World Wars

³²³ Martin Dauntton (ed.), *Housing the workers: a comparative history, 1850-1914* (Leicester, 1990), p. 14.

³²⁴ The majority of this scholarship came in a rush in the early 1980s, and their investigation of the architectural elements have remained relatively authoritative, although discussion of political or cultural factors merit reassessment. See, in particular, Mark Swenarton, *Homes fit for heroes: the politics and architecture of early state housing in Britain* (London, 1981); Martin Dauntton (ed.), *Councillors and tenants: local authority housing in English cities, 1919-1939* (Leicester, 1984); Paul Oliver, Ian Davis, and Ian Bentley, *Dunroamin: the suburban semi and its enemies* (London, 1981).

³²⁵ RECO 1/543. ‘Rough outline for providing houses and transit facilities, 9 July 1917’.

highlights the contrast in approach here,³²⁶ and more extensive research in to the relationship and learning experience between these two programmes would be welcome. The difficulty in providing such an extensive level of housing stock was formidable enough in itself, even without adding constraints of improvement in to the mix. As one builder commented in a letter to Addison in November, 1918, ‘The problem of urban populations and the ways and means of providing the housing accommodation that is in such pressing demand seem to us to be of importance as great as, if not greater than, the supply of suburban or rural dwellings, be they tenements or houses.’³²⁷

This highlights the recurring problem of location. As planners acknowledged, ‘A serious difficulty of placing the responsibility of providing houses on Local Authorities is that houses for people working in one area of one authority can often be most suitably provided in the area of another one.’³²⁸ As the first chapter has shown, understandings of housing scarcity cannot be confined to numbers in localities, but instead must remain acutely aware of the importance of *where* available houses are situated. For the Ministry and the local authorities who ultimately received responsibility for building, this question was closely linked to the availability of acquired or acquirable land. These sites were cheaper for a reason, and often their lack of desirability was linked heavily to the inadequate provision of inter-urban transport systems.³²⁹ As Tudor Walters noted, ‘It is upon the belts of underdeveloped land on

³²⁶ See Patrick Dunleavy, *The politics of mass housing in Britain, 1945-1975* (Oxford, 1981); Antony Sutcliffe (ed.), *Multi-storey living: the British working-class experience* (London, 1974); S. Merrett, *State housing in Britain* (London, 1979); Stephen V. Ward, *Planning and urban change* (London, 2004).

³²⁷ RECO 1/533. Letter from Harley & Sons to the Minister of Reconstruction’. 26 November 1918’.

³²⁸ RECO 1/543. ‘Rough outline for providing houses and transit facilities, 9 July 1917’. This is a problem which remains at the heart of housing problems a century later.

³²⁹ Inter-urban transport networks and their relationship to wartime housing deserve significantly more scholarly attention. See Simon T. Abernethy, ‘Opening up the suburbs: workmen’s trains in London, 1860-1914’, *Urban History*, 42 (2015), 70-88; Dyos, H.J., ‘Workmen’s fares in south London, 1860-1914’, in Cannadine, D. and Reeder, D. (eds.), *Exploring the Urban Past: Essays in Urban History by H.J. Dyos* (Cambridge, 1982); G. C. Dickinson and C. J. Longley, ‘The coming of cheap transport – a study of tramway fares on municipal systems in British provincial towns, 1900-14’, *Transport History*, 6 (1973).

the outskirts of towns that local authorities must chiefly depend for cheap land for housing purposes and, to render this available, tramway or light-railway facilities must be provided concurrently with development. If the acquisition of land is deferred until tramway extension schemes have been publicly projected and approved, the price of land will rise immediately.³³⁰ As it often does, the problem of a housing shortage intersected with other factors and its rectification required a level of faith that remedies would be provided for those concurrently.

This problem exposes a dissonance in the planning process. On the one hand, the experience of housing shortage during the war exposed that the location of accommodation – in particular its proximity to centres of industry – was of crucial importance. On the other, the opportunity to plan where large numbers of houses would be erected offered a chance at rectifying what were perceived to be problems with the current system. As the London Society noted, ‘In the past towns have been allowed to grow up haphazard without any ordered scheme as to residential and industrial areas respectively. There has been a lack of foresight as to arterial roads and means of communication and transit generally. As a result, factories and houses have been dumped side by side without regard to health and convenience and slum areas have developed without let or hindrance.’³³¹

The Tudor Walters Subcommittee, which was highly influential in the creation of many of the plans which were later used in the housing programme, has received a great deal of scholarly attention in particular. Mark Swenarton has described the work of this committee

³³⁰ ‘The Tudor Walters Report.’ PP 1918 Cd9191 vii, ‘Report of the Committee appointed by the President of the Local Government Board and the Secretary of State for Scotland to consider the questions of building construction in connection with the provision of dwellings for the working classes in England and Wales, and Scotland, and report upon the methods of securing economy and dispatch in the provision of such dwellings.’

³³¹ RECO 1/593. ‘Notes for the meeting of the London Society, 1 March 1918.’

as, ‘the first comprehensive treatise on housing design; it exerted a considerable influence abroad and had a direct and profound effect on the design of state housing in Britain.’³³² It is essential we remember that the plans this committee presented were coloured by the idealism which increasingly informed and drove Tudor Walters himself and many housing reformers and policy-makers at the Ministry of Reconstruction and in the government. This can be seen most clearly in a speech Tudor Walters himself offered at the legislation’s second reading in the Commons in April 1919:

It sounds a little dreary and dull to talk of such details as bricks and mortar, sites and prices, but at the back of these details there is a profoundly interesting human problem. The provision of the houses and the policy involved have to do with the health, happiness, and moral welfare of the vast majority not only of the men and women but of the children of these Islands... I want us to feel that in providing houses for the people we are engaged upon a great and supremely splendid task. I have sometimes stood, as other hon. Members have stood, amidst the ruins of the great cities of the ancient world, and in imagination I have tried to reconstruct those beautiful squares with their columns and their splendid architecture. I have been impressed with the manner in which the people who lived in those ancient cities loved them, with the local patriotism displayed and how they thought it a great thing to adorn and make splendid the city in which they lived. I wish we could catch something of that spirit in rebuilding our houses. Let us feel that it is a great and worthy task to make England beautiful and attractive and to make the dwellings of the poor things of beauty. I could go a step further than the cities of the ancient world and I could stand in some great cathedral of the Middle Ages and try to catch something of the spirit of those great men who designed it, and think of the reverent hands that laid the stone and bricks of the buildings. If the same spirit could be exhibited in building the humble dwellings of the poor we could build a great temple to humanity and our reverence would not be less acceptable to the Divine Being who is worshipped in those great temples.³³³

This idealism was also emphasised by sharp discontinuity, with another MP commenting in reply: ‘I am not sure that we ought not to commence our new programme of planning houses by hanging a few of the old architects and certainly a few of the old builders.’³³⁴ The plans must therefore be read as evidence just as clearly as a speech or diary: what they represent, in their purest form, is the evolution of state control to allow the assumption of responsibility for the provision of healthy, moral housing for the masses, and in that the assumption by

³³² Swenarton, *Homes fit for heroes*, p. 88.

³³³ HC Deb 08 April 1919 vol 114 cc1889-956

³³⁴ Ibid.

those planners and legislators that their vision of the future was the most desirable.³³⁵ Plans and designs therefore offer a window through which to examine the wider political problems and attitudes, as well as an essential physical anchor to tie later discussions on the impact of extra-design factors such as material and manpower shortages, the use of public utility societies, and the attitudes of builders and local authorities. Even for a thesis which is primarily concerned with construction and the builders more than the buildings themselves, it is therefore necessary to briefly examine the significance of the proposals.

In his authoritative work on social housing, John Burnett commented that, ‘Against the backdrop of a predominantly Victorian inheritance the recommendations in 1918 of the Tudor Walters Committee on the standards of post-war local authority housing were revolutionary, constituting a major innovation in social policy and in the future character of working-class life.’³³⁶ Tudor Walters was given a broad remit of investigation, establishing four subcommittees within the Housing (Building Construction) Committee to examine Materials and Supplies; Construction; Organisation and Labour; and Plans.³³⁷ Such terms of reference reflect the economic and social factors which were a strong undercurrent carrying the Ministry’s proposals. Materials and Supplies were charged with ascertaining what information is already available and what is being obtained by other departments as to supplies, whilst the Construction Subcommittee was asked to ‘consider alternative or new methods of construction or the use of new or alternative materials, with a view to economising materials which are likely to be scarce or expensive’.³³⁸ Similarly, the Organisation and Labour Subcommittee was tasked with establishing ‘what labour will be

³³⁵ See Peter Hall, *Cities of tomorrow: an intellectual history of urban planning and design since 1880*: 4th ed. (Chichester, 2014).

³³⁶ John Burnett, *A social history of housing, 1815-1985*: 2nd edition (London, 1986), p. 222.

³³⁷ RECO 1/556. Housing (Building Construction) Committee. Draft terms of reference for the Tudor Walters Committees, 30 August 1917.

³³⁸ Ibid.

required for the building of the cottages during the emergency period and how best that labour and the building operations may be organised.³³⁹ From the outset, then, Tudor Walters was at least ostensibly asked to operate from the position of building in exceptional circumstances created by the war. The plans they put forward were therefore a response to those specific circumstances as much as evidence of architectural innovation.

These pressures – the shortage of materials, increase in costs, high unemployment, and relatively low-skilled labour levels – often translated to a broad desirability for economy in the despatch of new housing. Rowntree and Unwin were involved in discussions about how ‘the degree to which standardising is desirable and economical in the various designs and fittings requires to be determined’,³⁴⁰ and in the instructions for the cottage competitions arranged by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the Local Government Board emphasised that, ‘It is essential that strict economy be exercised throughout the design, and this will be an important consideration in making the awards.’³⁴¹ Yet the terms of reference for Tudor Walters and strict economy of despatch cannot wholly be conflated, as other parts of this thesis have demonstrated in detail. Sophisticated use of labour to help alleviate a large-scale unemployment crisis concomitant with demobilisation was a consideration beyond strict economy; the speed with which new houses could be erected was a factor in the methodological desirability, as was the relationship between location and cost. Whilst it is natural to baulk at the figures presented by the construction of as many as half a million new

³³⁹ RECO 1/556. Housing (Building Construction) Committee. Draft terms of reference for the Tudor Walters Committees, 30 August 1917.

³⁴⁰ Ibid. Rowntree and Unwin were prolific in disseminating their views before and after the war. See Raymond Unwin, *Town planning in practice: an introduction to the art of designing cities and suburbs* (London, 1909); Raymond Unwin, *The war, and what after?* (London, 1915); Raymond Unwin, *Cottage plans and common sense* (London, 1902); B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty: a study of town life* (London, 1901); B. Seebohm Rowntree, *The labourer and the land* (London, 1914).

³⁴¹ RECO 1/589. ‘Cottage competitions arranged by the Royal Institute of British Architects at desire of L.G.B. etc.’

homes, and assume that in the wake of a massive and lengthy industrial conflict the provision of those buildings would be undertaken in the strictest economic manner, Tudor Walters' Subcommittee was responding to a number of factors, not all of which should be contained to the economic despatch of such a large number of houses. That the style of house proposed was not the most efficient form of production is one indicator of this; the specific instructions they were given is another.

The Tudor Walters Report is filled with the aspirations of its drafters. They noted that, 'It is not enough merely to cover the ground with streets and houses. The site should be considered as the future location of a community mostly engaged in industrial pursuits having many needs in addition to that of house-room'.³⁴² It offered comments on the layout of open spaces, playgrounds, allotments, and gardens. And for the houses themselves, it attempted to standardise the minimum acceptable quality of living provided by accommodation for the working classes. In line with this thinking it largely assumed that a more suburban, garden city style of life was preferable, following a school of reform advocated long before the war by Raymond Unwin – one of the report's chief contributors.³⁴³ It also called for a radical improvement in the layouts and quality of houses themselves, although – as discussed in Chapter Four – these recommendations simply echoed and added additional professional credibility to the calls of the Women's Housing Subcommittee. In fact, Tudor Walters often presented a rather more tame advocacy for the same issues that the Women's Subcommittee had fought for. Just as the voices of working women which speak through the evidence and recommendations of the women's report speaks of the importance of the parlour to a level

³⁴² Tudor Walters Report. Cd9191, 1918, p. 401.

³⁴³ Raymond Unwin, *Nothing gained by overcrowding! How the garden city type of development may benefit both owner and occupier*, 3rd edition (London, 1918).

slightly perplexing to the drafters, Tudor Walters emphasised the primacy of the importance of the parlour for working-class families also.

Perhaps the most debateable point in reference to accommodation is whether a parlour should be provided in addition to a living-room and scullery. The desire for the parlour or third room is remarkably wide-spread both among urban and rural workers. The provision of a living-room of sufficient size, and of a scullery so equipped as to relieve the living-room of cooking and other such work goes some way to meet the wishes of many of the tenants, particularly in view of the extra rent which the provision of a parlour must involve; nevertheless it is the parlour which the majority desire. Numbers of individual tenants would undoubtedly be willing to sacrifice the size of the living-room and scullery in order to secure the parlour; some would even be willing to adopt the old type of house with combined living-room and scullery, in order that the second room might be retained as a parlour.³⁴⁴

Perhaps more than any other element of the post-war planning, it is through parlours that a disconnection between policy-makers and recipients is exposed. The report ultimately failed to recognise the symbolic importance of the parlour to working-class families, prioritising – in a continuation of pre-war, moralistic ideals of housing reform – the preservation of *space* ahead of the provision of sites of cultural meaning. Their concession that ‘whenever possible a parlour should be provided’ and that ‘having regard to the fact that well-built houses may last far beyond the building loan of sixty years we are convinced that the provision of a parlour will in the long run prove more conducive to economy’ was underpinned by a lack of determination to implement this.³⁴⁵ ‘We do not’, they wrote, ‘consider that the parlour should be secured by cutting down the desirable minimum sizes of the living-room, scullery, or other essential parts of the house, and, where it is not possible to provide it except in this way, we recommend that it be omitted.’³⁴⁶ As a result, the wishes of working-class families – which are expanded in greater detail in Chapter Four – were recognised but without conviction; given the more economical production of house building where the parlour was omitted, the lack of a strict obligation to include one disincentivised the inclusion of an element of the

³⁴⁴ Tudor Walters Report, Cd 9191, 1918. p. 25.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

house that the majority of working-class people consulted had emphasised as vitally important. Even in Tudor Walters' presentation of the plans, the inclusion of a parlour was problematized, noting that 'The addition of a second living-room on the ground floor considerably complicates the planning and renders it more difficult to secure the proper aspects for all the rooms and yet to plan the house economically and with a simple rectangular form.'³⁴⁷ As such, by the time the Local Government Board prepared their manual for the preparation of housing schemes, houses not containing a parlour were represented as standard: 'the most general class of house should contain living-room, scullery, larder, fuel store, W.C., bath in separate chamber, and three bedrooms.'³⁴⁸

In the end, Tudor Walters' cottages were, perhaps, idealistic. The important question is for whom. The discussion of parlours in particular demonstrates that they struggled to overcome the idealism of their architects and those framing the policy in order to fulfil the idealism of their intended recipients. It is enlightening for our appreciation of the efficacy of the Addison Act that in one of the key aspects of its implementation – whether or not to include parlours as standard – the policy-makers allowed pragmatism and preconceived notions of the ideal home to overcome the evidence of working people that it had gathered.

Sewers and infrastructure

It is not difficult to imagine why the sleek architectural form of new cottages has received more attention than sewerage and road maintenance provision,³⁴⁹ but the Tudor Walters

³⁴⁷ Tudor Walters Report, Cd 9191, 1918, p. 43.

³⁴⁸ H.M.S.O., *Local Government Board Manual on the preparation of state-aided housing schemes* (London, 1919), p. 29.

³⁴⁹ See Robert Millward, 'The political economy of urban utilities' in Martin Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge urban history of Britain* (Cambridge, 2000), 315-351.

Report's recommendations were heavily predicated on consideration of the economic despatch of accompanying infrastructure.

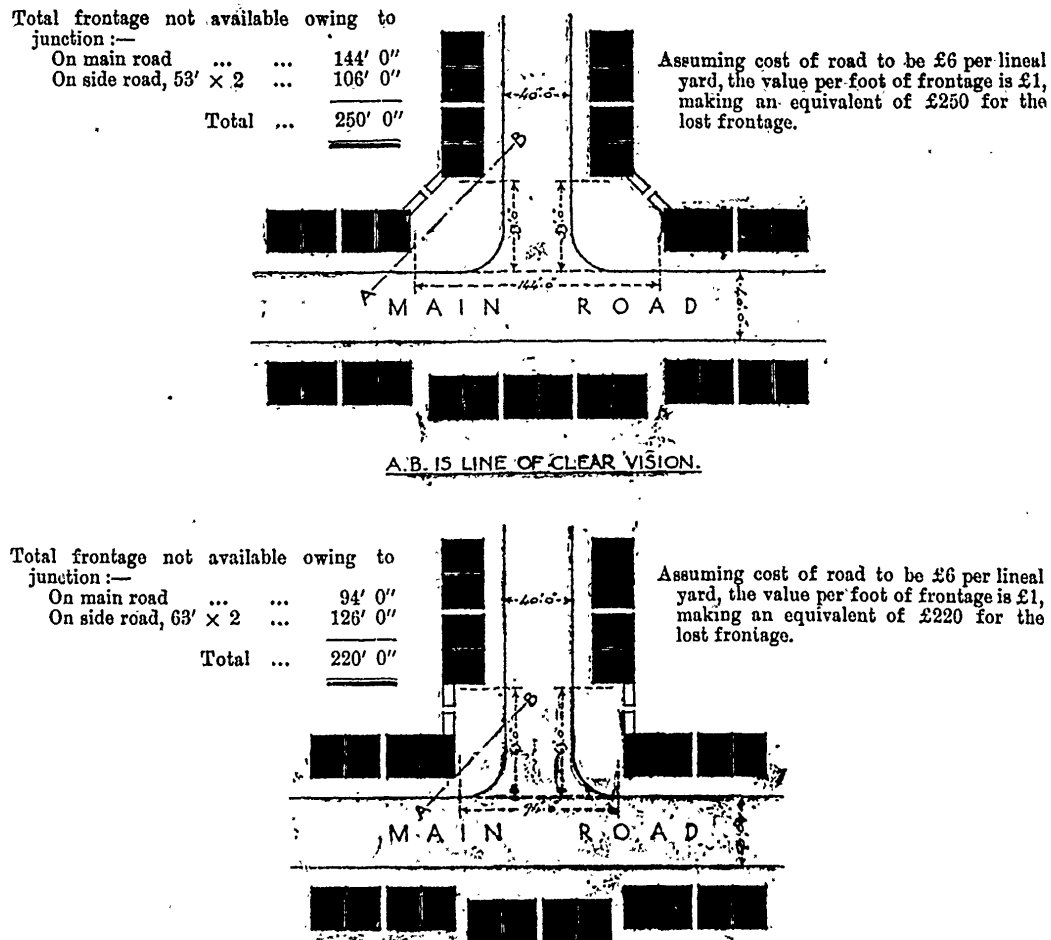


Figure 12. Proposed frontage of new houses. Tudor Walters Report.

As this thesis shows, the supposed economy of the housing programme was a key consideration in its creation, and the provision of efficient accompanying infrastructure was central to this. In particular, a strong case was presented that the relationship between frontage, accompanying roads, and density of production could – with careful consideration – present a greater economy at a lesser density if properly planned. Such consideration, they proposed, led to no additional cost in road making, and ‘on the contrary, if comparison is

made between schemes having houses requiring the same average amount of frontage, a slightly less total length of road may suffice with fewer houses to the acre than would be required with more houses.³⁵⁰ (Figure 12)

This logic promoted the primacy of the cul-de-sac, as well as espousing the merits of suburban living in more general terms. The report concludes that a 'more suburban type of development becomes practicable, and roadways and footways narrower in width and less expensive in construction will be adequate to the needs of districts developed on lines suggested by the Boards and may result in substantial economy in development expenses.'³⁵¹ This particularly demonstrates the garden city influences of planners.³⁵²

This logic was equally applicable to the sewers and drainage, which the report examined at great length. Again, the attempt to secure economic despatch of housing competed with the pressures of an idealised home. Attention to detail in the provision of roads, sewerage, and accompanying open spaces is not merely reflective of competent town planning but instead offers insights in to the ideological motivations underpinning some of these considerations. The representations of the merits of suburban life, and the economic calculations which accompanied them, rested on some key assumptions; principally, that the moral and health considerations of open space, direct light, clean air, and gardens to cultivate and allow children to play in, were axiomatically worthwhile – and therefore cost justified – incorporations. Tudor Walters presented the most economical way to provide homes within

³⁵⁰ Tudor Walters Report, Cd 9191, 1918. p. 13.

³⁵¹ Tudor Walters Report, Cd 9191, 1918. p. 15.

³⁵² See Ebenezer Howard, *Garden cities of to-morrow* (London, 1902); George M. Harris and Ebenezer Howard, *The garden city movement* (London, 1906); Stanley Buder, *Visionaries and planners: the garden city movement and the modern community* (Oxford, 1990); Stephen Ward, *The garden city: past, present and future* (London, 1992).

the construct of a series of value judgements about what constituted a worthwhile and moral home to live in.

The plans Tudor Walters suggested therefore highlight that despite the best intentions to improve the lives of working people clearly evident in the proposals, there was also a strong imposition of values about what that ‘improvement’ meant. The lack of commitment to the inclusion of a parlour, and the unwillingness to sacrifice space in other areas to provide one despite the clear understanding that this is what was desired, demonstrates the prioritisation of health over culture. As a result, what the policy-makers tell us in the plans they proposed is that ultimately they believed that they knew what was best for working-class families better than the families knew themselves. This was crucial in shaping the housing programme, and the practical implications and deeper meanings of this are explored in depth in Chapter Five.

Private enterprise

It is vital to avoid the teleological temptation to regard the provision of houses by local authorities – or even more direct state action – as inevitable, or even likely. As the Ministry of Reconstruction’s investigation into the housing situation progressed through the course of the war, they began to explore the range of potential delivery methods for ameliorative action. The size of the challenge ultimately led the Housing Panel to conclude that, ‘given the magnitude of the task, it is evident every agency which can fulfil the necessary conditions should, if possible, be utilised.’³⁵³

³⁵³ RECO 1/268. Memorandum by the Housing Panel on the Emergency Problem. 24 May 1918.

The development of this position, culminating in the primacy of the state as the deliverer of change, represented a drastic departure from the previously prevailing notion that private enterprise could be depended on to carry the load after the war. Prior to the conflict, 95 per cent of houses were constructed in the form of speculative building. The war changed that, with evidence forcing the concession that, ‘abnormal conditions apart, the expectation that it would continue to provide the necessary number of houses in the future would not be justifiable.’³⁵⁴ Charting the evolution of this principle of responsibility for the physical provision of new houses is enlightening for our understandings of the approach to the housing situation after the war as a whole. To do this, first it is necessary to examine in closer detail the situation with regard to private enterprise prior to and during the conflict, and the evidence gathering process and interactions with speculative builders that led the decision-makers in the Ministry to, somewhat reluctantly, conclude that direct assumption of responsibility through local authority empowerment was the only tenable recourse.

In moving away from reliance on private enterprise, the Ministry was forced to tread a politically precarious route. Opposition from interest groups and from within the political houses forced regular acknowledgements of the ultimate advisability of a private market being allowed to flourish. This was certainly not lost on government figures; as Chapter Two explored, the housing programme was heavily motivated by the desire to facilitate an effectively functioning private market. Statements on the course of action to be adopted were, therefore, often subject to caveats: ‘It is desirable to consider the possibility of encouraging private enterprise... In spite, however, of every encouragement, which the State can give,

³⁵⁴ RECO 1/268. Memorandum by the Housing Panel on the Emergency Problem. 24 May 1918.

private enterprise cannot in view of the circumstances which will exist at the end of the war, be relied upon for any large contribution.’³⁵⁵

That they could not be relied upon for any significant role was an inescapable conclusion given the communication with representatives of the sector who typically either refused to build for the poorest or seemed to see the government’s heightened involvement as a moment of opportunity, asking for long lists of concessions. The Building Societies Association, for example, recommended that to encourage building: the builders must have no financial accountability for roads and sewerage; be exempt from paying rates for a number of years; have land acquired for them; have subsidies for immediate building provided; that small houses be exempt from Income Tax; and that the sector as a whole be drastically deregulated and legal charges removed.³⁵⁶ Whilst such measures would almost certainly stimulate a significant increase in the construction of houses for the working classes, it also represents the position of strength that private enterprise believed themselves to be working from. In a private interview with the Ministry, Edward Cave – the editor of the *Municipal Journal* – admitted that ‘the private builder is asking for cheap money and grants’ and that Parliament should not look at this as an option.³⁵⁷

Such a lack of genuine cooperative spirit is not surprising, particularly considering the harm that the 1915 Rent Act did to the building sector – although, as has been shown, the decline in construction was already chronic prior to the artificial lowering of rents.³⁵⁸ This comes across clearly in the large number of interviews the Ministry took with builders. It is also not

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ RECO 1/492. ‘Report and Recommendations of our Executive Committee’, 5 February 1917.

³⁵⁷ RECO 1/545. Interview with Mr. Edward Cave, Editor of the *Municipal Journal*, N.D.

³⁵⁸ See S. B. Saul, ‘House building in England, 1890-1914’, *Economic History Review*, 15 (1962), 119-37; J. A. Yelling, ‘Land, property and planning’ in Dauntton, Martin (ed.), *The Cambridge urban history of Britain* (Cambridge, 2000), 467-495; Parry J. Lewis, *Building cycles and Britain’s growth* (London, 1965).

surprising that speculative builders, such as Mr. Squires in Nottingham, were not excited by the prospect of providing uneconomic houses:

He quite agreed that if the Government gave a substantial financial assistance they should control the kind of house to be built, and so far as he was concerned he was in favour of raising the standard of houses occupied by working people, but he said no speculating builder can himself accomplish this. He is bound to supply what is asked for. Working men are very slow to increase the sum they are expected to pay in rent. In several cases from his own experience, where he had provided a considerably better cottage at only a slightly higher rent, he had the greatest difficulty in either selling or letting these, whereas for a two-bedroom cottage, which he lets at 6/- inclusive of rates, he can get six tenants for every cottage he has to let. He says that a very small proportion of the working people would appreciate a house of the garden city type, i.e. built on the 12 to an acre plan. They prefer to live in houses of existing types in town.³⁵⁹

This view was repeated in a number of interviews with builders, such as F.W. Bristow from Golders Green, who told Raymond Unwin that many speculating builders simply would not build working-class houses or cottages, and it was ‘a mystery to him how people could build a house and make it pay at a rental of only 8/- or 10/- week’.³⁶⁰ Beyond the difficulties of obtaining an economic rent on working-class properties, builders frequently expressed a lack of desire to build houses for lower-income families and gladly ceded the responsibility, encouraging their production by local authorities instead. During a delegation to Lord Rhondda, a former President of the National Federation of Property Owners/Ratepayers – M. Cheverton Brown – flatly stated, ‘We cannot deal with the poorest. They have always been an unmitigated nuisance and there will be no objection to the municipality dealing with that section.’³⁶¹

When not asking for generous subsidies – or sometimes at the same time – builders frequently expressed their objection to any form of accountability or control. Edwin Evans,

³⁵⁹ RECO 1/545. Interview with Mr. Squires, Speculating Builder, Nottingham, with R. Unwin and B. S. Rowntree. 9 August 1917.

³⁶⁰ RECO 1/545. Interview with Mr. F. W. Bristow, Builder, Golders Green, N.W.

³⁶¹ RECO 1/580. Summary of proceedings of deputation to Lord Rhondda. 22 May 1917. Emphasis in original.

President of the London Property Owners Protection Association, stated emphatically that, ‘We do not ask for subsidies. That would mean public control and we do not want public control.’³⁶² Cheverton Brown added a voice of support: ‘We want no subsidies. We want to be perfectly independent. All restrictions on houses must be removed. Then we can in the future as in the past provide all housing that is needful and I think we can even make up arrears. There must however be absolute freedom of contract.’³⁶³

At the end of the two days of meetings and consultations with representatives of private enterprise, Lord Rhondda summarized the views espoused by private builders succinctly:

Shortly the view of the private builders was that restricting legislation should be done away with, substantial loans at market rates granted to private builders, no restriction imposed on rents, and no further assistance given to municipalities than to private enterprise except in regard to housing the poorest and rural workers.³⁶⁴

Private enterprise thus gave little to no indication that it would provide anything close to the level of investment or dedication required to help remedy the problem in any meaningful way. They were resistant to any element of control, and by the end of the war did little to hide their reluctance to build for the poorer classes. It is difficult to imagine a scenario where the government would provide large-scale subsidies without control of the money, and there is little evidence to suggest that without accountability, or an element of fiscal and regulatory coercion, private enterprise would provide houses of the quality or quantity required or envisioned.

³⁶² RECO 1/580. Summary of proceedings of deputation to Lord Rhondda. 22 May 1917. Emphasis in original.

³⁶³ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

Furthermore, the assertion that they could provide in the future ‘as in the past’ should be viewed with scepticism. The lack of construction by private enterprise was not a development limited to the conditions of war. As the graph below (Figure 13) demonstrates, construction as a whole was greatly and continuously depressed for a decade prior to the outbreak of the war, and highlights the trend Chapter One emphasised in national perspective.³⁶⁵

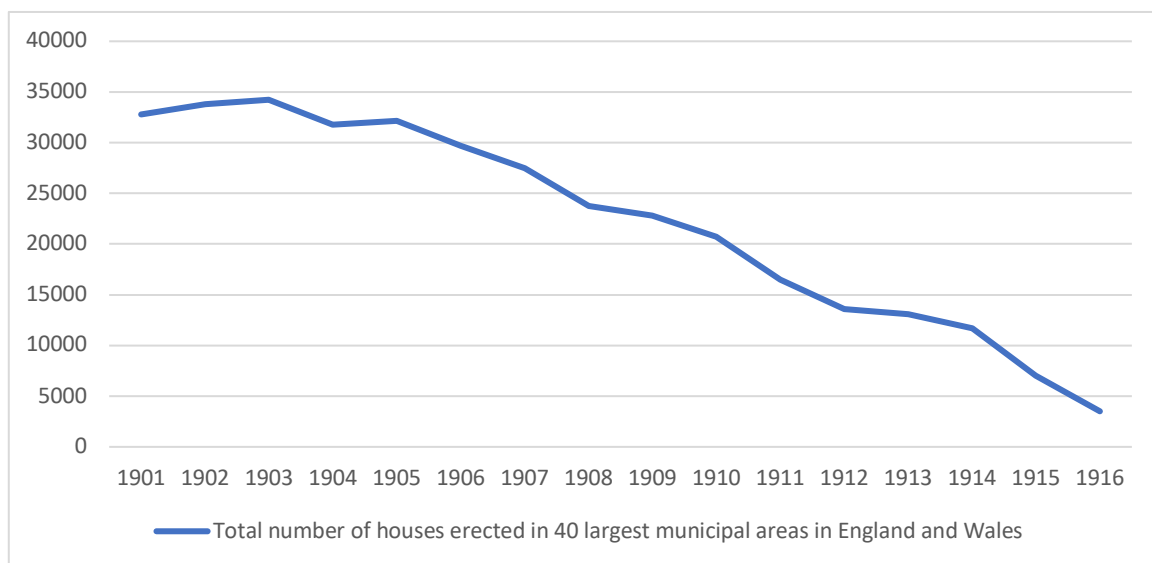


Figure 13. Total number of houses erected in the 40 largest municipal areas in England and Wales. RECO 1/488.

Public utility societies

Given the intractability of private enterprise, and the lack of evidence to generate any confidence in their commitment to building a significant housing scheme for the poorer classes, the government was forced to look elsewhere. This did not necessarily mean looking inwards immediately, however; the formulation of the housing programme instead involved the exploration of the maximum number of options to minimise direct state involvement as much as possible. It was also idealistic in its visions of the future development of housing,

³⁶⁵ RECO 1/488.

and as such, viewed public utility societies very favourably. Whilst there was some discussion about the need to more effectively define precisely what a public utility society actually was before they could be reliably employed as agents of the state, the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1909, defines them as a society registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act, 1893, ‘the rules whereof prohibit the payment of any interest or dividend at a rate exceeding five pounds per centum per annum.’³⁶⁶

There was some reason for optimism about the growth of this new approach to housing supply. From two in 1903, the number of co-operative housing and public utility societies had grown to one hundred and three in 1916, commanding a total value of land and buildings worth nearly three million pounds (see Figure 9).³⁶⁷ Peter Malpass has described the years preceding the war as ‘a period of innovation, growth and dynamism in what would be referred to now as voluntary housing providers.’³⁶⁸ That the vision of a productive public utility sector did not ultimately come to fruition should not diminish from the fact that for policy-makers during the war, the sector represented a modern, forward-thinking sector of promising growth (Figure 14, below).

³⁶⁶ Housing, Town Planning, &c., Act, 1909. IX [EDW VII], cc44. Section 4, paragraph 2.

³⁶⁷ RECO 1/482 ‘Table illustrating the growth of Co-operative Housing and Public Utility Societies’

³⁶⁸ Peter Malpass, ‘Public utility societies and the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1919: a re-examination of the introduction of state-subsidized housing in Britain’, *Planning Perspectives*, 15 (2000), 377-392, p. 379.

	1903	1909	1912	1915	1916
NO. OF SOCIETIES	2	19	69	106	103
RENTS FROM PROPERTY (£)	9,930	34,400	78,192	154,051	176,689
MANAGEMENT EXPENSES	1,047	15,550	17,694	23,049	24,454
PROFIT FOR DISPOSAL	280	6,964	13,999	7,500	10,730
<u>LIABILITIES</u>					
TO SHARE-HOLDERS	7,457	96,050	240,481	334,004	341,064
TO DEPOSITORS			17,637	365	422
TO CREDITORS FOR LOANS			1,291,820	2,455,195	2,608,277
OTHER LIABILITIES	36,207	544,860	43,372	65,112	65,376
TOTAL LIABILITIES	43,664	640,910	1,593,310	2,854,676	3,015,139
<u>ASSETS</u>					
VALUE OF FREEHOLD LAND & BUILDINGS	-	-	990,147	1,313,016	1,399,871
VALUE OF LEASEHOLD LAND & BUILDINGS	-	-	548,371	1,442,658	1,503,011
<u>TOTAL VALUE OF LAND & BUILDINGS</u>	-	625,705	1,538,518	2,755,674	2,902,882
OTHER INVESTMENTS	-	-	-	46,510	66,533
OTHER ASSETS	-	23,217	62,894	53,316	83,617
TOTAL ASSETS (£)	46,856	648,922	1,601,412	2,855,500	3,053,032

Figure 14. Growth of co-operative housing and public utility societies, 1903-1916. RECO 1/482.

Public utility societies were viewed favourably as a rapidly growing form of housing provision, but also from the way they engaged with the ideological elements of the housing problem. As Keith Skilleter noted, they ‘provided a case in bricks and mortar for increasing

standards in state and private sector housing.³⁶⁹ They tended to provide cottages and smaller houses, and adopted an approach to layout more in line with the ideas of popular reformers of the time.³⁷⁰ In particular, they usually set limits on the number of houses to the acre, and built more on garden city lines, as in the notable cases of the Bournville Village Trust and the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust Ltd.³⁷¹ They were seen as a moral form of provision, and one figure in the Ministry of Reconstruction forwarded the belief that ‘from the national health and child welfare point of view most of these public utility society estates are invaluable.’³⁷² For housing reformers, these programmes were particularly noteworthy as they focussed the scope of the architect towards a concern for the housing of the working classes.³⁷³ This period and these societies – both the ‘5 per cent philanthropy’ movement, and the wider work of reformers such as Octavia Hill – have received a great deal of scholarly attention detailing the work they carried out and the goals they had,³⁷⁴ although Anthony Wohl’s conclusion that the work of Octavia Hill ultimately demonstrated that her programmes could never truly solve the problems it combated, and thus opened the door to a more municipal approach, remains convincing.³⁷⁵ What is crucial, however, is the extent to which planners during the war believed they could harness this growing force to assist with a national building programme.

³⁶⁹ Keith John Skilleter, ‘The role of public utility societies in early British town planning and housing reform, 1901-36’, *Planning Perspectives*, 8 (1993), 125-165.

³⁷⁰ For wider historical context, see A. S. Wohl, *The eternal slum: housing and social policy in Victorian London* (1977).

³⁷¹ See Bournville, *Bournville housing: a description of the housing schemes of Cadbury Brothers* (Birmingham, 1922); Philip Henslowe, *Ninety years on: an account of the Bournville Village Trust* (Birmingham, 1984); Meryvn Miller, *Hampstead Garden Suburb: past and present* (Stroud, 1995); S. A. Barnett, *The story of the growth of the Hampstead Garden Suburb, 1907-1928* (London, 1928).

³⁷² RECO 1/482. Table illustrating the growth of Co-operative Housing and Public Utility Societies.

³⁷³ See J. N. Tarn, *Five per cent philanthropy – an account of housing in urban areas between 1840 and 1914* (Cambridge, 1973).

³⁷⁴ See Elizabeth Baigent and Cowell, Ben (eds.), “Nobler imaginings and mighty struggles”: *Octavia Hill, social activism and the remaking of British society* (London, 2016); Thomas Adam, *Buying respectability: philanthropy and urban society in transnational perspective, 1840s to 1930s* (Bloomington, 2009).

³⁷⁵ A. S. Wohl, ‘Octavia Hill and the homes of the London Poor’, *Journal of British Studies*, 10 (1971), 105-31.

In an internal memorandum it was noted that ‘the urgent necessity for more houses and the great national value of a higher standard of healthy dwellings, coupled with the excellent pioneer work of many of the societies and the opportunity they provide for democratic management, now a popular demand, all emphasize the advisability and desirability of the State providing every inducement and encouragement likely to secure a greater provision of dwellings through the agency of Public Utility Housing Societies which operate on a properly defined town planning method of development and a co-operative system of administration.’³⁷⁶ Indeed, as the report of the Financial Assistance Subcommittee commented, ‘by reason of their character and organisation they lend themselves most easily to State assistance and supervision.’³⁷⁷ Yet despite relative solvency, correspondence with public utility societies indicated that subsidies were essential. For example, the Rowntree Trust informed the Ministry that, ‘The extent to which we build will depends absolutely on the financial assistance we get from the State. If we get none, there is no doubt that we shall do nothing and wait until prices become normal.’³⁷⁸ Similarly, the Guinness Trust informed the Ministry that unless the prices of labour and materials falls, they would wait to build but that ‘If some financial help were given to meet the extra cost of building due to the war... the Trustees would deal sympathetically with any proposal to build at the earliest possible date.’³⁷⁹ Similar sentiments were expressed by the Sutton Trust, and remind us of an important reality behind the idealism of public utility societies. Even for the most philanthropically-minded organisations, a financial pragmatism necessarily prevailed, and could be morally justified in terms of the overall levels of public good achieved: why build one house today when, once prices fall, you can build two in the future? With the remit to

³⁷⁶ RECO 1/482. Table illustrating the growth of Co-operative Housing and Public Utility Societies.

³⁷⁷ RECO 1/531. Interim Report on Public Utility Societies. 29 October 1918.

³⁷⁸ RECO 1/525. Correspondence with Housing Trusts. 6 August 1918.

³⁷⁹ RECO 1/525. Correspondence with Housing Trusts. 18 August 1918.

produce housing of an acceptable quality for the working classes in a cost economic way, it made sense for public utility societies to exercise caution in a prohibitive building climate nearly as much as it did for speculative builders. This does not necessarily fit the scholarship's narrative of public utility societies, however. Richard Best has argued that they never envisaged themselves in terms of high numbers of housing provision, and were content that the high standards which were of the minimum acceptance to housing reformers meant that rent was always going to be set at levels unachievable to the poorer tenant.³⁸⁰ Their behaviour during and at the end of the war suggests that this was not necessarily always going to be the case. Given the accepted low returns on capital, and the subsidy offered, affordable rents were potentially well within reach.

Whilst popular opinion of public utility societies was generally positive, they were not universally liked. Speculative builders regularly expressed disdain for their agenda and activities. Politically, too, they were at times regarded with some trepidation. David Gillies, Librarian of the Labour Party, stated in an interview with the Ministry that the party were, 'regarding public utility societies with great suspicion, and he said there ought to be complete publicity of public utility society accounts.'³⁸¹ Whilst public utility societies were perhaps just one of many things the Labour Party viewed with suspicion at the time, many more contemporary commentators viewed their efficacy with a healthy level of scepticism. As W.G. Storer noted, public utility societies were trading heavily on trust and reputation and this had already been open to abuse: 'A Public Utility Society may erect houses in the usual long dreary ugly monotonous rows and provided the construction is sound and the sanitary arrangements are satisfactory, it can borrow from the P.W.L.C. precisely the same proportion

³⁸⁰ Richard Best, 'Housing Associations, 1890-1990' in Lowe and Hughes (eds.), *A new century of social housing* (Leicester, 1991), 142-9.

³⁸¹ RECO 1/545. Notes of various interviews.

of the value of its property, at precisely the same rate of interest, and for precisely the same period of years, and is loaned to a similar society carrying out its schemes on the most approved up to date Town Planning and Garden City lines.’³⁸² Given the lack of definitional stringency, governmental assistance to public utility societies was thus not guaranteed to result in the spacious, idealised homes envisaged.

It was therefore clear that any proposed assistance for public utility societies would require closer attention. In October 1918, the President of the Local Government Board received a deputation from the Federation of British Industries and the National Alliance of Employers and Employed which assured him that ‘a large number of firms... would proceed to set up Societies to submit schemes for housing now that they knew that they would receive similar treatment to that given to Local Authorities.’³⁸³ The government were perhaps, therefore, attempting to use the ethics and principles of public utility societies to control future development from other bodies. The financial incentives they proposed to do this with were broadly the same as those for local authorities, except that instead of varying terms allowed for different items, as for local authorities, the public utility societies were to be taken at an equated term of fifty years. As security for this, it was proposed that ‘safeguards’ should be put in place, with thirteen new conditions added to fulfil the ‘public utility society’ definition, including: the central authority approval of rents; a quarter of the Board of Management being appointed by the Tenant Members’ Committees; strict limits on profits; and regular auditing of accounts.³⁸⁴

³⁸² RECO 1/548. Letter from W.G. Storer to B. Seeböhm Rowntree, 3 May 1917.

³⁸³ RECO 1/528. Housing of the Working Classes. State Assistance to Public Utility Societies. Statement by the President of the Local Government Board in Birmingham, 8 October 1918.

³⁸⁴ RECO 1/531. Interim Report on Public Utility Societies. 29 October 1918.

Perhaps this stringency was the reason that public utility societies failed to have any meaningful growth after the war. Such control robbed them of some of the driving moral impetus and robbed enthusiastic philanthropist backers of motivation. Martin Daunton described the failure for them to keep pace alongside local authority provision as ‘one of the more puzzling features of the British housing system’.³⁸⁵ Such failure is somewhat less puzzling, however, when one considers how the war influenced housing construction and attitudes, and how the Ministry of Reconstruction sought to opportunistically utilise public utility societies. Peter Malpass has noted that many societies sold their 1919 Act houses in the years after the war, ‘suggesting that they were in fact providing for a rather more middle-class clientele.’³⁸⁶ That the houses they produced were perhaps targeted more towards, at the very least, the more affluent working class, is not revelatory but does not explain the whole story. The move to provision of housing for the working classes by the state also took some of the impetus for philanthropic action away. Given the huge investment by the government, and the apparent resonance of ideas regarding cottages and the desirability of building on garden city lines, it is unsurprising that money started to disappear for public utility societies and, by the middle of 1922, many were in ‘extremely grave financial circumstances.’³⁸⁷ The Addison Act, in changing the face of housing construction, also – at least for now – ended the rise of philanthropic housing.

³⁸⁵ Martin Daunton, *A property owning democracy?* (London, 1987), p. 116.

³⁸⁶ Peter Malpass, ‘Public utility societies and the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1919: a re-examination of the introduction of state-subsidized housing in Britain’, *Planning Perspectives*, 15 (2000), 377-392.

³⁸⁷ Malpass, p. 387.

Material shortages

As Chapter One has already outlined, the depth of the war's impact on housing was not limited to attitudes; the conduct of the conflict necessitated the consumption of raw materials at a huge scale, and the prioritisation of that over construction created scarcity and inflation in the building materials trade at the war's conclusion.³⁸⁸ As Hew Strachan comments, 'By 1918 goods were running out faster than cash; the maximization of resources was much more important than the management of money.'³⁸⁹ These prevailing circumstances forced deviation from the idealised cottages and innovation to varying levels of success. Tudor Walters shows us what they would have done in an ideal world, but at the end of the First World War they were building in far from ideal conditions. To understand how the homes Addison's Act created took the shapes they did, it is necessary to examine in greater detail what they were made from, and how that was produced.

Building a lot of houses requires a lot of materials. To build half a million new houses in the period immediately after the war would require, in particular, a huge number of bricks, and a great deal of timber. Housing construction had grown increasingly stagnant in the period prior to the war, and ceased entirely during the war, and this affected not just the building industry but also the associated industries – brickmaking in particular. The prospect of factoring in a huge construction programme at the end of the war thus had ramifications for reconstruction in a number of ways. Bricks and timber were desperately needed for the new cottages, and a shortage of both existed at the end of the war. Overcoming this shortfall was a complicated problem, however, which was impacted by shipping and Allied organisation,

³⁸⁸ See also Stephen V. Ward, *The geography of interwar Britain: the state and uneven development* (London, 1998), Chs. 4+5.

³⁸⁹ Hew Strachan, *Financing the First World War* (Oxford, 2004), p. 1.

labour demands and supply, and prices. Building Addison's houses required more than just bricks and mortar: it meant overcoming the difficulties of supplying those things too.

In a period of obvious scarcity and high demand, there was an urgent need – if the housing programme was to have any hope of success – to keep prices as low as possible. In investigating the costs of materials with a view to postwar planning, evidence frequently suggested that the existence of 'combines' in the building trades were greatly increasing costs.³⁹⁰ Despite vague prohibitions in Common Law, there were no strict rules regarding the use of cooperation to maintain prices, and certainly not the competition laws which were introduced later in the century.³⁹¹ Nevertheless, the strength of combines presented a clear, frequently expressed grievance from builders, and the government's need to keep prices as low as possible during post-war shortages meant that they investigated the impact of combines in a bid to 'ascertain whether the goods manufactured or sold... are charged to the consumer at a reasonable price and whether there is evidence of undue profit or unjustifiable increases in price.'³⁹² From as early as May 1917, a memorandum on housing in England and Wales issued by the Reconstruction Committee had noted that trade combines would pose significant problems at the end of the war: 'From information confidentially given it appears real difficulties may arise owing to the tight control of certain building materials by combinations of manufacturers.'³⁹³ This took place against a background of growing agitation about the influence of profiteers, as the first chapter examines in some detail. Reducing prices was a pragmatic necessity for reconstruction purposes, and by using the construction of the profiteer the war provided both the emergency powers necessary for

³⁹⁰ RECO 1/559, 'National Light Castings Association Correspondence'.

³⁹¹ Competition laws come much later in the twentieth century. See Richard Whish and David Bailey, *Competition law: 8th ed.* (Oxford, 2015); David Gerber, *Law and competition in twentieth century Europe* (Oxford, 2001).

³⁹² RECO 1/559, 'National Light Castings Association Correspondence'.

³⁹³ RECO 1/605.

intervention, and the moral excuse to take action; making profit in war time was, after all, at the expense of Tommy, and therefore unpatriotic and anathema to their sacrifice.³⁹⁴

Given the opportunity to investigate and curtail high prices in order to make the housing programme more tenable, a report by W. G. Storer on 'Combinations in Building Material Trades' was commissioned by the Ministry of Reconstruction, and painted the building materials industry in a starkly negative light. The report split industries into three categories: Controlled, Partially Controlled, and Uncontrolled. Controlled industries meant that combinations were widespread enough and had the strength to completely govern output and prices in the country as a whole; Partially Controlled industries had widespread combinations but could not *completely* govern output and prices. It concluded that Bricks; Lime, Plasters & Mortar; Gas Pipes; Metal Goods (such as locks, latches, furnishing ironmongery, nails etc.); and Slates were all Partially controlled industries. Tiles, Earthenware, Lead Pipes, Portland Cement, Iron Castings, Wallpaper, Boilers, and Glass were all Controlled industries.³⁹⁵

The proportion of a construction of a cottage was thus subject to control at the following levels, with Figure 15 showing the purely material element, and Figure 16 including labour costs (but excluding the acquisition of land, which is too variable to incorporate).

³⁹⁴ On the use of representations of soldiers, see Adrian Gregory, *The last Great War: British society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008), Jay Winter, *Remembering war: the Great War between memory and history in the twentieth century* (New Haven, 2006); Daniel Todman, *The Great War: myth and memory* (London, 2005); Paul Fussell, *The Great War and modern memory* (Oxford, 1975).

³⁹⁵ RECO 1/605. Report by W. G. Storer on Combinations in Building Material Trades.

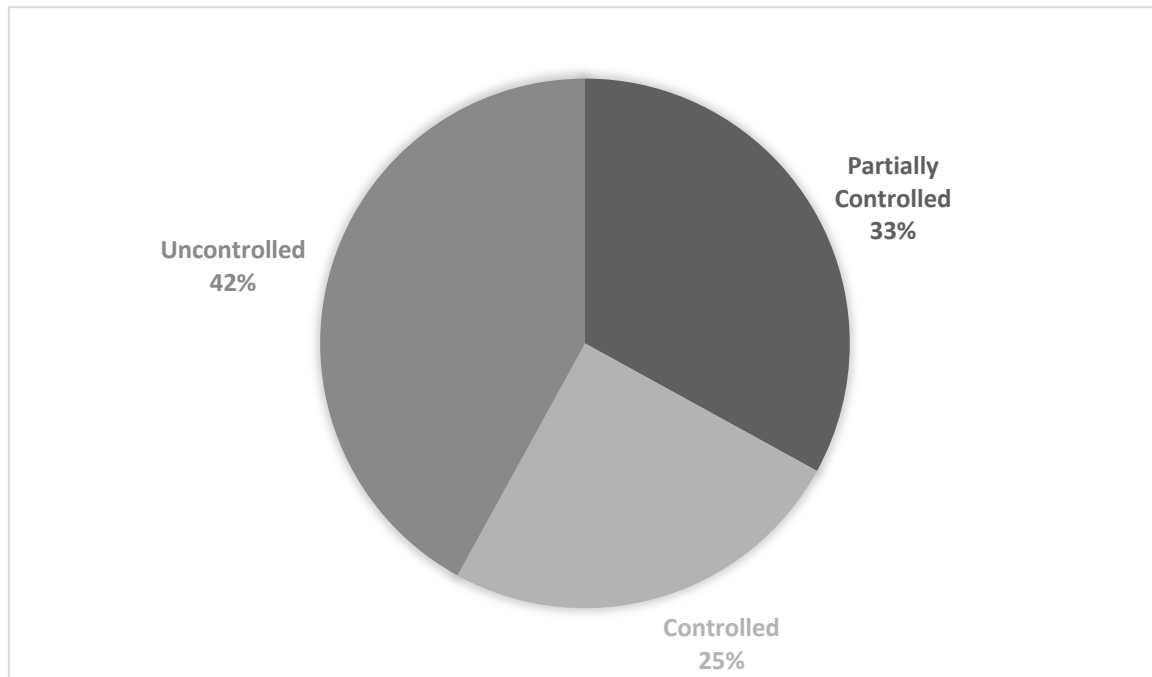


Figure 15. Proportion of controlled materials in cottage construction. RECO 1/605.

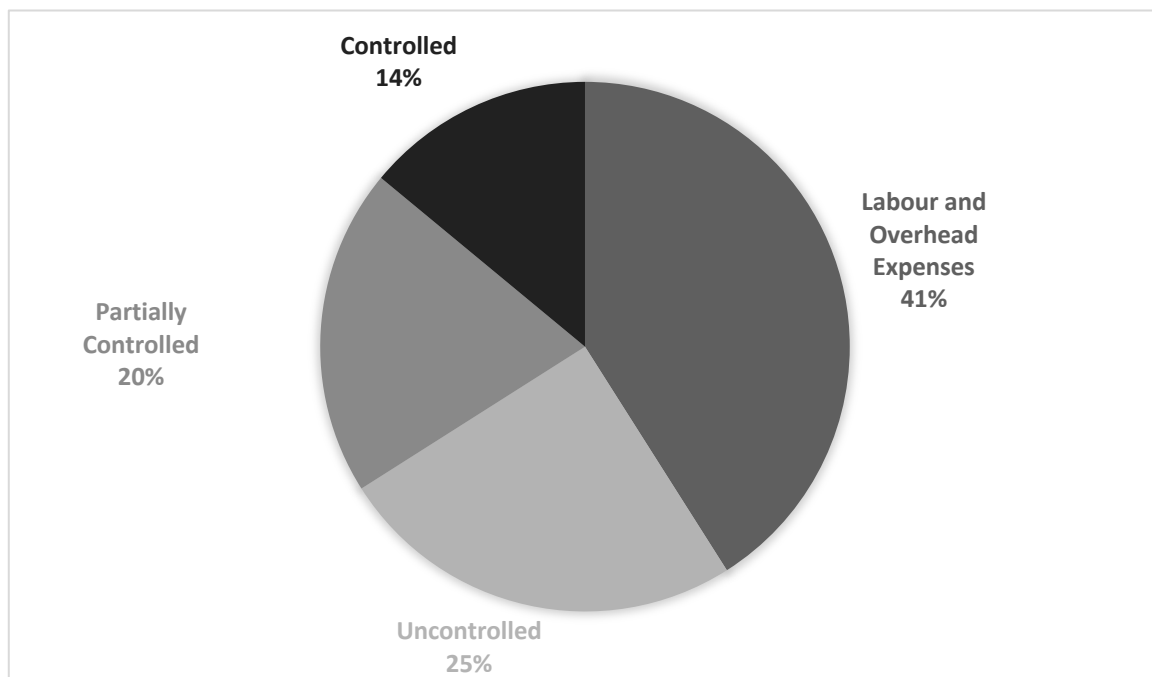


Figure 16. Proportion of controlled materials in cottage construction, including labour costs. RECO 1/605.

In material costs, the price of constructing a small house had advanced considerably through the course of the war.³⁹⁶ An assessment of the price of houses in 27 June 1918 calculated that prices had advanced, with the difference for a small house charted below (Figure 17):

	PRE-WAR PRICE	CURRENT PRICE [27 JUNE 1918]
20,000 BRICKS	£35	£60
HARDWARE; SANITARY FITTINGS; NAILS; ETC.	£35	£72
CEMENT	£9	£16

Figure 17. Rise in material prices of cottage construction. RECO 1/565.

W.G. Storer's report stated that the evidence received points to the existence of practices which are 'increasingly prejudicial' to the consumer, and stated that there is no doubt that combinations have 'limited competition, and raised the price of building materials against the consumer',³⁹⁷ especially in cases where the modifying influence of foreign or colonial competition on the price of home products had diminished or ceased. It condemns builders' merchants as willing co-operators in the policy of keeping up the prices of materials, and argues that in spite of the difficulty of forming estimates due to the rapid changes in selling prices due to the altered cost of raw materials, 'that high prices are partially due to combinations among sellers there can be no doubt whatsoever.'³⁹⁸ In this, it would seem that protests against profiteers and housing conditions thus had a valid point.

³⁹⁶ RECO 1/565. Housing carried out by the Ministry of Munitions, 27 June 1918.

³⁹⁷ RECO 1/605. Report by W. G. Storer on Combinations in Building Material Trades.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

The end of the war was also a particularly important period for interventionist action: ‘It is important to recognise that the combinations of manufacturers or merchants are steadily gaining power, and when the demand for materials becomes acute they will occupy a very strong position.’³⁹⁹ Again, the opportunity to represent the position of the public good in the context of the national sacrificial war effort offered the ability to take direct action against what could be a problematic level of power for organised combinations. Ultimately this contributed to the decision to take action against profiteering. It can be tempting to view the Profiteering Act of 1919 as more of a political move than a genuine attempt to engage with the problem of profiteering. Considering the plan to construct a large housing programme after the war and the relationship between the war and material prices shows, however, that there was perhaps an element of opportunism too. The representation of profiteering as an anti-war, unpatriotic activity allowed the government to represent combines in the building trades for its own benefit. Not only did this help deflect criticism of a lack of construction on to builders, it also added in another element of blame for construction ceasing other than the war.

Bricks

For all the discussion of combines in the building industry, the main problem remained that there existed a genuine shortage of bricks. Whilst the brick making industry had been in decline in the decade prior to the conflict – its fate was closely tied to that of the house building industry – the outbreak of war had greatly exacerbated its decline and by 1918, production had fallen drastically below pre-war levels.

³⁹⁹ RECO 1/605. Report by W. G. Storer on Combinations in Building Material Trades.

The production of bricks also shows how prioritisation of materials for war purposes during the conflict created further problems at its conclusion. The Coal Controller wished to have ‘as many brick yards as possible closed up, and the whole of the necessary work concentrated in the few which are kept open’,⁴⁰⁰ with a view to saving coal. Carrying out such an action would inevitably present problems for reconstruction, with brickyards taking considerable time to restart production after closure. In an interview in 1917 with Mr. Montgomery, the Editor and Proprietor of *The British Clay Worker*, he emphasised how detrimental such closures were to production: ‘A great many of the yards are now closed and it will be a long time before they could be got to work. Many of them have munitions stored in them; the machinery is in very bad condition; the whole of the staffs have been disbanded; the kilns are damp. He thinks it might be easily from 3 to 6 months before some of the yards can be set going.’⁴⁰¹ The lack of supply of materials was compounded further by labour shortages, with brickmakers unprotected from conscription. Aside from the time spent getting damp kilns firing properly, repairing machinery, and the other actions necessary to get production back to pre-war levels, the production of bricks was seasonally dependent, as a letter from a small brickmaker to the Ministry emphasised:

We closed our Brickyard at Earswick down in November 1916 owing to difficulty in obtaining labour. Our yard, like many small yards, is a seasonal one. We did clay in the winter and make up the weathered clay during the following summer, our drying being done in the open air by sun and wind action. The making season lasts from early April to end September. The actual making of bricks could not be recommended any time between September and April. Presuming we wished to make a start in April or during the summer, it would be necessary to have sufficient clay dug and weathered to provide the season’s requirements.⁴⁰²

⁴⁰⁰ RECO 1/565. Memorandum on Bricks by W. Storer, 14 August 1917.

⁴⁰¹ RECO 1/566. Notes an interview with Mr. Montgomery, Editor and Proprietor of “The British Clay Worker”, 15 August 1917.

⁴⁰² RECO 1/560. Letter from A. Giles, 2 August 1917.

The timing of peace was therefore crucial for the brickmaking industry. Coming as it did in November provided no opportunity for the necessary preparation for production, and the brickmaking window of April to September could not be taken advantage of. For the purposes of the housing programme, this meant that a key industry which would need to greatly exceed pre-war production was starting from an especially weak position.

To build an ordinary semi-detached cottage, in the style espoused by Tudor Walters, required around 20,000 bricks.⁴⁰³ Consequently, 100,000 cottages would require two-thousand million bricks, and the full half a million cottages that the government's post-war housing programme promised to supply required in the region of ten billion bricks. Obviously, not all bricks are created equal.⁴⁰⁴ In 1918, bricks were typically categorised as either Pressed or Stock. Pressed bricks, which derive their name from the machine pressing process that creates them, were a relatively new brick which had only been produced to an acceptable quality for around 25 years, and due to the low cost had quickly gained predominance in London, particularly for inside work but also for outside work except in cases where the build was of a high enough quality that the architect specified stock bricks. Stock bricks were the existing standard prior to the adoption of pressed bricks, and particularly reliant on seasonal production, requiring the winter for drying of clay. Many other small yards around the country produced bricks which typically could not compete at lower prices, and were not positioned to dramatically escalate production.

In July 1917, there were estimated stocks of thirty-one million Pressed bricks, with an annual production of seventy million per annum, and one hundred and twenty-five million Stock

⁴⁰³ RECO 1/560. Memorandum on the supply of bricks after the war, 21 August 1917.

⁴⁰⁴ Martin Hammond, *Bricks and brickmaking* (Aylesbury, 1981); John Woodforde, *Bricks to build a house* (London, 1976).

bricks, with an annual production of thirty million. All other stocks of bricks in the country were estimated at three hundred million. Before the end of the war, then, with production drastically slowed, the country had fewer than five hundred million bricks. Put another way, if every available brick in the country was dedicated solely to the production of new homes, stocks only existed to build approximately 4.5 per cent of the promised half a million houses. This was compounded, however, by the fact that demand outweighed production. Pressed bricks were produced at seventy million per annum, but demand was placed at over a hundred million per annum; Stock bricks were produced at thirty million per annum, but demand was placed at over fifty million per annum.⁴⁰⁵

Estimating the post-war production capacities of Britain, both Percy M. Stewart and W. Storer suggested that production in the first year after the war could be expected to be approximately:⁴⁰⁶ (Figure 18)

Pressed bricks	250 millions
Stock bricks	200 millions
Others	150 millions
Total	600 millions

Figure 18. Estimated brick production in the first year after the war. RECO 1/560.

Assuming every brick could be commandeered for the housing programme, annual production in the first year after the war therefore promised to contribute only 6 per cent of necessary production for the housing programme's new houses. To achieve these numbers,

⁴⁰⁵ RECO 1/560. The supply of bricks after the war, 21 August 1917.

⁴⁰⁶ RECO 1/560. Bricks – memorandum by W. Storer, 14 August 1917.

the war would have to end in time for labour to return to the yards, and production to start on the extraction and drying of clay over the winter period. That the war had a strong negative effect on the production of bricks is not difficult to imagine, but closer examination of the situation draws in to sharp focus the untenable situation that the post-war housing programme faced. To construct half a million houses in a short period of time after the war would require either a fundamental and rapid overhaul of the brickmaking industry, or the creative employment of alternative methods of construction which undermined the idealism of Tudor Walters and post-war planners.

Timber

Alongside bricks, the majority material component of house construction at the start of the twentieth century was timber. Timber posed a particularly problematic element for those concerned with reconstruction. The raw materials for brickmakers, quarrymen, cement-workers and most workers engaged in making building materials were located almost entirely in Britain. The timber industry, on the other hand, had increasingly relied on imports.⁴⁰⁷ Following the removal of imports duties on colonial timber in 1846, and the abolition of imports duties on all foreign timber in 1866, Britain had increasingly come to rely on imports from Sweden, Norway, the United States, Canada, and – increasingly in the period before the war – Russia. As one Ministry of Reconstruction report concluded, this meant that ‘At the outbreak of war we were almost entirely dependent upon imports for timber supplies. The governments of the day were satisfied with our position in this respect and their attitude with the command of the sea assured was a natural one to take up. They were not convinced, nor

⁴⁰⁷ RECO 1/588. Demobilisation of workers engaged in the manufacture of building materials and of building trade employers.

were the public convinced, that a large scheme of afforestation was a real national necessity.⁴⁰⁸ Control of the seas notwithstanding, however, the war seriously affected Britain's ability to import timber as Russia's Baltic ports – responsible for around 35 per cent of Britain's imports in 1913 – were shut off,⁴⁰⁹ and French exports ceased with the mobilisation of her armies.⁴¹⁰

The combination of the reduction of imports, as well as the shifting focus towards use of timber for war purposes, meant that by the end of the war, Sir James Bell – the Timber Controller – estimated that stocks were around 200,000 standards compared with about a million in peace time.⁴¹¹ Of crucial importance also were the type of woods required; home grown timber, such as oak and elm, were both very expensive and hard woods instead of the soft woods required. The war had created a clear shortage from pre-war levels, and significantly depleted reserves which could not be easily replaced. The Ministry of Reconstruction was therefore forced to explore necessary measures to overcome the shortfall, or its housing programme would be left without foundation.

Even by making exceptional efforts to secure the provision of timber supplies, there were limitations to what was available at the end of a war which had consumed materials at a prolific rate. At a conference discussing timber imports, it was noted that, 'There are at present stocks on the Baltic and other ports in Canada and the States, which it might be possible to purchase. However, the whole of these stocks, even if purchased, would not amount to any more than a normal year's consumption at the present time.'⁴¹² Remembering

⁴⁰⁸ RECO 1/648. Memorandum on Future Supplies to Great Britain by E. P. Stebbing.

⁴⁰⁹ Peter Gatrell, *Russia's First World War: a social and economic history* (Harlow, 2005).

⁴¹⁰ RECO 1/648. Memorandum on future supplies to Great Britain by E. P. Stebbing.

⁴¹¹ RECO 1/635. Minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the Raw Materials Board, 4 November 1918.

⁴¹² RECO 1/635. 'A conference held on 5 February 1918 on the question of Timber Supplies after the war'.

that the implementation of a massive housing programme would increase the demands on timber significantly beyond pre-war levels, the extent to which this shortage could be remedied was limited. The Raw Materials Board, just prior to the ceasefire, arranged for the immediate purchase of half a million standards of timber (one hundred and fifty thousand from Sweden and Norway, and from Finland; and one hundred thousand from Russia and Eastern Canada).⁴¹³ This was primarily motivated so that ‘when the men came back from the War they would find plenty to do’. Ultimately, however, demand inevitably outweighed supply: ‘In addition to buildings, wood for paving would be very much required, also wood for railway sleepers etc., in fact there would be more men to handle the wood than wood to handle.’⁴¹⁴

Additionally, demand was certain to be shared amongst all Allied powers in the wake of the conflict. France in particular anticipated a major need for timber for reconstruction purposes. In February 1916 an international commission named the ‘Commission Internationale d’Achat de Bois’ was formed to consider the purchase of timber during the war. As the war moved towards its conclusion, this commission started to turn its attention towards the procurement of timber for reconstruction purposes, and strongly advocated for a combined approach to be continued in order to ‘secure as economically as possible the timber necessary for the reconstruction of the districts devastated by the enemy or for the revival of the Allied countries economic life’,⁴¹⁵ noting that the greatest harm would come from speculative international competition inevitably increasing prices.

⁴¹³ RECO 1/635. ‘A conference held on 5 February 1918 on the question of Timber Supplies after the war’.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ RECO 1/635. Minutes of the 16th Meeting of the C.I.A.B., held at Caxton House, 6 February 1918.

The supply of timber after the war therefore shared commonalities with housing provision. Governmental intervention was essential in light of wartime shortages resulting in scarcity; as the Timber Controller noted, the industry could not be expected to function on its own in the first period after the war:

Sir James Bell regarded it is impracticable to leave the trade to purchase its own supplies during the first year of peace. A shortage is anticipated; and a scramble among the purchasers would inevitably cause prices to soar. He therefore recommended a system of centralised government purchases for a time. The trade favoured such a system; and it is essential to have immediate action.⁴¹⁶

Particularly on the minds of those concerned with scarcity of supply after the war was the situation in Russia. The Board of Trade emphasised that, ‘it is essential, if future supplies of Timber to this Country are to be dealt with on a reasonable basis, that some adequate steps should be taken to conserve British interests in Russia without delay’,⁴¹⁷ whilst Sir James Bell encouraged that, ‘early steps should be taken with a view to securing some forest areas in Russia for supplies for this country’.⁴¹⁸ Whilst it would certainly be a stretch to argue that British intervention in Russia was motivated by way of supplying timber supplies for a post-war housing programme, it is nevertheless enlightening how foreign policy intersected with the ability to enact a large domestic programme, and the keen interest that the situation in Russia attracted from less obvious quarters.

The limitations of stock were further underpinned by limitations in shipping tonnage available, which had also been heavily impacted by the war. It was estimated that in the course of the first complete year after peace, it would be possible to bring in about as large a quantity in tons of goods as were brought in 1916, which would be around 12 per cent less

⁴¹⁶ RECO 1/647. Agenda and minutes of the Raw Materials Board. 3rd Meeting, 4 November 1918.

⁴¹⁷ RECO 1/648. Memorandum on the General Timber Position by the Board of Trade, 17 October 1918.

⁴¹⁸ RECO 1/635. Minutes of the 16th Meeting of the C.I.A.B., held at Caxton House, 6 February 1918.

than was brought in 1913.⁴¹⁹ Just as with clay, this problem was also heavily dependent on the time at which peace was declared, as those working in the Ministry of Reconstruction were well aware:

As regards timber, it is almost certain that the world stocks will be insufficient... this raises a transport problem of a somewhat special kind. Much depends on the time of year at which peace is declared. Stocks in this country are very short, and in the winter the Baltic, White Sea, and St. Lawrence sources of supply are shut off. In the event of an Autumn peace it would, therefore, be most important that tonnage should be assigned to timber at once so as to bring in as much as possible before ports are closed... the main timber ports in these countries [Russia, Scandinavia, Canada, U.S.A.] are shut by, roughly speaking, from the end of November to early in May. So an Autumn peace would render the problem of restocking exceedingly difficult.⁴²⁰

What the timber and brick trades show us, then, is that not only were material shortages something which would take some time to address even with action starting immediately on the cessation of hostilities, but that the specific timing of the conflict ending impacted the ability for action to be undertaken, and that November was perhaps the least ideal time for either. When we consider that the perceived lack of alacrity in the implementation of the housing programme was one of its largest initial sources of discontent, a deeper understanding of the reasons why simply providing the materials to build the houses was a complicated matter in the wake of the First World War is enlightening.

Labour

Not only was the timing complicated, and the provision of the raw materials difficult, but the organisation of labour to create the basic elements of houses also presented a significant challenge. There is a significant literature surrounding the difficulties of demobilisation

⁴¹⁹ See William P. Elderton, *Shipping problems, 1916-1921* (London, 1928); Nicholas Lambert, *Planning Armageddon: British economic warfare and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2012).

⁴²⁰ RECO 1/652. Memoranda relating to raw materials. Emphasis in original.

already,⁴²¹ yet the importance of demobilising workers producing raw materials needed for industry – including the housing programme, conceived in no small part as a major panacea to post-war unemployment – has not always received much attention. This is not surprising, as it was overlooked by some at the time. A memorandum from R. H. Harte of the Raw Materials Board stated the case for the demobilisation of workers in the raw materials trade:

It is no exaggeration to say that once hostilities are terminated the question of raw materials will become the most vital in the whole scheme of civil reconstruction and if well conceived and timely measures are not taken the problem of unemployment may become acute; the restoration of our industries will be hampered; and the revival of our export trade delayed.⁴²²

Ultimately, of course, an orderly and logical demobilisation of the men proved impossible.⁴²³ The original plans for demobilisation, however, are enlightening for our understandings of how the government and the Ministry of Reconstruction sought to smooth the transition to peace in part by building huge numbers of houses, and their failure helps to explain why the implementation of the housing programme was hindered.

In the Second Interim Report of the Committee on Demobilisation, published in 1917, it was suggested that the Ministry of Labour should prepare a priority list of trades and occupations for the purpose of demobilisation. The first group, they suggested, should consist of agriculture, shipbuilding, railways, and coal-mining, and the second group should consist of the employees of public and local authorities, seamen, fishermen, and steel manufacturers.⁴²⁴

A memorandum to the Ministry of Reconstruction highlighted these proposals with alarm:

⁴²¹ See Joshua Cole, 'The transition to peace, 1918-1919' in Winter, Jay and Jean-Louis Robert (eds.), *Capital cities at war: Paris, London, Berlin, 1914-1919* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 196-227; John Horne, *Labour at war: France and Britain, 1914-1918* (Oxford, 1991), Ch. 9; Keith Jeffery, 'The post-war army' in Beckett, Ian and Keith Simpson, *A nation in arms: a social study of the British army in the First World War* (Manchester, 1985); Andrew Rothstein, *The soldiers' strikes of 1919* (London, 1980).

⁴²² RECO 1/647. Agenda and minutes of the Raw Materials Board.

⁴²³ Niall Ferguson, *The pity of war* (London, 1998), Ch. 7; Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War* (Cambridge, 2008), Ch 2.

⁴²⁴ RECO 1/832. First interim report of the Army Demobilisation Committee.

It is desirable to urge upon the Ministry of Labour the extreme importance of the early demobilisation of workers in building trades and allied trades. Housing is already so acute a problem that immediately on demobilisation the shortage will amount of a famine and all the other trades will depend upon an adequate supply of houses being proceeded with at the earliest possible moment. But before houses can be built the materials must be available, and the manufacture of these in large quantities will be an immediate necessity. It is, therefore, urged that brick-workers, quarrymen, cement-workers and others engaged in the manufacture of building materials should be included in the first class to be demobilised, together with a sufficient number of engineers to effect necessary repairs to brick-making and other plant required in the production of building materials.⁴²⁵

Furthermore, it was hoped that demobilisation which facilitated material production – and thus the housing programme – would help to counteract the strains which population concentration had produced as a result of the war. The same memorandum noted that ‘It would be easier to replace in industry those engaged in the manufacture of building materials, as these industries are not in the main localised in a few large centres. Brickfields, for instance, are spread all over the country, and it would be an easy matter to reabsorb the brick-makers serving with the colours.’⁴²⁶ Not only that, but the reestablishment and growth of sections of the building industry would help to relocate men not serving abroad. Appendix III of the First Interim Report of the Demobilisation Subcommittee noted that, ‘In building, if the number of men employed at the end of the war is to be equal to the number employed in July 1914, then at the end of the War, in addition to absorbing the 75 per cent. of the men who joined the forces from the building trade, that trade will need to draw back again the workmen who have left it during the war to work in other industries and other workmen.’⁴²⁷

Some of these men could be immediately employed in unskilled labour relating to the housing programme, such as road building, which would ‘spread labour all over the country

⁴²⁵ RECO 1/588. ‘Demobilisation of workers engaged in the manufacture of building materials and of building trade employers’, November 1917.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ RECO 1/832. First interim report of the Army Demobilisation Committee.

and would not depend for raw materials on oversea supplies.⁴²⁸ Spreading the men out was especially important in restoring equilibrium to the areas where overcrowding had been most increased by the housing shortages, as the first chapter detailed. This was especially true in the case of shipbuilding areas, owing to the necessity to continue a large shipbuilding programme in the period immediately after the war, and without special measures to incentivise the removal of those who had moved for munitions work during the war, the drastically overcrowded areas of the Medway, Tyne, Clyde, Tees, and the Wear, would be critical.⁴²⁹ The housing programme was, therefore, key to the management of this potential crisis. One Memorandum on Raw Materials and Unemployment summed up the interconnectivity of housing and the potential for significant problems:

It is almost impossible to find a single munitions area in the country where there can be said to be a surplus of accommodation. The erection of houses for the working classes has practically ceased since the outbreak of the war, and the men who have been called up to the Colours and who have to be replaced by new-comers, have to a very large extent left their families in the occupation of their homes. This has involved in practically every munitions area the influx of a new industrial population entirely disproportionate to the amount of housing accommodation set free by the calling up of men to the Colours. Particular attention is drawn to the desirability of setting free as many workers as possible from all shipbuilding areas, and districts contiguous to shipbuilding areas. The extension of the shipbuilding programme will necessitate a large influx of male and female labour into the shipbuilding areas, and there is no possibility of finding accommodation for this except by the displacement of labour already employed there, or the provision of new houses.⁴³⁰

The housing programme and the management of the demobilisation of servicemen was therefore closely interconnected. The organisation of labour – just as it had through the war – presented a potential problem for the government at the conflict's conclusion. Similarly, housing was both at the root of the cause of the problems, and also presented as a possible tool for its remedy. It offered the ability to incentivise the relocation of munitions workers

⁴²⁸ RECO 1/588. 'Demobilisation of workers engaged in the manufacture of building materials and of building trade employers', November 1917.

⁴²⁹ See M. B. Hammond, *British labor conditions and legislation during the war* (Oxford, 1919), Ch. 9.

⁴³⁰ RECO 1/651. 'Memorandum on raw materials and unemployment.'

back to industries involved in the production of materials needed for housing construction, provide employment for both skilled and unskilled workers, and to build much-needed housing in areas of especially dense population.

Raw materials were therefore at the heart of the problems that the implementation of the housing programme faced. The price of almost everything a house was made of was deeply affected by the war, either through overconsumption, scarcity through underproduction, or shipping shortages due to contraction of available hauling tonnage. Introducing a huge building programme was likely to exacerbate these issues, particularly when combines could work to increase prices at a time of real and political need for rapid production. Time was also not on the government's side. Transporting timber from stocks held abroad took significant time, as did the resumption of the production of materials such as bricks. Ending the war did not simply equate to a steady stream of new production, especially when both these major industries were heavily dependent on the seasons – and a November ceasefire was particularly inopportune. These problems are further reflected in how the building programme and the production of new materials was contingent on special consideration in the demobilisation of the armed forces. Ultimately, the timing of the war's end and the unstructured demobilisation of the men severely limited the ability of the government and local authorities to build at the levels they had hoped and promised to when plans (and electoral promises) were made.

Conclusion

Serious consideration of the measures required for reconstruction began relatively early in the war, and grew in scope as the war did. The Tudor Walters recommendations have tended to

be viewed as the logical conclusion of this research, but a closer look at the Ministry and the development of the course of the war highlights the ways in which the conduct of the conflict heavily impacted the form of amelioration at its conclusion. Cottages may well have been the preferred form of housing in 1914 and in 1918, but the plausibility of that recommendation and the extent to which it could be embraced was heavily influenced by the scope of the war. Moral and financial complicity meant that the government and not private enterprise or public utility societies had to bear the brunt of the burden. Moreover, the need for a large programme of employment after the war pointed towards the logic of a massive housing programme; the promise of reviving material industries, providing unskilled infrastructure work, and as a result relocating overpopulated industrial centres was a tempting proposition that was only facilitated by the war. The war made conditions worse, as the Ministry of Reconstruction increasingly discovered through the course of its investigations, but it also provided the groundwork for serious amelioration in a way unthinkable before the outbreak of hostilities in 1914.

Chapter Four

Women and the Addison Act: the Women's Housing Subcommittee

When one approaches the housing programme from the perspective of the designers or the politicians, it can be easy to focus on the seemingly key decision-makers and planners and present an approach that is fundamentally centred around men. Yet whether the focus is on housing reformers and planners, such as Ebenezer Howard or Raymond Unwin, or the men positioned in places to enact legislative change, such as Christopher Addison or Auckland Geddes, this attention tends to neglect the crucial input of other less prominent groups and individuals in the formulation of plans, especially the voices of the women who were deeply motivated by the opportunity to improve the lives of working women any new housing programme would offer.⁴³¹ In particular, concentrating on the work of the prominent men in the process fundamentally misrepresents the work of the Ministry of Reconstruction both from the perspective of how they conceived of who the houses were for and how they would be used, but also how they formed those decisions. On 2 February 1918, after it had been commented that 'it had been represented to us, both by societies and individuals, that women should be consulted about the construction of the new houses after the war',⁴³² the Ministry of Reconstruction established a Women's Housing Advisory Subcommittee. Through it, the Ministry solicited the input of women from a variety of backgrounds in constructing their visions for the future. The women who constituted the membership of the subcommittee were consciously approached due to the plurality of expertise and perspectives they offered. It suggests a department that was seeking to construct a relatively diverse picture of opinion more than an elite seeking to reaffirm its position.

⁴³¹ Helen Meller, 'Planning theory and women's role in the city', *Urban History*, 17 (1990), 85-98.

⁴³² RECO 1/618. IV. 7374, p. 1.

The women's subcommittee has provoked historical debate. In his 1963 article castigating the 'failure of social reform', Philip Abrams is particularly critical of Addison and his use of women.⁴³³ He draws attention to their middle-class backgrounds – suggesting their input was therefore unrepresentative of women as a whole (although it is doubtful what small group of women could ever be successfully fully representative of such a hugely diverse group) – and claims they were distracted by the struggle for women's rights, making them too distinctly politically interested to serve as useful advisors. Such a position has rightly commanded criticism from scholars such as Alison Ravetz and Helen Jones.⁴³⁴ This chapter therefore supplements the recent work of scholars such as Krista Cowman in making the case for the women of the subcommittee themselves, and emphasising the merit and importance of the work they did in constructing the housing programme.⁴³⁵ In particular, it highlights the ways in which women operated largely independently of other decision-makers and came to the same conclusions, reaffirming the findings and decisions of Addison and his contemporaries.

This chapter demonstrates the subcommittee's commitment to garner information on its own. The women on it obtained evidence of the current conditions through their own networks and organisations, rather than relying on the data collected by the Ministry through other methods. Whilst this appears to have led to a certain degree of repetition, it also meant that the Women's Housing Subcommittee established its evidentiary basis on its own merit and from the perspective of women; whilst they ultimately reached many of the same conclusions, that they did so through a novel and circuitous route is noteworthy. Whilst the actions of women such as Octavia Hill in the pre-war period have rightly commanded

⁴³³ Philip Abrams, 'The failure of social reform: 1918-20', *Past and Present*, 24 (1963), 43-64.

⁴³⁴ Alison Ravetz, 'The home of woman: a view from the interior', *Built Environment*, 10 (1984), 8-17; Helen Jones, *Women in British public life, 1914-1950: gender, power and social policy* (London, 2000), pp. 24-25.

⁴³⁵ Krista Cowman, "'From the housewife's point of view': female citizenship and the gendered domestic interior in post-First World War Britain, 1918-1928", *English Historical Review*, 130 (2015), 352-383.

scholarly attention, women also maintained an effective presence in the formulation of governmental policy.⁴³⁶ This chapter thus highlights the direct influence of women on the formulation of the post-war housing programme, but also uses the activities they took and the groups they consulted as a window through which to observe the importance of women in the politics and policies of housing more generally during the First World War. It pushes back against Abrams' notion that they were ineffective or hindered Addison's policies and instead presents the case that, despite their own middle-class backgrounds, they were the most consciously representative group working on reconstruction policy during the war.⁴³⁷

The remit for the subcommittee was initially relatively narrow. They were tasked with visiting 'specimen houses which have been erected by the Ministry of Munitions or other houses selected after consultation with Branch F. in order to make suggestions with special reference to the convenience of the housewife.' In addition, they were to, 'advise on the plans received from the Architect's Committee.'⁴³⁸ As it became increasingly clear that the production of new houses was not the sole vehicle through which to improve the living conditions of the working classes, the scope of the subcommittee quickly widened. The terms of reference were extended to include the important issue of the conversion of houses to flats, in an attempt to ascertain 'what adaptation is necessary from the view of the housewife that where houses, originally built for one family, are let out in tenements to two or more, there shall be proper conveniences.'⁴³⁹ By the time the report of the subcommittee was issued in January 1919, the scope of their investigation included health, morality, layouts and

⁴³⁶ These are not, of course, completely unrelated. See the excellent recent volume on this: Baigent, Elizabeth and Cowell, Ben (eds.), *'Nobler imaginings and mightier struggles': Octavia Hill, social activism and the remaking of British society* (London, 2016).

⁴³⁷ On Abrams' view of women and policy, c.f. Pat Thane, *Women and citizenship in Britain and Ireland in the twentieth century: what difference did the vote make?* (London, 2010).

⁴³⁸ RECO 1/618. Women's housing subcommittee: terms of reference and appointments.

⁴³⁹ RECO 1/620, Report of Captain Reiss, 27 March 1918.

amenities, and the possible benefits of communal living initiatives. In short, the women of the subcommittee were more interested in attacking the totality of the housing problem than simply addressing the conveniences of housewives, and the evidence they gathered and the suggestions they offered provide an important insight in to the vital role women played in building the new housing programme. When one considers how crucial the condition of housing was for the lives of many women throughout the country, this ought to come as little surprise.

The women of the subcommittee

The chairship was entrusted to Lady Emmott, known frequently by her maiden name, Mary Lees. Along with Eleanor Barton, Baroness Emmott of Oldham was already involved in the reconstruction work and it was intended that together they should form the ‘nucleus’ of the committee.⁴⁴⁰ Married to Alfred Emmott, a Liberal MP, she was highly active politically: a founding member of a local National Union of Women Workers (NUWW) branch; vice-chair of the Women’s Liberal Federation; and she served on the executive of the London Society for Women’s Suffrage. She was prominent in her work supporting Belgian refugees, for which she received the Queen Elisabeth Medal.⁴⁴¹ The other half of the ‘nucleus’ – Eleanor Barton – was a long-time member of the Women’s Co-operative Guild, and had served as its President. Originally from Manchester, she moved to Sheffield in 1897 and travelled the country giving talks on maternal and child welfare issues, as well as housing. A later general secretary of the Women’s Co-operative Guild described her as ‘rather dictatorial’, which appears to have been a diplomatically mild description.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰ TNA RECO 1/618. Women’s housing subcommittee: terms of reference and appointments.

⁴⁴¹ Cheryl Law, *Women: a modern political dictionary* (London, 2000), p. 58.

⁴⁴² David Doughan, ‘Barton, Eleanor (1872/3–1960)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47325>, accessed 28 June 2017]

The other women of the subcommittee shared a number of diverse interests, although a tendency to advocate publically for an improvement in women's lives is a natural commonality. Dorothy C. Peel was a journalist and writer on household management.⁴⁴³ In her own words, she was inspired to this vocation after being forced to run her own house when her maid left, whereupon she 'soon discovered how easily money could be wasted by bad kitchen management'.⁴⁴⁴ During the war, she organised a Soldiers' and Sailors' Wives Club in Lambeth, and worked in partnership with Maud Pember Reeves as co-director of the women's service for the Ministry of Food during the period of voluntary food rationing.⁴⁴⁵ 'My own experience leads me to think that a flat is to be preferred to a house',⁴⁴⁶ she wrote in one of her books, going so far as to say that, 'I must confess honestly that the suburbs of any large town appear to me detestable.'⁴⁴⁷

Her views were perhaps offset by Mrs Victor Banford, a noted housing reformer who was heavily involved in the co-operative movement through Charlotte Toynbee. She worked alongside Henriette Barnett in the planning of the Hampstead Garden Suburb, and with Henry Vivian on schemes in Oldham, Letchworth, Kettering, and Leicester.⁴⁴⁸ Dr Janet Lane-Claypom, the Dean of the Household and Social Science Department at King's College for

⁴⁴³ See Constance D. E. Peel, *Marriage on small means* (London, 1914); *The labour saving house* (London, 1917).

⁴⁴⁴ Constance D. E. Peel, *The new home: treating of the arrangement, decoration and furnishing of a house of medium size to be maintained by moderate income* (London, 1898), p. 111.

⁴⁴⁵ Deborah S. Ryan, 'Peel, Constance Dorothy Evelyn (1868–1934)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/56783>, accessed 28 June 2017]

⁴⁴⁶ Peel, *The New Home*, p. 6.

⁴⁴⁷ Peel, *The New Home*, p. 14.

⁴⁴⁸ John Scott, 'Banford, Victor Verasis (1863–1930)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Oct 2007; online edn, Sept 2015 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/97274>, accessed 28 June 2017]

Women, University of London,⁴⁴⁹ also served on the committee, bringing with her a vested interest and expertise on the health and welfare of women and children,⁴⁵⁰ although she resigned from the subcommittee in April 1918 and was replaced by Mrs Sanderson Furniss, who was active in the Labour Party and the Honorary Secretary of the Housing Section of the Women's Labour League, and Miss Churton of the Rural Housing and Sanitation Association. Throughout the committee's duration, new members or consultations were consistently sought in an apparent attempt to seek balance in representation and a plurality of opinion.

The subcommittee was therefore unsurprisingly comprised of affluent members, and Elizabeth Darling shared Abrams' concerns about the well-to-do nature of its membership.⁴⁵¹ Whilst this criticism is well founded it also discounts their conscious efforts to access the voices of working-class women. In their Final Report, the subcommittee sought to emphasise the importance of the opinions of working women in forming their recommendations. They highlight how they had, 'made a point of interviewing as many of the tenants as possible, and discussing with them the merits and demerits of the various types [of house] from a tenant's point of view.'⁴⁵² They solicited this opinion themselves, through committee members undertaking visits to sites, and also by using local women's organisations, who were frequently all-too-ready to help. When writing to these groups asking for assistance, the subcommittee stated that they were, 'very anxious that interest in the housing question should

⁴⁴⁹ Warren Winkelstein, jr., 'Claypon, Janet Elizabeth Lane- [*married name* Janet Elizabeth Forber, Lady Forber] (1877–1967)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/61714>, accessed 28 June 2017]

⁴⁵⁰ Janet Lane-Claypon, *The Child Welfare Movement* (London, 1920). See also her later book, *Hygiene of Women and Children* (London, 1921).

⁴⁵¹ Elizabeth Darling, "'A citizen as well as a housewife': new spaces of domesticity in 1930s London" in Heynen, Hilde and Gülsüm Baydar (eds.), *Negotiating domesticity: spatial productions of gender in modern architecture* (London, 2005), 49–64, p. 51.

⁴⁵² RECO 1/629. Report of the Women's House Planning Committee for Scotland. Cd. 9239/1919.

be stimulated among working women... A simple form of questionnaire is useful in some ways, but it is easier to get the genuine and spontaneous views of the women themselves *viva voce* than in the form of written replies to leading questions. In many places the Branches of the Women's Labour League and Women's Co-operative Guild have already taken up the question, and the more you could work in with those or other women's organisations the better.⁴⁵³

The testimony of working women thus appears throughout this section – at times verbatim – and the recommendations of the subcommittee were mostly consistent with the majority of evidence they received, even when this ran contrary to pre-existing ideas. As one report noted, there appeared to be a real desire from women to be involved in the planning of any governmental scheme for houses for the working classes:

I find too a strong feeling of resentment at the assumption that the working woman does not know far more about what she wants than any middle class people can do, and at the neglect in the past of seeking her advice and co-operation. There is also an equally strong feeling that it is an insult to working people to propose building houses for them which do not have the minimum of convenience found in middle class houses, e.g. hot water, separate bathroom, suitable bedroom accommodation, etc.⁴⁵⁴

It is difficult not to find sympathy with this position, yet the subcommittee was not without an element of superciliousness. At times, they proposed ideas – especially regarding communal living, health, and temperance – which they believed would improve the lot of working women despite testimony contradicting them. Yet whilst they worked on what – as they themselves termed – ‘working women ought to want and by what considerations they ought to be ruled’, they proclaimed to believe that, ‘education does not come all in a moment and saw no reason why a working woman's present legitimate desire should not be

⁴⁵³ RECO 1/623. Correspondence with the Leeds Women Citizen's League.

⁴⁵⁴ RECO 1/631. Report of Enquiry Conducted by Women in the Labour Party. IV W.H. 71.

satisfied.’⁴⁵⁵ In this, they differed from their male counterparts in allowing working women to have the final say – even if they believed they were wrong.

The peculiarity of the local was also a conscious element in the subcommittee’s decision making: ‘It is necessary to bear in mind the social conditions of each district, the type of tenant to be catered for, the requirements of special industries and occupations, the possibilities of using local materials, and local customs and predilections – e.g. the existence of public water, gas, and electric supplies, public washhouses, kitchens, playgrounds or allotments central hot-water supply and heating distance from shops etc. all have their bearing on plans for dwelling houses.’⁴⁵⁶ This is reflected in their determination to collect data from as many different regions of the country as possible, and this diligently multi-regional approach was certainly influenced by the different regions the subcommittee members themselves came from.

Layout, design, and the convenience of the housewife

Whilst the subcommittee ultimately delved in to the entirety of the layout of the new homes, they did still fulfil their initial remit of assessing the new plans from the perspective of the housewife. In practice, this translated to a discussion of cupboard space – of which it was unsurprisingly agreed that more was better – and the location of sinks, taps, bathrooms, and sculleries. They were scathing in their opinions of the plans submitted to R.I.B.A. for its competition:

⁴⁵⁵ RECO 1/631. Notes on a visit paid by 2 working women to the houses in course of erection by the Ministry of Munitions at Shirehampton. 11 May 1918.

⁴⁵⁶ RECO 1/631. ‘Notes on the Work of the Women’s Housing Subcommittee.’

We do not think that sufficient attention is paid to easing the work of the housewife. In many of the plans the larder, sink, and stove are not grouped together. This adds very much to the work of the housekeeper. Every scullery should be large enough to hold a gas or oil stove so that the scullery can be used as a kitchen or washhouse, leaving the living room as a suitable nursery for young children.⁴⁵⁷

Yet despite noting that the type of house is so largely a question of individual preference that ‘as much variety as possible should be allowed in each scheme for the arrangement of the rooms’,⁴⁵⁸ the women of the subcommittee had very definite ideas about how the houses should be arranged and what ought to be provided.⁴⁵⁹ In particular, the provision of a parlour and an (upstairs) bathroom became increasingly viewed as necessary more than simply desirable, and this was influenced heavily by the subcommittee’s underlying concerns and increasing involvement in attending to matters of health and morality.

This they viewed from the perspective of the housewife, but also from a more basic, eugenicist concern about societal good, and their initial remit to investigate from the perspective of the housewife mutated enough to incorporate ideas about perceived wider societal issues, such as temperance. Such a perspective was broadly in keeping with ideals which had been heightened by the experience of the war. As Susan Grayzel has noted, ‘Beyond being urged to provide sons and relinquish them to the war effort, women were also encouraged to exert a related moral influence’.⁴⁶⁰ The subcommittee’s concerns about health and moral behaviour thus built on a strong pre-war continuity that had been heightened by growing pronatalist and temperance concerns through the war.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁷ RECO 1/631. Report by Mrs. Peel and Mrs. Furness on the Architect’s Plans sent out for the R.I.B.A. competition of Cottage plans.

⁴⁵⁸ TNA RECO 1/629, Report of the Women’s House Planning Committee for Scotland. Cd. 9239/1919, p. 6.

⁴⁵⁹ See also Mark Llewellyn, ‘Designed by women and designing women: gender, planning and the geographies of the kitchen in Britain, 1917-1945’, *Cultural Geographies*, 10 (2004), 42-60.

⁴⁶⁰ Susan Grayzel, *Women’s identities at war: gender, motherhood, and politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill, 1999), p. 86.

⁴⁶¹ See Diana Gittins, *Fair sex: family size and structure, 1900-39* (London, 1982), p. 34.

Parlours and bathrooms

Parlours were at the heart of the subcommittee's disagreement with the Local Government Board and the plans submitted to R.I.B.A. They expressed the same broad views on parlours furthered by the Tudor Walters Committee in Chapter Three, but were stronger in their conviction, and represented the voice of the working classes more forcefully and faithfully. The provision of a parlour was viewed as a 'necessary shrine of respectability', and to an extent served as the epitome of the new, better home for the new, better citizen.⁴⁶² The subcommittee reported the desire for a parlour as 'universal', and argued that it should be recognised as an essential inclusion in any scheme. In a meeting of mothers in Camberwell, the parlour was described as 'indispensable' because 'there should always be somewhere for "him" to go and sit and rest himself.'⁴⁶³ In the idealised home, the parlour functioned as an important space for familial separation. As mothers at the Barton Hill Mother's School reported, 'I entirely disagree with doing without a best parlour but I don't like a room which isn't used. I bring up my children to be in the front room and learn not to hurt the things.'⁴⁶⁴ It is this divide between essential function and 'shrine of respectability' that created a dissonance between what was perceived as vitally necessary by the women consulted – and as a result, the women's subcommittee advancing their views – and the views of the Local Government Board, who were 'not prepared to accept the view of the Committee that it is essential that all houses should have a parlour in addition to a living room and scullery.'⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶² RECO 1/631. Report by Mrs. Peel and Mrs. Furness on the Architect's Plans sent out for the R.I.B.A. competition of Cottage plans.

⁴⁶³ RECO 1/631. Report of a visit to Camberwell by Miss Maud Bell.

⁴⁶⁴ RECO 1/631. Discussion on Housing with the Mothers of the Barton Hill Mother's School.

⁴⁶⁵ RECO 1/631. Notes of the Local Government Board on the First Interim Report of the Women's Housing Subcommittee. W. H. IV 97.

From a practical perspective, parlours served as the multifunctional space for all additional functions the home needed to provide. One group in Birmingham complained that under the present conditions, they had to hold the coffin under the kitchen table in crowded conditions, and expressed the opinion that ‘there was no room to live in and no room to die.’⁴⁶⁶ It could serve as a storing place for prams or cycles, or a quiet place for sleeping babies and children’s lessons. The parlour – the shrine of respectability – also served as a room through which to ensure propriety. The important influence of ideas related to moral behaviour on layouts and designs will be examined in more detail in Chapter Five, but it is important to remember that – as one housewife explained – the parlour was ‘preferable for courting couples rather than the street corners or public house’.⁴⁶⁷

Despite the apparently universal desire for the parlour, this was accompanied by a ‘growing feeling among intelligent working women that they want the living room to be a better place, and made larger and more important.’⁴⁶⁸ In an interview in Slindon in Sussex, the ladies expressed that they ‘considered that a large living room was very important and that the Parlour might be smaller.’⁴⁶⁹ There was, therefore, scope for discussion about the *form* of a parlour, but for working-class women no debate about the necessity for its inclusion.

The other part of the house which garnered the strongest opinions was the contentious question of bathrooms. Women’s feedback on this was less universal than parlours, although a relatively homogenous view does present from the evidence. The subcommittee offered a typically strong opinion on the matter: ‘There are two points on which the Committee have

⁴⁶⁶ RECO 1/631. Notes on interviews etc. during Birmingham visit.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ RECO 1/631. Report by Mrs. Peel and Mrs. Furness on the Architect’s Plans sent out for the R.I.B.A. competition of Cottage plans.

⁴⁶⁹ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women’s Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 22. 19 June 1918, p. 1.

no hesitation in making definite recommendations:- (1) That complete privacy should be secured by a separate bathroom. (2) That a waste pipe and an adequate but simple system of hot and cold water supply should be provided. We recognise that expense is an important factor but we are of opinion that no arrangement which does not fulfil these two conditions can be accepted.⁴⁷⁰

Disregard for the additional expense incurred is mostly due to a strong indication from the working women they consulted that additional rent was seen as an acceptable expenditure in the case of bathrooms, even in the poorer areas such as Plaistow where it was reported that ‘the women were invariably ready to pay 1/- a week extra for the bath room. They said that it cost them quite that for each member of the family to have a weekly bath at the public baths (at 3d. each).⁴⁷¹

The inclusion and location of a separate bathroom was thus viewed as a matter of economy, not just hygiene. In a resolution from the representatives of ten women’s organisations, they demanded that, ‘No new house should be constructed without a bathroom. The conference is emphatically of opinion that a mere bath in the scullery or elsewhere does not meet the requirements of convenience or decency.’⁴⁷² By seeking to locate the bathroom upstairs, as opposed to in the scullery with a flap table over it, the convenience of the housewife was also addressed, as otherwise the scullery, ‘could not be used for preparing the meal while the man was having his bath on returning from work.’⁴⁷³ The desire for the introduction of a separate bathroom was particularly strong in industrial areas, such as mining villages in South Wales;

⁴⁷⁰ RECO 1/632, Women’s Housing Subcommittee: Memoranda concerning suggestions for house planning, plans for cottage building, notes on construction, p. 9.

⁴⁷¹ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women’s Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 23. 25 June 1918, p. 3.

⁴⁷² RECO 1/631. Report of a Conference on Housing, Dudley Town Hall. 20 April 1918.

⁴⁷³ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women’s Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 4. 22 March 1918, p. 3.

it seems that those likely to benefit from the amenity the most were those least likely to have one in present conditions.⁴⁷⁴

Yet whilst the need for a parlour was more widely accepted, the Local Government Board in particular was reluctant to accept that a 'separate bathroom is in all cases essential.'⁴⁷⁵

Speaking in the House of Commons on 2 May 1918, the President of the Board left bathrooms conspicuously absent from his speech, stating that:

We intend to provide a house which contains a living room, scullery, parlour and three bedrooms. That is the best kind of house we intend to supply. It is intended to provide houses which are well built and laid out, and which will be regarded as moderate and suitable for working men's dwellings.⁴⁷⁶

Once again, the provision of emphatic evidence was not enough to sway Hayes Fisher and the notoriously conservative L.G.B.

Health

To add weight to these proposals, they were presented as a form of public health. The subcommittee's desire for a separate bathroom was influenced in part by their remit to ensure the convenience of the housewife was given due consideration, but also by concerns about health which permeated many of their attitudes to the proposed housing programme. By meshing the convenience of the housewife and the health and wellbeing of the family – the maintenance of which was also considered part of the duties of the women – the

⁴⁷⁴ See report in RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women's Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 5. 11 April 1918, p. 2.

⁴⁷⁵ RECO 1/631. Notes of the Local Government Board on the First Interim Report of the Women's Housing Subcommittee. W. H. IV 97.

⁴⁷⁶ HC Deb 02 May 1918 vol 105 cc1730-67. Statement by Mr. Hayes Fisher, c. 1741.

subcommittee was able to investigate areas they held individual interest in, as well as the concerns of women which did not immediately fall in to the categories initially established for investigation.⁴⁷⁷ The consistent clamour for a bathroom indoors should not, however, be confused with the desired location of the privy. As a meeting of mothers commented to the subcommittee members, ‘They must have bathrooms... upstairs, if possible, W.C. outside – “so much ‘ealthier, it ain’t nice to have them things indoors.’”⁴⁷⁸

This interest in the health and wellbeing of women was motivated as much through national interest as philanthropy. This is particularly evident in pronatalist considerations, which deserve some brief discussion. Child mortality rates and welfare had occupied the attention of policy-makers both nationally and locally for decades before the war,⁴⁷⁹ with many Medical Officers of Health fixated on this issue in their programmes of slum clearance. As the Ministry published after the war in its *Reconstruction Problems* series, ‘Until the child goes to school he is primarily in the care of his mother, and his well-being depends very largely on her health and strength, her intelligence, her understanding of child management, and her capacity to turn to best account her circumstances and surroundings’.⁴⁸⁰ In this context, the mother – and the home she lived in – were not viewed independently but rather as part of their relationship with the productivity and health of the nation. Whilst these pronatalist concerns often appear to marry neatly with those of the eugenics movement, it is better to

⁴⁷⁷ On this idea of the ‘separate spheres’, see Linda K. Kerber, ‘Separate spheres, female worlds, woman’s place: the rhetoric of women’s history’, *Journal of American History*, 75 (1988), 9-39. Amanda Vickery, ‘Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women’s history’, *Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), 383-414.

⁴⁷⁸ RECO 1/631. Report of a meeting held by Miss Maud Bell at Plaistow.

⁴⁷⁹ Amy J. Catalano, *A global history of child death: mortality, burial, and parental attitudes* (New York, 2015).

⁴⁸⁰ H.M.S.O., *Reconstruction Problems 33: Child welfare* (London, 1919), p. 1.

avoid conflating these two related but different motivations.⁴⁸¹ From the perspective of the housing programme, concerns about the health of women viewed them primarily as mothers. These views were further emphasised by the prominence that pronatalism enjoyed as a direct result of the conflict.

This attention to the health of the nation largely won the women of the subcommittee over to the experimental schemes they visited. On a trip to inspect Letchworth, it was commented that ‘every house whether large or small appeared to have the maximum amount of air and sunshine... and thus formed the model upon which one hopes all the towns of the future will be built.’⁴⁸² Indeed, the opinion prevailed that as a result of the war – and in particular a greatly developed Red Cross – ‘thousands of women are learning as they have never learnt before, a far higher standard of cleanliness, the necessary for fresh air (sic), the deadly elements in dust, etc.’, and expressed the sincere hope that the thousands of houses shortly to be built ‘will mean healthier and more convenient surroundings for the home-makers of the future.’⁴⁸³ Mothers groups in particular frequently expressed concerns about a lack of light and air,⁴⁸⁴ with one delegation causing the subcommittee to comment on how it was, ‘astonishing to find how much dissatisfaction and unrest was expressed by women at Mothers meetings etc. Some had even said that they were determined not to have children so long as the present bad conditions remained.’⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸¹ See Richard A. Soloway, ‘Eugenics and pronatalism in wartime Britain’, in Wall, Richard and Winter, Jay (eds.), *The upheaval of war: family, work and welfare in Europe, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 2005), 369-389.

⁴⁸² RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women’s Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 31. 1 August 1918, p. 3.

⁴⁸³ RECO 1/631. Report by Mrs. Peel and Mrs. Furness on the Architect’s Plans sent out for the R.I.B.A. competition of cottage plans.

⁴⁸⁴ See in particular the testimonies of delegations at RECO 1/631. Discussion on Housing with the Mothers of the Barton Hill Mother’s School; RECO 1/631. Report of a meeting held by Miss Maud Bell on 3 June 1918 at St. Mark’s, Hamilton Terrace.

⁴⁸⁵ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women’s Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 28. 15 July 1918, p. 2.

Morality

Concerns about the health and wellbeing of the populace were not limited to the physical, however, and the women's subcommittee was as concerned with promoting a moral, temperate society as many of their contemporaries in housing and town planning reform. To an extent, this was simply a question of space; for this reason they insisted that the guidelines laid down by the Local Government Board (300 cubic feet for each adult) were insufficient, arguing that standard provision should be 500 cubic feet for each adult and 250 cubic feet for each child under ten years old.⁴⁸⁶ Again, this created disagreement with the Local Government Board's views as they raised objection to, 'The small size of some of the bedrooms, which makes it impossible to put more than one bed in a room, thus the great evils arising from allowing several children to sleep in one bed cannot be avoided.'⁴⁸⁷ Prevailing conditions were thus viewed as both the cause of prevailing immorality and the obstacle obstructing their amelioration. As one woman in Birmingham commented after being summoned to the Magistrate for overcrowding, 'You tells us first to have children and then tells us we can't live nowhere.'⁴⁸⁸ Until the housing situation was resolved in an acceptable way, the values and wider ideas being promoted by the women of the subcommittee were likely to be undermined.

It was not just the women in the Ministry of Reconstruction who believed that overcrowded or poorly conceptualised housing conditions inevitably begot immoral behaviour. The communication from the Yardley Sisterhood in Birmingham is fairly typical of this view, which was frequently communicated to the subcommittee by women's groups, where they

⁴⁸⁶ RECO 1/623, Correspondence with the Leeds Women Citizen's League, p. 6.

⁴⁸⁷ RECO 1/631. Report by Mrs. Peel and Mrs. Furness on the Architect's Plans sent out for the R.I.B.A. competition of cottage plans. (check this is same as other).

⁴⁸⁸ RECO 1/631. Notes on interviews etc. during Birmingham visit.

expressed that it ‘was impossible for working class families to bring up their children properly in the only houses available at the present time.’⁴⁸⁹ This not limited to the inappropriate sharing of beds by family members, however, but frequently revolved around the question of temperance. Concern about the immorality of intemperate behaviour motivated the subcommittee to promote the value of parlours and larger living rooms, otherwise men had ‘no choice’ but to visit the public house.⁴⁹⁰ Yet it also prompted them to think outside the home, and in particular led to a strong appeal for gardens.

Gardens were viewed as a universally desired ‘necessity’ for childcare reasons.⁴⁹¹ Attitudes to public playgrounds were negative amongst many women consulted, who complained that in them ‘good and naughty, clean and dirty children are mixed.’⁴⁹² Yet more than this, gardens also provided the opportunity for wholesome, temperate behaviour. One meeting of mothers communicated how they ‘wanted “no matter how small a bit” of garden most of all. They said it “kept him and the boys” at home and gave them something to do.’⁴⁹³ One woman said that, ‘a garden do make all the difference to an ‘ome, it’d make all the difference to the Public ‘ouse if there were more of them.’⁴⁹⁴ Such an attitude to promoting moral behaviour through planning fits in well with the attitudes of many of their contemporary male housing reformers, who believed that intemperance could be addressed, at least in part, by gardening.⁴⁹⁵ Discussion of visits to Bourneville, Letchworth, and other housing schemes such as New Earswick in York reflect the subcommittee’s belief that responsibility for

⁴⁸⁹ RECO 1/631. Letter from the Yardley Sisterhood. 18 June 1918.

⁴⁹⁰ Temperance was an area of significant interest for the women of the subcommittee, and women’s organisations more widely, and is explored in closer detail in Chapter Five.

⁴⁹¹ Again, this conflated the role of ‘woman’ with ‘mother’ entirely.

⁴⁹² RECO 1/631. Notes on interviews etc. during Birmingham visit. One wonders if it is always the other parent’s child who is the naughty, dirty one.

⁴⁹³ RECO 1/631. Report of a meeting held by Miss Maud Bell on 3 June 1918 at St. Mark’s, Hamilton Terrace.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ For more on this, see discussion in Chapter Five.

outdoor spaces would promote good behaviours among the working classes,⁴⁹⁶ and the interviews they conducted with working women and mother's groups frequently supported these beliefs. The importance of individual responsibility for such spaces perhaps explains why there could be strong demand for gardens on the one hand, and an almost complete absence of support for communal garden and playground spaces on the other, as we will examine later in the chapter.

Just like their male contemporaries, the women involved in the post-war planning process were equally concerned with the pragmatic implications of layouts and design, but also in their relationship with healthy and moral citizenship. The recommendations they presented therefore represented a nexus of these issues viewed from the perspective of the housewife as a mother, the future of the nation and the gatekeeper of its good behaviour. They were not radically different from the other committees of the Ministry, but they were notably fierce in typically advocating for a higher standard for the women and the families they were expected to raise.

Communal living

Another area in which the subcommittee deviated from its original remit was in its strong belief in the benefits of communal living. This is not a great surprise when one considers the activities of its members. In 1919, Dorothy Peel wrote in a short memoir of her time in government, commenting that, 'Of all the work that Mrs. Reeves and I did at the Ministry of Food none interested me more than that which concerned National, as they were then called, Public Kitchens. Any scheme tended to ease the lives of hard-working women of all classes

⁴⁹⁶ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women's Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 4. 2 March 1918.

appeals to me... and I did what I could to advance the movement.'⁴⁹⁷ Jane Lane-Claypom once failed to attend a meeting of the committee due to volunteering at a communal kitchen she had established in London, an enterprise which was described by the *Common Cause* as 'national and racial service of the highest order'.⁴⁹⁸ The subcommittee therefore expressed the view in their final report that there could be no doubt that much labour and fatigue for the housewife might be saved by facilitating communal washing and cooking, and posited moreover that pleasure and holiday making could be much more easily and cheaply obtained by communal arrangements.⁴⁹⁹

Despite such positive conviction in the potential benefits of a more communal approach to living, the subcommittee were nevertheless forced to concede that this approach was not broadly in keeping with the wishes of working women. Whilst they honestly communicated this fact, it did not serve to deter them in investigating the possibilities:

That English women do not, under present conditions, regard communal arrangements with favour is not, however, a reason for neglecting to consider schemes by which unnecessary drudgery would be saved, and there can be little doubt that the solution of many of the more difficult domestic problems, will eventually be found along the lines of co-operated effort rather than in isolated effort.⁵⁰⁰

It is important to note that the divide in attitudes often operated along class boundaries, and that the subcommittee were usually impressively cognizant of that fact. Despite a general admiration of Homesgarth, they admitted that although it was both popular and successful, it was 'intended for middle class and not working class tenants.'⁵⁰¹ Experimental schemes

⁴⁹⁷ C. S. Peel, *A year in public life* (London, 1919), p. 179.

⁴⁹⁸ C. W. Saleeby in *The Common Cause*, 8 March 1918, p. 622.

⁴⁹⁹ RECO 1/629 Report of the Women's House Planning Committee for Scotland. Cd. 9239/1919, p. 12.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women's Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 31. 1 August 1918, p. 2.

aimed more consciously at the working classes⁵⁰² – such as at Meadoway Green – had proven to be somewhat less effective, and came with costs of 1/4 a week to cover the wages of the cook.⁵⁰³ Consultation with outside experts, such as the architect Annie Hall, tended to reinforce this view: whilst it was thought that communal housing would ‘also be of value for the weekly wage earning class’, plans generally revolved around those earning from £200-£500 per annum, and so struggled to fit within the subcommittee’s remit.⁵⁰⁴ Despite this, they investigated the possibilities of incorporating such schemes in to the post-war programme, and such perseverance is enlightening for our understandings of women working on reconstruction’s mentalities towards the future. In doing so they were building on a legacy of imagined communal living which was grounded in middle-class domination. Carol Dyhouse has highlighted how the feminist Utopias in fiction promoted the benefits of co-operative or communal living arrangements using a ‘fairy-godmother’ to provide the capital – usually a wealthy widow or heiress.⁵⁰⁵ Such dependence on the benevolence of the wealthier classes, or on additional contributions in rent, made the vision of communal kitchens which the subcommittee so enthusiastically espoused unappealing to the working-class audience they were supposed to be catering for.

The most common form of communal living proposed was the implementation of some form of shared kitchen or cooking service. The subcommittee was of the belief that the ultimate solution for communal cooking arrangements lay in the development of schemes for supplying ‘varied and wholesome cooked foods’ at a reasonable price, but whether this was to be done by municipal, co-operative, or private enterprise, is left unclear.⁵⁰⁶ They admitted,

⁵⁰² Even then, it must be noted that the intended tenants were relatively affluent by working class standards.

⁵⁰³ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women’s Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 31. 1 August 1918, p. 3.

⁵⁰⁴ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women’s Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 27. 11 July 1918, p. 3.

⁵⁰⁵ Carol Dyhouse, *Feminism and the family in England, 1880-1939* (Oxford, 1989), p. 120.

⁵⁰⁶ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women’s Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 31. 1 August 1918, p. 3.

however, the somewhat fanciful nature of this desire, noting in the report that, 'It does not seem probable communal kitchens in which women could come in and cook for themselves will ever find favour', although they did strongly indicate that if such an arrangement were desired by a group of women, it would be worthwhile making such an experiment.⁵⁰⁷ The idea that the necessity for a housing programme offered an opportunity for experimentation was not unique to the subcommittee, as publications such as the *The Labour Woman* often noted:

The need for new houses gives us an opportunity for experiment. It ought to be possible in every housing scheme, and in every improvement of present housing conditions, to make a co-operative kitchen for the use of all. We do not mean a kitchen in which women would go to cook their own food, but a kitchen where food would be cooked in large quantities which the tenants might go and purchase as they required it.⁵⁰⁸

Yet whilst these opinions were ostensibly concerned with the convenience of the housewife, they were also strongly grounded in the attitudes towards morality and temperance that were visible in the discussion of layouts and gardens. This is especially evident in the proposal advanced by the subcommittee to replace public houses with cheap communal restaurants.

The transformation of the public house into the cheap restaurant should be a great assistance to communal life. The returning soldiers will have become familiar with the sight of the worker and his family sitting under the trees in foreign cafes enjoying a cheap and well-cooked meal, and it is probable that, if those engaged in the work of social reconstruction will interest themselves in this idea, the results will be: (a) a vast improvement in our public houses, and (b) a source of rest and enjoyment for the working women.⁵⁰⁹

This idyllic image exposes the ulterior motives for the subcommittee in their advocacy of communal kitchens. Not only were they looking to improve the conveniences of the housewife, they were also seeking to socially engineer a morally better and more temperate working class. The realisation of such an underlying agenda increasingly became untenable

⁵⁰⁷ RECO 1/629. Report of the Women's House Planning Committee for Scotland. Cd. 9239/1919, p. 42.

⁵⁰⁸ *The Labour Woman*, February 1919, p. 2.

⁵⁰⁹ RECO 1/629. Report of the Women's House Planning Committee for Scotland. Cd. 9239/1919, p. 13.

given the repeated negative responses to the idea of communal kitchens, however. As one group of working women stated, they did not want communal kitchens, as ‘there wouldn’t be nothing left for us to do if we hadn’t no dinner to cook’.⁵¹⁰ The inevitable additional expense that such ventures would incur, combined with the negative attitudes in general, left a popular idea amongst the subcommittee unlikely to get off the ground.

Similar attitudes were expressed to the prospect of the establishment of communal laundry services, although these arrangements were not as strongly rebuffed. Nevertheless, the subcommittee were forced to conclude that, ‘Washhouses common to a group of houses and used by women in rotation are not popular, and it is improbable that this type of communal washing arrangement would meet with much success.’⁵¹¹

Despite this, cases such as Falworth and Battersea were offered to advance the merits of communal laundry programmes where implemented effectively. To gain popular support, however, they would need to overcome the objections working women raised to the idea when consulted. These were chiefly that each tenant had to wash on a particular day and ‘no one wanted to have to do the washing on Thursday or Friday’, and in particular it was ‘unpleasant to have to use the wash house after a dirty neighbour’.⁵¹² Any such communal arrangement would therefore have to be large enough to be used by many tenants at the same time, and so only be required to open on more convenient days, or take the form of a municipal laundry where tenants could have their laundry done for them at cost price. The subcommittee believed that this latter proposal had many advantages, and was the only

⁵¹⁰ RECO 1/631. Report of a visit to Camberwell by Miss Maud Bell.

⁵¹¹ RECO 1/629, Report of the Women’s House Planning Committee for Scotland. Cd. 9239/1919, p. 13.

⁵¹² Ibid.

possible arrangement that may prove popular and would serve to 'relieve the housewife of the heavy household washing'.⁵¹³

This highlights the difference in attitudes between the women working for the Ministry of Reconstruction and the working-class women they consulted. In their proposals for both kitchens and laundry services, their conception of the 'convenience of the housewife' at times became overridden by the more middle-class experience they were accustomed to; after all, what could make doing laundry easier than paying someone else to do it for you? This divide is only heightened by the lack of support these ideas commanded from the women they were intended for, whose dominating concern was economy, not convenience.

This was not the case for all aspects of communal living, however, and one area which did garner some support from working women were playgrounds. Concerns about health and morality were once again guiding the hand of the subcommittee, but in this instance they were grounded in the care of the family, something they perceived to be the responsibility of the housewives. In their report, the women of the subcommittee argued that it is 'neither possible or desirable to treat housing as a separate matter from Site and Town Planning', and firmly stated that any new homes should not be regarded as 'separate units'.⁵¹⁴ However, considering the lack of support for communal kitchens or laundries, it is only in assessing playgrounds that this stance presents as a coherent representation of the desires of working women. Discussing the merits of playgrounds did, however, offer the subcommittee an opportunity to espouse more general beliefs about the physical and moral health of future communities:

⁵¹³ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women's Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 21. 18 June 1918, p. 2.

⁵¹⁴ RECO 1/629. Report of the Women's House Planning Committee for Scotland. Cd. 9239/1919, p. 10.

Only through careful planning can we make a real advance towards building up the community of the future, whether we are considering their needs from the housewives' and mothers' point of view, or from that of the citizens in general. While it is, of course, urgent for the convenience of the housewife that children of all ages should have provision for recreation near the home, we realise the matter is still more urgent in order to raise the low health standard of our population.⁵¹⁵

In fact, whilst the use of a communal play area to make the supervision of children easier is mentioned in the reports, it is only in discussions of the health of children that their benefits are truly expounded. Moreover, in keeping with their pronatalist stances examined earlier, the subcommittee espoused a more earthly ideal that was in keeping with the movement's concern with light and space on human development: 'We believe a rough ground with trees, hedges, and boulders would make a much more interesting playground than a field levelled and artificially prepared beforehand.'⁵¹⁶

One group consulted informed the women of the Ministry of Reconstruction that, 'The children's playgrounds are an absolute necessity; and if they could be supplemented by one or two quiet corners (however small) kept sacred to old people, another long-felt want would be delightfully met.'⁵¹⁷ Such consideration for the elderly, or the possibility to represent these spaces as serving a dual purpose, was apparently lost on the subcommittee, and the care for the elderly or the accommodation of them within provided accommodation is notable for its absence throughout their discussions and proposals. Whilst one might assume that provision for the elderly would be viewed positively for any communal living scheme, they remained unconsidered throughout. Again, this emphasises the primacy of the concerns of women as mothers, and the associated concentration on the future of the nation led to an almost-blinkered focus on the *youth* of the nation.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid, p. 12.

⁵¹⁷ RECO 1/631. Suggestions on Housing questions from Working Women.

Communal living thus serves to emphasise a point at which the aspirations of the subcommittee deviated from the wants of the working women they were seeking to advocate on behalf of. The women of the Ministry of Reconstruction appeared to view the reconstruction programme as an opportunity to secure societal improvements, and the communal arrangements they proposed were often grounded in these ideas of a healthier, more temperate society. Yet the evidence was fairly clear in all aspects: in this area, they may have believed themselves to be acting for working women, but it was not on their behalf.

Conversion of houses to flats

Shortly after the establishment of the Women's Housing Subcommittee, their terms were extended to include, 'as to what adaptation is necessary from the view of the housewife that where houses, originally built for one family, are let out in tenements to two or more, there shall be proper conveniences.'⁵¹⁸ Considering the ideas and concerns expressed in the discussion of planning and layouts, this extended remit makes sense; if housewives were to be charged with the operation of a home that was both healthy and moral, the alteration of homes where such conditions were under threat should also necessarily be under their purview. Such a widening of scope suggests that even as the housing programme was being formed it was becoming clear to the figures at the heart of it that the housing shortage could not realistically be countered solely through a building programme, no matter how extensive that may be. Considering the restrictions on production from the material and manpower perspectives, the housing problem could not be solved by the production of new houses alone.

⁵¹⁸ RECO 1/618. Women's housing subcommittee: terms of reference and appointments.

The conversion of houses to flats represents the acceptance of this shortcoming. It forced the subcommittee to investigate the practicalities of working-class living in a way that the at times fanciful construction of the 'ideal home' did not, and to attempt to implement the ideological principles highlighted by the layouts and design section in another setting. Moreover, it demonstrated the difficulties present in any attempt to house a significant number of people in non-bespoke accommodation, as their report was ultimately forced to concede: 'In light of the investigation made we have reluctantly come to the conclusion that since conversion must displace permanently some of the population any alteration at the moment would only tend to make conditions worse in an already overcrowded neighbourhood.'⁵¹⁹

The same issue which had increasingly hamstrung the activities of local health departments during the course of the war therefore also persisted for the women considering conversions: it was difficult to clear out buildings or areas which were deemed insanitary when no replacement was forthcoming, and that by doing so, overcrowding would inevitably increase in other buildings or areas as a result of the work they were carrying out to improve matters. Dr Higgins, the Medical Officer of Health for London County Council, stated as much, suggesting that the Government assistance forthcoming for the building of new houses ought to be extended to the conversion of existing houses.⁵²⁰ This confirmed the research of the subcommittee, which clearly suggested that any effective conversion or adaptation would be impossible without fiscal governmental intervention.

⁵¹⁹ RECO 1/629, Report of the Women's House Planning Committee for Scotland. Cd. 9239/1919, p. 13.

⁵²⁰ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women's Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 19. 6 June 1918, p. 3.

The conversion of middle-class houses to flats – or maisonettes – was not a new idea, but it was the first time that such an approach was broached as a potential partial solution for housing shortages. This was in large part due to the class divide prevailing in the conversion of flats (where such conversion had been consciously undertaken) prior to the war. Such ‘definite forms of conversion’ were almost exclusively confined to middle-class requirements, and whilst this perhaps helped to relieve the pressure in a more general sense – as more of the middle classes occupied a smaller amount of space – these spaces were almost never intentionally brought ‘within the reach of the working-classes’.⁵²¹

In fact, they were often intentionally kept outside the reaches of the working classes. The subcommittee were informed that landlords were sometimes found who refused to convert their houses to flats for the working classes and instead preferred to leave the properties empty.⁵²² Miss Jeffery reported that the process of houses becoming occupied by the working classes was often relatively ad hoc, with tenants letting off apartments until finally the whole house was let out in flats with no conscious process of adaptation.⁵²³

The women of the subcommittee considered that this could be legislatively addressed by using governmental subsidies to convert middle-class houses in to ‘maisonettes’, using Mecklenburgh Square as the paradigm of an ideal conversion.⁵²⁴ Once this had been achieved and new homes produced using governmental assistance, the subcommittee urged that they should be ‘reserved for the working classes’.⁵²⁵ It was agreed that if no form of assistance were given, the rents would be beyond the reach of the working classes and the system would

⁵²¹ RECO 1/629, Report of the Women’s House Planning Committee for Scotland. Cd. 9239/1919, p. 14.

⁵²² RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women’s Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 19. 6 June 1918, p. 2.

⁵²³ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women’s Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 21. 18 June 1918, p. 3.

⁵²⁴ Located in central London, the maisonettes were aimed at middle-class families.

⁵²⁵ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women’s Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 21. 18 June 1918, p. 3. Emphasis in original.

perpetuate. It should be noted, however, that the subcommittee's opinion was strongly against the idea of construction with this model in mind, with them stating that 'they felt that the working class opinion has in their experience been very definitely unfavourable to cottage flats. It seems likely that this view was influenced by the present experience of housing of this type, which would afford a false impression of the potential the format could offer if implemented consciously'.⁵²⁶ Nevertheless, both the subcommittee and the working women they consulted expressed the view that flats may be a necessity, but were far from the ideal. As a result, for the Addison Act and the post-war housing programme, conversion offered itself as, at most, a temporary solution.

This conclusion was broadly accurate and sensible. Yet despite the investigation of the successful conversion of middle-class houses to working-class flats being a central part of the investigatory remit of the subcommittee, discussions of the true possibilities such conversions presented were limited. The subcommittee were less interested in solving this problem, in part because the exercise involved safeguarding the minimum standards of cleanliness and wellbeing more than it did the construction of a new ideal home. They were concerned that bedrooms must not be so small that sharing occurred between family members of opposite sexes, and that access to light and air be preserved where possible, but ultimately the conversion of middle-class houses appeared to the subcommittee to be a temporary solution where their attention and hopes were focussed on a permanent systemic fix. In this, the women's subcommittee was much the same as the men of the Tudor Walters and other committees; they allowed the pursuit of an ideal, and the sense of opportunity to obscure potentially cheaper and more practicable 'fixes'.

⁵²⁶ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women's Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 17. 24 May 1918, p. 3.

Use of women's organisations

The women of the subcommittee did not operate in a vacuum. They were, as we have explored, often chosen to advise the Ministry of Reconstruction due to public activities relating to either women's welfare or housing reform, which came through their involvement in a number of organisations. When tasked with obtaining evidence through which to represent working women, they leaned on those affiliations and the structures and networks they afforded. They also recognised that representing women and the activities of those organisations would need to be continued throughout the process and subsequent developments if the housing programme was to be successful.⁵²⁷ Soon after the subcommittee was formed they forwarded a resolution to the Local Government Board, urging that any local authorities preparing housing schemes must consult women: 'It was thought better', they wrote, 'to urge the appointment of women members to the Housing Committees of Local Authorities than the formation of Women's Subcommittees'.⁵²⁸ They were especially fervent in the belief that women representative of the class who were to inhabit the houses had to be consulted, and if necessary the powers to secure this object should be obtained from parliament.⁵²⁹

This clearly suggests that the subcommittee viewed itself as a part of a process more than a solution, and was consciously interested in women's representation in housing schemes beyond the process of reconstruction. This representation could best be effected across the

⁵²⁷ On this, see Meta Zimmeck, 'Strategies and stratagems for the employment of women in the British Civil Service, 1919-1939', *Historical Journal*, 27 (1984), 901-924; Elizabeth Brimelow, 'Women in the Civil Service', *Public Administration*, 59 (1981), 313-335.

⁵²⁸ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women's Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 17, 22 May 1918, p. 2.

⁵²⁹ RECO 1/631. Revised resolution to the Local Government Board.

nation through the employment of women's organisations, and this was identified when the committee was formed:

There is no doubt that in order to secure proper investigation over the whole country, it will be necessary to get a large number of other people to work for the Committee. For this purpose... the various women's organisations should be utilised.⁵³⁰

To this end the subcommittee published letters in newspapers and pamphlets, calling on women's organisations throughout the country to 'stimulate among working women investigation and discussion of housing problems' and report back the results of activities, conferences, etc.⁵³¹ Their call for help was well taken-up, and the responses they received and the organisations they utilised represented a significant cross-section of women's representation at the time, crossing class and political boundaries. For example, a conference held in Dudley Hall on 20 April 1918 attracted the representatives of over twenty organisations, including the Women's Co-operative Guild; the British Women's Temperance Association; the National Federation of Women Teachers; the National Federation of Women Workers; the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies; and the Mother's Union.⁵³² Examination of their interaction in the advisory process is essential for our understanding of how the subcommittee formed its conclusions, but also provides an opportunity to examine the way in which women's groups regarded the forthcoming housing programme and the aspects which they sought to influence the most.⁵³³

⁵³⁰ RECO 1/620. Women's Housing Subcommittee: representation of the Welsh Housing and Development Association on the committee for consideration of conditions in Wales. 27 March 1918.

⁵³¹ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women's Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 11. 30 April 1918, p. 2.

⁵³² RECO 1/631. Report of a conference on Housing, Dudley Town Hall, 20 April 1918.

⁵³³ See Alison S. Fell and Ingrid Sharp (eds), *The women's movement in wartime: international perspectives, 1914-19* (Basingstoke, 2007).

In particular, it is worth briefly noting the presence of suffrage societies at many of the housing conferences held during the final years of the war. Whilst the war had mostly caused the suspension of suffrage campaigning, the organisations that the fight for women's votes had established did not suddenly disappear.⁵³⁴ For these groups interested in improving the rights and lives of women,⁵³⁵ the housing programme offered a new platform through which to enact positive change. Despite a general decline in suffrage activities during the war,⁵³⁶ building new homes that would improve the lives of housewives across the country maintained as a political interest for suffrage-centred groups, and they enthusiastically contributed to the discussion and evidence-gathering.

Foremost in consultation process, however, were mothers, and the subcommittee made a conscious effort to gain the views of mother's groups. Again, for the purposes of reconstruction – even by the women of the subcommittee – women were viewed primarily as mothers. In towns and cities across the nation, they met with local mother's groups, such as in Plaistow, Camberwell, Glasgow, and South Wales.⁵³⁷ Those mothers clearly communicated their views, and the subcommittee took their concerns and desires seriously. In the context of the growing importance of ideas of pronatalism and eugenics, which is discussed in more depth in Chapter Five, the importance accorded to the evidence provided by mothers in the housing programme does suggest that despite a rise in the mortality rate, there was – at least from those concerned with reconstruction – an effort to improve the health and livelihoods of the women at the heart of those pronatalist aspirations. Claire Culleton has used working-class maternal mortality rates to emphasise a 'scandalous area of

⁵³⁴ See Elizabeth Crawford, *The women's suffrage movement* (London, 1999).

⁵³⁵ See Johanna Alberti, *Beyond suffrage: feminists in war and peace, 1914-28* (Basingstoke, 1989).

⁵³⁶ Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 2nd ed.* (Basingstoke, 2000), Ch. 2; Cheryl Law, *Suffrage and power: the women's movement, 1918-1928* (London, 1997).

⁵³⁷ RECO 1/631. Women's Housing Subcommittee: papers circulated to the committee.

neglect', commenting how it 'exposes the sobering consequences of an imperial nation aggressively determined to sustain its potency'.⁵³⁸ Whilst she clearly demonstrates this neglect statistically, the work of the women's subcommittee does emphasise that the protection of mothers was a point of emphasis in areas of the reconstruction programme.⁵³⁹

Housewives and mothers did not merely communicate by being consulted, however, but often used their own organisational affiliations such as the Women's Institute (W.I.), branches of which regularly sent the subcommittee opinions on domestic issues such as the virtues of cooking by electricity.⁵⁴⁰ Whilst it would be easy to view the emphasis on traditional domesticity as apolitical, Maggie Andrews has demonstrated that the W.I. used the home as a legitimate site for political struggle, and their traditional ascendancy over the space empowered their arguments.⁵⁴¹ Despite the importance of social gains made in the workplace during the war,⁵⁴² for many women returning to roles as housewives and mothers carried a great deal of satisfaction, as Joanna Bourke has shown.⁵⁴³ Even further, Susan Pedersen has convincingly demonstrated how the 'service' offered by motherhood during and after the war provided a compelling argument for increased welfare rights.⁵⁴⁴ Any such reward would naturally start with housing. This helped to push the subcommittee towards a focus on this more traditional ideal of the housewife as a mother, and the number of forcefully expressed

⁵³⁸ Claire Culleton, *Working-class culture, women, and Britain, 1914-1921* (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 164.

⁵³⁹ It should be noted that, in keeping with pronatalism, the emphasis on wellbeing was primarily tied to childbearing, as outlined in Barbara Harrison, 'Women and health' in Purvis, June (ed.), *Women's history: Britain 1850-1945* (London, 1995), 157-193.

⁵⁴⁰ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women's Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 28. 15 July 1918, p. 3.

⁵⁴¹ Maggie Andrews, *The acceptable face of feminism: the Women's Institute as a social movement* (London, 1997), p. 153. See also, Helen McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain', *The Historical Journal*, 50 (2007), 891-912.

⁵⁴² Cf. M. Higonnet et al. (eds), *Behind the lines: gender and the two World Wars* (New Haven, 1987).

⁵⁴³ Joanna Bourke, *Working-class cultures in Britain: gender, class and ethnicity* (London, 1994), Ch. 3; See also Judy Giles, 'A home of one's own: women and domesticity in England, 1918-1950', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 16 (1993), 239-253.

⁵⁴⁴ Susan Pedersen, 'Gender, welfare, and citizenship in Britain during the Great War', *American Historical Review*, 95 (1990), 983-1006. See also Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and motherhood in Western Europe, 1890-1970* (New York, 2005).

opinions they received from mother's groups helped to reinforce this view.⁵⁴⁵ It is surprising, however, that the subcommittee failed to utilise or communicate with the Mother's Union in any meaningful way, despite the enthusiasm that the organisation was taking in attempting to address the housing question.

Instead, they worked closely with the Women's Co-operative Guild (W.C.G.), who were the most proactive organisation in attempting to influence the findings and recommendations of the subcommittee. Through its championing of statutory maternity benefit and divorce law reforms, by the First World War the W.C.G. had established a reputation as a 'kind of trade union for married women'.⁵⁴⁶ In June of 1918 they wrote to the subcommittee offering to make housing the primary subject of their district meetings. This was enthusiastically received, with the women of the Ministry of Reconstruction feeling that, 'the Guild was the body best able to get at the women whose views were most important, and able to create a widespread interest in the housing question'.⁵⁴⁷ This is unsurprising considering the level of involvement the subcommittee's members had with the W.C.G. personally. It should be remembered that such collaboration or consultation does not automatically result in empathy or representation, however. Carol Dyhouse has noted that middle-class feminists often struggled to empathise with the plight of working-class women, highlighting Virginia Woolf's experience at a Women's Co-operative Guild meeting in Newcastle where the predicament of working men's wives, with their demands for hot water, labour-saving

⁵⁴⁵ This is not, however, to assume a postwar 'backlash' against women's position. See Adrian Bingham, "'An Era of Domesticity?': histories of women and gender in interwar Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), 225-233. Cf. Deirdre Beddoe, *Back to home and duty: women between the Wars, 1918-1939* (London, 1989); Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter-war Britain* (Princeton, 1993).

⁵⁴⁶ Gillian Scott, *Feminism and the politics of working women: the Women's Co-operative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War* (London, 1998), p. 93.

⁵⁴⁷ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women's Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 22. 19 June 1918, p. 4.

appliances and housing reform left her with ‘contradictory and complex feelings.’⁵⁴⁸ Whilst this may be true, the credence paid to the findings of the Women’s Co-operative Guild, and the attendance of these middle-class women at their meetings, does at the very least highlight the desire to understand working women and listen to their concerns.

To systematically discover those wants and concerns, the Women’s Co-operative Guild established a list of ‘Points for Discussion at Meetings’, which focussed on the areas highlighted by the subcommittee, especially the inclusion of parlours and bathrooms, and the layouts of kitchens and sinks. It sought to garner opinion on communal spaces and playgrounds, and they requested that the Ministry sanction the printing of 1,000 copies for their housing meetings; such ambition was laudable but recognised as fanciful by the Ministry, who printed 150 copies.⁵⁴⁹

The fervour with which the Women’s Co-operative Guild sought to integrate itself in the advisory process was perhaps a response to an increasingly emergent radical working-class women’s movement as much as through desire to influence policy. No organisation encapsulated this more than the Labour Party, as women were absorbed in to the industrial and political labour movement and expectations that the party would take up issues of gender as well as class grew.⁵⁵⁰ In 1917, the Labour Party overhauled its constitution, moving from affiliate to individual membership. This was a particularly important development for

⁵⁴⁸ Carol Dyhouse, *Feminism and the family in England, 1880-1939* (Oxford, 1989), p. 108.

⁵⁴⁹ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women’s Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 30. 25 July 1918, p. 1.

⁵⁵⁰ Pamela Graves, *Labour women: women in British working-class politics, 1918-1939* (Cambridge, 1994).

women, who no longer had to rely on joining through unions or similar groups,⁵⁵¹ and in the years which followed the war over 150,000 women joined the party.⁵⁵²

This rapidly expanding base was put to good use in an enquiry, started in October 1917, which sought to ask what kind of house the working woman really wanted. The returns – which came in daily – were later turned in to a book, and the subcommittee ‘felt much satisfaction in finding that the conclusions at which they had so far arrived independently were almost identical’.⁵⁵³ That this was the case should not be a great surprise. The influx of new members to the Labour Party also created significant overlap in political affiliations, and the women active in the Labour Party were often also involved in the Women’s Co-operative Guild and other interested bodies.⁵⁵⁴

The Women’s Labour League (W.L.L.), which was incorporated in to the structure of the Labour Party in 1917, also sought to educate – and influence – the opinion of working women on the housing problems afflicting the nation. The W.L.L. was traditionally devoted to the idea of the woman in the home, the ‘wives and sweethearts’ who were not represented in politics through trade unionism. It recognised the specific concerns of women as wives and mothers, and saw political activity as necessary to secure the improved conditions in the home that were essential for these housewives to perform their duties properly.⁵⁵⁵ It did this primarily through its publication, *The Labour Woman*. Every issue sought to educate its readers and mobilise them for action on what it described as the ‘supreme duties’ of the

⁵⁵¹ The numbers of women who joined unions has inspired debate in the literature, but the representation membership afforded for issues such as housing certainly increased their appeal. See Deborah Thom, ‘The Bundle of sticks: women, trade unionists and collective organisation before 1918’ in John, Angela (ed.), *Unequal opportunities: women’s employment in England, 1800-1918* (Oxford, 1985), 260-289.

⁵⁵² Krista Cowman, *Women in British politics, c. 1689-1979* (Basingstoke, 2010), p. 137.

⁵⁵³ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women’s Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 28. 15 July 1918, p. 1.

⁵⁵⁴ Krista Cowman, p. 138.

⁵⁵⁵ Caroline Rowan, ‘Women in the Labour Party, 1906-1920’, *Feminist Review*, 12 (1982), 74-91.

nation: 'the building of new houses, and the maintenance and improvement of the standard of life and the re-organisation of the whole health services of the community'.⁵⁵⁶

Locally the Labour Party relied on the Women's Sections of the Labour Party Housing Associations to place pressure on local authorities,⁵⁵⁷ and they did so frequently through the interwar period. Such activity serves to reinforce the arguments of Pat Thane and Cheryl Law, who pushed back against historians critical of the women's movements after the war, correctly observing that women in the Labour Party engaged fiercely with the dismal housing and its effect on the health of housewives and mothers.⁵⁵⁸

Other organisations

Yet whilst national organisations such as the Labour Party and the Women's Co-operative Guild maintained pressure on the subcommittee, at a local level women's groups organised around a variety of issues related to housing and pressured local government for change. In Glasgow, the Corporation received regular delegations from the Women's Patriotic Crusade,⁵⁵⁹ the Scottish Council for Women's Trades,⁵⁶⁰ and the British Women's Temperance Association.⁵⁶¹ In Liverpool, the Housing Committee was petitioned by local branches of The Women's National Committee to Secure State Purchase and Control of the

⁵⁵⁶ *The Labour Woman*, January 1919, p. 2.

⁵⁵⁷ Mitchell Library, CI 3/61 Corporation Minutes, Apr 1919-Nov 1919, p. 1378.

⁵⁵⁸ Pat Thane, 'The Women of the British Labour Party and Feminism, 1906-1945' in Smith, Harold (ed.) *British feminism in the twentieth century* (Aldershot, 1990), p. 135; Law, *Suffrage and Power*, pp. 226, 229.

⁵⁵⁹ Mitchell Library, CI 3/56 Corporation Minutes, Nov 1916-Apr 1917, p. 120.

⁵⁶⁰ Mitchell Library, CI 3/59 Corporation Minutes, Apr 1918-Nov 1918, p. 1895.

⁵⁶¹ Mitchell Library, CI 3/51 Corporation Minutes, Apr 1914-Nov 1914, p. 2027.

Liquor Trade,⁵⁶² the National Union of Women Workers,⁵⁶³ the Women's Co-operative Guild,⁵⁶⁴ and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.⁵⁶⁵ In Birmingham, the Women's Suffrage Society held a Housing Conference for women's organisations,⁵⁶⁶ and in Manchester the Manchester Citizens' Association sent in regular reports, as did equivalent groups in York, Chester, Oldham, and Leeds.⁵⁶⁷ Locally, more specifically issue-oriented groups created pressure, especially temperance groups.

The housing question thus served as a logical meeting point for multiple women's organisations throughout the country: local and national; conservative and progressive. Not all these organisations were overtly or consciously feminist in their aspirations.⁵⁶⁸ Yet whether interested in equality, temperance, or health and mortality issues, the continuing deplorable standard of accommodation on offer stimulated the political activity of an impressive cross-section of women's organisations during and immediately after the war, and the combination of these groups both assisted the women's subcommittee in its fact-finding and recommendations process, and added impressive weight to their findings.

Conclusion

It would be foolish to suggest that the inclusion of the Women's Housing Subcommittee revolutionized the findings or approach of the Ministry of Reconstruction during the war, or

⁵⁶² Liverpool Central Library, 352 MIN/HOU 1/6 - Housing Committee Minute Book, Nov 1918-Feb 1921, p. 555.

⁵⁶³ Liverpool Central Library, 352 MIN/HOU 1/5 - Housing Committee Minute Book, Oct 1912-Oct 1918, p. 628.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 504.

⁵⁶⁵ Liverpool Central Library, H352 COU Proceedings of the Council, 1913-14. Vol. I. Minutes, p. 120.

⁵⁶⁶ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women's Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 30. 25 July 1918, p. 1.

⁵⁶⁷ RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women's Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 4. 22 March 1918, p. 2.

⁵⁶⁸ Caitriona Beaumont, 'The Women's Movement, Politics and Citizenship, 1918-50s', in Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Ina (ed.), *Women in Twentieth Century Britain* (Harlow, 2001), 262-277.

that they were in a position to overhaul the recommendations of the other related committees they worked in tandem with.⁵⁶⁹ Whilst the work they did in planning and design has at times been eclipsed by that of the more famous Tudor Walters Committee,⁵⁷⁰ to compare the influence so directly rather misses the significance of the Women's Housing Subcommittee. Not only did they force those interested in housing reform to make considerations from the perspective of the housewife, they contributed a wealth of evidence from the women the new houses were aimed at. Such consultation and feedback not only helps to explain why the houses took the forms they did, but also helps to expose the additional factors which influenced opinion and policy, including the importance of pronatalism, temperance, and morality. Whether consciously or unconsciously, their ideas surrounding health and morality betray the depth of the pronatalist agenda working behind the state's actions. The attempts to convince working women of the merits of communal living and their inability to develop this idea is particularly enlightening. It demonstrates that women were not passive recipients of new housing, merely happy to be offered new accommodation of which virtually any form would be an upgrade. Instead, they offered a coherent view of the homes they wanted, and a hitherto underappreciated enthusiasm for participation in the planning process. If the end of the war was to signify a return to pre-war visions of the woman as the primary keeper of the home, the investigations and work of the Women's Housing Subcommittee clearly shows that women themselves held clear opinions of what that meant; they formed a coherent, effective representation of women and helped to make social reform better for many women from a broad variety of class backgrounds.

⁵⁶⁹ The inter-committee communication was relatively good, with Captain Reiss often acting as a correspondent and urging discussion between the groups on issues which intersected subcommittees' interests. See, for example, RECO 1/630. Minutes of the Women's Housing Subcommittee, Meeting 19. 4 June 1918, p. 1.

⁵⁷⁰ Mark Swenarton, *Homes fit for heroes: the politics and architecture of early state housing in Britain* (London, 1981), p. 92.

Chapter Five

Health, morality, and temperance

I regard the Government as pledged to carry a measure of reform, and I hope when it comes it will be complete, because I am confident it is necessary. The sooner this measure of essential reform is given, followed by encouragement and support for the provision of houses by any and every agency, the sooner will follow substantial improvement of existing housing conditions and ample provision for future needs. This will further the ideal to which H. M. George V gave utterance some years ago:- “The foundations of the national glory are set in the homes of the people.”⁵⁷¹

Walter Long, President of the Local Government Board, speaking on 20 September 1916.⁵⁷²

Whilst the Local Government Board were not always in lock-step with the Ministry of Reconstruction and the government on the nature of the proposed housing programme, Walter Long’s comment harkens to a deeper lineage of thought on housing reform in Britain which preceded the conflict. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, interest on the relationship between environment and health – and healthy behaviours – had grown significantly. In the decades prior to the war this had begun to manifest in a creeping level of state intervention, primarily at a local government level.⁵⁷³ As we have seen in Chapter One, the activities of local authorities in Glasgow and Liverpool had been slowly ratcheting up in the years before the outbreak of the conflict, and were almost entirely confined to the remedying of unhealthy areas as a ‘nuisance to public health’.⁵⁷⁴

The war catalysed the expansion of this thought, but it continued to underpin the activities which housing reformers, activists, and the decision-makers in government undertook during the war, and the plans they formulated. When the housing programme was being constructed,

⁵⁷¹ RECO 1/587. Quoted in the *Architect and Contract Report*, 25 January 1918. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁷² Long was the most proactive and receptive of the presidents of the L.G.B., and would later lament the lack of decisive action undertaken, prior to his death. See Walter Hume Long, *Memories* (London, 1923); Alvin Jackson, ‘Long, Walter Hume, first Viscount Long. (1854-1924)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 6 January 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/34591>.

⁵⁷³ See Avner Offer, *Property and politics, 1870-1914: landownership, law, ideology and urban development in England* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 1-18; John English, Ruth Madigan, and Peter Norman, *Slum clearance: the social and administrative context in England and Wales* (London, 1976).

⁵⁷⁴ See also Colin Pooley, ‘Housing for the poorest poor: slum clearance and rehousing in Liverpool, 1890-1918’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 11 (1985), 70-88.

it was firmly built upon decades of discussion and hypothesising about the importance of health, housing, and community, and as a result the programme served as a platform to enact pre-existing ideological agendas. It is important to look in more detail at those assumptions in order to fully understand why the housing programme took the form it did. This chapter looks more closely at the motivations for housing policy from policy-makers; what did they think they could achieve, and why were they trying to do so at this moment specifically?

The first section details why activity was necessary urgently, the important change in mentalities from decision-makers inspired by the experience of war, and the way in which the housing programme was at times utilised as an ameliorative ‘silver bullet’ for other reconstruction problems. It also takes the time to examine in more detail the man for whom the Act is named – Christopher Addison. The second section then looks more closely at the lofty aspirations of the housing programme as an enactor of social change: it details how pre-war considerations of health and eugenics influenced the development of the programme, how strong temperance lobbies seized an opportunity to create what they viewed as positive change, and why the First World War offered them a position of strength from which to influence. This section, when combined with our understandings of the sense of ‘opportunity’ the war had presented, demonstrates how policy-makers were in many ways attempting to engineer a ‘better’ working class, and the narrative of the ‘deserving poor’ at times dominated their formulations. Finally, this chapter briefly examines the reactions to the proposed construction of cinemas, or ‘picture palaces’, in order to highlight how housing construction had, by the end of the war, come to be perceived as a moral pursuit in society.

Urgency and the threat of inactivity

If the war created the conditions for governmental intervention and exacerbated conditions to the point of crisis, as previous chapters have detailed, it also added a sense of urgency to accompany the Ministry's calculations. The economic urgency is elucidated in Chapter Two, but the pressing concern was a reflection of more than numbers or financial need. At a basic level this can be found in the somewhat ethereal spectre of revolutionary discontent which was discussed in Chapter One, yet this threat was never really substantive nor believed enough to be a truly motivating factor. Correspondence to the Ministry by reactionary figures such as by Richard Williamson stressed to the government that 'there is a great deal of discontent among the workers in connection with the housing problem',⁵⁷⁵ yet this was neither revelatory nor ever defined in more than vague terms.

It is necessary, therefore, to separate the notion of a heightened sense of urgency and the ramifications of a lack of significant action, and the threat posed by popular discontent manifesting as violent protest or unrest. Urgency was nevertheless provided by many sources: by the threat of mass unemployment; by private parties in property angered at the crippling of their industry, and in particular at the Rent and Mortgage Restriction Act; and by the need to seize the opportunity that the war and its reconstruction presented whilst it was possible. The desire to use the opportunity presented and strike whilst the iron was hot should not be discounted as a factor motivating those working on reconstruction to aspire to lofty ambitions. As Sir Hayes Fisher told a conference in Birmingham just before the end of the war, 'I feel that a new spirit of genuine reconstruction is breathing in the Country'.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁵ RECO 1/465. Housing problem (Scotland). 4 April 1917.

⁵⁷⁶ RECO 1/528. Housing of the working classes. Statement by the President of the Local Government Board made in Birmingham, 8 October 1918.

If the opportunity for action hastened the hand of reconstruction officials, they received frequent and fervent prompting from the private building sector to utilise it. As one report to Addison concluded, ‘the vested interest by private parties in property is very large and the fact of... other bodies building is just bringing them into conflict with private owners and builders, and is creating more bad feeling and aggravating a situation already bad.’⁵⁷⁷ The pressure from private builders follows an unusual cyclical logic: prior to the war, the private sector was firmly against the idea of governmental intervention in the housing market. But, with that now inescapable following the artificial maintenance of low rents, and with construction prices rapidly rising, it was now adamant that governmental intervention was urgently necessary in order that the state could extract itself from the housing sector entirely. They were adamant the state had no place in the building sector: therefore, the state had to build, and do so extensively.

There was a further communicated urgency regarding the production of food after the war. In a memorandum on the urgent need for a large housing programme after the war, it was noted that, ‘before production can be increased it is necessary to have houses for producers to live in... Housing has been thought of last instead of first with the result that production has been retarded.’⁵⁷⁸ It opined that, ‘the soldiers and sailors are not going back to the land whatever the attractions of an open air life unless they are reasonably sure of decent homes.’⁵⁷⁹

Britain’s long-standing concern about ensuring the adequate supply of food thus continued to influence policy during and after the war,⁵⁸⁰ and serves as a reminder that urgency was

⁵⁷⁷ RECO 1/465. Housing problem (Scotland). 4 April 1917.

⁵⁷⁸ RECO 1/497. Notes on the urgent need for a large housing programme after the war.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ Lloyd George had been vocal about the need to return the land from before the war. See David Lloyd George, *The rural land problem: the remedy, a speech* (London, 1913). See also Avner Offer, *The First World War: an agrarian interpretation* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 217-233.

informed not purely by the housing shortage alone, but also by other aspects of the economy and national life which were heavily informed by housing conditions. It would be simplistic, therefore, to believe that any one issue was responsible for infusing those planning reconstruction with a renewed sense of urgency. Instead, the nexus of these issues led to a heightened sense that action had to be taken, it had to be significant, and it had to be *soon*.

Opportunity: the war and changing attitudes to state intervention

This sense of real urgency for action was motivated largely by the need to address the critical factors affecting the nation which this thesis has detailed throughout. Yet there was also a notable sea-change in the minds of policy-makers inspired by the experience of fighting the war. The response of Addison to the cessation of Ministry plans in the years after the war certainly suggests that those working on reconstruction problems the nation faced sensed a genuine opportunity to make an improvement to lives of many – that ‘spirit of reconstruction’. This was often underpinned by subscription to certain facets of eugenics, and there can be little doubt that certain aspects of the policies formulated in response to the war were informed by eugenicist ideologies. How these factors influenced the policies adopted is explored in greater detail later in this chapter. For policy-makers, the emergency conditions of the war could be used to combat problems which would otherwise have demanded a previously unheard-of level of governmental interference. Addison later wrote in his memoirs how he believed the war changed attitudes:

The Ministry's action was often denounced as socialistic, but whatever criticisms it may have received on that account were as nothing to what they would have been if we had adopted some of the schemes pressed upon us. The explanation was that individual interests, except for the disgusting profiteer class, had been merged in the one overwhelming national purpose - to win the war. It was a habit at that time - indeed, sometimes it was almost a mania - to expect the State to do everything... These State-directed enterprises, however, provided another kind of opportunity, and Lloyd George and I agreed from the very beginning that as soon as ever there was a moment's

breathing space, use ought to be made of the exceptional situation to secure a better and more humane standard of working conditions.⁵⁸¹

The hope to utilise the moment that the war created was clearly on the minds of planners and reformers, and the word ‘opportunity’ regularly surfaces in discussions, demonstrating decision-makers’ conscious awareness of the circumstances. When first presented with the possibility of running Reconstruction, Addison wrote in his diary: ‘During lunch, L.G. came back to the question of Reconstruction. He has long been anxious about getting questions dealt with and that I should do it with a view to getting together a Reconstruction Policy and organising a Reconstruction party. I said, as before, that I am quite willing to take the job on. He agreed that I must have sufficient powers. Given these, it might be a *splendid opportunity*.’⁵⁸² Lloyd George’s conviction that he needed ‘men of push and go’ extended to reconstruction, and – consequently – to housing.⁵⁸³ The Housing Panel’s report commented that the ‘present scheme of State building provides an opportunity, which must not be let slip, of securing permanently a greatly improved standard of building.’⁵⁸⁴ In the second reading of the bill in the parliament, Tudor Walters also emphasised the moment that the end of the war presented, commenting that, ‘Out of this terrible War some great opportunities are rising’, and that the chance existed to ‘commence to do things on a scale and in a spirit which has never suggested itself before’.⁵⁸⁵

Outside of the Ministry, these ideals were viewed with more scepticism. The *Glasgow Herald* noted that town planning developments were idealistic, but welcomed this development: ‘it is the mission of such a body to be idealistic, though not Utopian; its aims must necessarily

⁵⁸¹ Christopher Addison, *Politics from within*, vol. 1 (London, 1924), p. 211.

⁵⁸² Christopher Addison, *Four and a half years: a personal diary from June 1914 to January 1919*. Vol. 2., 1916-1919 (London, 1934), Entry for Sunday 22 June 1917. My emphasis.

⁵⁸³ David Lloyd George, *War memoirs* (London, 1933), p. 15.

⁵⁸⁴ RECO 1/268. Memorandum by the Housing Panel on the Emergency Problem.

⁵⁸⁵ HC Deb 08 April 1919 vol 114 cc1889-956.

always be far ahead of the actual achievements of officially responsible bodies.’⁵⁸⁶ The change between 1914 and 1918 was that war accelerated the thinking of officially responsible bodies, so that their ideas were suddenly was far more in line with groups which had previously been viewed as idealistic; temperance, eugenics, garden cities, and town planning were suddenly given serious large-scale consideration in a way which had been largely theoretical before. Those officially responsible bodies had also proliferated during the war, as the Ministry’s official history discussed:

New Ministry after new Ministry sprang up for special War purposes, each developing... its little (or sometimes big) section of health provision, each bequeathing as a permanent heritage to our administrative system its own independent and watertight medical or health organisation. The redeeming feature of the utter chaos which resulted is that the complete deadlock and breakdown is now self-evident; while by a thousand irresistible arguments War has, at the same time, driven home to certainty the people’s conviction as to the vital importance of the national health and the imperative necessity for the best possible organisation of the nation’s resources for the fulfilment of this splendid and realisable ideal.⁵⁸⁷

There is a level of post-hoc justification in these sentiments: Addison, Tudor Walters, and the members of the Ministry of Reconstruction and Cabinet had a vested interest in selling a narrative of opportunity to justify what would be perceived by some as huge and inadvisable expenditure. Yet there is evidence to suggest that they were also simply infected by a change which afflicted policy-makers in many facets of governance as a result of the experience of war. The men of push and go were accustomed, by 1918, to pushing.

Demobilisation, unemployment, and direct labour

Almost immediately following the outbreak of war, legislation began to address housing shortages and the conflict. Worried about unemployment as a result of war demands, the

⁵⁸⁶ *The Glasgow Herald*, ‘Housing Ideals’, 1 December 1916.

⁵⁸⁷ Reconstruction Problems, 23. *Public Health – A survey* (London, 1919).

Housing (No. 2) Act, 1914, empowered the Board of Agriculture in rural districts and the Local Government Board elsewhere to acquire land and buildings for housing purposes. They were given the power to do ‘all the things which may appear necessary or desirable for housing purposes in connection with the land and buildings so acquired and to make any arrangements for housing purposes with any local authority or authorized society.’⁵⁸⁸

As the war continued, unemployment worries came to the fore again, and coloured the Ministry’s approach to reconstruction. When convenient, Addison represented the housing programme as one large solution to a problem which would need to be counteracted anyway, stating in the House of Commons that, ‘One of the governing considerations is clearly the provision of employment with as little delay as possible.’⁵⁸⁹ In response, Noel Billing – M.P. for Hertford – stated that ‘I would sooner have put all the working classes digging a hole on Monday and filling it up on Tuesday than I would have given them money for walking about doing nothing. There is nothing more calculated to deteriorate the working man than to pay him for doing nothing.’⁵⁹⁰ Leslie Scott, speaking in support of the housing programme in the House of Commons, reflected the wider concern about men returning to the land: ‘unless we ensure for the returning soldiers the certainty of reasonable houses – not perhaps with the houses ready but the preparations made so that the soldiers returning can count upon their houses as a certainty within a reasonable length of time. You will not get the soldiers on the land unless you do that. The policy of getting soldiers to take up life in agriculture is one of the policies most dear, not only to Members of this House, but to the nation at large. This housing question is at the very root of it.’⁵⁹¹ As this chapter discusses in more depth later, the pursuit of an idealised rural life held strong roots for health and eugenicist reasons, as well –

⁵⁸⁸ Housing (No. 2) Act, 1914.

⁵⁸⁹ HC Deb 04 November 1918 vol 110 cc1793-4. Housing: post-war work.

⁵⁹⁰ HC Deb 07 April 1919 vol 114 cc1713-820. Statement by Dr. Addison.

⁵⁹¹ HC Deb 28 October 1918 vol 110 cc1119-211. ‘Housing Bill’.

in the middle of the war – as more nationally existential ones. The housing programme therefore represented an opportunity to address unemployment at the same time as pushing returning soldiers back towards the land, and the healthier, agrarian ideal.

It also highlights the plurality of concerns which the Ministry of Reconstruction was attempting to juggle. Before even accepting the post of Minister, Addison wrote in his diary that ‘The first thing to tackle at Reconstruction is to secure that some provision is made for the millions of demobilised soldiers, munition workers and other war workers, who will suddenly become at a loose end on the Declaration of Peace.’⁵⁹² After the war, labour shortages, particularly of skilled labourers, impacted significantly on housing construction. The importance of the paucity of such workers at home was appreciated by the government as the war was ongoing, as plans for demobilisation show:

It is desirable to urge upon the Ministry of Labour the extreme importance of the early demobilisation of workers in building trades and allied trades. Housing is already so acute a problem that immediately on demobilisation the shortage will amount to a famine and all the other trades will depend upon an adequate supply of houses being proceeded with at the earliest possible moment. But before houses can be built, the materials must be available, and the manufacture of these in large quantities will be an immediate necessity.⁵⁹³

They addressed this through the housing programme in part by stipulating that local authorities should implement their schemes through the use of direct labour schemes to relieve unemployment. Local authorities, who shared the central government’s concerns about the potential consequences of high numbers of suddenly unemployed ex-servicemen, were happy to oblige. In Liverpool, relations between the local authorities and labour organisations were strengthened by the coordination of employment on housing schemes

⁵⁹² Bodleian Library, Oxford. MSS Addison, ‘Diaries, 1914-21’, A, d. 4., Tuesday 17 July 1917.

⁵⁹³ TNA RECO 1/588, ‘Demobilisation of workers engaged in manufacture of building materials and of building trade employees’, p2.

through direct labour, with the Corporation positing that tradesmen after the war simply wanted fears about unemployment allayed and direct labour pledges helped achieve this.⁵⁹⁴ The *Labour Gazette* expressed its approval,⁵⁹⁵ although as it correctly noted, the Whitley Report had already expressed the need for more well-constructed relationships between governmental authorities and trade unions.⁵⁹⁶ In Glasgow, they viewed the extension of direct labour as a positive opportunity to secure better tradesmen: ‘What is obviously wanted is a scheme which will offer to workmen a lengthy period of employment... and would, therefore, attract the best men available.’⁵⁹⁷ This is also a reflection of the prevailing mentality, in both central and local government during and at the end of the war, that the employment of workmen on the construction of new housing for the working classes was, in many respects, as important as the construction of houses themselves. State-funded work projects designed specifically with the aim of countering unemployment have received more scholarly attention after the Second World War; the housing programme in 1919 was not dissimilar – just less well advertised.⁵⁹⁸

The Ministry of Reconstruction were therefore early in identifying the problems which demobilisation and accommodation shortages would provide. They had an answer ready in the form of an extensive housing programme which would alleviate unemployment, counter unrest and deplorable housing conditions, fix the broken rental market, and promote the relocation of the population away from the now heavily overcrowded industrial areas and

⁵⁹⁴ Liverpool Central Library, 352 MIN/HOU 1/6. ‘Direct Labour’, 630-633.

⁵⁹⁵ *The Labour Gazette*, April 1919, ‘The Whitley Report and Public Services’, p. 126.

⁵⁹⁶ TNA WORK 22/47. See also H. J. Wilson (rev. Mark Pottle), ‘Whitley, John Henry (1866-1935)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36875>

⁵⁹⁷ Mitchell Library, Glasgow. D-TC 14/2/18/12.

⁵⁹⁸ Sidney Pollard, *The development of the British economy, 1914-1990: 4th edition* (London, 1992). On the goal of ‘full employment’ more specifically, see John Maynard Keynes, *The general theory of employment, interest and money* (London, 1936); Jose Harris, *William Beveridge: a biography, 2nd edition* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 426-443.

back to the land. As we have seen in other chapters, these plans were precariously contingent on a number of factors being set in to motion to avoid delays, and their demobilisation strategies sought to address this. At the end of the war and the moment of demobilisation, however, they were forced to abandon these plans due to the unrest that such preferential treatment accorded.⁵⁹⁹ Soldiers' protests as to the terms of demobilisation 'brought the army to its knees, prompting the generals to ask "but how are we going to occupy Germany if you all want to go home?"' The soldiers' response was simple: "we neither knew nor cared, but it wasn't going to be us".⁶⁰⁰ Such a stance received a great deal of public sympathy, with *The Observer* – a paper whose editorials frequently condemned the housing crisis – commenting that, 'the soldier simply wishes to get back to civilian life as soon as possible. It is a rational wish and no-one blames him for it.'⁶⁰¹ Their protestations are not surprising. By the very nature of enlistment and the protection of industries, governmental proposals often suggested that those most 'useful' would be demobilised first, yet in practice these were often men who had joined – or been conscripted – later. Any plan which proposed that those who went to serve first would be the ones to get home last was unlikely to work, and did not.

Governmental plans as to the management of labour after the war and its impact on the building manufacture industries, as well as the skilled workers of the construction industry, thus went somewhat awry as pressure from soldiers changed the envisaged plans for demobilisation.⁶⁰² These protests hindered the government's ability to put in to action the effective demobilisation of workers, and as a result, their ability to start construction in an orderly or efficient manner. It is often said of battle that few strategies survive contact with

⁵⁹⁹ Stephen Graubard, 'Military demobilization in Great Britain following the First World War', *Journal of Modern History*, 19 (1947), 297-311.

⁶⁰⁰ Quoted in Douglas Gill, *The unknown army* (New York, 1985), p. 124.

⁶⁰¹ *The Observer*, 19 January 1919, p11.

⁶⁰² Andrew Rothstein, *The Soldiers' Strikes of 1919* (London: 1980).

the first shot; for the Ministry of Reconstruction, carefully laid plans were immediately thrown awry by the suddenly chaotic – or at least, disordered – change to demobilisation terms.

Addison

Without writing a full biography of Addison, it is still worth taking time to appreciate the man whose name the Act holds, and who pushed through a great deal of the work and decisions to create it.⁶⁰³ At a time when resources were stretched, the agency of one individual was heightened, and the activities of the Ministry of Reconstruction were frequently a reflection of the values and desires of its leader. Addison was born in 1869 on a farm in Lincolnshire and came from a long line of yeoman farmers there. He studied Anatomy at the Medical School in Sheffield, with his parents struggling to finance his studies – a debt he later insisted on repaying.⁶⁰⁴ He entered politics after serving as Professor of Anatomy in Sheffield in order to ‘help the poor’,⁶⁰⁵ and won the East London borough of Hoxton in 1910 at his second attempt. His early days were typified by a fixation on public health,⁶⁰⁶ and he later wrote in his memoirs that he ‘became a candidate for Parliament because I was interested in certain social and health subjects, and I found plenty of occupation as a private member from 1910 to 1914.’⁶⁰⁷ He was close friends with David Lloyd George from early in his parliamentary career and throughout the duration of the

⁶⁰³ Addison is certainly meritorious of a comprehensive biography. The ODNB entry is the best currently available: Kenneth O. Morgan, ‘Addison, Christopher, first Viscount Addison (1869-1951)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30342>, 23 September 2004.

⁶⁰⁴ Bodleian Library, Oxford. MSS Addison, ‘Miscellaneous Personal Papers’, Q5, fol. 5.

⁶⁰⁵ Bodleian Library, Oxford. MSS Addison, ‘Party and Constituency Papers’, K.

⁶⁰⁶ See his first major publication for wider circulation: Christopher Addison, *The health of the people and how it may be improved* (London, 1914).

⁶⁰⁷ Christopher Addison, *Politics from within, 1911-1918, including some records of a great national effort: vol. 1* (London, 1924), p. 18.

war,⁶⁰⁸ although as Addison's attitude towards the accomplishments of the ministries soured in the early 1920s, so did their relationship.

Given his background, it should therefore come as little surprise that Addison often viewed the housing problem as a subset of the wider health problem in Britain. As we have seen, he viewed the position as an 'opportunity' to create change, but it took little time before he realised the complexities of the task ahead. In September 1917 he wrote gloomily in his diary that, 'Coming now to my present job [Minister of Reconstruction] which, with every day, seems to loom up as more intricate and prodigious'.⁶⁰⁹ In fact, his diaries expose that despite an appreciation of the complexities and urgency of reconstruction, Addison rarely lost sight of his driving focus: creating a Ministry of Health for the nation.

Without such a Ministry [for Health] we are fighting with divided forces against the evils which menace the nation's health, some of them already upon us, others certain to arise as a result of the war. We have to repair the ravages of battle, and the diminished resistance to disease caused by excessive work and strain among non-combatants; we are faced already by a grave shortage of hospital accommodation even for men discharged from His Majesty's forces; we ought to provide for the harmonious development of extended health services for mothers and infants; we ought to be forearmed against the spread of dysentery and malaria and other diseases which may follow the return on demobilisation of the millions who have been exposed to such infections.⁶¹⁰

Through this lens, Addison's housing programme becomes a matter of social improvement of the health of the nation more than a response to discontent, or a reward for sacrifice. It also helps to explain why efficiency was not a frequently considered metric for Addison, whose rural, agrarian background and expertise in disease and mortality coloured his perception of urban construction. In one entry of his diary he lauds Lloyd George's comment that 'The

⁶⁰⁸ Bodleian Library, Oxford. MSS Addison. 'Miscellaneous Political and Personal Correspondence, 1906-51, L, fols. 1-16.

⁶⁰⁹ Bodleian Library, Oxford. MSS Addison, 'Diaries, 1914-21', A, d. 4., Monday 3 September 1917.

⁶¹⁰ Bodleian Library, Oxford. MSS Addison, 'Diaries, 1914-21', A. c. 3., Wednesday 24 April 1918.

expert is the trusted servant of the State, but things become dangerous when he assumes the role of Master', without, it would seem, a great deal of critical introspection.⁶¹¹

Those who might be assumed to be 'experts' in other aspects of the housing problem – the Local Government Board – were frequently treated by Addison with contempt. After the appointment of Hayes Fisher as President in Autumn 1917, Addison wrote: 'In the morning I saw Hayes Fisher on Building Materials and Housing, Maternity, Health questions and so on. It is pitiful, after a man like Rhondda, to have a man with his parochial outlook at the L.G.B.'⁶¹² Increasingly, the Local Government Board's mixture of intransigence and conservatism frustrated Addison and his lieutenants. In this, division fell not so much along Party ideological lines, as by those who represented continuity (the Local Government Board), and those who represented change (the Ministry of Reconstruction). After one argument with the L.G.B. in 1917, he wrote in his diary of the peculiar divides the housing problem was creating:

Here am I, a life-long Radical, fighting side by side with a life-long Tory (Salisbury) and finding our best backer in a Conservative leader (Bonar Law) against a reactionary Tory Minister and Department (Hayes Fisher and the L.G.B.). What are we fighting for? Everybody admits the justice of the case which Salisbury's very mixed Committee put forward last October, that, what with slums and shortage, the Housing problem will be acute immediately after the war is over and will soon be a source of serious discontent. The Committee contented themselves with an emergency programme to be put in hand during the first year after the war. They urged (and I am backing them up for all that I am worth) that we should begin preparations without delay so as to be ready when the time comes, and thereby avoid delay and possible inflation of costs of materials... Nothing resulted from the amiable but indefinite circular of the L.G.B. last July and now they have come forward with a request to issue *another circular!*⁶¹³

⁶¹¹ Addison, *Four and a half years*, Monday 13 March 1916.

⁶¹² Bodleian Library, Oxford. MSS Addison, 'Diaries, 1914-21', A, d. 4., Wednesday 12 September 1917.

⁶¹³ Bodleian Library, Oxford. MSS Addison, 'Diaries, 1914-21', A, d. 4., Monday 8 October 1917.

Addison's animosity towards Fisher was reciprocated, with the L.G.B. President viewing him as arrogant, reactionary, and fanciful.⁶¹⁴ The same great opportunity which the war seemingly presented for some naturally occasioned resistance from others, who prompted caution, consideration, and above all the strict limitation of expenditure. Fisher ultimately lost; at the business-end of the war, his lethargy on housing and the preparations of a new Parliamentary Register were unacceptable to a Lloyd George administration intent on action. He was replaced with the more forward-thinking Auckland Geddes in November 1918. Addison's defendants would argue that by then, the damage had been done. Addison was not robustly set up for the political life: he was sensitive to criticism, frustrated by perceived attacks on his character, and worn out by what he thought to be failures, penning *The Betrayal of the Slums* in 1921 as a frustrated attack on a government which he believed to have abandoned its opportunity.⁶¹⁵ This should not detract from the levels of aspirational optimism espoused during and immediately after the war, which created a housing programme unlike anything the nation had attempted before. In 1918, Addison had the conviction and imagination of a visionary presented with what seemed to be an opportunity of a lifetime; over the course of the rest of his life, this was gradually worn-down by the experience of political life.

The deserving poor and the creation of a 'better' working class

By the outbreak of the First World War, the idea of the improvement of the working classes as a whole through state intervention in their dwellings was not a new concept. The relationship between the home environment and morality was a thinly veiled subtext of the

⁶¹⁴ Bodleian Library, Oxford. MSS Fisher, 1-251. See also A. Ryan, 'Fisher, Herbert Albert Laurens (1865-1940)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/33141>, 27 May 2010.

⁶¹⁵ Christopher Addison, *The betrayal of the slums* (London, 1922).

influential Booth and Rowntree reports,⁶¹⁶ and Seebohm Rowntree himself worked closely on the housing programme as a member of the Ministry of Reconstruction. The popularity of the ‘Condition of England’ novels such as *Hard Times* widening the scope of interest in the working-class and housing conditions also brought the home environment and its influence on morality to a broad audience and widened the national debate – something the authors consciously cultivated.⁶¹⁷

It is thus essential that in our understandings of the ‘working classes’ we remember that the government and housing reformers were working within the socially constructed confines of the ‘deserving poor’ narrative.⁶¹⁸ For some, the apparently desperate conditions of their existence occasioned little sympathy, as one report in the Ministry of Reconstruction demonstrates:

There still remains with us the difficulty of providing suitable houses for the very poor. It cannot be doubted that a large proportion of the slum dwellers have sunk to their present unhappy condition through their own inherent viciousness, and, it must be confessed, their often appalling improvidence, laziness, and intemperance. The reckless improvidence which allows a boy or man with 18s. or 19s. to have a wife and children is, one would hope, to most people not only incomprehensible, but entirely reprehensible. Surely no right-minded man, unable for any reason to earn more than the barest living wage for himself, would assume the grave and most sacred responsibilities of husbandhood and fatherhood. And yet no obligation is more lightly and thoughtlessly undertaken.⁶¹⁹

As a result, a complex and at times contradictory narrative of the poor living as subject to their surroundings – and therefore within the scope of social improvement through State action – and the immoral or irresponsible, intemperate poor – and therefore deserving of their

⁶¹⁶ Charles Booth, *Life and labour of the people in London* (London, 1892); Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty: a study of town life* (London, 1901).

⁶¹⁷ Kate Flint, *The Victorian Novelist: Social Problems and Social Change*. (London, 1987); Rosemarie, Bodenheimer, *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction*. (Ithaca, 1988), Arnold Kettle, “The Early Victorian Social-Problem Novel”, in Boris Ford (ed.), *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature. From Dickens to Hardy: vol. 6* (Harmonsworth, 1990).

⁶¹⁸ Alan Hunt, *Governing morals: a social history of moral regulation* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 18.

⁶¹⁹ RECO 1/607. After-war housing.

depravity – emerged. In seeking only to help the most ‘deserving’, charges of gentrification, or the illusion of provision for the working classes by catering only to the most well-off of that group, were frequent. This was dismissed by organisations espousing ‘social progress’, such as in the report of the Thames-Side Housing and Development Committee – a section of the Garden Cities and Town Planning Society – who wrote, ‘One important matter to be noted: There is to be no snobbery in this new town. No part is set aside for houses for the well-to-do, but all kinds are erected in all parts, not with a view to suiting the social standing, but simply with a view to providing a sufficient number of rooms for different sized homes. This is a very important feature of the town-planning scheme. It means the social amenities provided in common shall be used in common. The poor will not be quartered in narrow small streets with a restricted outlook while the rich enjoy the woods and finer avenues.’⁶²⁰ Their version of the poor being integrated in to the more affluent aspects of society was, however, relatively narrow.

The truth is that this vision of a diverse class constituency may have at times included working-class tenants, but rarely incorporated the truly poor. A pamphlet issued by the Scottish Council for Women’s Trades charged that ‘By far the larger number of the houses built by the Corporation [of Glasgow] hitherto are *intended for, and occupied by, a higher class* – the earners of 25s. a week and upwards, for whom private enterprise is always ready to build houses.’⁶²¹ In response, the Glasgow Corporation alleged that the houses they built encouraged social mobility. In a pamphlet entitled ‘Can the “Undesirable Tenant” be trained in Citizenship?’, A. K. Chalmers – the Medical Officer of Health – wrote of his conviction that rehousing created social improvement: ‘Read the Reports of the Medical Officer and you

⁶²⁰ RECO 1/536. Garden Cities and Town Planning Report.

⁶²¹ RECO 1/607. ‘The housing problem in Glasgow’ – Pamphlet circulated by the Scottish Women’s Trades.

will be convinced that the process of rehousing the tenants displaced from houses in slum areas is already acting as a filter with results in the highest degree encouraging. On a first contact nine-tenths of the rehoused respond to improved conditions and supervision with advantage to themselves and to the community.’⁶²²

This understanding of social improvement was predicated on the understanding that Peter Fyfe – the Chief Sanitary Inspector and future Medical Officer of Health of Glasgow – elucidates effectively when he wrote that, ‘Habitations have impressed themselves on habits. Ill-health and poverty become interchangeable forces in the vicious circle which is established and from which the slum emerges.’⁶²³ For advocates of this school of thought, housing was at the heart of all social impurity and health. As Viscount Bryce, the British Ambassador to the United States, stated at the Second National Housing Conference in Philadelphia in 1912, ‘Whatever you are trying to accomplish for the benefit of the poorer classes leads you by one path and another to the housing problem. The place in which a man or woman dwells is vital to the character of the man or the woman.’⁶²⁴ For many housing reformers during the First World War, the housing programme therefore represented the chance to improve conditions for the working classes; not necessarily to benefit them, but to benefit the community as a whole.⁶²⁵ As we will now explore, this work was predicated on a belief that healthy living led to a better, more temperate, and more moral nation. At a time when Britain was locked in a huge national conflict, housing reformers saw their work as advancing the future cause of the nation just as the general on the Western Front did.

⁶²² Mitchell Library, Glasgow. D-HE 5/2/10, ‘Can the “Undesireable Tenant” be trained in Citizenship?’, by A. K. Chalmers and Sir John Mann.

⁶²³ Mitchell Library, Glasgow. LP 1/90, ‘The human wastage caused by social impurity’.

⁶²⁴ Quoted in Mitchell Library, Glasgow. LP 1/90/39, ‘Health and Housing by A. K. Chalmers, 1916.’

⁶²⁵ See Lucinda McCray Beier, *For their own good: the transformation of English working-class health culture, 1880-1970* (Columbus, 2008), pp. 35-39.

In constructing this image of a better nation, reformers' idealistic vision also focussed on a more 'beautiful' country to produce a better citizenry. Chapter Three has examined the ways in which this infected the planning process, with the primacy of cottages a reflection of a desire to produce a population living more respectable lives. Chapter Four has noted the way in which playgrounds and gardening occupied the minds of planners as sites of healthy recreation. These ideals at times, however, were also rooted simply in the idea of a more beautiful nation. It is unsurprising that these figures who devoted such a large amount of time to housing placed an increasing emphasis on 'pretty' or 'beautiful' houses and spaces. Beauty was, for some, a desirable end in and of itself.

To an extent, this is a reflection of the optimism surrounding the opportunity which reconstruction presented allowing idealistic considerations to outweigh practicality. Yet it is also an appreciation that the home is more than just bricks and mortar, and that a rejection of the physical aesthetic form would represent a failure from planners despite all considerations of economy or practicality. William Wallace, writing in *The Builder*, elucidated the perceived connection between beauty and the other desirable elements of healthy living:

Finally, it must be seen that no house is built in the future which does not comply with a certain minimum standard of health and beauty. We want no more "long, unlovely rows" or "brick boxes with slate lids". The towns and villages of the future must grow on an ordered plan. They must be regulated by the interests of all and not by the financial interests of the few. The houses of the future must have air and sunlight. They must be pleasing in design and pleasant in surroundings. There must be gardens and allotments, recreation grounds and children's playgrounds. In short, they must be fit homes for free men.⁶²⁶

In a meeting with the London Society, they also urged that the Ministry of Reconstruction pay sufficient attention to the importance of beauty, stating that 'In preparing town plans and

⁶²⁶ *The Builder*, 'Homes after the war. Article by W. Wallace', 29 July 1917.

developments, regard should be had not merely to convenience but also to beauty.’⁶²⁷ The romanticised ideals that housing reformers believed they could accomplish help to explain how, in attempting to produce such vast quantities of new housing at a time of material shortage, emphasis was still placed on avoiding ‘boxes with lids’.⁶²⁸ Again it is clear that for many creating the housing programme, they saw an opportunity for improvement, not a crisis to be managed.

Eugenics

‘We must stop at no sacrifice of interest or prejudice to stamp out unmerited poverty, to diminish unemployment and mitigate its sufferings, to improve decent homes, to improve the nation’s health, and to raise the standard of well-being throughout the community.’

King’s speech from the Throne to the Houses of Parliament, 11 February 1919.⁶²⁹

For some, the First World War served as a test of the vitality of the nations’ peoples. The experience of large-scale mobilization, and eventually compulsion, betrayed perceived deficiencies in the health of the citizenry. Helen Jones has argued that ‘pre-war concerns over the fitness of the population to fight in wartime proved to be justified.’⁶³⁰ As one housing reformer commented, ‘If ever there was a period in the history of the British Empire when the vitality and stamina of our race had to be maintained and strengthened in every direction by deep-thinking and earnest endeavour, surely it is at this present hour, when the flower of our young manhood is being cast into the furnace of war.’⁶³¹ Lloyd George himself commented on the way in which compulsion – and the physical examination of the populace it occasioned – ‘has given prominence to one very striking fact – that an immense number of

⁶²⁷ RECO 1/593. Notes from a meeting with the London Society on Town Planning.

⁶²⁸ *The Housing Journal*, May 1918.

⁶²⁹ *The Times*, 12 February 1919, ‘King’s Speech’, p. 1.

⁶³⁰ Helen Jones, *Health and society in twentieth-century Britain* (London, 1994), p. 50. See also Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British people* (London, 1986), p. 273.

⁶³¹ Mitchell Library, Glasgow. PA 11/1/11, ‘Health and Housing’, September 1916.

men and women, through that lack of vitality and stamina which comes from unhealthy conditions and surroundings, live lives that are a prolonged struggle against debility and disease.’⁶³² The Departmental Committee on Land Settlement emphasised this point internally as well, noting that ‘The stability and physical strength of a nation depend largely on those classes who have either been born or brought up in the country or have had the advantages of country life. It is certain that the physique of those portions of our nation who live in crowded streets deteriorates. The recruiting returns show a much larger proportion of men rejected for physical reasons in the large towns than in the county districts.’⁶³³ Concern with the health of the citizenry was not a new phenomenon but the scale and nature of the conflict meant that suddenly the issue was firmly in the spotlight.

It may be pointed out that by the time conscription was introduced, many of the younger and most physically able men had already joined the colours. Between 1 January 1918 and 31 August 1918, the National Service Medical Boards in Great Britain conducted 2,080,709 examinations and placed 36 per cent in to Grade I.⁶³⁴ This means that two of every three men examined were deemed to be incapable of enduring physical exertion suited to their age, and had not attained the normal standard of health and strength. It could be easy now to discount their findings as anachronistic benchmarks based on eugenicist ideals, yet those most interested in examining the data and remedying the perceived problem at the time used the experience of mass mobilization as evidence to justify their agenda. One contemporary analysis was typical: ‘Too little food, too long hours of work, too little sleep, too little fresh air, too little play, too little comfort in the home, are evidently the chief factors concerned in producing this mass of physical inefficiency with all its concomitant human misery and direct

⁶³² Quoted in Reconstruction Problems, *Public Health*, p. 4.

⁶³³ RECO 1/607. ‘The housing problem’.

⁶³⁴ *The British Medical Journal*, 19 October 1918.

loss to the country. To take effective measures on the broadest lines to remedy this condition of things is a most urgent duty.⁶³⁵ This method of assessment of the population in conjunction with the war led to Richard Reiss – an active member of the Ministry of Reconstruction – to term the now well-known slogan, ‘You cannot expect to get an A.1 population out of C.3 homes.’⁶³⁶ (Figure 19)

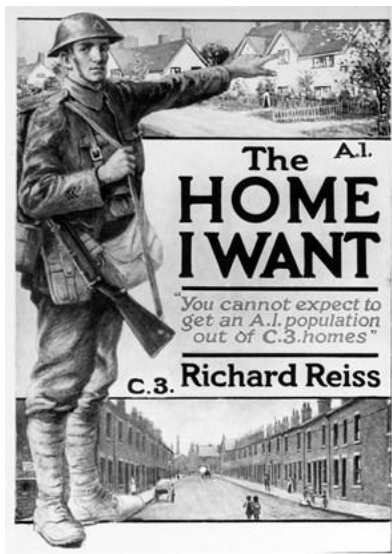


Figure 19. Richard Reiss, *The home I want* (London, 1919).

The Ministry of Reconstruction more widely largely agreed, commenting on the ‘growing tendency of public opinion in favour of fresh air and green fields’.⁶³⁷ Interested bodies across the industry as a whole frequently lobbied for limitations to be placed on the number of houses per acre, with land left undeveloped for recreation grounds, public gardens, and allotments, and all maintained ‘at the cost of the community’.⁶³⁸

These considerations received significant attention from the various Ministry reports, including Tudor Walters (Figure 19), which notes that: ‘Medical opinion is unanimous as to the importance of allowing plenty of sunshine to penetrate into the rooms; it is in the winter

⁶³⁵ RECO 1/537. ‘A physical census and its lesson’.

⁶³⁶ Richard Leopold Reiss, *The home I want* (London, 1919).

⁶³⁷ RECO 1/607. ‘The housing problem’.

⁶³⁸ *The Municipal Journal*, 10 August 1917.

when the sun is low even at midday that its light and warmth are most valuable. This should be considered when planning the distance between houses facing one another.⁶³⁹

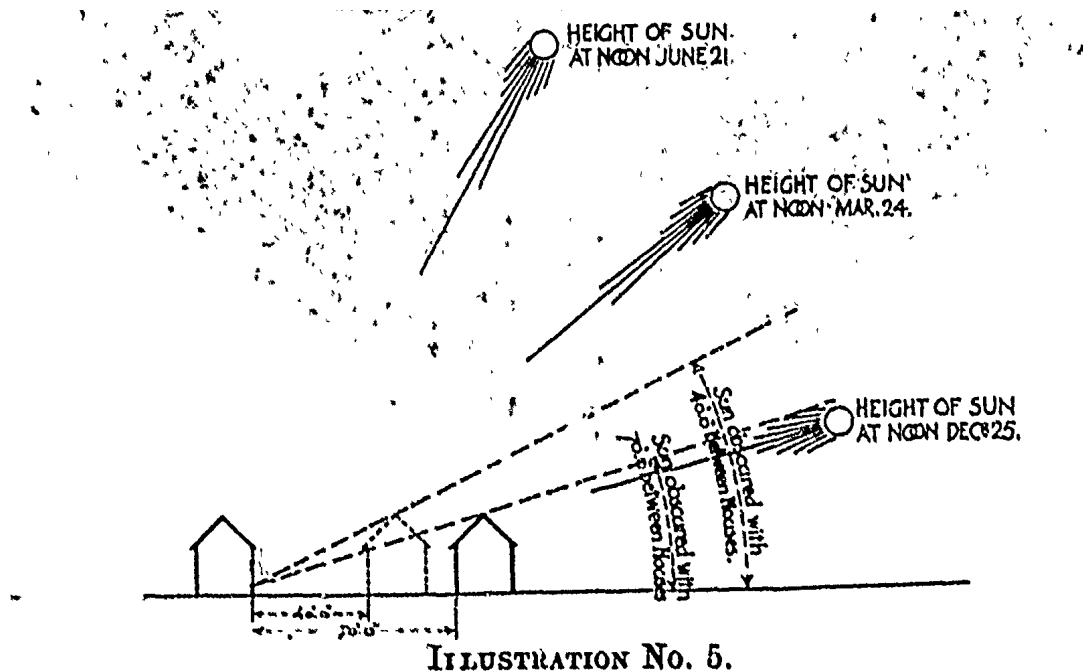


Figure 19. The desirable distance between houses facing one another. Tudor Walters Report, Cd. 9191 (1918), p. 405.

Behind the emerging belief that the rigours of war had exposed a growing weakness in the constitution of the citizenry was a lineage of deep-seated, class-based eugenic thought. In October 1913, during a public lecture, Dr. James A. Adams – President of the Royal Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons in Glasgow – spoke of the masses as ‘anthropoid apes’:

[Adams said] that the questions of eugenics was bulking largely in the mind of the public at present, and there was discussion as to what should be done for imbecile children, idiots, the feeble-minded, and the criminal classes. Some of them he had no doubt had strong views on the subject and believed that such classes should be incarcerated, segregated, or sterilised. He had strong views himself. Recently he passed through a crowd leaving a football match, and 30 per cent. of them were no more than anthropoid apes in appearance. (Laughter.). He had better say no more now, lest something be done to eliminate them and he would get in to trouble. (Laughter.).⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁹ Tudor Walters Report, Cd9191. 1918, p. 405.

⁶⁴⁰ *The Glasgow Herald*, 31 October 1913.

The First World War, and the popular veneration of plucky Tommy who bravely won the war,⁶⁴¹ perhaps quietened the outspokenness of such disparaging opinions. The response to him, by Major L. Darwin – son of Charles Darwin – betrays a more persistently acceptable ideal of many eugenicists, however, when he claimed that, ‘Social reformers should receive every encouragement, but it was also essential to adopt reforms based on hereditary. The breeders of race horses did not quarrel as to which was the more important for their horses, good training or good pedigrees, and the breeders of mankind should not wrangle as to which was the more important, environment or heredity.’⁶⁴² Five years later, in 1918, views may have progressed somewhat. For many housing reformers, at least, the war shifted the scope of discussion away from heredity eugenics – which had often portrayed the slum dweller in racialized and derogatory terms as Irish, Jewish, or gypsy – towards a more environmental interpretation.⁶⁴³ Yet this remained a prescriptive interpretation of society and their role within it; fundamentally, decision-makers working on these principles still envisaged themselves as the same ‘breeders of mankind’ that Leonard Darwin outlined.

Their conviction that ill-health and immoral and intemperate behaviour was a product of environment was further strengthened by the belief that these conditions created their own perpetuation. In the spirit of the age of science, immorality could therefore be *diagnosed* as a chronic condition.⁶⁴⁴ In his influential 1908 work *Practical Housing*, John Nettlefold

⁶⁴¹ See, Helen McCartney, ‘The First World War soldier and his contemporary image in Britain’, *International Affairs*, 90 (2014), 299-315; Peter Doyle and Chris Foster, *Remembering Tommy: the British soldier in the First World War* (Stroud, 2013).

⁶⁴² *The Glasgow Herald*, 31 October 1913.

⁶⁴³ For the theoretical pre-war position of eugenicists, and the differing opinions on ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ eugenics, see Dorothy Porter, *Health, civilization and the State: a history of public health from ancient to modern times* (London, 1999), p. 168-9.

⁶⁴⁴ See Daniel M. Fox, *Health policies, health politics: the British and American experience, 1911-1965* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 3-21.

comments that ‘Not only are lives lost through insanitary housing, but, worse still, a chronic condition of low vitality and ill-health is fostered in our towns.’⁶⁴⁵ In building the housing programme, the Ministry of Reconstruction was therefore consciously trading on a legacy of eugenic thought which had been honed and accorded heightened importance as a result of the conflict. The grandiose nature of their plans reflects this; their goal was to do more than simply remedy the shortage. Instead, this highlights their belief that the very image of society and the ‘stock’ of the nation could be improved through the policies they were developing. In their own words, their actions were:

The symbol and outcome of a profound national conviction which may be summed up in a logical sequence of three conclusions. In the first place, it marks a recognition of the truth that the national health is of supreme and vital importance as one of the foundations of well-being, whether personal, social or national, and that without it all effort towards morality, enlightenment or a sane and well-ordered political future is grievously handicapped. In itself this conviction might be no more than a regretful appreciation of unattainable ideals, bringing with it despair rather than hope, paralysis rather than resolution, but for the dazzling light of new knowledge now dawning that this land of promise is within reach, and that “public health is purchasable”, subject to the Divine power, and given a reasonable exercise of human endeavour.⁶⁴⁶

The economics of public health

The purchase of public health, however laudable a goal, involved significant expenditure. As Chapter Two has demonstrated, the formulation of housing policy was often done by using the myriad of issues it helped to combat as a justification; the cost of failing to repair the rental market was argued to be less than the expenditure on its amelioration. The narrative of the national health as a public good carried some weight, but for those more sceptical it could also be demonstrated to be cost-efficient. Taking the overall expenditure on health-related issues across the nation, advocates argued that the admittedly expensive housing programme

⁶⁴⁵ John S. Nettlefold, *Practical housing* (Letchworth, 1908), p. X?

⁶⁴⁶ H.M.S.O., *Reconstruction Problems: 23. Public Health – A survey*, (London, 1919), p. 5.

represented a more efficient expense of national funds. This line of thinking was not new, as Asa Briggs has shown: ‘Throughout the Victorian age the most effective argument for sanitary reform was that it would actually save money in the long run, not squander it. “Civic economy” was a branch of political economy.’⁶⁴⁷ Victorian diseases such as rickets and tuberculosis were certainly costly: following the 1848 Public Health Act, the attempt to reduce the cost – both socially and financially – of diseases associated with poor housing conditions had been a growing legislative agenda. Contemporary commentators such as Edward Smith argued that poor housing accommodation both created and perpetuated these problems: ‘it is his sleeping accommodation which produces the most insidious (and often fatal) results upon his health. Overcrowding has probably killed more than all other evil conditions whatever.’⁶⁴⁸ For policy-makers, this cost also extended to economic inefficiency and diminished productivity, making the illness of working-class workers bad business.

As we have seen in Chapters Three and Four, the limited experience of Public Utility Societies demonstrated to policy-makers the ‘unlimited possibilities for cooperative trading in household and garden requirements... and the wonderful opportunity for economy of money, labour and time amongst residents’.⁶⁴⁹ As much as the possible economy of labour was an argument deployed by housing reformers, however, the economy of construction to the State as a whole was a more convincing argument. Despite frequent assertions in public that ‘If the minimum requirements of health and decency cannot be attained on an “economic” basis, then we must be content for a while with an “uneconomic” basis’,⁶⁵⁰ the burden of ill-health on state expenditure framed a more convincing argument as emphasis

⁶⁴⁷ Asa Briggs, *Victorian cities* (London, 1963), p. 20.

⁶⁴⁸ Edward Smith, *The peasant’s home, 1760-1875* (London, 1876) quoted in Burnett, *Social history of housing*, p. 43.

⁶⁴⁹ RECO 1/482. Report on Public Utility Societies and Housing.

⁶⁵⁰ *The Glasgow Herald*, 1 December 1916. ‘Housing Ideals’.

shifted from treatment to prevention. ‘The public health system was originally equally unconcerned with the interests of the individual’, the official history notes. ‘It was concerned with the prevention of certain consequences to individuals, but primarily with the economic object that those individuals might now become chargeable to the poor rate.’⁶⁵¹

Addison’s background in health, and his proclivity for publishing on preventable illnesses, betray the history of his conviction. In this element of the housing programme, the war had presented an opportunity to enact an idea which had been germinating for Addison and his contemporaries for decades prior to the outbreak of the conflict: ‘In the summer of 1914 I had been four years in Parliament and, as the Diary shows, had been encouraged by Mr. Lloyd George, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, to assist the elaboration of schemes for improved Health Services... the Health Insurance Service had revealed in striking fashion the economic loss that was arising from preventable sickness’.⁶⁵² Whilst it is unconvincing that the construction of healthier homes would result in a cost-neutral expense, it was not an uncommonly espoused position from sanitary inspectors. Peter Fyfe stated that ‘ill-health that arises from bad housing is costing the nation and the communities more than would be necessary to entirely remodel the housing conditions for the people of the whole country.’⁶⁵³ At the Annual Conference of Sanitary Inspectors’ Association, held in Cardiff in 1916, Bailie Stewart of Glasgow furthered the case:

The only way you can provide proper healthy homes is by the Government making grants of about thirty million pounds per annum for some years to come to local authorities to enable them to erect houses... You would reduce your death-rate, your infantile mortality, you would diminish your expenditure on infirmaries and on convalescent homes... You would diminish drunkenness; you would

⁶⁵¹ H.M.S.O., *Reconstruction Problems: Public Health – a Survey* (London, 1919), p. 2.

⁶⁵² Bodleian, Oxford. MSS Addison. ‘Diaries, 1914-21’, A, d. 2., Monday 13 March 1916.

⁶⁵³ Mitchell Library, Glasgow. PA 11/1/11. ‘Health and Housing’.

improve morality; you would improve and develop the intellectual capacity of the people; and you would improve the physique of the men and women of the future nation.⁶⁵⁴

On its own the cost to the state of ill-health being diminished as a result of an extensive housing programme presents as a slightly tenuous argument. In the context of the belief that building was necessary for the multitude of factors outlined in the previous chapters, however, it presents a unexpected benefit for policy-makers who had preconceived notions that large state expenditure on ‘healthy areas’ would lead to a concomitant reduction in expenditure on public health issues. There was a genuine belief from some planners that money spent on housing was money saved; considering this alongside the other compelling reasons for the housing programme only served to make this cost appear more worthwhile. Furthermore, as Stewart alluded to, it promised to combat another pressing, expensive issue in society: intemperance.

Temperance

It is only by providing homes for the working people, that is by providing for them not only shelter, but shelter of such a kind as to protect life and health and to make family life possible, free from surroundings which tend to immorality, that the evils of crowded city life can be mitigated and overcome.

Report of Tenement House Commission, 1919, New York.⁶⁵⁵

There were a great number of perceived evils associated with unhealthy housing and overcrowding.⁶⁵⁶ Fathers sleeping in the same room – and often, the same bed – as their daughters occasioned horror.⁶⁵⁷ The First World War helped to brighten the spotlight on the

⁶⁵⁴ Mitchell Library, Glasgow. PA 11/1/11. Paper read at the Annual Conference of the Sanitary Inspectors’ Association in Cardiff, September 1916.

⁶⁵⁵ Quoted in John J. Clarke, *The Housing Problem: its history, growth, legislation and procedure* (London, 1920), p. 203.

⁶⁵⁶ For their public representation, see Alan Mayne, *The imagined slum: newspaper representation in three cities, 1870-1914* (Leicester, 1993).

⁶⁵⁷ Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (New Jersey, 2004), p. 49.

harm of one ‘evil’ in particular: intemperance.⁶⁵⁸ Addison – a tee-totaller – and Lloyd George shared in their friendship a fierce abhorrence for alcoholism and its effects; through the course of the war, in particular at the Ministry of Munitions, this shared conviction had grown, with Lloyd George insistent that alcohol was hindering the nation’s productivity.⁶⁵⁹ A *Glasgow Herald* editorial commented in 1916 that, ‘Some persons interested or disinterested were inclined to say the present condition of drunkenness is only normal, that there is no room for improvement, so why make all this fuss? Whether drunkenness is normal or not in the Glasgow district it is clear to all that it is excessive and a *great bar to efficiency*.’⁶⁶⁰ Although it was at times portrayed that restrictions on alcohol sales and licensing were as a result of war shortages, Lloyd George and Addison at the Ministry of Munitions eagerly seized the opportunity to limit the provision of alcohol to the working-classes.⁶⁶¹

Whilst the strict restriction of alcohol consumption was their ultimate goal, success in this regard was limited. The establishment of a Central Control Board in 1915, under the stewardship of Lord D’Abernon, did make progress.⁶⁶² As with other forms of social engineering, they adopted an ostensibly more scientific approach, with D’Abernon noting that the public would be more accepting of reform if measures were limited to ‘demonstrable facts and is protected by scientific proof’.⁶⁶³ With this in mind he appointed a committee to consider the physiological effects of alcohol, which asked questions which would today seem

⁶⁵⁸ See Robert Duncan, *Pubs and patriots: the drink crisis in Britain during World War One* (Liverpool, 2013).

⁶⁵⁹ Henry Carter, *The control of the drink trade* (London, 1918), p. 1; Murray Marr, *Drink and the war from a patriotic point of view* (London, 1915).

⁶⁶⁰ *The Glasgow Herald*, 19 January 1916. ‘Liquor Control’.

⁶⁶¹ See HC Deb 17 May 1915 vol 71 cc1997-2086. Restrictions on Immature Spirits and Home Consumption.; HC Deb 29 May 1916 vol 82 cc2485-527. Output of Beer (Restriction) Bill.

⁶⁶² John Turner, ‘State purchase of the liquor trade in the First World War’, *The Historical Journal*, 23 (1980), 589-615.

⁶⁶³ TNA HO 185/228. Minutes of the Advisory Alcohol Committee of the Central Control Board, November 1916.

more the research of first-year undergraduates, such as: ‘What differences exist between the inebriating action of the several sorts of alcoholic beverages taken in equivalent quantities?; Does the drunkenness of beer or wine differ from that of whiskey?; and Does mixing drinks produce a higher degree of drunkenness?’.⁶⁶⁴

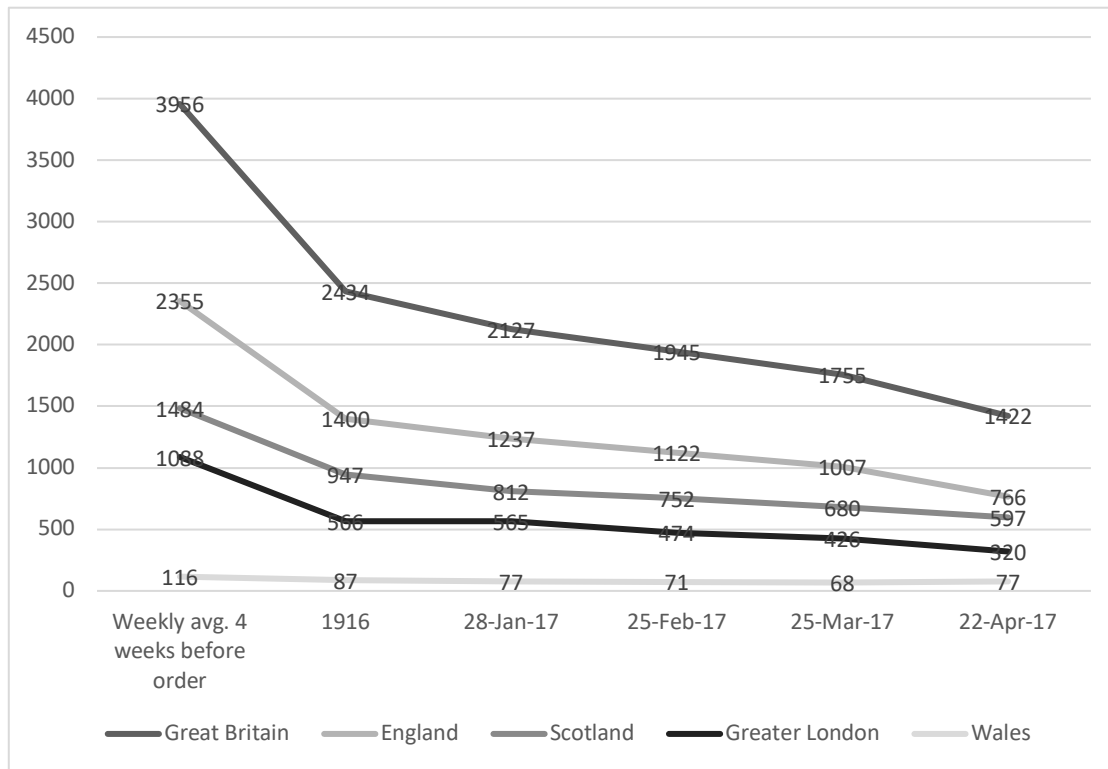


Figure 20. Drunkenness convictions in the United Kingdom, 1915-1917. Fourth Report of the Central Control Board (*Liquor Traffic*), Cd. 9055 (1918).

By May 1917, levels of drunkenness had ostensibly dropped to a third of previous levels. *The Times* reported with optimism that ‘Rapid progress has been made in the direction of temperance... most areas under the authority of the Central Control Board have been reduced to the level of one-third of that which existed before the war. There is every reason to believe

⁶⁶⁴ *Defence of the Realm (Liquor Control) Regulations, 1915. Fourth Report of the Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic) Appointed under the Defence of the Realm (Amendment) (No. 3) Act, 1915, 1918 [Cd. 9055] XI.117.* For a longer history of the scientific understanding of alcohol, See Jean-Charles Sournia, *A history of alcoholism* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 98-112; Stuart Walton, *Out of it: a cultural history of intoxication* (London, 2001).

that the present level will be further reduced when the reduced supply of beer and spirits has been better realized.’ (See Figure 3 above)⁶⁶⁵

Progress could also be charted successfully in the areas legislation was focussed on, such as the industrial Glasgow⁶⁶⁶:

YEAR	PERSONS PROCEEDED AGAINST	RATE PER 1,000 OF POPULATION
1913	17,402	16.8
1914	15,929	15.1
1915	17,078	15.8
1916	11,735	10.7
1917	7,244	6.5
1918	4,108	3.6
1919	9,143	8.2
1920	18,709	16.6
1921	10,465	9.3
1922	8,001	7.7

Figure 21. Proceedings relating to alcohol in Glasgow, 1913-1922. Mitchell Library, Glasgow. LP/1/90/39.

Despite these measures, when Addison took over Reconstruction, he believed a great opportunity had already been lost, writing in his memoirs that:

During the spring of 1915 this country missed a great opportunity of dealing comprehensively with the drink question. The licensing trade was disposed to accept reasonable terms for national purchase, and public opinion on the whole was favourable. A Cabinet Committee had been at work on the subject and in touch with the representatives of the Trade for a considerable time, but all that came of it was the establishment of the Liquor Control Board under Lord D'Abernon. The Control Board accomplished a great work, but what have we to show for it to-day? We might have had a system whereby the conduct of the Trade would come under national control... The apostles of prohibition, of improved

⁶⁶⁵ *The Times*, 8 May 1917, 'Less Drunkenness', p. 3.

⁶⁶⁶ Mitchell Library, Glasgow. LP 1/90/39, 'Health and Housing'.

management, or any other specific, would then have had free opportunity for advocacy and experiment. Judging by the experience gained in munition areas where licensing premises were acquired, it is certain that the terms which the Trade was disposed to accept would have provided a most remunerative investment. Progressive reform would, for the first time, have become possible.⁶⁶⁷

Given the belief in this failed opportunity, the programme of reconstruction – and the housing programme in particular – presented itself as the next logical vehicle through which to enact this change. Again, Addison's views were not new or especially radical compared to many of his peers. Whilst his opinions were in line with some of the more devoted and radical temperance activists, the notion of state-control of the industry had been posited by figures such as Thomas Whittaker decades prior.⁶⁶⁸ In wider European circles similar ideas had also been widely discussed, especially in the more puritanically religious France.⁶⁶⁹ For Addison, the war had created an opportunity to put those views in to practice which had been spurned, and perhaps informed his own approach to reconstruction. Yet whilst Addison was certainly a devoted temperance advocate, his view was certainly not anomalous to housing reformers as a whole. For them, the successes of state intervention in combatting temperance, limited though the sample was, served as evidence of the potential which further action could achieve.

Temperance activists frequently drew a direct line between alcoholism and habitations.⁶⁷⁰ Addison saw intemperance as part of a negative cycle responding to dreary conditions, writing: 'Is the British working man, who has no decent home to go to, more likely to drink if he has a comfortable chair to sit on and some entertainment to listen to, than if he were

⁶⁶⁷ Addison, *Politics from within*, p. 47.

⁶⁶⁸ Thomas Whittaker, *Brighter England and the way to it* (London, 1891). For more on Whittaker, see Mark Clement, 'Whittaker, Thomas (1813-1899)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/39161>

⁶⁶⁹ See William Clement, "'Giving the Worker His House": intervention, interaction, and inaction in Three French Cities, c. 1840-80' (DPhil thesis. University of Oxford, 2018), pp. 173-224; Mark Schrad, *The political power of bad ideas: networks, institutions, and the global prohibition wave* (New York, 2010).

⁶⁷⁰ A. E. Dingle, *The campaign for prohibition in Victorian England* (London, 1980), pp. 204-213; Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Crusade against drink in Victorian England* (London, 1988), pp. 236-240.

penned up in a wretched enclosure with nothing to do but stand before a bar and swill beer?’⁶⁷¹ Another contemporary pamphlet commented that ‘there is reason for thinking that it is the slum which creates the demand for the public house, and not the public house which creates the slum. Deprived of the natural physiological stimulants of sunlight and moving air, the need for artificial substitutes among the inmates becomes urgent.’⁶⁷² The importance for the housing programme here is evident in the belief of a cyclical nature of intemperate behaviour. Maurice Bonham Carter – another key member of the Ministry of Reconstruction – revealed his own strict views on the relationship between poor housing and alcoholism when he commented that ‘Insobriety breeds content with squalor... and it is a brake on social progress.’⁶⁷³

Just as with other aspects of behavioural modification discussed earlier in this chapter, housing reformers believed that an improvement in the housing stock of the country would lead to a concomitant improvement in the levels of intemperance amongst the population. The Commercial Temperance League wrote that the key to combating the drink problem lay in creating a ‘Reduction of the craving for alcohol by steady improvement in the conditions of social and industrial life’, commenting that, ‘alcoholism is a protest against the unhealthy conditions.’⁶⁷⁴ It helped that predominantly middle-class networks advocating change had already been well-established by the war.⁶⁷⁵ In 1913, the Scottish Temperance League held its seventieth anniversary celebrations – with many Councillors attending the ceremony⁶⁷⁶ –

⁶⁷¹ Addison, *Politics from within*, p. 47.

⁶⁷² Mitchell Library, Glasgow. LP 1/90. ‘The wastage caused by social impurity’.

⁶⁷³ RECO 1/607. After-war Housing.

⁶⁷⁴ Mitchell Library, Glasgow. LP 1/90/54. ‘Some illustrations of the recent history of alcoholism in Glasgow’

⁶⁷⁵ This has been well documented in John Greenaway, *Drink and British politics since 1830: a study in policy-making* (New York, 2003), pp. 73-86; Scott C. Martin, *The Devil of the domestic sphere: temperance, gender, and middle-class ideology, 1800-1860* (DeKalb, 2010).

⁶⁷⁶ Mitchell Library, Glasgow. CI 3/50, Corporation Minutes, Nov 1913-Apr 1914.

and through the course of the war the Corporation of Glasgow received multiple delegations from the Scottish Temperance League, the National Temperance Council, the United Free Church Presbytery, the Glasgow Citizen's Committee for War-Time Prohibition, and the Women's Patriotic Crusade, all urging that action be taken to prohibit the sale of liquor.⁶⁷⁷ Such local agitation was not confined to Glasgow: local branches of the same or similar groups petitioned the Corporation in Liverpool and Newcastle with the same goal.⁶⁷⁸

For local authorities, moves to combat temperance through the development of new housing initiatives often pre-dated the housing schemes which would be built as a result of the Addison Act, even though the scope was far more limited. In Liverpool, restrictions on licenced premises on Corporation property became common policy before the outbreak of war, with the Corporation's annual report commenting that, 'It is extremely gratifying to notice the improvement in the health and habits of the occupiers. There is a higher moral tone, the removal of public-houses tends to lessen the wastage of money, and consequently the people, once so steeped in poverty, have become more self-respecting, and show a keener appreciation of a decent home.'⁶⁷⁹ As David Beckingham has commented, 'That Liverpool was so consistently portrayed as one of the most drink-sodden cities in Victoria's Britain makes its apparent transformation all the more remarkable.'⁶⁸⁰ The same rhetoric of the poorer classes 'squandering' their money – which formed a key element of property owners' protests as shown in Chapter Two – was thus particularly prevalent in regards to alcohol. The

⁶⁷⁷ Mitchell Library, Glasgow. CI 3/56, Corporation Minutes, Nov 1916-Apr 1917.

⁶⁷⁸ Liverpool Central Archive. 352 MIN/HOU 1/6. Housing Committee Minute Book, Nov. 1918-Feb 1921, p. 555; James Samuelson, *Drink: past, present, and probable future, with some bearings on the war* (Liverpool, 1917); *Newcastle Journal*, 15 September 1914, 'The Temperance League', p. 6.; *Newcastle Journal*, 25 September 1916, 'Temperance Reform', p. 7.

⁶⁷⁹ Liverpool Central Archive. 352 COU. Proceedings of the Council, 1913-14. Insanitary Housing Report by Medical Officer of Health.

⁶⁸⁰ David Beckingham, *The licenced city: regulating drink in Liverpool, 1830-1920* (Liverpool, 2018), p. 2.

Liverpool Corporation argued that ‘Very large sums of money are expended in these premises [public houses]’,⁶⁸¹ and concluded as a result that a higher rent would be affordable due to the higher-quality accommodation breaking the cycle of alcoholism. In ostensibly combatting the intemperance problem, the housing programme was also helping to justify the cost of a more expensive style of living by implying that the result of their actions would free up more money for living expenses on the part of the tenants.

The work of non-governmental organisations – in particular the 5 per cent. philanthropy movement – has often highlighted the fixation on temperance that these developers held.⁶⁸² The lack of pubs on Bourneville, for example, has become a well-documented ‘quirk’ of these early housing programmes. What deserves more attention, however, is the way in which the principal decision-makers in the housing programme unabashedly display their temperate vision of the future in public discussion and their plans. In central government, the driving figures in the Ministry of Reconstruction – following the lead of Addison – display a notable history of temperance activism. More locally, medical officers of health often approached the housing problem from the perspective of decades of work taken on the clearance of unhealthy areas and a believed close correlation between intemperance and those conditions.⁶⁸³

Attention is drawn here to the importance of eugenics and temperance for two key reasons: to highlight the climate of debate in which the housing programme was being constructed; and

⁶⁸¹ Liverpool Central Archive. 352 COU. Proceedings of the Council, 1913-14. Insanitary Housing Report by Medical Officer of Health.

⁶⁸² See Cynthia Zaitzevsky, ‘Housing Bolton’s poor: the first philanthropic experiments’, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 42 (1983), 157-67; John Nelson Tarn, *Five per cent philanthropy: an account of housing in urban areas between 1840 and 1914* (Cambridge, 1973).

⁶⁸³ See, for example, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. LP 1/90; Central Library Archive, Liverpool. 352 HOU/MIN 1/6.

to emphasise the myriad ‘opportunities’ which the war – and the need for extensive construction – appeared to present to policy-makers during the conflict. The belief that immoral and intemperate behaviour created and perpetuated ill-health helped to justify the significance of the outlay, in both expenditure and manpower terms. It also tapped in to a narrative of national improvement which found a ripe breeding ground in the national existential crisis which the war could be represented to present. Given prevailing concerns surrounding unemployment, demobilisation, ill-health, and the improvement of the nation – physically and morally, the housing programme represented a potential silver bullet; it was, for Addison and the decision-makers in Government and the Ministry of Reconstruction, a vehicle through which a broad range of social improvement could be channelled.

The morals of ‘luxury’ building: cinemas and picture palaces

This thesis has hitherto focussed on houses, and the myriad of factors involved in their production during the First World War. It is, however, worth, however, taking some time to examine the ways in which the housing situation impacted societal opinions towards the construction of buildings which were *not* the urgently desired houses. As has been shown throughout, restriction of labour and materials meant that the proposed housing programme was hindered even if viewed in a vacuum; the production of other buildings perceived by those concentrated on housing issues to be ‘luxuries’ served as a further hindrance to the effective amelioration of the housing shortage. This ire can be seen most clearly in attitudes towards the construction of cinemas, or ‘picture palaces’, which were seen to be ostentatious in form, unnecessary in function, and became a symbol of the profiteering private market dismissing the needs of the nation.

Cultural historians, enviably unburdened with worries about the housing programme, often look back on the inter-war period as a halcyon moment for cinema, a so-called ‘golden age’ where, as Jeffrey Richards has commented, ‘the local cinema occupied a special place in the life of the community, a place to which people went regularly in order to be taken out of themselves and their lives for an hour or two. In palatial, sumptuously appointed buildings, they could for no more than a few coppers purchase ready-made dreams.’⁶⁸⁴ This focus on the cinema house as a destination has created a tendency in the historiography to concentrate attention on the films themselves, with historians adopting literary or visual interpretations in an attempt to shed new light on what these pictures and their stories can tell us about the society they were created for.⁶⁸⁵ And yet, such concentration on content has created a tendency to neglect the picture houses themselves, those ‘palatial, sumptuously appointed buildings’ which demanded a portion of what little disposal income many had available.⁶⁸⁶ In particular, histories of the apparently inexorable growth of the popularity of cinema tend to neglect the importance of the prevailing conditions and political atmosphere during, and especially immediately after, the First World War.⁶⁸⁷ If we examine responses to the physical construction of new cinema houses, a different picture emerges.

Given that the cinemas were mostly targeted at a different demographic from that suffering most from the housing shortage,⁶⁸⁸ we need to examine why the conditions created by the

⁶⁸⁴ Jeffrey Richards, *The age of the dream palace: cinema and society in 1930s Britain* (London, 2010).

⁶⁸⁵ See Jon Burrows, *Legitimate cinema: theatre stars in silent British films, 1908-1918* (Exeter, 2003); Stuart Hanson, *From silent screen to multi-screen: a history of cinema exhibition in Britain since 1896* (Manchester, 2007).

⁶⁸⁶ Some attention is given to this in Richard Gray, *Cinemas in Britain: a history of cinema architecture* (London, 2011); Giuliana Bruno, *Public intimacy: architecture and the visual arts* (Cambridge, MA, 2007).

⁶⁸⁷ See, for example, Gerben Bakker, *Entertainment industrialised: the emergence of the international film industry, 1890-1940* (Cambridge, 2008).

⁶⁸⁸ Although they employed tiered seating and made moves to include working-class audiences, cinemagoing was still a relatively middle-class pursuit in 1919. See Lawrence Napper, *British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture in the Interwar Years* (Exeter: 2009); Jon Burrows, *Legitimate cinema: theatre stars in silent British films, 1908-1918* (Exeter, 2003).

First World War made their construction problematic. Many contemporary arguments against the construction of cinemas were rooted in the shortages engendered by the war, the most obvious of these being materials. The shortages detailed earlier were often furthered as an excuse for the apparent lethargy in enacting the programme. As one report on unrest commented, ‘the lack of houses is very keenly felt, and the men are now saying that the promises of the Prime Minister with regard to the housing scheme was only an election device. They do not, of course, understand the amount of work that has to be done before the builders can get to work on a site.’⁶⁸⁹ Another reported that ‘there is a strong feeling that the local authorities are lethargic in dealing with the housing problem, and the agitators are making the best use of this.’⁶⁹⁰ With raw materials and labour scarce, creating a bottleneck on produced materials such as bricks, construction of cinema houses were portrayed as actively preventing the building of new dwelling houses by occupying coveted construction materials.

Protests against these new cinema houses, frequently expressed by delegations to local councils and in meetings in town halls, therefore often condemned the buildings in these terms. For example, Dumbarton Town Council unanimously carried a resolution to ‘prevent the erection of the picture-house... as they considered it nothing short of a public scandal that house-building material should be used for such a purpose knowing, as they did, that hundreds of families were living in the town under housing conditions which were deplorable.’⁶⁹¹ These protests occurred throughout the country. Liverpool City Council blocked the construction of new cinemas immediately after the war, with the Director of Housing reporting that he was strongly of the opinion that such building cannot be allowed due to the ‘present and possible future situation with regard to the supply of materials and

⁶⁸⁹ TNA CAB 24/76/0077.

⁶⁹⁰ TNA CAB 24/86/0035.

⁶⁹¹ *The Scotsman*, 21 November 1919, p3. ‘Nothing short of a public scandal’.

labour', and reminding the council of the popular mood with regard to delays in construction.⁶⁹² The proposed construction of new cinema 'palaces' only served to exacerbate these frustrations, and give those agitators more fuel for fire, especially as the year progressed and complaints about the lack of speed became more acute as winter approached:

As the cold weather approaches, the need of houses is becoming more acute: building operations are hampered, and makeshift accommodation which is possible in the summer months, becomes less tolerable. The unrest caused by the lack of houses cannot be exaggerated: it is further accentuated by evictions and by the erection in certain districts of cinematograph theatres instead of houses.⁶⁹³

This rising pressure prompted the prioritisation of housing in legislation. Section 5 of the Housing (Additional Powers) Act, 1919, empowered local authorities to postpone or prohibit construction of luxury buildings 'where it appears that the provision of dwelling accommodation within their area is or is likely to be delayed by a deficiency of labour or material arising out of the employment of labour or material in the construction of any works or dwellings, and that the construction of those works or dwellings is in the circumstances of the case of less public importance than the provision of dwelling accommodation'.⁶⁹⁴

Introducing the necessity for this measure in the House of Commons, Addison stated that:

Another proposal which I am sure is an essential part of the scheme, in view of the immense attractions for the building trade in other directions, is the provision in Clause 5 that the local authority shall have power to prohibit unessential building. I do not think myself it will be found that a very material percentage of building labour and materials is in fact employed on luxury building, but the social and political effect of people every day seeing masses of labour employed on buildings which are luxuries and unnecessary, while they themselves are wanting fresh houses, is a circumstance we must take account of.⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹² Liverpool Central Library, 352 MIN/HOU 1/6, 'Housing Committee Minutes', Nov 1918 – Feb 1921, p404.

⁶⁹³ CAB 24/89/0028.

⁶⁹⁴ 1919 [Cmd. 233], *Housing (Additional Powers) Bill*.

⁶⁹⁵ *HC Deb 08 December 1919 vol 122 cc953-1021, c962. My emphasis.*

The central legislation appeared to be embraced by the local authorities who were required to enforce it, with councils often already under pressure from local groups. Up to 31 July 1920, the London County Council ‘had issued prohibition orders under Section 5 of the Housing (Additional Powers) Act, 1919, in respect of 60 buildings, comprising 42 cinemas, 8 commercial buildings, 5 theatres, 3 clubs, 3 buildings for billiards and other games, and 1 music hall.’⁶⁹⁶

The Glasgow Corporation was also under constant pressure, in particular from the Glasgow Labour Party Housing Association. Their delegation on 22 January 1920 was typical, where they expressed concerns, ‘relative to the resolution passed at a public meeting, held on 29th ultimo, protesting against the unnecessary delay in erecting houses, the subsidising of private enterprise in building houses, and the erection of cinema houses and consequent use of building material for non-essential building operations.’⁶⁹⁷ Protests were not confined to the Labour Party, however, as demonstrated by the letter from the Rev. J.W. Findlay, Buchanan Memorial U.F. Church, which similarly protested against ‘the utilisation of building material for the erection of cinemas and other non-essential buildings.’⁶⁹⁸ As a result of this pressure, the Corporation in Glasgow resolved to prohibit the construction of any cinemas, and in the eighteen months which followed the war blocked the proposed construction of nine new cinemas, much to the consternation of the cinema company owners.⁶⁹⁹ The cinema trade in Glasgow was thus brought to a halt in the years after the war,⁷⁰⁰ as pressure from local groups – largely engendered by the housing crisis and perceptions of profiteering – forced the hand

⁶⁹⁶ *HC Deb 16 August 1920 vol 133 cc627-8W*

⁶⁹⁷ Mitchell Library, CI 3/62 ‘Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, November 1919 – April 1920’, p620.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p709. Letter dated 15 January 1920.

⁶⁹⁹ Mitchell Library, CI 3/63, ‘Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, April 1920-November 1920’, pp1609-12; 1709-11; 1907-1910. See also *HC Deb 30 November 1920 vol 135 cc1114-5*.

⁷⁰⁰ Trevor Griffiths, *The cinema and cinema-going in Scotland, 1896-1950* (Edinburgh, 2012).

of the local government. Liverpool was a similar case, enforcing Section 5 to prevent the construction of multiple cinemas and picturedomes in 1919.⁷⁰¹

Profiteering

The protests against the construction of cinemas took place in a context which meant they were fuelled more than simply by concern for the amelioration of hardships. As mentioned earlier, profiteering was one of the principle issues engendering discontent in British society after the war. The new cinema, especially with its tendency to adopt palatial styles, appeared to some as the physical embodiment of the disregard for the needs of many in favour of the wants of others. The attempt to compete with the grandiose theatres by providing grand hallways with pillars also led to a style of construction which prompted criticism at the luxurious nature of construction at a time of national need.⁷⁰² Frustration at perceived profiteering was an ongoing problem for the government and private enterprise alike, and at around the same time as the Housing (Additional Powers) Act, 1919, was passed, the Profiteering Act was passed, with cinema construction suffering from two angles as a result.⁷⁰³ As the *Manchester Guardian* commented, ‘profiteering is only one element... but it is urgently necessary to check and punish it because of its effect on the imagination.’⁷⁰⁴

At times, this belief that cinema construction was a callous money-making enterprise which worked to the detriment of the government’s promised attempts to take action on the housing crisis appeared to have clear justification. For example, tenants in Glasgow responded furiously to the Lorne Cinema House Ltd. ‘requiring such tenants to quit their houses on 28th

⁷⁰¹ Liverpool Central Library, 352 MIN/HOU 1/6, ‘Housing Committee Minutes’, Nov 1918 – Feb 1921.

⁷⁰² Gray, *Cinemas in Britain*.

⁷⁰³ Leonard Wilfred James Costello, *The Profiteering Act, 1919, Fully Annotated* (London: 1919).

⁷⁰⁴ *The Manchester Guardian*, 7 August 1919, p6.

May next, with the object it is believed, of extending a picture house there.’⁷⁰⁵ The Special Committee on Housing and General Town Improvement, on which Labour councillors were strongly represented, thereupon resolved to ‘take all competent steps to protect the interests of the tenants in question’, and to require the Town-Clerk to ‘attend the Court in any action that may be raised for the eviction of the tenants in the properties referred to.’⁷⁰⁶ Following this concerted pushback, the eviction notices were subsequently countermanded. Such encounters were frequent, and are enlightening for our understanding of the impact of anti-profiteering sentiment on attempts to grow the cinema trade, not just in the responses of tenants, but in the support they commanded at the local government level.

Profiteering allowed a morally-fuelled response to the construction of new cinemas, and this was facilitated by emphasising the ostentatiousness of their palatial styles at a time when construction for the working classes was deeply diminished. Yet proposed construction of cinemas frequently attracted protests from more conservative, moralistic groups who utilised the war shortages and profiteering to advance protests which were actually grounded in fears about the impact of films on the populace, and women in particular. Cinema thus offered a platform for protest from diverse and at times contradictory groups. As a result, investigation at the local levels reveals pressure on local government from a number of different directions: those suffering hardship as a result of the crisis; radicalised left-wing groups and thinkers; and middle-class eugenicists, intellectuals, and temperance activists who pursued housing reform for the perceived good of society more than out of interest in individual hardship.

⁷⁰⁵ Mitchell Library, CI 3/60, ‘Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, Nov 1918-Apr 1919’, pp. 666; 738.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.

The historiography of the British cinema does offer somewhat more insight on this obstacle to cinema in the early years, usually through examinations of censorship. However, in these histories the public becomes a somewhat passive actor, with the moralistic outrage apparently confined to a conservative minority who censored items they believed to be harmful to the moral character of the nation. Indeed, traditional histories have tended to criticise governmental taxation through the war from the perspective of the local cinema houses,⁷⁰⁷ arguing that ‘the cinema had real value not only as recreation for the common people, but also as a wide medium of propaganda and information. Ironically, official recognition of this fact during the war took the shape of taxes, restrictions and interference on a scale hitherto unknown.’⁷⁰⁸ Not only did the government curtail the growth of the cinema industry, but they curbed its content. Enough has been written about the impact of censorship on the burgeoning film industry itself,⁷⁰⁹ but what has hitherto received scant attention is the pressure placed by local groups to prevent the construction of new cinema houses motivated on these grounds. The material crisis, and Section 5 of the Housing (Additional Powers) Act, 1919, offered the platform for state intervention, but it should be remembered that pressure on local authorities for those powers to be exercised came from a number of directions. Ultimately, many groups were interested in the construction of cinemas for often substantially different reasons, with the result that cinema construction at the end of the war engendered significant protest. The housing crisis loomed over all proposed constructions after the war, and the elaborate and ostentatious forms of the new picture palaces particularly opened them up to criticism from malcontents decrying perceived profiteering. Histories of the growth of cinema during the early twentieth century will be improved by incorporating this development in to their analysis. Despite the growth of cinema at the start of the century and through the interwar

⁷⁰⁷ This was called the Entertainments Duty. See Hew Strachan, *Financing the First World War* (Oxford, 2004).

⁷⁰⁸ Rachael Low, *The history of the British film, 1918-1929* (London, 1997), p. 13.

⁷⁰⁹ Annette Kuhn, *Cinema, censorship and sexuality, 1909-1925* (London, 1988).

period, closer examination reveals that at the end of the war, lavish new cinemas were the last thing many wanted to see constructed.

Infrastructure

The fixation on the production of houses, as the discussion on attitudes to cinema construction shows, also demonstrates the failure from much of the public to account fully for the necessary competition for resources from essential accompanying infrastructure and amenities. This aspect of the housing problem deserves greater consideration, particularly given the garden city movement-inspired cottages and the frequently espoused merits of suburban living. Housing reformers typically rested on the assumption that suburban living was the future, with R. C. Philimore declaring at a conference in London that it was ‘socially immoral’ for people to live in the city centre. ‘It seems our plain duty, as a community, to counteract the present alarming congestion and to encourage, by every means, the dispersion of the population.’⁷¹⁰ Discussion earlier in this chapter about the health of the nation, the relationship between overcrowding and intemperance and immorality, and the absence of space for construction in city centres all explain why, at the end of the war, the move to the suburbs appeared to be the natural future development of housing more than ever before.

Moving away from factories and industry was an important element of this. The association between bad smells and ill-health received increasing attention at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁷¹¹ As the publication arm of the Garden Cities and Town Planning movement commented in March 1918, ‘It is not pleasant to live beside a factory which makes

⁷¹⁰ RECO 1/607. Pamphlets on the housing question.

⁷¹¹ Mark S. R. Jenner, ‘Follow your nose? Smell, smelling, and their histories’, *American Historical Review*, 116 (2011), 335-351.

spelter. With the best will in the world zinc smelting and sulphuric acid plants do not smell nice, and in any case it is a bad plan to allow workers' houses to luster around the walls of the factory yards.'⁷¹² Instead, a healthy population should be promoted by reserving a stretch of country around all factories, spacing out houses and factories widely.⁷¹³ The Ministry conceded that 'other causes besides bad housing and overcrowding contribute to the physical deterioration and high death rate in cities... excessive use of alcohol, the noxious fumes of some chemical works, and the atmosphere poisoned by the breathing of a million lungs',⁷¹⁴ but – as we have seen – they believed housing conditions as directly causal to each of these factors. Yet the relocation of the population to the outskirts was not simply a case of building new suburban houses, as the Medical Officer of Health in Glasgow recognised in 1916: 'It is suggested that the provision of houses in the outskirts will of itself initiate an outward migration of the population... But will the problem of housing be solved or even be more on the way to being solved thereby? I wish I could think so.'⁷¹⁵

As Chapter One has demonstrated in detail, the housing shortage was more than simply a product of unavailable accommodation. Habitable unoccupied or newly constructed houses, aside from being affordable, required a location which allowed access to work. At the end of the war, the emphasis on new houses and their production obfuscated the fact that concurrent development of infrastructure and intraurban transport networks were essential to their viability, and the construction of this would necessitate reallocation of resources away from houses themselves. Just as with housing, this required a departure from pre-war mentalities amongst local and central government actors. The London Society summed up the pre-war situation as it advocated for more comprehensive transit facilities:

⁷¹² RECO 1/536. The Garden Cities and Town Planning Magazine, March 1918.

⁷¹³ See also, for example, John Gordon Allen, *The cheap cottage and the house* (Letchworth, 1913).

⁷¹⁴ RECO 1/607. After-war Housing.

⁷¹⁵ Mitchell Library, Glasgow. LP 1/90/39, 'Health and Housing' by A.K. Chalmers, 1916.

In the past towns have been allowed to grow up haphazard without any ordered scheme as to residential and industrial areas respectively. There has been lack of foresight as to arterial roads and means of communication and transit generally. As a result, factories and houses have been dumped side by side without regard to health and convenience and slum areas have developed without let or hindrance. This was happening even up to the outbreak of war. Witness the G.W. Line between London and Slough. Earlier legislation was too directed towards remedying the evils instead of preventing them.⁷¹⁶

Fixation on the quantification of housing thus drew attention away from the steps necessary for those developments to be viewed as viable. That this happened is natural; providing an unprecedented number of new houses in a short time frame was a big enough task in itself without attempting to revolutionise transit networks at the same time. Yet it also helps to explain why the housing programme was not as successful as it may have otherwise been. In competing for resources and at a time of ostensible national crisis – and in a moment of opportunity to build as never before – placing accompanying transport networks in place fell by the wayside.⁷¹⁷

This competition for resources also impacted buildings required to accompany new developments. Temperance activists again utilised this opportunity to restrict the number of public houses provided on new estates. The Becontree Estate in London has received notoriety in the post-war period for its lack of pubs,⁷¹⁸ but this policy was not confined to the L.C.C. This presented no conflict for those in favour of restricting public houses and the provision of liquor, as the new houses could replace the public house with the garden or allotment, providing instead a ‘source of profit and boundless pleasure, and the most

⁷¹⁶ RECO 1/593. Notes from the meeting of the London Society, 1 March 1917.

⁷¹⁷ This was not uncommented on at the time. See J. E. Hutton, *Welfare and housing: a practical record of war-time management* (London, 1918); Francis L. Thompson and Ernest G. Allen, *The town plan and the house* (London, 1917).

⁷¹⁸ Andrzej Olechnowicz, *Working-class housing in England between the wars: the Becontree Estate* (Oxford, 1997).

powerful aid to temperance and thrift.⁷¹⁹ For the occupants, however, the lack of public houses was a source of dismay.

Despite the attention on temperance, however, new housing developments – particularly those located in new or suburban areas – necessitated other accompanying buildings.

Foremost of these were shops. Producing houses with the financial assistance of the central government helped local authorities to keep costs and rents at more manageable levels, but such discounts were not accorded to non-accommodation buildings. In the case of cinemas or public houses, this was not perceived to be a problem, but in the case of essential amenities such as shops, it meant that these were either not built at all, or were let at figures completely out of proportion with local housing.⁷²⁰ Despite protests from locals – one author commented that ‘It is all to the good to have somewhere to sleep, but it has been forgotten that the poorer classes need to eat and to drink also’⁷²¹ – it took local authorities many years to realise that houses removed from city centres by design required supporting infrastructure to be subsidised also.

Conclusion

Looking at the wider moral and physical landscape of housing reform in the early twentieth century, it becomes clear that decision-makers and activists were attempting to remedy more than just shortages. Their beliefs were not surprising. The ‘breeders of humanity’ were imbued with a necessary arrogance typical of their period; it empowered them with the

⁷¹⁹ RECO 1/482. Report by Mr. Bryce.

⁷²⁰ Central Library Archives, Liverpool. 352 MIN/HOU 1/6. Housing Committee Minute Book, Nov 1918-Feb 1921, p. 722.

⁷²¹ *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 21 November 1921.

confidence to enforce a prescriptive remedy to the housing problem even when the answers they proposed clashed at times with the desires of working-class people, the experiences of the recent past, or the more economical or logical remedy to the problem in terms of time and resources. Understanding this requires more than merely appreciating the prevailing ideas about eugenics, the vitality and health of the nation, and the evils of intemperance, however: setting the Addison Act in its moment – during and immediately after the war – these issues held heightened significance in the wake of a ‘war of peoples’,⁷²² and at a time Addison and his underlings viewed excitedly as a great ‘opportunity’. As a result, the Addison Act did not simply try to fix the housing shortage; it believed it could help fix society.

⁷²² Adrian Gregory, *A war of peoples, 1914-1919* (Oxford, 2014).

Conclusion

Rethinking the Addison Act

This thesis has focussed primarily on the creation of the Addison Act in 1919 and the circumstances which engendered its enactment. Less time has been spent on the homes it built. To have sufficiently examined the housing schemes created or engendered by the Addison Act in a national context would be impossible within the scope of this thesis; the divergent levels of local administration, housing shortages and provision, infrastructure, population movement, and local activism make a national investigation a daunting undertaking. The nationally conceived Act struggled with this itself. Applying a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to a problem which is locally specific, and profoundly impacted by local traditions of construction pattern, is one of the criticisms which can justly be applied not just to Addison, but to the majority of housing policy from the past century. Leaving this in the hands of the local authorities for the most part was an attempt to combat this, with varying degrees of success. For the same reasons, picking a few case studies inevitably leads to potentially misleading assumptions about a wider national experience. Liverpool and Glasgow have received close attention in this thesis due to the impact of the war on their industry and populations; parsing these experiences out to the post-war programme as a whole becomes increasingly complex and problematic. The lack of a coherent national story, however, can obfuscate the success the Act had.

How many homes did it build?

The work of Swenarton and Dauntton in particular has drawn some more attention to the successful elements of the Addison Act in practice. It is difficult to get an accurate count for

exactly how many new homes it created; the need during the war was assessed at half a million new dwellings, whilst the most generous calculations would suggest that the number produced was less than half that number. John Burnett puts the number at 170,000 (although 214,000 were sanctioned and much of these additional 44,000 were built in a varying form instead of disappearing altogether).⁷²³ In the longer term, however, Addison represented a fundamental change. Alterations in subsequent Acts, including the new Labour government's first major initiative – the Wheatley Act, named after the Glaswegian politician who had been one of the most vocal councillors advocating that the Corporation should take extensive action during the war, and who became Labour's first Minister of Health⁷²⁴ – should be seen as a revitalisation of the efforts of 1919. Madge Dresser has calculated the numbers of corporation houses produced in England and Wales between Addison and Wheatley⁷²⁵:

Addison Act (1919)	170,101
Chamberlain Act (1923)	73,902
Wheatley Act (1924)	283,800

Figure 22. Corporation houses build in England and Wales under housing acts, 1919-1924.

Looking at the number of houses produced from a purely numerical standpoint can misrepresent the time lag that housing acts contended with.

Thinking about housing production in a longer span shows the difficulty in implementing the policies, and in the same moment the difficulty in withdrawing them. Housing acts ebb and

⁷²³ John Burnett, *A social history of housing, 1815-1985* (London, 1986), p. 224.

⁷²⁴ See Ian S. Wood, 'Wheatley, John (1869-1930)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004. [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36848>]

⁷²⁵ Madge Dresser, 'Housing policy in Bristol, 1919-30' in Daunton, Martin (ed.), *Councillors and tenants: local authority housing in English cities, 1919-1939* (Leicester, 1984), 155-209, p. 164.

flow; they build new dwellings over a period of time, with the peak production of the Addison Act coming *after* it was all but rescinded in 1921. Sheila Marriner, more concerned with finances and numbers, concludes that the Addison Act ‘fizzled out after achieving just over two-fifths of its target’.⁷²⁶ This view both underappreciates the impact of Addison in the longer term, and the myriad of goals it was attempting to combat beyond the simple production of half a million new homes. As Peter Malpass and Alan Murie comment in their authoritative history of housing policy in Britain, ‘the period 1914-1919 represents a historic turning-point in the development of housing policy, leading up to far more state intervention than had seemed possible before 1914, and in the years up to the outbreak of the Second World War it proved impossible for this intervention to be completely withdrawn, despite considerably altered political and economic circumstances.’⁷²⁷

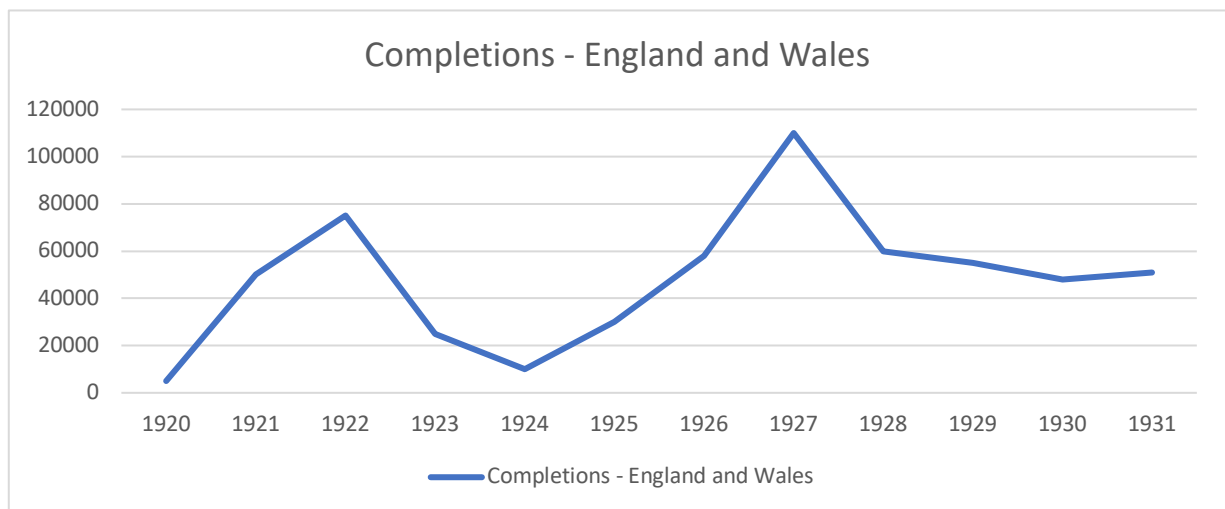


Figure 23. House completions in England and Wales, 1920-1931. HC Deb 11 March 1946, 'Written Answers' vol. 420, cc. 161.

⁷²⁶ Sheila Marriner, 'Cash and concrete: liquidity problems in the mass production of "homes fit for heroes"', *Business History*, 18 (1976), 152-189, p. 152.

⁷²⁷ Malpass and Murie, p. 36.

Instead of focussing on the deficit of houses which Addison failed to build, we should consider with greater importance the houses it did successfully build. In Bristol, it produced 1,189 new homes; in Leeds it produced 3,329 new homes; and in County Durham it was responsible for about 7,000 new council houses.⁷²⁸ In Glasgow, Addison's Act produced 4,606 new houses; at first glance this number seems relatively low, yet the groundwork was laid by the preparatory work for Addison for many of the houses which Glasgow produced under the Wheatley Act: an impressive 21,586.⁷²⁹ In Liverpool, Addison stimulated the construction first of the 252 houses of the Elms House Estate, followed by multiple projects including the 274 houses on the Fazakerley Estate and in 1921 the 2,300 houses of the Larkhill Estate.⁷³⁰ In total, Liverpool's Corporation constructed 6,043 new homes under the Addison Act. Those familiar with the area will know those estates could not be considered central by 1920s standards, and in this regard the production of new homes closer to the outer reaches of the city effectively reversed the wartime trend, producing new unoccupied houses further from the centre of town without meaningfully addressing the desire for dwellings closer to the industrial heartlands.

Criticisms of the Act

The production of the houses, and the complex relationship between Act and construction, highlights some of the criticism the 1919 Act was subject to. In her evocative popular history *Estates*, Lynsey Hanley describes the period the Addison Act began as a 'sustained and glorious period of renewal, during which time two generations of slum dwellers were lifted

⁷²⁸ Daunton, pp. 46, 107, 164.

⁷²⁹ Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Compiled from various files, CI 3/51-CI 3/83 Corporation Minutes, Apr 1914-Nov 1932

⁷³⁰ Liverpool Central Library, H643 HOU. 'Housing progress, 1864-1951'.

from cellars and tenements into seemingly vast new houses that lengthened their lives and transformed those of their children. The battle that was undertaken – to house the nation fairly and equably – cannot be underestimated.’⁷³¹ What Hanley describes is the desire of Addison Act at its heart, but in practice the period was neither as sustained nor glorious as portrayed. Whilst the production of new estates was cause for some elation, their location on the periphery of industrial centres raised familiar worries about intraurban transport. One letter in the *Liverpool Courier* in 1922 questioned ‘the use of a house’ if the tenant was ‘unable to get to work or back again’.⁷³²

This familiar problem had, at its root, the same issue which had plagued property developers and local authority corporations alike: land shortages. Whilst areas which had shown an increased activity in slum clearance operations prior to the war had created some space for development, there was little land available for new accommodation in the city centres. This, combined with work and employment patterns and woeful provision of affordable transport facilities in most major cities, meant that more working-class populations tended to concentrate closer to industry, yet the ability to provide new accommodation in these areas was strictly limited. In the course of researching this thesis, the phrase ‘Homes fit for heroes’ has not surfaced in contemporary literature once; what they *do* discuss at great length is ‘Land fit for heroes’.⁷³³ The problem was, there was little if any land available in the areas

⁷³¹ Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: an intimate history* (London, 2012), p. 51.

⁷³² *Liverpool Courier*, ‘New homes’, 24 July 1922.

⁷³³ This claim is made with some trepidation; I am sure that ‘Homes fit for heroes’ has been deployed at some point. However, considering its widespread use in book and article titles, and its ubiquity in secondary literature, it is conspicuously absent from contemporary discourse. For ‘Land fit for heroes’, see – amongst others – Bodleian Library, Oxford. MSS. Addison dep. c. 1-7, d. 1-4; Paul Barton Johnson, *Land fit for heroes: the planning of British reconstruction, 1916-1919* (Chicago, 1968); and in particular, the case of the Scottish campaign to resettle heroes on the land which utilised the slogan, Leah Leneman, *Fit for heroes?: land settlement in Scotland after World War I* (Aberdeen, 1989).

required. As a result, major building projects were forced to the relative periphery of urban centres.⁷³⁴

The quality of the houses produced is difficult to criticise. The Tudor Walters Report has been lauded for its architectural significance and its commitment to enshrine a new standard of housing. In this, it was relatively successful. John Burnett comments that ‘Of the quality of Addison houses there was little if any complaint. Indeed, in terms of space standards at least they were the best of all inter-war local-authority houses.’⁷³⁵ However, this quality often correlated to an increased cost, with local authorities eager to extract rents which would justify the costs of construction. Despite the plans of the Addison Act being carefully constructed to negate this precise problem, the houses it built tended to be aimed at the affluent artisanal working classes more than the truly poor. It could be argued that this had a ‘trickle-down’ benefit, although this should not be overstated – new houses were often taken up by young professionals moving out of parents’ houses, and so did not always contribute to the alleviation of the perceived housing shortage as a whole.⁷³⁶ The rigid implementation of a minimum standard of quality but a lack of conviction in the *maximum* level of quality served as a major shortcoming of the Addison Act, as it became overwhelmed by the shortcomings of its own idealism. The spacious suburban cottages it promoted were quality dwellings – and many remain so to this day – but almost always out of the reach of those who needed them most.

⁷³⁴ This nationwide phenomenon is perhaps best summed up by the LCC’s ambitious Becontree Estate. See Andrzej Olechnowicz, *Working-class housing in England between the wars: the Becontree Estate* (Oxford, 1997).

⁷³⁵ John Burnett, *A social history of housing, 1815-1985* (London, 1986), p. 227.

⁷³⁶ Avner Offer, *Property and politics*, p. 13.

For their critics, Addison's houses took too long to arrive, cost too much, and were in the wrong place. Yet the Addison Act deserves more credit for its influence on the changing face of British housing policy. It did build many much-needed homes at a time when private enterprise would have provided almost none, stimulating the economy and the industry, alleviating both protest and unemployment. More importantly, it laid the foundations of future policy.

Subsequent legislation, 1919-39

New housing policies came and went in the next twenty years before the Second World War. The 1939 Rent and Mortgage Interest Restriction Act demonstrates the way in which the learned experience of the first war prompted swifter, pre-emptive – rather than reactive – action on the outbreak of the second. Although new subsidies for the Addison Act were withdrawn in 1921, the Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act, 1920, continued the principle of control and attempted – with limited success – to permit very specific and limited increases in rent. The very problem which the Addison Act was attempting to avoid – that of continuing rent controls undercutting the 'normal' functioning of the free market – continued after the war and underpinned and begot subsequent legislation until well after the Second World War. Just as in 1919, for the administrations which followed, the housing question was often, fundamentally, the rent question.

In part as a result of this ongoing wrestle with rent, housing – close to the heart of domestic politics for decades – assumed an increasing role in political parties' pursuit of the newly

expanded electorate.⁷³⁷ These political promises manifested in a number of programmes through the interwar period, each one a response to the last, emphasising the fundamentally altered status quo. In 1923, the Chamberlain Act introduced a new subsidy to renew construction, although this was targeted at private builders and largely ineffective for many of the reasons the Ministry of Reconstruction had identified. The 1923 version of the Rent and Mortgage Interest Restrictions Act introduced the deregulation of rents at the change of tenancy; whilst fine in principal, this discouraged movement of tenants, with some renters holding on to properties with deregulated rents until the 1970s. In 1924, the Labour Party immediately utilised their first opportunity to govern, enacting a major housing policy to fulfil promises made for decades before the war. The Wheatley Act introduced a new, higher subsidy, allowing many schemes devised in preparation for the Addison Act but not implemented in time to be built under the newly offered terms. The 1930s saw another period of involvement followed by attempted state withdrawal, starting with the Greenwood Act in 1930 which renewed the historic engagement with the slums which had been lost in the Addison-inspired drive towards the production of *new* houses at the expense of the replacement of old, insufficient stock which had dominated previous approaches. The Housing (Financial Provisions) Act, 1933, again removed subsidies for new housing except for slum clearances. The cycle of state foray accompanied by retreat shown with Addison was thus repeated again a decade later. This retreat from housing provision did not last long, however, with new subsidies introduced in 1935, 1936, and 1938. The Second World War created new but similar problems, and with them new attempts by the government to come to terms with the difficulty of affordable housing provision in the twentieth century, with the

⁷³⁷ Jon Lawrence, *Electing our masters: the hustings in British politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford, 2009).

cycle of expensive involvement and removal of subsidies to limit expenditure starting anew and continuing to the present day.

The Addison Act deserves to share at least partial credit for the success – and, perhaps, the failures – of these policies. This thesis has demonstrated the way in which the First World War fundamentally altered the relationship between the state and housing provision. It has also demonstrated the extent to which the 1919 Act represented an ambitious attempt to avoid this continued involvement. In this sense, each subsequent policy signifies further detraction from the central ambition of Addison – even when those policies implemented similar ideas.

Housing as the ‘silver bullet’

Although the raw numbers in terms of houses completed by the Act are somewhat misleading, the history of housing provision since the First World War clearly highlights that in its goal to completely alleviate the housing shortage in Britain, it was unsuccessful. Its purpose, however, was more than the number of houses which it could produce. As this thesis argues throughout, if the sole function of the Addison Act was to produce enough new dwellings to alleviate the housing shortage, spacious cottages were a remarkably inefficient way to do this. As we have seen, this was a response to prevailing or anticipated problems in a number of areas, and to fully assess the efficacy of the Addison Act we must consider its attempt to cope with these myriad problems instead of counting house numbers and looking at it in the longer perspective of housing policy in Britain.

On its own, the Addison Act was an important response to a housing situation which was deteriorating prior to the outbreak of war. It is hard to imagine that governmental intervention could have been avoided entirely regardless of the war, but it is also difficult to argue that the ambitious scope of action could ever have come to be without the war. This is in part due to the influence that the war had on the mentalities of policy makers, but also due to its attempt to combat new challenges.

From the perspective of the housing programme, the war meant one thing more than anything else: strain. Population concentration for the production of war-related materials and munitions strained housing conditions. Furthermore, it placed new strains on the production and importation of raw materials, labour availability, and the price of materials. Strained as the sinews of production were, industrial action gained a significantly heightened importance; as a result, the Rent Act of 1915 broke the market. Assessing whether the Addison Act was an effective piece of legislation thus requires that we consider the entirety of the prevailing conditions it was attempting to combat. It needed to build houses, but importantly it also needed to do so in a way which stimulated the restoration of normality as far as possible in those other factors, allowing a less turbulent transition to peace.

Bearing this in mind, the post-war housing programme should be regarded as more than just a housing programme. It was the Ministry of Reconstruction's answer to a great number of urgent questions at the end of the war – the 'silver bullet' for a multitude of the most pressing concerns facing society at the end of the war, all folded in to one ambitious programme. Was it successful in this regard? Not entirely, but it certainly deserves more credit than historians have tended to accord it.

As the second chapter of this thesis outlines in particular, market confidence in housing as a form of investment was critically low. Whilst this presented obvious problems for the successful implementation of the Addison Act, it was also an issue which would present problems on its own merit if left unaddressed. The significant contraction of the building industry during the war was concealed in large part due to the armed services subsuming labourers; at the end of the conflict, the diminishment of this competing alternative demand presented a serious threat of significant unemployment. Furthermore, it was not a problem which could be quickly fixed, with industries such as brickmaking suffering a serious lag between the recommencing of operations and significant outputs. By meaningfully investing immediately after the war, the government helped to prevent more costly atrophy of the industry, as well as the further escalation of prices due to scarcity. The ability of the Bonar Law government to revoke Addison's subsidies in 1921 is in part a testament to this success; without preventing the market from abject deterioration, there would have been little prospect of private building resuming primacy. The Act certainly helped to quell popular discontent, it prevented further market destabilisation, and – more importantly – it secured an industry and then directly led to the employment of vast numbers of demobilised soldiers, with local authorities often deliberately stipulating that ex-servicemen would receive priority. From a purely housing point of view, it did not construct the numbers of houses it hoped to; from a wider reconstruction view, it was a vital element in securing the smooth transition to peace.

Addison at the centenary

On 5 March 2018, a century after Christopher Addison and the Ministry of Reconstruction began to form their plan to combat the housing problem in earnest, Prime Minister Theresa May unveiled her vision for the future in a speech in East London.

On my first day as Prime Minister, I spoke on the steps of Downing Street about my desire to make this a country that works for everyone. A country where, regardless of where you live, your race or religion, or what your parents do for a living, you have a fair chance to get on and build a life for yourself and your family.

It's a philosophy that shapes everything this government does... It's all about making this country a fairer place for all, breathing fresh life into the British dream that every generation has a better future than the last. But we cannot fulfil that dream, we cannot bring about the kind of society I want to see, unless we tackle one of the biggest barriers to social mobility we face today: the national housing crisis.

The causes and manifestations vary from place to place but the impact is all too clear: in much of the country, housing is so unaffordable that millions of people who would reasonably expect to buy their own home are unable to do so. Others are struggling even to find somewhere to rent.

The root cause of the crisis is simple. For decades this country has failed to build enough of the right homes in the right places. It's a problem that has plagued successive governments of all colours since post-war housebuilding peaked under the first Wilson administration...

Talking to voters during last year's election campaign, it was clear that many people, particularly younger people, are angry about this. Angry that, regardless of how hard they work, they won't be able to buy a place of their own. Angry when they're forced to hand more and more of their wages to a landlord to whom their home is simply a business asset. Angry that, no matter how many sacrifices they make to save for a deposit, they'll never be able to compete with someone whose parents have released equity from their own home to help their children buy...

The shortage of housing in this country reinforces inequality. It prevents social mobility and stops people fulfilling their potential. It creates and exacerbates divisions between generations and between those who own property and those who do not. And it undermines something more, something less tangible but just as important. The sense of community, of belonging, of responsibility that comes with owning your own home or having an affordable, secure, long-term tenancy.

That is what this country should be about – not just having a roof over your head but having a stake in your community and its future. All that is put at risk by the mismatch between housing supply and housing demand and the soaring prices that have resulted.⁷³⁸

Almost the entirety of May's speech in 2018 would have been perfectly appropriate for Lloyd George in 1918. Through this contemporary lens, the Addison Act and the lofty aspirations of early state social housing policy have clearly failed: how could it have been successful when, a hundred years later, nothing has changed? In 2018, the debate on the housing 'crisis' rages on with little sign of any abatement. The tragedy of the Grenfell Tower – a large block of social housing in West London which caught fire on 14 June 2017, causing 71 deaths,⁷³⁹ occasioned both public mourning and outrage.⁷⁴⁰ It brought in to sharper focus a longer

⁷³⁸ PM speech on making housing fairer: 5 March 2018. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-making-housing-fairer-5-march> [Accessed 5 September 2018].

⁷³⁹ BBC News, 'Grenfell Tower final death toll stands at 71', 16 November 2017. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42008279> [Accessed 5 September 2018].

⁷⁴⁰ See the LRB coverage in particular. Andrew O'Hagan, 'Grenfell Tower', *London Review of Books*, 7 June 2018; *The Guardian*, 'The Guardian view on the Grenfell anniversary: sorry is not enough', 13 June 2018.

discussion about the chronic lack of investment in affordable housing amidst worries of the bursting of the housing ‘bubble’,⁷⁴¹ and the perceived abandonment of governmental responsibility in the housing sector, causing – amongst other issues – a sharp rise in homelessness. In an attempt to combat this, the government introduced the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.⁷⁴² During the First World War, policy-makers concluded that attempting to legislate to fix the consequences of a shortage of affordable, acceptable accommodation was a false economy; housing issues could only be combatted effectively by targeting their root, they concluded. This lesson certainly appears to have been lost in contemporary policy. As homelessness charity Shelter comment, the ‘legislation alone cannot reduce homelessness unless the underlying structural which both cause it, and make it difficult to solve, are addressed.’⁷⁴³

The underlying causes similarly occasion protest today, the language of which would have been at home in the demonstrations of 1915. On a march for greater governmental intervention in housing conditions in London, protestors carried placards emblazoned with slogans reading, ‘Social housing not social cleansing’, and ‘Homes for people not profit’.⁷⁴⁴ Grassroots agitation is growing, with national organisations such as: Homes for All; Eviction Resistance; Defend Council Housing; and local groups providing organised resistance, such as the Sweets Way Resists group; Focus E15; and Barnet Housing Action, utilising social media networks to bring local struggles in to a wider national network of resistance. Again, this is nothing new. The mobilization of tenants to oppose the raising of rents or the

⁷⁴¹ *The Telegraph*, ‘Housing market a “bubble on a bubble”, as experts warn prices could be overvalued by as much as 12pc, 12 August 2018.

⁷⁴² Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, [Ch. 13]. 27 April 2017.

⁷⁴³ Shelter, ‘Homelessness Reduction Act 2017: policy and practice briefing’, p. 19.

⁷⁴⁴ *The Guardian*, ‘Politicians aren’t going to solve the housing crisis, but people power will’, 15 November 2017.

‘gentrification’ of areas denotes an important continuity from the First World War to the present day.

For the past century, housing policy has presented administrations from across the political spectrum with a quagmire. Government’s involvement ebbed and flowed through the interwar years before a new, concerted approach followed the Second World War. Despite this multitude of approaches over time, an observer in 2018 could argue that the situation has not improved in a hundred years of governmental action. A housing shortage still exists, and access to fair housing conditions for the working classes is still limited and – in some areas, such as London – appears to be worsening. In this sense, the Addison Act clearly failed. However, comparing its approach and aspirations to contemporary policy does it a disservice. It deserves more credit as perhaps the last, and only, time that the government offered a truly concerted effort to rectify housing conditions in Britain in a meaningful way. Policy since has often targeted the consequences; the Addison Act targeted the root.

Conclusion

The houses which the Addison Act built are objects of beauty. They stand as a testament to a sincerity and honesty – blended with naivety – which aptly reflects Christopher Addison himself. The Act evolved through the course of the war: as the Ministry of Reconstruction investigated the housing problem and the impacts of the Rent Act of 1915 in closer detail, it became increasingly clear that huge intervention would be necessary, and that the state, working through direct subsidisation of local authorities, would have to incur the majority of the burden of construction itself.

In these circumstances, Addison and the Ministry had limited options. They could negate the housing shortage to a level which would allow the slow retraction of rent controls by building as many new dwellings as cheaply as possible, producing houses which were of a low quality but copious and inexpensive. Perhaps this would have worked. That they did not do this, however, speaks to the idealism and genuine sense of opportunity which decision-makers embraced in forming their plans. The Addison Act was about trying to fix so much more than a housing shortage, or market failures. The buildings it created are physical testament to the hope which the end of the war occasioned: the desire to create a better, healthier nation; leaving the slums, immorality, and intemperance behind. It was prescriptive in its ideas of good behaviour, and riddled with negative assumptions about working-class culture, but it was also the last, and only, true attempt to deal with the housing shortage in Britain in the twentieth century. A century later, with many of the same problems afflicting the nation, politicians could do far worse than looking to Addison and the genuine spirit of reconstruction at the end of the First World War for inspiration.

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