

Housing Needs: Power, Subjectivity and Public Housing in England, 1920-1970



Matthew Hollow
Wolfson College
University of Oxford

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This thesis addresses two key questions: First, how did those involved in the provision of public housing in twentieth-century England conceptualise the people who they were providing houses for? Second, how did their ideas change over time?

These questions are important and need answering because, although there has been a great deal written about the history of public housing in England, there has up until now been very little thought given to the manner in which the council estate tenants themselves were actually identified and conceptualised as subjects in need of state-funded housing. My thesis begins to redress this imbalance by providing an overview of the changing forms and practices through which prospective tenants were conceptualised and acted upon by those in positions of power in England between 1920 and 1970. Using records from local authority archives, sociological surveys, architectural and town planning journals, central government publications, Mass Observation reports and tenant handbooks, and focusing primarily on council estates in London, Manchester and Sheffield, it shows how ideas about what prospective tenants needed from their homes changed dramatically over the course of this period, with the narrowly sanitary and biopolitical approaches of the 1920s and 1930s increasingly being challenged and complemented by a host of new ideas and discourses which placed far more emphasis upon the prospective tenant's emotional, social and personal needs. As such, this thesis not only adds substantially to our understanding of the changes that took place in the English public housing sector between 1920 and 1970, but also adds to the burgeoning literature on questions of governmentality; contributing in the process to our understandings of modern modes of power.

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My thesis examines the changing ways in which those involved in the provision of public housing in England between 1920 and 1970 conceptualised the people that they were providing homes for. Taking into account the opinions of politicians, local authority officials, architects, town planners, sociologists, scientists and housing managers it shows how ideas about what prospective tenants needed from a council estate home altered quite dramatically over this period. Indeed, far from being a static or uncontested category, the concept of domestic need proved to be a fertile arena within which wider debates about the nature of the self intersected and overlapped. As such, this study of the shifting ways in which prospective tenants were understood provides an account of mid-twentieth century council housing that is not only significantly different from much of the previous literature on public housing in England but also contributes to our wider understanding of modern modes of governance.

On one level this thesis is original because although a great deal of historical literature has been produced about public housing in England there has up until now been relatively little attention shown towards the ways in which prospective tenants were conceptualised by those in positions of power. Likewise, far too little consideration has been given to investigating how ideas about domestic needs altered over the course of this period. Indeed, more often than not the figure of the council estate tenant is treated as an unproblematic subject with needs that are so self-evident to be barely worthy of a mention. My thesis challenges these assumptions by showing that far from being a pre-existent subject passively waiting for housing assistance, the prospective tenant had to first be thought of and regarded as being in need of state housing and then be articulated and conceptualised through a meaningful conceptual framework. Indeed, as the first chapter shows for those involved in the provision of public housing in the interwar years the prospective tenant could only really be understood by adopting the same sort of sanitary outlook as had been used by their Victorian predecessors. As such, the emphasis was at first overwhelmingly centred upon ensuring that the physiological needs of the prospective tenant were being met, with the chief concern being to maintain and protect their health so as to make sure that they could become efficient and industrious workers.

In terms of historical scope, the focus of this thesis is on developments that took place within the public housing sector in the period between 1920 and 1970. While this represents something of a break with the sorts of periodizations that have tended to be used in previous accounts of public housing in England, which have mostly focused either on the interwar period or take the Second World War as their starting point, it does allow for a broader framework within which to trace both the continuities and

changes that took place in the ways that prospective tenants were conceptualised and acted upon in this period. Indeed, as a result of this more expansive outlook, I have been able to show just how great the changes were that took place over this period; resulting in the rigidly sanitary understandings of the 1920s and 1930s coming to be challenged, and sometimes even replaced, by a wide array of new governmental outlooks which placed far greater emphasis upon satisfying the prospective tenant's emotional, social and individual domestic needs.

Nevertheless, this thesis does not simply and uncritically provide a rehashed version of the same-old tired, teleological narrative that a great many social theorists have told about how contemporary societies have seamlessly and inexorably progressed from the 'pre-modern' to the 'modern' and now into the 'postmodern.' Indeed, although this thesis has been loosely structured in relation to the sorts of conceptual categories used in many other governmentality studies, with the first chapter looking at the extent to which biopolitical ideas dominated, the second and third focusing on ideas of expertise, the fourth exploring the impact of new sociological theories and the fifth chapter looking at consumerist ideals, the intention has not been to simply try and fit the story of public housing provision in England into some larger macro-societal narrative, but rather to use these more expansive conceptual categories as yardsticks against which to measure and evaluate the changes that have taken place in the way that the figure of the prospective tenant has been conceptualised and acted upon. Ultimately, what it reveals is that although these sorts of macro-societal concepts can certainly help to shed new light on the history of public housing in England, especially in respect of how the figure of the prospective tenant has been subjectivised, it is nonetheless important to appreciate that at a practical level these sorts of overarching conceptual transformations were neither unproblematic nor uncontested, as governmental ideas and practices often overlapped and interacted in ways that were both messy and unexpected.

Furthermore, because this project is more a study of a specific site of government (the council estate), than a political history in the conventional sense, I have deliberately cast my net wider than many former histories of public housing in England. Indeed, whereas most previous studies have tended to be based upon one sort of source, be that architectural plans, governmental policies or local council records, in this thesis I have sought to incorporate evidence from a wide range of different sources with the intention of providing a more encompassing and less one-sided account of developments within the public housing sector. As such, I have at different points taken evidence from local authority archives, the personal papers of architects and politicians, the technical reports of building research organisations, central government publications, tenant handbooks, Mass Observation reports, architectural and town planning journals, local and national newspapers and sociological surveys.

In the first chapter, which, as I mentioned above, looks at how far the sanitary ideas of the Victorians carried over into the interwar years, I first demonstrate how easily medical ideas were able to enter into debates surrounding housing reform, using Christopher Addison as an example of a figure who was able to straddle the two worlds

and by dissecting the strong sanitary attitudes that ran throughout the earliest housing legislations. I then show how architects and designers were similarly influenced by these prewar sanitary ideals, providing a detailed study of the views and work of Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker in order to show just how influential the ideas of philanthropic designers such as Ebenezer Howard continued to be in this period. Finally, I end the chapter with an investigation of the management practices that were adopted on the Wythenshawe Estate in Manchester and the Downham Estate in London in order to show how sanitary concerns also came to exert a strong influence over the ways in which council estate managers conceptualised and acted upon the tenants under their control.

The second chapter builds on the findings of the first chapter, showing how the heavily biopolitical understandings of prospective tenants that tended to dominate at this time served to facilitate and encourage politicians, architects and local authority officials to look for and apply theories and formulas to public housing issues that were as rigidly precise and statistically quantifiable as possible. Looking first at the set-up and establishment of the Building Research Station (BRS), it shows how politicians increasingly placed more and more faith in the findings and opinions of specially-trained scientific experts as the interwar period progressed. It then moves on to look at the actual experimental work carried out in the BRS's laboratories, demonstrating how there was a strongly mechanistic understanding of the prospective tenant, based on the assumption that man's needs were subject to universal and, hence, definable rules, underpinning all their work. Finally, it concludes by showing how, despite the increased prestige afforded to them, these early scientific experts initially actually struggled to exert any influence over the public housing sector; only really beginning to have any impact on the shape and layout of council estate homes in the period after the Second World War.

The focus in the third chapter is on the 1940s and, more specifically, on the impact that the Second World War had on the way that those involved in the provision of public housing conceptualised the people that they were providing homes for. Previous accounts of public housing have tended to paint the 1940s as a time of great optimism and utopian dreams about the future, dismissing the reconstruction plans that were put forward as naïve and unrealistic. What I have done in this chapter is challenge this narrative by showing that although these proposals may not always have been especially feasible or even practical they can and do still tell us a great deal about the intellectual shifts that were taking place at this time regarding the way that the prospective tenant was coming to be reconceptualised. Looking in particular at the views of the expanding town planning professions, I demonstrate how the upheavals caused by the Second World War provided the impetus for the assumptions and norms of the interwar period to be scrutinised and challenged as more and more challenging questions came to be asked about what exactly it was that prospective tenants really needed from their council estate homes. I end the chapter with an investigation of the showcase Lansbury

Estate in Poplar, showing how these new ideas were slowly beginning to impact upon the shape and layout of the English council estate.

The fourth chapter looks at the increasing influence that sociologists, particularly those involved in opinion surveying, came to have over the public housing sector in the postwar period. Starting in the 1940s, it shows how anxieties over civic morale during the Second World War played a crucial role in bringing sociological experts into governmental circles, resulting in the emergence of groups such as Mass Observation and the Wartime Social Survey who explicitly sought to both break the national social body down into smaller composite social groupings and to uncover the subjective feelings of the individual. It then moves on to look at how these sorts of concerns and tactics began to infiltrate into the public housing sector, influencing how politicians, architects and town planners conceived of and acted upon the figure of the prospective tenant. Finally, the chapter concludes by showing how much of an impact these new sociological concerns had over both the housing legislations passed in the postwar period and the way in which council estates were designed and run, focusing in particular upon developments on the Park Hill Estate in Sheffield.

In the fifth chapter I turn my attentions to the question of the postwar affluence, looking at the impact that rising wages and an expanding consumer market had upon the public housing sector. This is an area of investigation that has received little attention from historians who have tended to assume that issues relating to affluence were confined to the private and commercial sectors. What I show in this chapter is that this was far from the case. Indeed, politicians and architects were acutely aware of the rising living standards that the English working classes were coming to enjoy in the 1950s and 1960s and actively sought to improve accommodation conditions in public housing schemes so that they would be more in line with them. Moreover, the growth of consumer movements and the increased attention being given to the rights of consumers in this period also put pressure on politicians and local authorities to try and make themselves more accountable and responsive to the individual requirements of the people they were providing homes for. Finally, I show how these new concerns also began to impact upon the shape and layout of the council estate home, using the Lillington Gardens Estate in Pimlico as a case study to demonstrate how new ideas of 'flexible living' began to come to the fore in this period.

Taking all of the chapters together, then, this thesis demonstrates just how great were the changes that took place as regards the ways that those involved in the provision of public housing conceptualised the people they were providing homes for. From being conceived of in narrowly sanitary terms at the start of the 1920s, the council estate tenant had by the end of the 1960s been remoulded into a far more complex and multi-layered subject, with needs that were simultaneously universal, social, individualistic, and emotional. As such, this thesis not only adds substantially to our understanding of the changes that took place in the English public housing sector between 1920 and 1970, but also contributes to and problematizes the way in which we approach the larger issues of twentieth-century power and governance.

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List of Abbreviations

BRS	Building Research Council
DoE	Department of the Environment
DSIR	Department of Scientific and Industrial Research
LCC	London County Council
LGB	Local Government Board
MHLG	Ministry of Housing and Local Government
MO	Mass Observation
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoR	Ministry of Reconstruction
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
WESC	Wythenshawe Estate Special Committee

Introduction

*'Needs appear, are satisfied, and fade out, only to make place for new needs.'*¹

*'Council housing estates were the basic social products of the twentieth century.'*²

*'The problem of the house is the problem of the epoch.'*³

On Friday the 14 February 2008 late-night revellers in Sheffield were treated to a unique visual spectacle as the entire front façade of the domineering Park Hill Estate, built between 1957 and 1960 by the Sheffield City Council, was illuminated against the night sky for the evening by a series of high-wattage floodlights. The brains behind this display was contemporary Swedish-born artist Annika Eriksson who used footage of the lit-up estate in a video installation that was later put on display in the city's Millennium Galleries as part of the city-wide "Art Sheffield 08" Festival. Satirically entitled "Maximum Happiness" in reference to a comment made at the time by the architects of the scheme that 'it is clearly impossible to secure the maximum happiness of everybody,' the piece was intended to deal with the issue of 'how communities today constitute their identities' by highlighting the fact that, despite being so visually

¹ S. Riemer, 'Architecture for Family Living', in *Journal of Social Issues* vol. 7, no. 2 (1951), p. 148.

² A. Briggs, *History of Birmingham: vol. II* (Oxford, 1952), p. 228.

³ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans., F. Etchells (London, 1946), p. 12.

imposing, there was still much ‘confusion’ and ‘ambiguity’ over what exactly the Park Hill Estate represented.⁴

Conceptually, then, Eriksson’s piece was very much premised upon a broadly postmodern or anti-structuralist outlook, rejecting as it did the idea that the Park Hill Estate had any intrinsic visual meaning in itself and instead focusing upon the differing ways in which people have imposed their own understandings and values upon it. Indeed, the unifying theme of the art show, entitled “Yes. No. Other Options”, in which Eriksson’s piece featured was actually centred upon the difficulties that individuals in contemporary societies face when trying to meaningfully define both the world around them and their own personal relationship to it, as the accompanying programme affirmed: ‘How can we address the current changes in our societies and lives?’, ‘Who is we?’, ‘What do we feel about ourselves and our lives?’, ‘Are we happy?’, ‘Are we in charge?’⁵

In many ways, questions of this sort are also at the heart of this investigation into the changing ways in which those involved in the provision of public housing in England between 1920 and 1970 conceptualised and acted upon the people that they were providing homes for. Indeed, like the pieces featured in the “Yes. No. Other Options” Exhibition, this thesis is, broadly speaking, concerned with looking at whether or not modern-day identities and modes of subjectivity are becoming inherently unstable and

⁴ See, ‘Art Sheffield 08: Yes. No. Other Options Exhibition’ [Online]. Available at: ><http://www.artsheffield.org/as08/programme.html>< [Accessed: 1 July 2011]; ‘New choices for the post-industrial city’, in *The Metro* (16 February, 2008) [Online]. Available at: ><http://www.metro.co.uk/news/98471-new-choices-for-the-post-industrial-city>< [Accessed: 1 July, 2011].

⁵ J. Verwoert, ‘I can, I can’t, Who cares’ [Online]. Available at: ><http://www.artsheffield.org/as08/context.html>< [Accessed: 1 July 2011].

contested as they are used, appropriated, and applied by an increasing array of different actors in different contexts, tracing as it does the processes through which the residents of England's council estates have been moulded and configured into visible and knowable subjects thought to be in need of state-assisted housing.

Of particular concern in this thesis is the issue of how ideas about the domestic 'needs' of the figure of the prospective tenant have altered over time, as different judgements as to the sorts of things deemed to be 'essential' to satisfactory domestic life can and do reveal a great deal about broader social attitudes.⁶ In this context, for example, the fact that the domestic needs of the English prospective tenant were regarded largely in physiological terms during the interwar period reveals just how far those involved in the provision of public housing continued to conceive of the individual subject in the sorts of biopolitical frameworks that their Victorian predecessors had used, with the chief concern being to maintain and protect the health of the individual so as to make sure that they could remain as efficient and industrious as possible. Likewise, the fact that new sorts of considerations, such as the ease with which prospective tenants were able to gain access to communal facilities and the extent to which they were able to modify their homes to their own specific requirements, began to enter into debates over public housing provision during the 1950s and 1960s highlights just how much had changed in respect of how the figure of the prospective tenant was understood and acted upon.

Overall, then, what this thesis affirms above all else is the fact that, conceptually, the figure of the English prospective tenant has undergone a great many transformations during the course of the twentieth-century. Having been initially conceived of as a basic

⁶ See, A. Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (Yale, 2006); S. Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1988).

biological unit within a larger undifferentiated social body, the prospective tenant had by the end of the 1960s been reconfigured into a much more complex and multi-layered subject, with specific needs and personal aspirations that were at once physical, social, personal and emotional. As this thesis demonstrates, the effects of these shifting attitudes were felt in almost every facet of public housing provision, not only encouraging housing managers and local authority officials to deal with the tenants under their command in more flexible and personalised ways, but also leading those involved in the design and layout of England's council estates to experiment with new and innovative designs in an attempt to provide more individualistic and socially fulfilling living spaces.⁷

Subjectifying the Prospective Tenant

Conceptually, the main inspiration for this thesis has been the burgeoning body of neo-Foucaultian 'governmentality' literature. Springing from his enduring interest in questions of power and knowledge, the concept of governmentality was developed by Foucault in the later years of his life to describe those modern modes of power that had entire populations as their targets. More nuanced than many of his earlier dialogues on power, which had tended to emphasise the repressive and draconian characteristics of modern modes of control, his concept of governmentality was intentionally made to be as flexible as possible so as to allow for the entire spectrum of mentalities, rationalities and techniques involved in the 'art' of government to be brought into consideration so

⁷ See, M. Hollow, 'Governmentality on the Park Hill Estate: The Rationality of Public Housing', in *Urban History*, vol. 37, no.1 (2010), pp. 117–135.

as to encourage analysis's that evaluated the entire 'ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power.'⁸

In other words, then, one of the things that Foucault was trying to emphasise in these writings on the subject of governmentality was the idea that modern modes of power, rather than just being 'something that is divided between those who have it and hold it exclusively, and those who do not have it and are subject to it,' were instead inherently diffuse and all-pervasive, 'traversing', 'characterizing' and 'constituting' the entire social body.⁹ Indeed, in his eyes at least, all human relationships were 'to a certain degree relationships of power.'¹⁰ This expansive approach to power relations also explains why Foucault tried so hard to avoid constricting the concept of governmentality to any sort of restrictive definition, preferring always that others treated his pronouncements as 'propositions' or 'game openings,' as he reminded the audience at one of his 1976 lectures at the *Collège De France*: 'you are completely free to do

⁸ M. Foucault, 'Governmentality', in J. D. Faubion (Ed.). *Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984, vol. III: Power* (London, 2002), pp. 219–220. For more in-depth discussions about how Foucault's ideas on power changed over the course of his career see, S. Gunn, 'From Hegemony to Governmentality: Changing Conceptions of Power', in *Journal of Social History* vol. 39, no. 3 (2006), pp. 709–713; C. D. Shearing and P. C. Stenning, 'From the Panopticon to Disney World: The Development of Discipline', in E. McLaughlin, J. Muncie and G. Hughes (Ed.), *Criminological Perspectives: Essential Readings, Second Edition* (London, 2003), pp. 425–428; C. Gordon, 'Governmental Rationality', in G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Hertfordshire, 1991), pp. 1–52; M. Dean, *Critical and Effective Histories: Foucault's Methods and Historical Sociology* (London, 1994); P. O'Malley, L. Weir and C. Shearing, 'Governmentality, Criticism, Politics', in *Economy and Society* vol. 26, no. 4 (1997), pp. 501–527.

⁹ M. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975–76*, trans., D. Macey (London, 2003), pp. 24–29.

¹⁰ M. Foucault, 'The Risks of Security: An Interview Conducted by R. Bono,' in P. Rabinow (Ed.), *Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984: Volume 1, Ethics* (London, 2000), p. 372.

what you like with what I am saying. These are suggestions for research, ideas, schemata, outlines, instruments; do what you like with them.’¹¹

In the social sciences at least, the academics who have most markedly carried forwards these lines of enquiry in recent years have been Colin Gordon, Peter Miller, Nikolas Rose and Mitchell Dean. Like Foucault, all four have sought to broaden-out how we go about analysing modern modes of power, emphasising the need to look at ‘issues of the government of human conduct in all its contexts, by various authorities and agencies...using definite resources, means and techniques’, in a bid to deepen our understanding of the ways in which contemporary societies operate.¹² Moreover, like Foucault, these writers have all seen language and discourse as being central to modern power relations and have all given particular attention to the conceptual frameworks and rationalities that inform and underpin contemporary social relations. Rose, in particular, has been emphatic on this point, claiming that power should be analysed as ‘a kind of intellectual machinery or apparatus for rendering reality thinkable in such a way that is amenable to political programming’ and declaring in his influential 1999 study *Powers of Freedom* that if we are to understand the changes that have taken place in the West during the course of the twentieth century we need to first question and establish ‘the

¹¹ M. Foucault, ‘Questions of Method’, in *The Foucault Effect*, p. 74; Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, p. 2. See also, M. Foucault, ‘So Is It Important to Think? An interview conducted by D. Eribon,’ in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984: Volume 1*, pp. 454–458.

¹² M. Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society, Second Edition* (London, 2010), p. 3. See also, G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality, With Two Lectures by and An Interview with Michel Foucault* (London, 1991); A. Barry, T. Osborne and N. Rose (Eds.), *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism and Rationalities of Government* (London, 1995).

conditions under which it becomes possible to consider certain things to be true, and hence to say and do certain things, about human beings and their interrelations.’¹³

Increasingly, historians have also started to be influenced by these ideas, with writers such as Mary Poovey, Patrick Joyce, James Vernon and Chris Otter, to name but a few, all taking inspiration from different aspects of Foucault’s voluminous writings on power and discipline.¹⁴ Joyce, in particular, has sought to apply Foucault’s later ideas on governmentality to his work, as can most clearly be seen in his 2003 study *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City*, in which he endeavours to show how, rather than just functioning as a political ideal, nineteenth-century British liberalism was instead a much more expansive rationality of governance that was centred around the figure of the liberal subject and which actively sought to promote notions of transparency and vigilance through the design and layout of urban spaces.¹⁵ Vernon, too, has been heavily influenced by Foucault’s writings on governmentality, especially those parts connected with the tracing and uncovering of the genealogical roots of different governmental categories and societal labels, and has recently used the concept of ‘hunger’ as a ‘critical locus’ for rethinking how contemporary forms of government

¹³ N. Rose, ‘Governing “Advanced” Liberal Societies’, in *Foucault and Political Reason*, pp. 41–42; N. Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 8.

¹⁴ See, M. Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864* (London, 1995); P. Joyce, *The Social in Question: New Bearings in History and the Social Sciences* (London, 2002); C. Otter, ‘Making Liberalism Durable: Vision and Civility in the Late Victorian City’, in *Social History* vol. 27, no. 1 (2002), pp. 1–15; S. Gunn, ‘Conference Report: Knowledge, Power and the City since 1700’, in *Social History* vol. 27, no. 1 (2002), pp. 59–63.

¹⁵ P. Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London, 2003). See also, P. Joyce, ‘What is the Social in Social History?’, in *Past and Present* vol. 206, no. 1 (2010), pp. 213–232.

and statecraft have emerged and changed in his 2007 publication *Hunger: A Modern History*.¹⁶

The relevance of these sorts of enquires to this piece of work is that, in the end, they are all concerned with thinking about the ways in which people, processes, and spaces become recognised and defined as both the objects and objectives of government, with particular attention paid to looking at the processes through which individuals have been ‘subjectified’ in modern societies.¹⁷ Indeed, as Mitchell Dean points out, one of the most important aspects of the governmentality literature is its ability to create a ‘novel thought-space across the domains of ethics and politics’ through the bringing together of what has been termed ‘practices of the self’ and ‘practices of government.’¹⁸ Foucault himself confirmed the importance of this weaving together of technologies of the self and technologies of the state in one 1982 interview in which he declared that the issue which was at the core of all his work on power and discipline was that of understanding ‘the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects.’¹⁹

Ultimately, then, it is at this level that my thesis most directly engages with and contributes to the current body of governmentality literature, focusing as it does on the processes through which modern individuals have been ‘subjectified’ by considering the

¹⁶ J. Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (London, 2007), pp. 2–3. See also, M. A. Cabrera, *Postsocial History: An Introduction*, trans., M. McMahon (London, 2004).

¹⁷ Foucault, ‘Governmentality’, pp. 214–220; T. Johnson, ‘Expertise and the State’, in M. Gane and T. Johnson (Eds.), *Foucault’s New Domains* (London, 1993), p. 141.

¹⁸ M. Dean, *Critical and Effective Histories*, p. 174. See also, T. Lemke, ‘Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique’, Paper presented at the “Rethinking Marxism Conference”, University of Amherst (21–24 September 2000), pp. 1–4.

¹⁹ M. Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, in *Critical Inquiry* vol. 8, no. 4 (1982), pp. 777–795. See also, Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, p. 43.

ways in which they have been categorised into different groupings, endowed or deprived of certain rights, defined as having certain needs, and, perhaps most importantly, been constituted and rendered visible as coherent subjects in need of governing.²⁰ In particular, I have devoted a great deal of attention in this thesis to looking both at the different ideologies and discourses through which individual citizens were rendered into knowable and coherent domestic subjects with definable domestic needs and to evaluating the changing techniques and practices that the disparate collection of politicians, architects, scientists, planners, housing managers and local authority officials involved in the provision and maintenance of England's council estates used to cater to these needs.

At the same time, however, this thesis does differ somewhat from the sorts of works that social-theorists such as Rose and Dean have produced in that it is first and foremost a *historical* study rather than a *theoretical* one. As such, it is much more focused on specific historical situations and actors, looking at how broader governmental ideas were put into practice on particular estates and articulated by different organisations, than on grand, overarching socio-political trends. Consequently, my analysis tends not to be as 'neat' as in some of the more theoretically-inclined governmentality literature, which have a tendency to make grand, sweeping statements about whole eras or epochs based upon only a handful of sources.²¹ Instead, what my thesis affirms is that, at least

²⁰ See, H. Gutman, 'Rousseau's Confessions: A Technology of the Self', in L. H. Martin, H. Gutman and P. H. Hutton (Ed.), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michael Foucault* (Amherst, 1988), p. 107; R. Braidotti, 'Towards a New Nomadism: Feminist Deleuzian Tracks, or Metaphysics and Metabolism', in C. V. Boundas and D. Olkowski (Eds.), *Gilles Deleuze and the Theatre of Philosophy* (New York, 1994), p. 163; M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981–1982*, trans., G. Burchell (New York, 2005), pp. 3–6; N. Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London, 1990), p. 218.

²¹ This is a point that a number of critics have actually made in relation to the current body of governmentality literature, with the suggestion being that too much attention is given to language and

in the field of public housing, changes in outlooks often occurred in a much more piecemeal and haphazard manner at the local and historical specific level than more theoretically-inclined studies give credit for, with established ways of thinking and acting rarely just fading away and disappearing in the face of new ideas and approaches.²²

This thesis also differs from a great many of the other governmentality-inspired historical works in that it is focused upon developments in the twentieth-century, rather than the eighteenth or nineteenth. Conceptually at least, there are two main reasons why I felt it was important to contribute a study to this body of literature that was situated within this time-period. Firstly, the great emphasis that historians and social theorists have given to looking at both the formative years of the modern state, when ideas modern ideas about populations and citizenship first began to emerge, and the more recent rise of the so-called ‘post-modern’ or ‘post-social’ society, in which the authority of the state has been superseded by private and commercial interests, has meant that there has emerged, as James Vernon has recently noted, a ‘largely unexamined historical gap’ encompassing the mid-years of the twentieth century in this body of literature.²³ Secondly, and linked to the first point, by focusing on events taking place in England during the middle years of the twentieth-century, when support was at its

discourse and not enough to individual subjects. See, O’Malley, Weir and Shearing, ‘Governmentality, Criticism, Politics’, pp. 501-507; Gunn, ‘From Hegemony to Governmentality’, pp. 716–718; B. Curtis, ‘Taking the State Back Out: Rose and Miller on Political Power’, in *British Journal of Sociology* vol. 46, no. 4 (1995), pp. 575–589; R. Gagnier, ‘Methodology and the New Historicism,’ in *Journal of Victorian Culture* vol. 4, no. 1 (1999), p. 117; N. Abercrombie, *Class, Structure and Knowledge* (Oxford, 1980), p. 176; C. Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800–1910* (London, 2008), p. 16.

²² Poovey, *Making a Social Body*, 52.

²³ Vernon, *Hunger*, p. 14. See also, T. Judt, *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century* (London, 2008); B. Beavan and J. Griffiths, ‘Creating the Exemplary Citizen: The Changing Notion of Citizenship in Britain 1870-1939’, in *Contemporary British History* vol. 22, no. 2 (2007), pp. 204–205.

highest for the ideal of the welfare state, this thesis is also able to contribute to our wider understandings of how social democracy actually *functioned* in twentieth-century Britain.²⁴

Overall, then, what this thesis principally takes from the burgeoning body of governmentality literature is the idea that before being governed or regulated an individual, in whatever situation, must first be thought of and identified as being in need of governing. In the context of public housing, this meant that before becoming embroiled in the provision of public housing it was first necessary for the state to identify and categorise the prospective tenant as a figure endowed with certain domestic needs that required assistance from the state. By tracing the ways in which these ideas changed between 1920 and 1970, this thesis provides a historically specific case-study of one arena within which the English state was actively involved in the welfare of its citizens and, thereby, contributes to our wider understandings of the changing ways in which the twentieth-century individual was targeted, made visible and rendered as a social subject.

Writing the History of Public Housing in England

From a historical perspective, there is a need for a study of this nature because up until now there has been far too little consideration given to the changes that have taken place in the way that the figure of the prospective tenant has been conceptualised and acted

²⁴ See, J. Vernon, 'The Local, the Imperial and the Global: Repositioning Twentieth-century Britain and the Brief Life of its Social Democracy, Roundtable: Twentieth-century British History in North America', in *Twentieth Century British History* vol. 21, no. 3 (2010), pp. 404–418; F. Mort, 'Scandalous Events: Metropolitan Culture and Moral Change in Post-Second World War London,' in *Representations* vol. 93 (2006), pp. 106–137.

upon in England. Instead, most historical studies of public housing in England have tended to be written from a fairly conventional socio-political standpoint, looking at housing policies, housing finance, and architectural trends, but paying little attention to changing notions of housing need.²⁵ Moreover, there has, as Keith Jacobs has noted in a recent paper, been far too little attention paid to how ‘individual subjectivity affects the way in which public housing is understood and consumed,’ with the figure of the council estate tenant too often treated as an unproblematic, historically-stable subject.²⁶ This thesis bucks this trend by returning the figure of the prospective tenant back to the centre of the analysis in a bid to better understand *who* exactly politicians, architects, planners, housing managers and local authority officials thought they were providing for.

Academically, the first historical study of any real note on public housing in England was Marion Bowley’s 1945 monograph *Housing and the State*. Published in the final months of the Second World War, her work was, unsurprisingly, very much written with one eye on the present, with the primary aim being to assist politicians in the reconstruction effort by offering them an overview of the economics and legislations of the interwar years so that they might learn from the mistakes of the past.²⁷ This desire to contribute to contemporary debates over housing legislation has continued to influence the way in which historians and academics from other fields have approached the

²⁵ A point made in, M. J. Daunton (Ed.), *Councillors and Tenants: Local Authority Housing in English Cities, 1919–1939* (Leicester, 1984), pp. 1–38.

²⁶ K. Jacobs, ‘Subjectivity and the Transformation of Urban Spatial Experience’, in *Housing, Theory and Society* vol. 19 (2002), pp. 102–111. See also, C. Gurney, ‘Lowering the Drawbridge: A Case Study of Analogy and Metaphor in the Social Construction of Home-Ownership’, in *Urban Studies* vol. 36, no. 10 (1999), pp. 1705–1722; P. Shapely, *The Politics of Housing: Power, Consumers and Urban Culture* (Manchester, 2007), p. 2.

²⁷ M. Bowley, *Housing and the State, 1919–1944* (London, 1945). See also, L. F. Orbach, *Homes for Heroes: A Study of the Evolution of British Public Housing, 1915–1921* (London, 1977).

history of public housing in England.²⁸ For instance, in the 1982 study *The Future of Council Housing*, edited by John English, all of the essays were focussed on ‘the implications of government policies’ in the hope that this would allow the volume to ‘make some contribution to more informed debate about housing policy.’²⁹

In more recent works especially, this compulsion to diagnose and critique the interventions made by the British government into the public housing sector has resulted in the publication of a number of studies that have explicitly sought to explain why exactly public housing in England has ‘failed’.³⁰ Anne Power’s 1987 study *Property before People*, which looks at the historical roots of housing management in England, is typical in this respect, with an introduction declaring that the chief reason why council housing had ‘failed’ was because it had been inadequately managed and a conclusion that outlines a series of suggestions for how to go about rectifying this situation; including proposals such as breaking down estates into manageable units, fixing problems quickly and encouraging community development.³¹ Alice Coleman has been similarly committed to uncovering the failings of public housing in England, claiming in her 1985 study *Utopia on Trial* that the reason why there was no ‘consensus as to the cause’ of the ‘housing crisis’ was because there had been ‘no real factual evidence to sift out the true from the false.’³² Even in Alison Ravetz’s far more critically-engaged 2001 study *Council Housing and Culture* it is still suggested that

²⁸ A point made in, A. D. Cochrane, ‘The Social Construction of Urban Policy’, in G. Bridge and S. Watson (Eds), *A Companion to the City* (Oxford, 2000), p. 531.

²⁹ J. English (Ed.), *The Future of Council Housing* (London, 1982), p. i.

³⁰ This is perhaps most evident in L. Hanley’s recent study, *Estates: An Intimate History* (London, 2007).

³¹ A. Power, *Property Before People: The Management of Twentieth-Century Council Housing* (London, 1987), pp. xv–xvi and 240–244.

³² A. Coleman, *Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing* (London, 1985), p. 1.

‘British council housing was a social experiment whose story affords an opportunity to anatomise a major policy failure.’³³

Similar assumptions inform Patrick Dunleavy’s 1981 study *The Politics of Mass Housing*, which takes a slightly different line of approach to the aforementioned studies by applying a structuralist approach to the UK housing market so as to uncover and evaluate the influence that private building contractors and construction companies had wielded over the public housing sector.³⁴ Ian Cole and Robert Furbey adopt a similar sort of perspective in their 1994 book *The Eclipse of Council Housing*, focusing heavily on economic trends and evaluating the ways in which ‘market interests’ had impacted upon public housing provision.³⁵ Likewise, in Stephen Merrett’s 1979 study *State Housing in Britain* there is a similarly strong economic bent to the analysis, which is unsurprising given that the author is a trained economist who had, up until that point, spent all his working life studying applied economic research.³⁶ Yet, despite these differences in approach, the overriding priority in these studies continues to be centred upon ascertaining and diagnosing the reasons behind the ‘failure’ of the public housing project in England, with the hope being that these findings might assist in ‘the development of a comprehensive housing policy.’³⁷

³³ A. Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture: The History of a Social Experiment* (London, 2001), p. 8.

³⁴ P. Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain 1945-1975: A Study of Corporate Power and Professional Influence in the Welfare State* (Oxford, 1981).

³⁵ I. Cole and R. Furbey, *The Eclipse of Council Housing* (London, 1981), pp. 3–6.

³⁶ S. Merrett, *State Housing in Britain* (London, 1979), p. xv. See also, S. Lowe and D. Hughes (Eds.), *A New Century of Social Housing* (Leicester, 1991), p. 2; A. E. Holmans, *Housing Policy in Britain: A History* (London, 1987); G. Towers, *Shelter is Not Enough: Transforming Multi-Storey Housing* (Bristol, 2000); J. Tickell, *Turning Hopes into Homes: A Short History of Affordable Housing* (London, 2005).

³⁷ Merrett, *State Housing*, pp. 302–303.

This enduring fixation upon the ‘failures’ of council housing in England has proved to be problematic for two main reasons. Firstly, it has encouraged historians to produce overly polemical narratives that are so focused on condemning and criticising specific groups or individuals that they lose sight of the bigger picture; failing, as Peter Shapely has pointed out, to ‘consider the cultural context within which decisions were formed.’³⁸ Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the pressure to come up with decisive judgements and answers to the problems that have beset public housing in England has meant that too often there is very little actual critical engagement with the sorts of criteria that are being used to assess council estates nor any real consideration given as to the historical specificity of different ideas of ‘success’ and ‘failure’.³⁹

By focusing first and foremost upon the assumptions and understandings that have underpinned public housing provision in England between 1920 and 1970, especially in terms of how the domestic needs of the prospective tenant have been conceptualised, this thesis not only overcomes these methodological problems, but also reveals how as ideas about the domestic subject changed so too did the sorts of categories used to assess council housing projects. Thus, during the interwar period, when the figure of the prospective tenant was primarily understood as a physiological being with set biological needs, housing schemes were predominantly judged and evaluated in terms of space and cleanliness, with a healthy home considered to be a good home. By contrast, during the 1950s and 1960s, when more sociologically-informed notions of individual subjectivity were coming to the fore, the emphasis began much to be focused on the wider

³⁸ Shapely, *The Politics of Housing*, p. 2.

³⁹ A point that is also made in Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, p. 4.

communal facilities available, with good housing schemes deemed to be those that provided ample social facilities for their inhabitants.

Another aspect in which this thesis differs significantly from much of the previous historical literature on public housing is in the prominence it attaches to the design and layout of England's council estates. For the most part, issues of this sort have received far too little attention from historians, who, as Mark Swenarton notes, have tended not to 'regard this as a matter that they are required to explain or take into account.'⁴⁰ Indeed, up until fairly recently most of the work on the design and layout of the twentieth-century council estate came either from organisations such as the English Heritage or the Twentieth Century Society, who wanted to ensure that housing schemes of 'architectural significance' were not destroyed, or from architectural historians working on the monographs of key twentieth-century architects; suffering in both cases from what Leif Jerram has described as a 'suffocating obsession' with 'star architects and a narrow cannon of buildings.'⁴¹

One of the first studies that tried to buck this trend was John Burnett's 1978 *A Social History of Housing*, which as Burnett himself explained sought to 'identify trends, measure changes and especially, to evaluate the quality of accommodation...available to the English people' between 1815 and 1970.⁴² Yet, despite the fact that Burnett's book broke new ground in terms of the level of attention it devoted to the practical and

⁴⁰ M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes: The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain* (London, 1981), p. 2. See also, A. Ravetz, *Remaking Cities: Contradictions of the Recent Urban Environment* (London, 1980), p. 30; Daunton (Ed.), *Councillors and Tenants*, p. 26.

⁴¹ L. Jerram, *Germany's Other Modernity: Munich and the Making of Metropolis, 1895-1930* (Manchester, 2007), p. 9. For some examples of these sorts of work see, E. Harwood and A. Powers, *Taylor and Green Architects 1938-1973: The Spirit of Place in Modern Housing* (London, 1988); K. Powell, *Powell and Moya* (London, 2009); A. Powers, *Adlington, Craig and Collinge* (London, 2009); E. Denison, *McMorran and Whitby* (London, 2009).

⁴² J. Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815-1985: Second Edition* (London, 1986), p. 278.

physical changes that had taken place in the shape of the English home, there was still hardly any consideration given to the ideas and assumptions underpinning these designs, nor any thought given to how ideas about *who* was to live in these houses altered over this period, with the figure of the prospective tenant conspicuous only by their very absence.

The first serious attempt to link questions of design of with questions of policy was made by Mark Swenarton who, firstly, in his 1981 *Homes for Heroes* and, more recently, in *Building the New Jerusalem* (2008), has sought to show how the British government endeavoured to prevent revolution and ‘ensure the survival of the status quo’ during the interwar years through the provision of spacious new council estate homes.⁴³ In a similar vein, Miles Glendenning and Stefan Muthesius have in their 1994 book *Tower Block* attempted to record and analyse the ‘political driving forces’ that have impacted upon the design of post-1945 council estates; looking at the ‘personalities involved and the way they acted’ in a bid to uncover the ‘feelings, attitudes, opinions, convictions and motivations’ that have ‘prompted the enunciation of specific theories, directions of research, images and ways of designing.’⁴⁴ Alison Ravetz has also contributed a great deal to debates over public housing design, firstly through her pioneering 1980 study *Remaking Studies*, in which she demonstrates how the council estate home ‘was the product of a certain ‘style’ embodying deeply held social attitudes towards the environment,’ and, more recently, in both *The Place of Home* (1995) and *Council Housing and Culture* (2001), in which she seeks to show, through

⁴³ Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, pp. 191–195. See also, M. Swenarton, *Building the New Jerusalem: Architecture, Housing and Politics 1900–1930* (Watford, 2008), pp. 18–19.

⁴⁴ M. Glendenning and S. Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland* (Yale, 1994), pp. 324–325.

looking at changing architectural trends in conjunction with developments in housing policy and housing management practice, how much of a contribution English public housing has made to twentieth-century material culture and working class life.⁴⁵

Yet, despite the insights that these more recent studies have provided in terms of our knowledge of changing architectural ideals, there is still far too little consideration given to thinking about how changes in the design and layout of the council estate dwellings were also premised upon shifting ideas about what prospective tenants' *needed* from a home.⁴⁶ Likewise, there has also been no real attention given to thinking about how spaces can, in practical and material terms, be used to directly alter the conduct and behaviour of people, as, for instance, was the case during the interwar period when council estate designers sought to discourage drinking amongst tenants by limiting the number of pubs available and by providing increased facilities for alternate, less 'disreputable' leisure activities like gardening.⁴⁷ This thesis goes about redressing these issues by focusing upon the changing ways in which those involved in the design and layout of the council estate conceptualised the people they were charged with providing homes for, looking both at how their designs were intended to encourage the

⁴⁵ Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, pp. 3–7; A. Ravetz with R. Turkington, *The Place of Home: English Domestic Environments, 1914–2000* (London, 1995), pp. 13–15. For a similar study see, S. Lowe, *Housing Policy Analysis: British Housing in Cultural and Comparative Context* (Basingstoke, 2004).

⁴⁶ A point also made in, F. Mort and M. Ogborn, 'Transforming Metropolitan London, 1750–1960', in *Journal of British Studies* vol. 43, no. 1 (2004), p. 4.

⁴⁷ For more on how space can influence the way we experience the world around us see, L. Jerram, 'Kitchen Sink Dramas: Women, Modernity and Space in Weimar Germany', in *Cultural Geographies* vol. 13 (2006), p. 539; J. R. Short, 'Three Urban Discourses', in *A Companion to the City*, p. 19; M. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans., S. Rendall (London, 1984), pp. 98–117; R. Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London, 1991), p. 18; G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How we Experience Intimate Places*, trans., M. Jolas (London, 1964), pp. 46–48; K. Heatherington, 'In Place of Geometry: The Materiality of Place', in K. Heatherington and R. Munro (Eds.), *Ideas of Difference: Social Spaces and the Labour of Division* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 183–199; S. Eden and J. W. Crampton (Eds.), *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography* (London, 2007), pp. 1–9.

tenant to act in certain ways and how they were produced in response to shifting ideas about the domestic needs of the prospective tenant.

Finally, this thesis also contributes to the history of housing management practice in England by analysing both official housing management documentation, such as tenancy handbooks and regulations, and the actual tactics employed by housing managers and estate supervisors during this period. Again, this has been an area in which far too little attention has been given to the figure of the prospective tenant, with most historical studies of housing management instead opting to focus on shifts in legislation and practice.⁴⁸ The result, as David Clapham has pointed out, is that there has been almost no thought given to either the ‘taken-for-granted assumptions of housing managers themselves’ or ‘the language deployed and the meanings which this carried.’⁴⁹ This thesis goes some way to addressing these issues by bringing the figure of the prospective tenant back to the centre of the analysis, showing in the process how the punitive and draconian tactics initially adopted by housing managers and estate supervisors gradually came to be replaced by more ‘client-centred’ and egalitarian tactics as ideas about domestic need altered over the course of this period.

To reiterate then, there is a need for a thesis of this nature because, although there has been a great deal of historical writing about public housing in England, there has up

⁴⁸ See, Power, *Property Before People*; Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, pp. 183–191; W. Bines, *Managing Social Housing: Summary and Recommendations* (London, 1993); P. Kemp and P. Williams, ‘Housing Management: A Historical Perspective’, in Lowe and Hughes (Eds.), *A New Century of Council Housing*, pp. 121–141; P. Gallagher, ‘The Ideology of Housing Management’, in J. English and D. Clapham (Eds.), *Council Housing: Current Trends and Future Developments* (London, 1982), pp. 132–154.

⁴⁹ D. Clapham, ‘The Social Construction of Housing Management Research’, in *Urban Studies* vol. 34, no. 5 (1997), pp. 761–764. See also, J. Flint, ‘The Responsible Tenant: Housing Governance and the Politics of Behaviour’, in *Housing Studies*, vol. 19, no. 6 (2004), pp. 893–910; S. Damer, ‘“Engineers of the Human Machine”: The Social Practice of Council Housing Management in Glasgow, 1895–1939’, in *Urban Studies*, vol. 37, no. 11 (2000), pp. 2007–2026.

until now been very little thought given to the manner in which council estate tenants were actually identified and conceptualised as subjects in need of state-funded housing. Instead, most of the literature has been devoted to looking at, and dissecting the failures of, central housing policy and estate layout in the hope of being able to contribute to current debates over housing provision. My thesis goes some way towards redressing this historiographical imbalance by bringing to the fore the main forms and practices through which the domestic needs of the prospective tenant were defined, assessed, measured and met over the period, showing in the process how ideas about housing need were neither static nor uncontested.

The Roots of Public Housing in England

Before proceeding on to discuss the estates and locales under investigation in this thesis it is both useful and necessary to provide a brief outline of the historical roots of public housing in England as there can sometimes be a certain amount of confusion over what exactly is being referred to when discussing ‘public housing’ in this country. Of particular importance is the need to recognise that, unlike in most other European countries, the majority of social housing in Britain and Ireland has historically been provided and managed directly by local authorities, subject to central government financial constraints, rather than through non-profit landlords or charitable housing associations.⁵⁰ It is for this reason that I have used the term ‘public housing’ throughout this thesis, which refers exclusively to a form of housing tenure in which the property is

⁵⁰ See, P. Emms, *Social Housing: A European Dilemma?* (Bristol, 1990); C. G Pooley (Ed.), *Housing Strategies in Europe, 1880-1930* (Leicester, 1992); G. McCrone and M. Stephens (Eds.), *Housing policy in Britain and Europe* (London, 1995).

owned directly by a government authority (central or local), rather than the more all-encompassing category of ‘social housing’, which is commonly used to refer to any sort of affordable housing be it government-owned or otherwise.

Whilst on the topic of terminology, it is also necessary to reiterate that this is a study of *English* public housing rather than *British* public housing.⁵¹ This distinction needs to be made because there were great variations in how public housing was provided and managed in England, Scotland and Wales during the twentieth century. For one thing, many of the Housing Acts passed in England did not apply to Scotland as she retained her own separate legal system under the Act of Union, resulting in a much higher proportion of corporation housing being built than in England or Wales.⁵² Likewise, localised tastes, economic circumstances, and patterns of living have also produced very different looking public housing schemes in Scotland and Wales which have their own histories and, as such, deserve to be studied on their own terms.⁵³

Historically, the chief motivating factor for the English state’s involvement in the provision of public housing has been a general belief that the private market by itself is incapable of providing adequate accommodation for all.⁵⁴ The roots of this outlook can be traced back to the middle years of the nineteenth century when, as Stephen Merrett notes, the full extent of the deplorable and dangerous living conditions that prevailed in

⁵¹ On the general need for British historians to more clearly distinguish between ‘England’, ‘Britain’ and the ‘UK’ in their work see, P. Levine, ‘Decline and Vitality: The Contradictions of and Complexities of Twentieth-Century Britain: Roundtable: Twentieth-century British History in North America,’ in *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 21, no. 3 (2010), p. 403.

⁵² Holmans, *Housing Policy in Britain*, p. 4.

⁵³ See, Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, pp. 2–5; J. Alfrey, ‘Themes and Sources for Public Housing in Wales’, in E. Harwood and A. Powers (Eds.), *Housing the Twentieth-Century Nation: Twentieth-Century Architecture 9* (London, 2009), pp. 69–86.

⁵⁴ See, C. Pooley, *Local Authority Housing: Origins and Developments* (London, 1996), p. 5.

many of England's poorest areas first became apparent to the ruling classes.⁵⁵ The most pressing problems were undoubtedly in the inner-city areas where overcrowding and pollution was becoming rife as the number of workers flocking to the cities in search of work rapidly increased.⁵⁶ The statistics alone give some sense of the scale of the problem, with life expectancy at birth, for instance, dropping in England's largest cities from thirty-five years in the 1820s to twenty-nine in the 1830s.⁵⁷

In response to these appalling living conditions, a great number of policies and legislations relating to the regulation and maintenance of sanitary services were passed.⁵⁸ Particular concern was shown towards issues relating to water supplies and sewage disposal, with legislations such as the 1848 Health of the Towns Act permitting local authorities to raise funds through taxation to establish drainage and water-supply systems.⁵⁹ Emphasis was also placed upon ensuring that dwellings were spaced far enough apart to allow fresh air to circulate, with local authorities being granted the power to control the areas of open space around houses and the width of streets.⁶⁰ The culmination of these sorts of sanitary initiatives came with the passing of the 1897 Public Health Act which, amongst other things, gave local authorities the right to 'prevent the unhealthy use of existing houses and to remedy conditions that were

⁵⁵ Merrett, *State Housing*, pp. 2–5.

⁵⁶ See, P. Clark (Ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Vol. 2, 1540–1840* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 835; Rodger, *Housing in Urban Britain*, pp. 47–55; Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, pp. 56–57; E. Gaudie, *Cruel Habitations: A History of Working Class Housing* (London, 1978), pp. 100–102.

⁵⁷ See, S. Szreter and G. Mooney, 'Urbanisation, Mortality and the Standard of Living Debate: New Estimates of the Expectation of Life at Birth in Nineteenth-Century Cities', in *Economic History Review* vol. 51, no. 1 (1998), pp. 84–112.

⁵⁸ See, M. Daunton (Ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Vol. 3, 1840–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 2–6.

⁵⁹ F. B. Smith, *The People's Health, 1830–1910* (London, 1979), p. 198; Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, p. 21.

⁶⁰ Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p. 158; Daunton (Ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, pp. 5–6.

dangerous to health’, ‘demolish houses unfit for habitation’ and ‘clear areas of insanitary housing.’⁶¹

At the same time as the government was making these sanitary reforms a number of philanthropically-minded social reformers, businessmen and charitable trusts were, on their own initiative, also experimenting in providing affordable housing to the neediest workers. One of the earliest and most active of these organisations was the Peabody Trust, set up in 1862 by the London-based American banker George Peabody, who set up their first model housing estate in Spitalfields, Tower Hamlets, in 1864 and later established schemes at Greenman Street, Islington, and Shadwell, Wapping.⁶² Other important philanthropic trusts to emerge at this time included the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company (1863) and the Artisans’, Labourers’ and General Dwellings Company (1867).⁶³ Large-scale model housing schemes were also constructed by socially-conscious businessmen such as George Cadbury, at Bournville, and William Lever, at Port Sunlight, in this period.⁶⁴

Ultimately, however, these efforts had only a modest impact upon the overcrowded and insanitary conditions in England’s inner cities; revealing not only how great the housing problems really was, but also raising serious questions about the feasibility of leaving the housing of the working classes solely in the hands of the private sector.⁶⁵ In response, the government began pushing through a number of new housing legislations

⁶¹ Holmans, *Housing Policy*, p. 24.

⁶² See, Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, pp. 176–178; Peabody Trust, ‘History’ [Online]. Available at: ><http://www.peabody.org.uk/about-us/history/the-early-years-1865-1875.aspx>< [Accessed: 12 July 2011].

⁶³ See, Power, *Property Before People*, p. 15.

⁶⁴ See, S. M. Gaskell, *Model Housing: From the Great Exhibition to the Festival of Britain* (London, 1986), pp. 130–131; Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, pp. 177–183.

⁶⁵ See, R. Rodger, *Housing in Urban Britain 1780–1914* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 46–47.

which, although still falling someway short of making the housing of the poor an outright obligation, did place more emphasis on local authorities to become involved in housing provision in their municipalities. For instance, in the Cross Act of 1875 provisions were included that allowed local authorities to undertake slum clearance and gave them the right to build homes themselves, although any dwellings erected in this way were to be sold off again within ten years of completion.⁶⁶ The 1890 Housing Act further consolidated these principles, granting local authorities the right to erect houses outside of the slum clearance context and empowering them to make alter, enlarge or repair any existing insanitary housing.⁶⁷

Although in real terms these measures had little actual impact upon the housing market, with well under 0.5% of the national housing stock having been built by local councils prior to the First World War, they are nonetheless still of relevance to any study of public housing in England as they laid the groundwork and set the parameters for the sorts of interventions that were to take place in the post-First World War era. Above all else, they reflect the fact that the housing of the neediest was, largely as a result of the failures of private enterprise to deal with the housing problems, increasingly coming to be seen and accepted as a legitimate area within which the state could and should intervene in the lives of its citizens.

⁶⁶ Merrett, *State Housing*, pp. 26–27.

⁶⁷ Pooley, *Local Authority Housing*, p. 7; Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, pp. 183–185.

Public Housing in London, Manchester and Sheffield

In terms of a source base, this thesis is predominantly based on archival research carried out on public housing provision in three English cities: London, Manchester and Sheffield. The decision to focus on these three locales was based on a number of factors. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, all three were amongst England's biggest and most industrialised urban centres during the nineteenth century, comprising three of the six largest cities in England in 1851, with substantial concentrations of heavy industry and large working-class populations that were expanding all the time as more and more migrants came from the countryside looking for work.⁶⁸ As a result, the housing conditions in these three cities were amongst the worst in the country; providing graphic evidence of the private sector's incapacity to provide adequate housing for all and making the provision of public housing for the neediest a pressing and immediate problem in each city.

Unsurprisingly, given its sheer size and diversity, some of the most deplorable housing was to be found in London. Overcrowding, particularly in the central and eastern parts of the city, was especially rife, with one 1841 investigation into working-class housing revealing that in one back alley just off Tottenham Court Road there were 485 people crammed into just 27 houses.⁶⁹ Pollution too was a problem, particularly in the

⁶⁸ London was far and away the biggest, with 2,363,000 inhabitants by 1851. Manchester, with a population of 338,000, and Sheffield, with a population of 135,000, were the third and sixth biggest respectively. The other three cities in the top six were Liverpool, Birmingham and Leeds. See, Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p. 57.

⁶⁹ Figures quoted in, R. Porter, *London: A Social History* (London, 2000), pp. 324–325. See also, 'Housing Conditions in London', *Economic Journal*, vol. 27, no. 107 (1917), pp. 330–345; 'The Present Phase of the Housing Problem in London', in *Public Administration* vol. 8 (1930), p. 77; Building Centre, *Housing: A European Survey by the Building Centre Committee, Vol. I: England, France, Holland, Sweden, Denmark, Spain* (London, 1936), pp. 5–7; 'From Slums to Council Estates', in *New Blackfriars* vol. 37, no. 431 (1956), p. 58.

docklands where the factories and construction plants ‘spewed out a thick, obnoxious fog which discoloured houses, killed plants [and] contaminated the water.’⁷⁰ Taken together, these problems had a hugely damaging effect upon the health of London’s inhabitants, with outbreaks of epidemic diseases common and generally low life expectancies across the city.⁷¹

Living conditions in both Manchester and Sheffield were equally foul, with Manchester’s Officer of Health, Dr Leigh, declaring in 1868, for instance, that the City held an ‘unenviable position as one of the most unhealthy towns in the kingdom.’⁷² Indeed, at this time Manchester actually had the highest annual rate of mortality of any city in England, with outbreaks of infectious diseases such as smallpox, scarlet fever and typhus common, and when the British army came to the city in the 1890s looking for recruits for the Boer War they found that only 18% of the 11,000 citizens who volunteered were physically acceptable for army duty.⁷³ Overcrowding was also a major problem in Manchester, with visitors to the city such as Frederick Engels describing with horror the ‘irregular cramming together of dwellings in ways which defy all rational plan,’ and in the 1901 census it was found that 34,137 people were still living in overcrowded conditions.⁷⁴ Sheffield too, as a large manufacturing centre, was affected by health problems resulting from overcrowding, with the Registrar General, in an 1847

⁷⁰ G. Weightman and S. Humphries, *The Making of Modern London* (London, 2007), pp. 46–47. See also, J. White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: A Human Awful Wonder of God* (London, 2008), pp. 48–59.

⁷¹ See, M. Pugh, *State and Society: British Political and Social History 1870–1992* (London, 1994), pp. 40–45; Porter, *London*, pp. 313–317.

⁷² Quoted in, S. D. Simon, *A Century of City Government: Manchester, 1838–1938* (London, 1938), p. 166. See also, J. P. Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester: Second Edition* (London, 1970), pp. 28–29.

⁷³ Simon, *A Century of City Government*, pp. 191–192; Rodger, *Housing in Urban Britain*, p. 54.

⁷⁴ Engles is quoted in, E. D. Simon and J. Inman, *The Rebuilding of Manchester* (London, 1935), p. 5. See also, M. Harrison, ‘Housing and Town Planning in Manchester before 1914’, in A. Sutcliffe (Ed.), *British Town Planning: The Formative Years* (Leicester, 1981), p. 109.

assessment of national death-rate statistics, singling out the City for particular criticism.⁷⁵ Infant mortality was also a major problem, with one 1891 Report into overcrowding directly linking such incidents with poor living conditions; claiming that ‘it would be hard to find in any town poorer conditions of property and worse surroundings than are to be found in these central areas of Sheffield.’⁷⁶

Given the fact that all three cities suffered acutely from problems of overcrowding and insanitary accommodation, it is unsurprising to note that another common factor linking London, Manchester and Sheffield was that they were, prior to the First World War, amongst the most active municipal authorities in terms of public housing provision. In terms of output, London was certainly the most productive of the three; constructing impressive new estates at Boundary Street, in the East End, and at Millbank, beside the then new Tate Gallery, and taking major steps towards regulating and cleaning up the Capital’s sewage and utilities networks.⁷⁷ In total, they had by 1914 provided almost 10,000 houses and flats at a cost of just over £3 million.⁷⁸ The Manchester City Council were similarly progressive in responding to the housing problems in their city, obtaining a local Act of Parliament in 1867, which was the first to lay down guidelines that stipulated that lodging houses which were ‘unfit for human habitation’ could be closed without compensation to their owners, and appointing an ‘Unhealthy Dwellings Committee’ in 1885 to deal specifically with the dilapidated and insanitary dwellings in

⁷⁵ M. Walton, *Sheffield: Its Story and its Achievements* (Sheffield, 1948), p. 210. See also, V. S. Doe, ‘Some Developments in Middle Class Housing in Sheffield 1830–1875’, in S. Pollard and C. Holmes (Eds.), *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire* (Sheffield, 1976), pp. 174–176.

⁷⁶ Quoted in, R. Hebblethwaite, ‘The Municipal Housing Programme in Sheffield before 1914’, in *Architectural History*, vol. 30 (1987), pp. 144–145.

⁷⁷ See, R. Dennis, ‘Modern London’, in M. Daunton (Ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, pp. 100–116; K. Young and P. Garside, *Metropolitan London* (London, 1982), pp. 87–102.

⁷⁸ S. P. B. Mais, *Fifty Years of the LCC* (Cambridge, 1939), p. 55.

the city.⁷⁹ The Sheffield City Council was no less ambitious, making use of Part I of the 1890 Housing Act to deal with 5¼ acres of insanitary property in the Crofts district of the City and providing some 230 out-of-town houses on the High Wincobank Estate development.⁸⁰

The focus in this thesis, however, is on the public housing schemes that each of these three local authorities designed and constructed in the years after the First World War. The estates that I have predominantly focused on are: the Downham (1924), Lansbury (1949) and Lillington Gardens (1961) Estates in London, the Wythenshawe Estate (1927) in Manchester and the Park Hill (1957) Estate in Sheffield.⁸¹ Although other historians have written about these estates in some detail, more so for Park Hill and Wythenshawe and less so for the London ones, their work has, like so much writing on public housing, tended to be written from either a narrowly-defined politico-economic perspective, focusing primarily on issues surrounding local housing legislation and finance, or from a purely architectural stance, with the emphasis being on the aesthetic qualities of the estate layouts.⁸² As such, there has up until now been no real thought given to thinking about the deeper assumptions and outlooks informing the work of the local authorities in these three municipalities, and even less consideration given to looking at how they conceptualised the tenants under their jurisdiction.

⁷⁹ Simon and Inman, *The Rebuilding of Manchester*, pp. 10–17. See also, Harrison, ‘Housing and Town Planning in Manchester’, pp. 106–155.

⁸⁰ S. M. Gaskell, ‘Sheffield City Council and the Development of Suburban Areas Prior to World War I’, in *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire*, pp. 188–192.

⁸¹ The dates in brackets indicate when construction was started on each estate.

⁸² For more on the housing estates built in London see, J. Lever (Ed.), *Home Sweet Home: Housing Designed by the LCC and GLC Architects, 1888–1975* (London, 1976).

By contrast, in this thesis questions relating to the processes through which the figure of the prospective tenant has been conceptualised and acted upon have been at the forefront of my archival research. Moreover, because this thesis was not intended to be a comprehensive historical monograph of any particular estate, I was able to look beyond the official records and notes that were left by each of these three local authorities and bring into the analysis sources and evidence that had previously been neglected. Thus, I have at different points in my work taken evidence from tenant handbooks, the personal papers of architects and politicians, oral testimonies, Mass Observation reports and local newspaper coverage; seeking to explore in each case how the domestic needs of the figure of the prospective tenant were understood and presented.

As a final point on my archival research, the decision to incorporate evidence from both the years before the Second World War and the years after was based on two main factors. Firstly, the majority of work on local authority housing has tended to limit itself to either looking at developments in the interwar period or in the postwar era, meaning that there has up until now been little attention given to thinking about the mid-century period as a whole. Secondly, by providing a study that adopts a broader timeframe I hope to not only redress the chronological limitations of the current literature, but also provide a nuanced study that allows for the continuities and changes in policies, practices and experiences in the field of public housing, particularly as regards the changing ways in which the figure of the prospective tenant was conceptualised and

acted upon, to be traced and analysed; contributing in the process to our more general understandings of notions of subjectivity and selfhood in the twentieth-century.⁸³

Thesis Outline

In terms of structure, this thesis is part-chronological and part-thematic. Thus, in the first chapter the focus is on sanitary concerns and the impact that they had upon the ways in which the figure of the prospective tenant was conceptualised and acted upon by those involved in the provision and management of social housing during the 1920s and 1930s. Looking at the ways in which both the design and management of public housing was regulated by specific government legislation alongside the wider debates going on in political and architectural circles at this time, with particular emphasis upon the views and actions of figures such as Christopher Addison and Raymond Unwin and the events taking place on both the Wythenshawe and the Downham Estates, I show how sanitary concerns of the sort briefly mentioned above not only coloured the way in which politicians, government officials, architects and housing managers went about tackling the housing problem at this time, but also heavily impacted upon how they conceived of the domestic needs of the prospective tenant.

The second chapter then moves on to look at the emergence and expansion of technocratic research organisations in the interwar period and considers the impact that this had on the field of public housing, focusing once again on the manner in which the

⁸³ This is a point that has recently been made by B. Jones in, 'Slum Clearance, Privatization and Residualization: The Practices and Politics of Council Housing in Mid-twentieth-century England', in *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 21, no. 4 (2010), pp. 512–514.

figure of the prospective tenant was conceptualised and acted upon. Focusing largely on the BRS, a research organisation that has received far too little attention from both public housing historians and, more generally, from historians of modern Britain, it looks at both the relationships that developed between those in the scientific disciplines and those concerned with the provision of public housing along with the actual experimental work that was carried out by the BRS on issues relating to housing provision; revealing how there emerged at this time a growing interest in and acceptance of abstract and statistically-verifiable approaches to public housing provision.

The third chapter is centred on the 1940s, with the focus being on the so-called ‘utopian’ reconstruction plans and proposals that were being put forward at this time. Looking at both the debates that took place in architectural and political circles and the plans and proposals for the reconstruction of England’s bomb-damaged cities put forward at this time, focusing specifically on the work carried out by the London County Council (LCC) in Lansbury, it shows how, despite the lack of attention usually afforded to this era in historical narratives of public housing, the 1940s proved to be a major turning point in terms of changing attitudes towards the figure of the prospective tenant, with the biopolitical assumptions of the interwar era increasingly coming under scrutiny and a host of new ideas about the prospective tenant’s wider social and emotional domestic needs beginning to enter onto the radars of those involved in the provision of public housing in England.

The focus in the fourth chapter is on the increasing prominence of sociological ideas and approaches, particularly those related to the uncovering of public opinion, in governmental practices in the 1950s and 1960s and the impact that this had upon the

ways in which the domestic needs of the prospective tenant were identified and catered to. Looking first at the sociological work carried out on issues relating to public housing provision, with particular emphasis upon both the assumptions and ideas informing these investigations and the tactics, techniques and methods adopted, and then moving on to consider how these ideas impacted upon the way that council estates were designed in this period, using Park Hill in Sheffield as an example, it shows how far greater attention came to be given to the wider social and communal needs of the individual tenant as the heavily deterministic biopolitical tactics of the interwar years began to give way.

Finally, in the fifth chapter I turn my attention to thinking about how those involved in the provision of public housing responded to the shifting expectations and assumptions of the so-called 'affluent' 1950s and 1960s. Focusing on the debates taking place within architectural, political and housing management circles and looking at the shifts taking place in council estate design, I show how newly emerging market-orientated ideas about the role of the state and the rights of the citizen proved to have profound effects upon the way that those involved in the provision of public housing in the 1950s and 1960s conceived of and dealt with the figure of the prospective tenant; resulting in greater efforts being made to improve the standard of the council estate dwelling and in far more attention being given to the individual wishes and personal preferences of the prospective tenant.

Ultimately, what this thesis reveals, then, is that understandings of the figure of the prospective tenant changed dramatically between 1920 and 1970, reflected most clearly in the fact that notions of domestic 'needs' fluctuated so greatly over this period. Largely conceived of in narrowly sanitary terms as a subject whose needs were

principally physiological and biological during the interwar period, the council estate tenant had by the 1970s come to be reconfigured into a far more complex subject with needs and aspirations that were at once physical, social, personal and emotional. These deeper transformations in outlook were, I argue, significant not only because they clearly demonstrate how notions of the self are inherently unstable and, thus, liable to change over time, but also because they profoundly influenced how those involved in the provision of public housing acted upon and provided for the council estate tenant; shaping the twentieth century English public housing experience in the process.

1. Sanitary Concerns: Housing and Health

*'The promotion of sanitation and public health is far from being a purely medical province; it is linked up intimately with the whole of the life and the activities of the citizen.'*⁸⁴

*'Where the home is insanitary and cheerless, the temptations to intemperance are increased. Where there are insufficient rooms to separate sexes, immorality is the natural result.'*⁸⁵

*'Biopolitics will derive its knowledge from, and define its power's field of intervention in terms of, the birth rate, the mortality rate, various biological disabilities, and the effects of the environment...biopolitics deals with the population, with the population as political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power's problem.'*⁸⁶

On the 11 April 1919, less than six months after the end of the First World War, the National Housing and Town Planning Council arranged for a meeting to take place at Buckingham Palace so that those concerned with the welfare of the British population could come together and start making plans for how to go about tackling the postwar housing situation. Throughout questions of a sanitary nature were very much to the fore, with King George V, who was keen to stress his personal commitment to resolving the situation, declaring in the main speech that, 'a great offensive must be undertaken

⁸⁴ 'Public Health', in *Town Planning Review*, vol. 13, no. 2 (1928) p. 91.

⁸⁵ R. Reiss, *The Home I Want* (London, 1920), p. 6.

⁸⁶ Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, p. 245.

against disease and crime, and the first point at which the attack must be delivered is the unhealthy, ugly, overcrowded houses in the mean streets which we all know so well.’⁸⁷

Similar concerns over the unhygienic conditions that prevailed in England’s worst inner-city residential areas were expressed in the speech that Walter Long, former President of the Local Government Board, delivered, in which it was pointed out that ‘to let our men come from the horrible waterlogged trenches into something little better than pigsties would indeed be criminal.’⁸⁸

Historically, this preoccupation with issues of dirt and disease is one that has been well discussed in the literature on public housing in England. For instance, in Marian Bowley’s *Housing and the State* it is suggested that for interwar politicians ‘the housing problem was the slum problem, the problem of people living in insanitary conditions,’ while in John Burnett’s *A Social History of Housing* it is noted that ‘the housing evil which aroused the greatest concern among reformers, moralists and, ultimately, legislators, was the extent of overcrowding in the great towns.’⁸⁹ A number of reasons have been put forward to explain this infatuation with issues of overcrowding and sanitation. Some, such as Anne Power, have suggested that it was a fear of social unrest and a desire to maintain the status quo that prompted politicians and social reformers to try and improve these overcrowded and inhospitable living conditions, while historians such as Stephen Merrett have emphasised the capitalist logic underpinning these

⁸⁷ Bodleian Library, MSS.Addison.Dep.c.146 (Addison Papers), ‘Notes on Speeches Delivered at National Housing and Town Planning Council Meeting’ (11 April 1919), pp. 205–206.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁸⁹ Bowley, *Housing and the State*, p. 3; Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p. 144. See also, J. Davies, ‘Central Government and the Towns’, in Daunton (Ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, pp. 273–274; J. Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (London, 1999), p. 31; S. M. Gaskell, ‘“The Suburb Salubrious”: Town Planning in Practice’, in Sutcliffe (Ed.), *British Town Planning* (Leicester, 1981), p. 18; Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, p. 22; D. Crouch and C. Ward, *The Allotment: Its Landscape and Culture* (Nottingham, 1997), p. 193; Orbach, *Homes for Heroes*, p. 49.

sanitary concerns, suggesting that the main goal was to ensure that the workforce remained healthy and productive.⁹⁰ Further explanations have included a growing fear amongst social reformers over the extent to which immorality, drinking, crime and promiscuity was present in these overcrowded areas.⁹¹

Yet, up until now, what has often been overlooked in previous accounts of both the public housing and the anti-slum movements is the issue of how exactly these post-First World War social reformers actually conceptualised and conceived of the people who lived in these deplorable conditions. Likewise, there has been little critical attention given to thinking about how the domestic needs of the figure of the interwar council estate tenant were conceived of, with the assumption seemingly being that their needs and wants were so obvious and self-evident that they are not worth even discussing. This next chapter goes some way towards redressing this imbalance by looking at the impact that sanitary concerns had upon the ways in which the figure of the prospective tenant was conceptualised and acted upon by those involved in the provision and management of social housing during the 1920s and 1930s. Beginning by briefly summarising and restating some of the main sanitary concerns of the Victorian era, this chapter then moves on to look at the extent to which politicians carried forward these sorts of ideas into the interwar period. The following section then looks at the extent to which architects and designers were influenced by similar sorts of sanitary ideas,

⁹⁰ For those that have focused on fears of social unrest see, Power, *Property Before People*, p. 22; Cole and Furbey, *The Eclipse of Council Housing*, p. 5; Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, pp. 191–192. For those that have focused on monetary and market factors see, Merrett, *State Housing*, p. 61; Davies, ‘Central Government and the Towns’, pp. 273–275; Rodger, *Housing in Urban Britain*, pp. 66–67; J. H. Treble, *Urban Poverty in Britain, 1830–1914* (London, 1979), pp. 171–178.

⁹¹ See, S. Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 38–42; A. Wohl, ‘Sex and the Single Room: Incest Among the Victorian Working Classes’, in A. Wohl (Ed.), *The Victorian Family: Structure and Stresses* (New York, 1978), pp. 197–216; Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p. 93; Smith, *The People’s Health*, p. 195.

focusing in particular upon the work of Garden-City enthusiasts such as Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker. Finally, in the last section I look at how far concerns over unhygienic conditions impacted upon the housing management professions in London and Manchester, looking in particular at how they conceived of and acted upon the tenants under their supervision.

Overall, what this chapter shows is that sanitary concerns and fears over overcrowding not only coloured the way in which politicians, government officials, architects and housing managers went about tackling the housing problem at this time, but also heavily impacted upon how they conceived of the domestic needs of the prospective tenant. Above all else, this was reflected in the great emphasis that was placed upon the individual's biological and physiological needs, with the overwhelming priority being to ensure that each tenant was provided with clean and structurally-sound housing in green and spacious surroundings. Furthermore, this infatuation with questions of cleanliness and hygiene also meant that housing managers came to prioritise the physiological and sanitary needs of the council estate tenant over any other potential issues, with severe restrictions imposed over anything that threatened the health and well-being of the individual or social body.

The Politics of Sanitary Reform

The Slum and the Slum-Dweller

As the diverse collection of essays in the wide-ranging *After The Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Britain* (1994) so masterfully demonstrate, Victorian social and political ideas were able to exert a strong and lasting influence over

intellectuals, politicians and social reformers well into the twentieth century.⁹² Nowhere was this more in evidence than in the field of public housing where fears over overcrowding and insanitary conditions continued to prevail during the early years of the twentieth century; providing the intellectual foundations upon which the housing legislations of the interwar period were based.⁹³ The purpose of this first section, then, is to briefly look back at these pre-First World War fears over bad housing provision, laying bare the sorts of issues, concerns and assumptions that tended to dominate so as to get a clear sense of the intellectual foundations upon which those involved in the provision of public housing during the interwar period were to later base their approaches to the figure of the prospective tenant.

No discussion of pre-twentieth century housing reform would be complete unless it took account of the issue of the 'slum'. First coined, according to Simon Gaskell, in the 1840s as 'the grim consequences' of the rapid urbanisation of the previous century started to manifest themselves through the 'blockages in the circulation of water and wastes' and the 'stagnation of foul cess pits and graveyards', the 'slum' quickly became synonymous with phrases such as 'rookeries', 'fever-dens', 'little-hells', 'devil's acres' and 'dark purlieus'.⁹⁴ Dark, damp, and dirty it was, as historians such as Lynda Nead and Judith Walkowitz have suggested, feared as being a disordered and dangerous place

⁹² P. Mandler and S. Pedersen (Eds.), *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain: Essays in Memory of John Clive* (London, 1994). See also, S. Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850-1930* (Oxford, 1991).

⁹³ See, J. N. Tarn, *Five-per-cent Philanthropy: An Account of Housing in Urban Areas between 1840 and 1914* (Cambridge, 1973), p. xiv; Gaskell, 'The Suburb Salubrious', p. 17; Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, p. 22.

⁹⁴ Gaskell (Ed.), *Slums*, p. 3. See also, L. Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven, 2000), pp. 160–184; J. R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London, 1992), pp. 15–34; Otter, *The Victorian Eye*, pp. 60–67; Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, pp. 73–89; F. Driver, 'Moral Geographies: Social Science and the Urban Environment in Mid-Nineteenth Century England', in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 13 (1988), pp. 275–287.

where the moral and sanitary reforms of the age had failed to penetrate.⁹⁵ Moreover, thanks to the writings of Victorian social reformers, writers, and journalists, the conditions in these rundown and overcrowded inner-city residential districts were brought home to a mass-audience in lurid detail for the first time.⁹⁶

Of particular concern to nineteenth century social reformers were the insanitary conditions that prevailed in these areas, with great fears expressed over the harmful effects that slum environments were having upon the health of England's population.⁹⁷ For instance, in the Health of the Towns Commission's 1840 report into inner-city housing conditions it was demonstrated through maps and diagrams that incidents of death and disease were higher in more overcrowded areas.⁹⁸ At the same time, the public were also being provided with graphic descriptions of the 'living nastiness and offensive living matter which we have been content to allow to accumulate in [our] streets...matters not only offensive, repulsive, and pernicious when viewed in detail, but in their aggregated masses acting to the deep permanent injury of mankind in general' through publications by writers and philanthropists like the Reverend Andrew Mearns and the Reverend S. G. Osborne and through the widely surveys of London poverty carried out by the *Pall Mall Gazette*.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ As Simon Gaskell notes, the slum was 'not only physically separate, its inhabitants were a race apart whose characters were judged akin the most primitive form of humankind, or worse.' Gaskell (Ed.), *Slums*, p. 3.

⁹⁶ See, D. Trotter, *Circulation: Defoe, Dickens and the Economies of the Novel* (London, 1988), p. 73; H. J. Dyos and M. Wolff (Eds.), *The Victorian City: Vol. II* (London, 1973), p. 612.

⁹⁷ See, Rodger, *Housing in Urban Britain*, pp. 44–56; Trotter, *Circulation*, p. 73; R. J. Dennis, *English Industrial Cities in the Nineteenth Century: A Social Geography* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 48; E. Gaudie, *Cruel Habitations: A History of Working Class Housing* (London, 1978), pp. 100–102.

⁹⁸ See, Rodger, *Housing in Urban Britain*, pp. 44–56.

⁹⁹ S. G. Osborne, 'Immortal Sewerage', in *Meliora* 2 (1853), p. 7, quoted in Trotter, *Circulation*,

Yet, as historians such as Richard Rodger have noted, there was also a moral angle to the increased attention that came to be shown towards the living conditions in England's slums during this period.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, insanitary conditions were often seen not to just to breed disease and death, but also to encourage promiscuity, deviancy, intemperance and criminality. Popular accounts by writers such as Charles Dickens and philanthropists such as Arthur Morrison provided graphic accounts of these debased conditions, sparking fears over the extent of criminal activity that was taking in England's poorest inner-city areas.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, these accounts would often have sexual overtones, as the presence of too many bodies in too little space was seen to encourage prostitution and other immoral sexual acts.¹⁰² Indeed, as historians of Victorian leisure have noted, there was a pervasive sense amongst nineteenth-century politicians and social reformers that poor living conditions naturally encouraged debased behaviour, with working-class leisure imagined to constitute little more than drinking, being noisy and fighting.¹⁰³

Although many of the images conjured up in these sorts of accounts of slum life were, inevitably, over-sensational and not always representative of the conditions that the vast majority of England's workers actually lived in, they nonetheless are still worthy of

p. 73. See also, Dennis, *English Industrial Cities in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 48; Gauldie, *Cruel Habitations*, pp. 100–102; A. Mearns and W. C. Preston, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry Into the Condition of the Abject Poor* (London, 1883).

¹⁰⁰ See, Rodger, *Housing in Urban Britain*, pp. 2–3; Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, p. 163; Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p. 79; Treble, *Urban Poverty*, p. 171; Gaskell (Ed.), *Slums*, pp. 3–5; Driver, 'Moral Geographies', pp. 275–285.

¹⁰¹ See, A. Morrison, *A Child of the Jago* (London, 1896); C. Dickens, *Hard Times for These Times* (London, 1854). Other popular accounts included: Rev. A. O. Jay, *Life in Darkest London* (London, 1891); J. Greenwood, *The Seven Curses of London* (London, 1869).

¹⁰² See, Koven, *Slumming*, pp. 88–140; Wohl, 'Sex and the Single Room', pp. 197–216; Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 22.

¹⁰³ See, R. W. Malcolmson and M. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700–1850* (Cambridge, 1973); P. Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England* (London, 1978); B. H. Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815–72* (London, 1971); G. Stedman-Jones, 'Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London, 1870–1900; Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class', in *Journal of Social History*, vol. 7, no. 4 (1974), p. 463.

attention because of the prominent coverage they secured, both officially and otherwise, for housing and domestic issues that might otherwise have remained unreported; providing ‘imaginative force to the real and alarming crisis’ in the housing market and ‘bringing a variety of problems together into a single frame of reference and uniting otherwise disparate issues in a way which justified action and intervention.’¹⁰⁴ As a result, by the turn of the century the slums, and the problems associated with them, had for many social reformers become wholly synonymous with the housing problem, leading one 1907 writer to declare that ‘the slum [was] the physical embodiment of the housing evil.’¹⁰⁵

One particularly intriguing aspect of the emergence of the slum as a social problem was the extent to which it was premised on an inherently deterministic understanding of man’s relationship with his environment. Inspired in part by the evolutionary theories of natural scientists such as Darwin and Galton, many of the writings on the problem sought to present people’s bodily features and physiological attributes as being reflective of the environmental conditions in which they had been brought up in, with the assumption being that insanitary conditions had the potential to produce a physically deficient and enfeebled race.¹⁰⁶ Seebohm Rowntree, the pioneering social reformer, was especially insistent in this respect, suggesting in his hugely influential 1901 report *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* that ‘the necessity of improving the surroundings of the

¹⁰⁴ Daunton (Ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, p. 1. See also, Rodgers, *Housing in Urban Britain*, pp. 54–55.

¹⁰⁵ E. R. Dewsnup, *The Housing Problem in England: Its Statistics, Legislation and Policy* (Manchester, 1907), p. 227. See also, R. Lambert, *Sir John Simon 1816–1904 and English Social Administration* (London, 1963), p. 50; A. S. Wohl, *The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London* (Montreal, 1977), pp. 48–50.

¹⁰⁶ See, P. Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (London, 1989), pp. 327–328; G. Procacci, ‘Social Economy and the Government of Poverty’, in Burchell et al. (Eds.), *The Foucault Effect*, pp. 151–168; Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, pp. 115–118.

slum dweller is urgent, for it is Nature's universal law that all living things tend to adapt themselves to their environment.'¹⁰⁷

As a result, therefore, a situation developed in which, as Martin Daunton has shown, dirt, darkness and overcrowding became the absolute enemies of society; understood and treated as evils that impaired and undermined the strength of the national body.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, conditions in the slums were often imagined to be so horrific that there was also a fear that they could have seriously harmful effects upon mental well-being of the individual, with social reformers such as Reverend S. G. Osborne claiming that in the slums 'there are moral miasmas just as there are physical. The mind, the soul of man, can be just as polluted as to its springs of healthy life by external, removable causes, as can the human physical constitution.'¹⁰⁹ In other words, then, mind and body were seen to be one and the same as both were contingent upon physical factors and both required sustenance from natural sources.¹¹⁰ The upshot of this perspective was that nineteenth-century social reformers and politicians increasingly came to the conclusion that if the appalling insanitary conditions that were so prevalent in England's inner-cities could be successfully dealt with then the English population would naturally not only become healthier and stronger, but also happier, better behaved, harder working, temperate, more intelligent and generally more well-rounded.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ B. S. Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (London, 1901), p. 158.

¹⁰⁸ Daunton (Ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, pp. 1–4.

¹⁰⁹ Osborne, 'Immortal Sewerage', p. 7.

¹¹⁰ See, Koven, *Slumming*, pp. 184–192; D. E. Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation and the City* (London, 1995), pp. 93–95.

¹¹¹ H. Jones, *Health and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London, 1994), p. 7.

Housing Legislation and Sanitary Concerns

The purpose of this next section is to look at the extent to which the sorts of biopolitical assumptions discussed above were carried forward into political debates over housing provision in the interwar period. Focusing heavily on Christopher Addison, who probably did more than any politician in this period in terms of laying the foundations for interwar public housing, I investigate how far the legislation passed in the immediate years after the First World War continued to be premised on the assumption that the productivity, character and moral fortitude of the individual citizen were inherently connected to their surroundings. Ultimately, what my work reveals is that, despite being pioneering in terms of the powers they conferred upon local authorities, the housing legislations passed in the immediate years after the First World War remained very much grounded in the sorts of biopolitical frameworks that had dominated in the latter half of the nineteenth century, with the assumption being that the needs of prospective tenants could best be satisfied through the provision of clean and sanitary homes.

So far as public housing provision is concerned, it is clear that a great many interwar politicians continued to be fearful of the effects that the sorts of slum conditions discussed above were having on the health and well-being of the population.¹¹² Addison, in particular, was fully aware of the horrific conditions that prevailed in many of England's industrial cities having served as MP of the Hoxton division of Shoreditch in 1907; an area referred to by the local police force as 'Darkest Hoxton' as it was so renowned for its poverty and depravity, with Charles Booth declaring it to be 'the

¹¹² For more on these general fears see, F. Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830: Second Edition* (London, 2000), pp. 129–139.

leading criminal quarter of London, and indeed all of England.’¹¹³ Other politicians from right across the political spectrum were similarly horrified by the working-class housing in England’s largest industrial cities, with figures such as Joseph Chamberlain, David Lloyd George, Edwin Andrew Cornwall, and Robert Morant all at different times condemning the state of the housing market in England.¹¹⁴

Yet, it is to Addison that I first want to turn as he was, first in his role as Minister of Reconstruction (1917–1919) and then later as Minister of Health (1919–1921), probably the most influential voice in debates over public housing in the immediate years after the First World War.¹¹⁵ Brought up in rural Lincolnshire, Addison had been educated in medicine first at Trinity College, Harrogate, before going to attend the Sheffield Medical School.¹¹⁶ Appointed as the first holder of the Arthur Jackson Chair of Anatomy in 1897, he quickly established himself within medical circles, becoming a member of the British Medical Association’s Advisory Committee in May 1911, appointed to the Tuberculosis Commission in February 1912 and, from 1914 onwards, playing an active role in the Medical Research Committee.¹¹⁷ Moreover, right from the start he placed great emphasis upon the idea of preventative sanitary reforms, arguing that rather than just dealing with medical issues when they became manifest in epidemics and outbreaks of ill-health, medical practitioners needed to take a more active

¹¹³ C. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London: 1st Series: Poverty* (London, 1902), p. 353. See also, B. Magee, *Clouds of Glory: A Hoxton Childhood* (London, 2004).

¹¹⁴ See, Pugh, *State and Society*, pp. 109–117; F. Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (Yale, 2010), p. 4.

¹¹⁵ See, M. J. Daunton (Ed.), *Housing the Workers: A Comparative History 1850–1914* (Leicester, 1990), pp. 2–38.

¹¹⁶ J. R. Minney, *Viscount Addison: Leader of the Lords* (London, 1958), p. 102.

¹¹⁷ See, K. and J. Morgan, *Portrait of a Progressive: The Political Career of Christopher, Viscount Addison* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 2–5.

interest in putting in place measures that would make such outbreaks less likely.¹¹⁸ Consequently, he was a keen supporter of the 1911 National Insurance Bill and, after being appointed as a member of the government's Tuberculosis Commission in February 1912, devoted a great deal of his time to looking at the environmental causes of tuberculosis.¹¹⁹

Just like his nineteenth-century predecessors, Addison also considered good physical health to be vital not just for the well-being of the individual citizen but also for the vitality and strength of the nation as a whole; explicitly linking the body of the individual with the body of the nation. Indeed, as was the case with so many of his contemporaries, Addison believed that if Britain was to remain a dominant player in the global arena then she had to first ensure that her citizens were fit and healthy; reminding the audience at the inaugural sessional address at the National School of Pharmacy that, 'our national strength ultimately resides in the vitality, independence, initiative and character of individual citizens.'¹²⁰ Furthermore, Addison was also of the belief that healthy workers were not only more productive, but also less likely to engage in immoral and deviant activities; even going so far as to claim in that 'national health is of supreme and vital importance as one of the foundations of well-being...and that

¹¹⁸ See, Bodleian Library, AP.MSS.Addison.Dep.c.217.75 (Addison Papers), C. Addison, 'The Health of the People and How it May be Improved', A Speech Delivered at the Whitehall Rooms (6 February, 1914), p. 10; C. Addison, 'Untitled Draft of Speech on Reconstruction Given to the Conference of Workmen's Associations at the Albert Hall Manchester (22 November, 1919); C. Addison, 'The Part of the State in the Prevention of Disease', reprinted from *the West London Medical Journal* (July, 1921), p. 2.

¹¹⁹ C. Addison, *Four and a Half Years: A Personal Diary from June 1914 to January 1919: Volume I, 1914–1916* (London, 1934), pp. 18–19.

¹²⁰ Bodleian Library, AP.MSS.Addison.Dep.c.217 (Addison Papers), C. Addison, 'School of Pharmacy Inaugural Sessional Address (2 October, 1918)', reprinted in *The Pharmaceutical Journal and Pharmacist* (5 October, 1918), p. 8. For more on concerns over Britain's place in the world order at this time see, J. Davies, *A History of Britain, 1885–1939* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 65–69.

without it all effort towards morality, enlightenment or a sane and well-ordered political future is grievously handicapped.’¹²¹

Biopolitical assumptions of this sort were, thanks in no small part to the lobbying of Addison, at the core of the pioneering 1919 Housing and Town Planning Act, which for the first time made it a duty for local authorities to ‘make provision for the housing needs of their district.’¹²² A separate Additional Powers Act was also passed which made central funds available for house-building, stipulating that any losses beyond the one-penny rate that local authorities incurred whilst building new houses were to be borne by the Exchequer.¹²³ Measures were also put in place which empowered the state to intervene and assume responsibility for house building if any local authorities proved incapable of tackling such problems.¹²⁴ Ultimately, the hope was that these legislations would enable local authorities to effectively intervene in the housing sector and begin providing some of the 300,000 to 400,000 new houses which the wartime coalition government admitted were needed at that time.¹²⁵

Significantly, responsibility for supervising local authority house-building was placed in the hands of the newly created Ministry of Health (Ministry of Health), which was headed by Addison and which sought to bring together and consolidate under a single

¹²¹ Bodleian Library, AP.MSS.Addison.Dep.d.6 (Addison Papers), MoR, ‘Public Health I: A Survey’, in *Reconstruction Problems*, vol. 23 (1919), p. 1.

¹²² National Archives, CAB 24/76, nos. 6901–700 (Records of the Cabinet Office), ‘Housing Bill’ (19 March 1919), p. 46.

¹²³ Bodleian Library, AP.MSS.Addison.Dep.c.147 (Addison Papers), ‘The New Act’, in *Housing* vol. 1, no. 3 (16 August, 1919), pp. 33–34. See also, M. Ball, M. Harloe and M. Martens, *Housing and Social Change in Europe and the USA* (London, 1988); G. McCrone and M. Stephens, *Housing and Policy in Britain and Europe* (London, 1995); A. Power, *Hovels to High Rise: State Housing in Europe since 1850* (London, 1993).

¹²⁴ Bodleian Library, AP.MSS.Addison.Dep.c.147 (Addison Papers), ‘The New Act’, in *Housing* vol. 1, no. 3 (16 August 1919), pp. 33–34.

¹²⁵ Bodleian Library, AP.MSS.Addison.Dep.d.6 (Addison Papers), MoR, ‘Housing in England and Wales’, in *Reconstruction Problems*, vol. 2 (1918), p. 9.

authority all of the medical and public health functions of central government; reflecting above all else how issues relating to public housing were still predominantly conceived of as being ‘largely of a Public Health and sanitary nature.’¹²⁶ Indeed, it was actually Addison’s great hope that the 1919 Act would actually act as a catalyst for bringing about and encouraging greater cooperation between medical experts and government officials, resulting in far greater responsibility and authority being placed into the hands of medical experts and sanitary officials than had been the case prior to the First World War.¹²⁷

Great emphasis was also placed upon the physiological and biological needs of the individual, with Addison asking every local authority to work in collaboration with and make use of the expertise of local medical and sanitary officials when assessing the housing needs of their constituencies.¹²⁸ On top of this, the elimination and prevention of insanitary conditions continued to be of paramount importance, with measures put in place to ensure that local authorities would be able to easily provide a clean and efficient water supply to residential districts, while special dispensations were also made so as to make extra funds available should local authorities feel the need to purchase extra land ‘on account of the sanitary condition of the premises thereon or of those premises being dangerous or prejudicial to health.’¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Bodleian Library, AP.MSS.Addison.Dep.c.146 (Addison Papers), ‘Minute Sheet: Stages of Housing Schemes’ (6 May 1919), p. 56.

¹²⁷ Bodleian Library, AP.MSS.Addison.Dep.c.147 (Addison Papers), C. Addison, ‘County Medical Officers of Health’, in *Housing*, vol. 1, no. 5 (1919), p. 69.

¹²⁸ Bodleian Library, AP.MSS.Addison.Dep.c.147 (Addison Papers), ‘Survey’, in *Housing*, vol. 1, no. 5 (1919), p. 63.

¹²⁹ MoH, *Housing and Town Planning Act 1919* (London, 1919), sections 9 and 18.

In other words, then, it is evident that underpinning the 1919 Act was a strongly deterministic and biopolitical notion of the prospective tenant which had its roots very much in the previous century, with the emphasis continuing to be centered upon protecting and promoting the bodily health and physical well-being of the individual subject so as to make them efficient and orderly workers.¹³⁰ As such the priority remained centered on the elimination of insanitary conditions and the prevention of overcrowding, with the assumption continuing to be that if one could secure good, clean and sanitary living conditions for the poorer classes then not only would they become healthier and more efficient, but also better behaved, less immoral and generally more content.

Designing for the Sanitary Subject

The Garden City Ideal

As the previous section highlighted, for interwar politicians like Addison the housing problem was primarily conceived of as a sanitary one, with the emphasis overwhelmingly centred on the prevention of filth and disease. What this next section shows is that fears over unhygienic conditions and overcrowding were just as rife amongst the architectural and planning professions during the interwar period, with the chief priority being to eliminate and prevent the slums. Focusing primarily on the views and opinions of those figures who were involved in or inspired by Ebenezer Howard's Garden City Movement, this next section demonstrates how in the eyes of a great many

¹³⁰ See, M. Foucault, 'Right of Death and Power over Life', in P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, pp. 260–262.

interwar architects and planners the only way to tackle England's housing problems lay with the provision of brand new, well-lit, ventilated and spacious cottage-estate dwellings in out-of-town surroundings; reflecting the fact that they too conceived of the figure of the prospective tenant largely in environmental terms.

Founded in 1899 by Ebenezer Howard to promote the principles of garden city planning in Britain and around the world, the Garden City Association, which had over 1,300 members by 1902, was made up of a disparate collection of wealthy industrialists, politicians, architects, planners and academics who all in their own way were interested in Howard's ideas about architecture and town planning.¹³¹ Although, as a number of historians have pointed out, some of the more radical elements of Howard's proposals tended to get diluted as the movement expanded, the basic ideas that informed his 1898 treatise *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (later reissued as *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*) remained essentially the same.¹³² In particular, his basic notion that the only way to tackle the overcrowding in England's inner-cities was to move the people out into the countryside and rehouse them in purpose-built Garden Cities, each providing accommodation for up to 32,000 people and providing all the amenities of the city but in a healthy rural setting, proved to have an enduring appeal.¹³³

¹³¹ See, R. Beevers, *The Garden City Utopia: A Critical Biography of Ebenezer Howard* (London, 1987), pp. 72–80; P. Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: Third Edition* (London, 2002), pp. 97–101; R. Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier* (New York, 1977); K. Parsons and D. Schulyer, 'From Garden City to Green City: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard', in *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, vol. 23, no. 2 (2003), pp. 213–215. Some of the more famous members included George Cadbury, Joseph Rowntree, Neville Aneurin Williams, Barry Parker, Raymond Unwin, Alfred Russel Wallace, and George Bernard Shaw. The Garden City Association later became (and still is) the Town and Country Planning Association.

¹³² S. V. Ward (Ed.), *The Garden City: Past, Present and Future* (London, 1992), pp. 3–9.

¹³³ Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, pp. 93–97.

Of particular importance to Howard was the need to ensure that every citizen was provided with ample open green space and opportunities to get out into the countryside, suggesting that all future Garden Cities should come complete with ‘beautifully and well-watered’ public parks liberally spread throughout each new Garden City scheme.¹³⁴ Underpinning this emphasis upon greenery was a supposition that fresh air, sunlight, greenery and natural landscapes were not only aesthetically more beautiful to look at, but were also hugely beneficial to the individual’s health and well-being. In part, this belief was based upon the results of contemporary medical research, which had often attributed outbreaks of disease in the inner-cities to a lack of fresh air and sunlight.¹³⁵ At the same time, however, Howard also had a heavily romantic sense that the countryside was good for the soul or spirit of man, declaring that ‘the country is the symbol of God’s love and care for man...our bodies are formed of it; to it they return...it is the source of all health, all wealth, all knowledge.’¹³⁶ Taken together, these two strands of thought helped elevate the natural environment to a position of extreme importance, with greenery, fresh air and sunlight coming to be seen as essential to the individual’s, and ultimately the nation’s, bodily and spiritual health.

The first attempt to apply Howard’s ideas was made in 1903 when the newly formed First Garden City Ltd commenced the building of an experimental town with a target population of 33,000 on 3,818 acres of land at Letchworth. The two architects appointed to design the new town were Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker, who were not only keenly interested in the Garden City Movement but, like Howard, were also strong

¹³⁴ E. Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow: New Revised Edition with an Introduction by Ray Thomas* (Eastbourne, 1985), p. 22.

¹³⁵ See, Dauntton (Ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, pp. 5–8.

¹³⁶ Howard, *Garden Cities*, pp. 17–18.

believers in the beneficial and healing properties of the natural environment.¹³⁷ Unwin in particular was inspired by the pastoral ideas of writers such as William Morris and John Ruskin (both of whom he heard give lectures while studying in Oxford), declaring some years later that ‘my early days were influenced by the musical voice of John Ruskin...and later by the more robust personality of William Morris, and his crusade for the restoration of beauty to daily life.’¹³⁸ Likewise, Parker, who had been raised in Chesterfield and educated at the Simmons Art Studio in Derby, was similarly fascinated by the Arts and Crafts ideas of Ruskin and Morris and was resolute in his belief that ‘nature can and does teach us more than any work of man.’¹³⁹ Bucolic ideals of this sort were central to their work on the Letchworth project. All commercial and industrial areas were strictly separated from the residential districts, so as to ensure that each house was afforded enough space and sunlight, and great care was taken over the landscaping of the whole project.¹⁴⁰

The pair were also offered the chance to put their pastoral ideas into practice on the New Earswick Estate, near York, by the philanthropically-minded Joseph Rowntree. Again, their subsequent design bore all the hallmarks of the Garden City Movement’s ideals, with the prime concerns being to ensure that all cottages were amply spaced out so as to ensure that people could have enough room ‘to carry on the business of life

¹³⁷ As Parker put it, ‘I remember well how attracted to Howard I was, and how completely sympathetic we were in our aims and views.’ ‘Interview with R. Barry Parker’, in *Letchworth Citizen* (5 March, 1943), quoted in S. Meacham, ‘Raymond Unwin 1863–1940: Designing for Democracy in Edwardian England,’ in Pedersen and Mandler (Eds.), *After the Victorians*, p. 91.

¹³⁸ Quoted in, Swenarton. *Building the New Jerusalem*. 95. See also, F. Jackson, *Sir Raymond Unwin: Architect, Planner and Visionary* (London, 1985), p. 9.

¹³⁹ B. Parker and R. Unwin, *The Art of Building a Home: A Collection of Lectures and Illustrations* (London, 1901), p. 26.

¹⁴⁰ M. G. Day, ‘The Contribution of Sir Raymond Unwin and R. Barry Parker to the Development of Site Planning Theory and Practice, 1890–1918’, in Sutcliffe (Ed.), *British Town Planning*, pp. 174–176.

freely and with pleasure’ as well as ‘to secure around the house the air space requisite for health.’¹⁴¹ Thanks in no small part to these sorts of well-publicized commissions, Unwin and Parker both, as historians such as Standish Meacham have shown, went on to become increasingly influential voices in debates over housing and town planning in the early years of the twentieth century.¹⁴² Unwin, who became increasingly interested in political issues related to planning, entered government as the Chief Town Planning Inspector for the Local Government Board in 1914, while a few years later Parker was invited to work on the Jardim America Garden suburb in São Paulo, Brazil, where he stayed until 1919.¹⁴³

For the purposes of this thesis, however, figures such Unwin and Parker are of interest primarily because they provide windows through which to gain an insight into the intellectual and discursive climate of the period, enabling us to better understand how architects and planners conceived of the figure of the prospective tenant at this time. What emerges from both theirs and their Garden City compatriot’s work and writings above all else is a sense that the health, productivity, morality, and efficiency of the individual citizen were ultimately dependent upon environmental factors, with Parker boldly declaring in one 1901 publication that ‘the influences which our common everyday surroundings have upon our characters, our conceptions, our habits of thought and conduct are often very much underrated.’¹⁴⁴ As such, the views of Garden City

¹⁴¹ B. Parker, ‘Our Homes’, reprinted from *The Building News* (1895), quoted in, D. Hawkes, *Modern Country Homes in England: The Arts and Crafts Architecture of Barry Parker* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 120. See also, S. Meacham, *Regaining Paradise: Englishness and the Early Garden City Movement* (London, 1999), pp. 11–40; Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, p. 60.

¹⁴² Meacham, ‘Raymond Unwin 1863–1940’, p. 85.

¹⁴³ See, Swenarton, *Building the New Jerusalem* pp. 4–7; J. W. R. Whitehand and C. M. H. Carr, ‘The Creators of England’s Inter-War Suburbs’, in *Urban History*, vol. 28, no. 2 (2001), p. 219.

¹⁴⁴ Parker and Unwin, *The Art of Building a Home*, p. 1.

enthusiasts like Parker and Unwin were able to sit very comfortably with those of politicians like Addison; lending further credence to the idea that the prospective tenant should be treated solely as a biological subject with certain core physiological needs.

The Interwar Council Estate House

The sorts of Garden City-inspired ideas and ideals discussed in the previous section are of relevance to my thesis not only because they chimed so closely with those of the late-nineteenth sanitary reformers, but also because they were central to interwar debates over the shape and layout of the public housing provision. Indeed, as historians such as Alison Ravetz have argued, Howard's Garden City proposals was perhaps the principal guiding source for those involved in designing the interwar council estate.¹⁴⁵ What this next section demonstrates is that this continuing interest in Howard's work proved to be important not simply for practical and aesthetic reasons, but also because it meant that many of the assumptions and understandings underpinning his work, particularly in respect of how the domestic needs of the figure of the prospective tenant were conceptualized, were also carried forward into the interwar period.

A large part of the reason why Howard's Garden City ideals remained so influential in the interwar period was because they found such an able and influential mouthpiece in Raymond Unwin.¹⁴⁶ In terms of public housing, perhaps his most significant contribution came with the publication of the findings of the Tudor Walters Committee in November 1918. Chaired by John Tudor Walters, a Liberal MP, and including

¹⁴⁵ Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, pp. 81–83; Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, pp. 189–194.

¹⁴⁶ See, Swenarton, *Building the New Jerusalem*, pp. 66–76.

amongst its members such notable figures as Sir Aston Webb and William Hayes, the Committee had been established by Addison (now Minister of Reconstruction) the previous year to look into the layout and standards to be adopted in post-War housing schemes. Their subsequent Report was groundbreaking not only because it called for the obligatory state provision of housing via local authorities, but also because it set such high minimum living standards for working-class dwellings in a bid to ensure that any homes built would ‘continue to be above the accepted minimum’ for ‘at least 60 years.’¹⁴⁷

For the purposes of this thesis, however, the Tudor Walters Report is of particular interest because it is so heavily laden with the sorts of sanitary ideals discussed in the previous sections, with many passages bearing all the hallmarks of Unwin’s pastoral outlook.¹⁴⁸ Amongst other things, it recommended that every house should be provided with an outside coal shed and a detached bathroom, thus both removing and containing possible sources of dirt and disease. Likewise, overcrowding (and all the accompanying evils it brought with it) was to be eliminated through the provision of separate bedrooms and storage space. On top of this, strict recommendations were laid out in respect of external space, with the Report stipulating that houses should be built at no more than 12 to the acre in urban areas and 8 to the acre in rural ones with a minimum of 70ft between opposing houses.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Local Government Board: Tudor Walters Committee, *Report Of The Committee Appointed...To Consider Questions Of Building Construction In Connection With The Provision Of Dwellings For The Working Classes...andC.* (London, 1918), paragraph 27.

¹⁴⁸ As Mark Swenarton writes; ‘It was the brain and hand of Unwin more than any other member that moulded the structure and argument of the Report.’ Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, p. 93.

¹⁴⁹ LGB, *Report of the Committee*, paragraph 28.

These sorts of sanitary recommendations were also supported by those of the Ministry of Reconstruction's Women's Housing Sub-Committee, which had been established by Addison in 1918 to 'find out the relative importance of different questions from the housewife's point of view'.¹⁵⁰ Chaired by Lady Emmott, an active social reformer and the first woman to be elected to the Oldham Board of Guardians, their Report also put great emphasis on isolating and containing unhygienic activities, suggesting that there should be a separate room where the 'dirty work' of laundry and cooking could be done, and also advised that all houses should be fitted with the most up to date hot-water boilers, electric fittings and appliances, and central heating systems.¹⁵¹ Indeed, issues of cleanliness and hygiene were prevalent throughout the Report, with one of the Committee members declaring that 'from the point of view of the housewife the question of the health of the family predominates over all others.'¹⁵²

Thanks to Addison's backing, the recommendations of these two Committees were quickly absorbed into official government legislation. The Local Government Board's 1919 *Manual on the Preparation of State-Aided Housing Schemes* was especially influenced by their findings, favouring in unequivocal terms the sorts of detached and semi-detached cottage-style homes so beloved by Unwin and Parker. Essentially, local authorities were offered two types of layout: 'Class A Homes' contained a living room, scullery, larder, fuel store, WC, separate bathroom, and three bedrooms, while the

¹⁵⁰ Bodleian Library, AP.MSS.Addison.Dep.c.108 (Addison Papers), MoR, Women's Advisory Committee, 'Record Of Proceedings Of The First Meeting' (21 October 1918), p. 244.

¹⁵¹ Bodleian Library, AP.MSS.Addison.Dep.c.120 (Addison Papers), MoR, 'Advisory Council: Women's Housing Sub-Committee, First Interim Report', (1919), Cd. 9166, pp. 4-7.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

‘Class B Home’ was identical apart from the fact that it included a parlour.¹⁵³ Likewise, sanitary concerns were again to the fore, with the guidelines stipulating that housing units were to be carefully arranged so that each family was provided with ample sunlight and space and that all sewers and drainage pipes were to be laid beneath ground out of harm’s way.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, these guidelines were expected to be strictly adhered to, with Addison declaring that he would ‘not be prepared to approve schemes which show deviations from the standard specification, except in so far as to suit the particular circumstances of each scheme.’¹⁵⁵ Significantly, the responsibility for approving the plans put forward by local authorities and issuing new directives through publications such as the government journal *Housing* was placed in the hands of the Ministry of Health’s Housing Department, thus enabling Unwin, who was at this time Chief Architect of the Department, to exert even more influence over the appearance of the interwar council estate home.¹⁵⁶

As a result of this close supervision, the sorts of sanitary ideas and ideals that Howard had outlined at the start of the century continued to exert a very strong influence well into the interwar period. Indeed, as Mark Swenarton has shown, one of the chief characteristics of the housing revolution in this period was the extent to which it was based upon and inspired by publications by designers like Howard and Unwin and official documents like the Tudor Walters Report.¹⁵⁷ This was important not only for aesthetic reasons, but also because it meant that the sorts of assumptions about the

¹⁵³ LGB, *Manual on the Preparation of State-Aided Housing Schemes* (London, 1919), pp. 8–10. The Manual did also permit 2 and 4 bedroom houses as well as bungalows, but only in exceptional cases.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 5–7.

¹⁵⁵ ‘General Housing Memorandum 3’, in *Housing* vol. 1, no. 5 (1919), p. 69.

¹⁵⁶ ‘Housing Commissioners’, in *Housing*, vol. 1, no. 10 (1919), p. 131.

¹⁵⁷ Swenarton, *Building the New Jerusalem*, p. 10.

domestic subject that had underpinned these sanitary-minded works continued to hold sway into the interwar years as well, profoundly influencing the shape and layout of local authority council estates in this period as I go on to show in the next section.

The Local Authority Cottage Estate

Although, as Mark Swenarton demonstrated in his 1981 monograph *Homes Fit for Heroes*, there is no surviving evidence of any local authority in this period not conforming to the standards laid out by the Ministry of Health, it is still worth remembering that their guidelines were not totally all-encompassing.¹⁵⁸ What this next section does, then, is to look at how local authorities actually implemented these sorts of sanitary ideals in practice. Focussing primarily on the Downham Estate in London and the Wythenshawe Estate in Manchester, this next section shows how the sanitary concerns and biopolitical conceptions of domestic need discussed above were translated into built form through the construction of out-of-town cottage estates in which the emphasis was firmly centred upon providing ample sunlight, fresh air and greenery.

In terms of size and influence, the Wythenshawe Estate, a ‘courageous experiment of its kind and a model of forethought and planning to the rest of the world’, according to one contemporary, was the most significant council estate built by the Manchester City Council (MCC) in the interwar period.¹⁵⁹ Constructed on an area of undeveloped rural land to the south of the city near the village of Northenden, the estate was by 1939

¹⁵⁸ Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, p. 159.

¹⁵⁹ ‘50, 000 Houses Below a Reasonable Standard of Habitation: Manchester’s Problem of Slum Clearance and Rehousing’, in *Manchester Review*, vol. 1 (1936–38), p. 21. See also, A. Olechnowicz, ‘Civic Leadership and Education for Democracy: The Simons and the Wythenshawe Estate’, in *Contemporary British History*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2000), pp. 3–5.

home to around 35,000 people; compromising over a third of the City's interwar housing stock.¹⁶⁰ The site had been specifically recommended by Patrick Abercrombie, the influential town planner, who in a 1919 Report for the MCC's Housing Committee had declared it to be 'exceedingly attractive...a virgin land [with] an air of unspoilt rusticity which should and could be preserved.'¹⁶¹ These rural qualities proved particularly appealing to the MCC who, as was the case generally with local authorities in this period, placed great faith in the 'health-giving' and 'live preserving' of the natural world.¹⁶²

Given this high valuation of rural conditions, it is unsurprising to find that the MCC's Housing Committee were especially interested in the work of the Garden City Association. Nowhere was this more evident than in Wythenshawe, with Lady Sheena Simon, wife of Ernest Simon (chairman of the MCC's Housing Committee from 1919 to 1924) and herself a member of the Wythenshawe Estate Special Committee from its creation in 1926 (and its chairman from 1931 to 1933), even going so far as to claim that the new scheme was 'in the line of direct descent from Ebenezer Howard's original conception.'¹⁶³ Indeed, so enamoured were the MCC's Housing Committee with the Garden City movement that in August 1927 they appointed Barry Parker to be their

¹⁶⁰ A. Hughes and K. Hunt, 'A culture transformed? Women's lives in Wythenshawe in the 1930s', in A. Davies and S. Fielding (Eds.), *Worker's Worlds: Cultures and Communities in Manchester and Salford, 1880-1939* (Manchester, 1992), p. 80.

¹⁶¹ Manchester Archives, M14/1/1/1 (Papers of Lady Simon of Wythenshawe), 'Abercrombie Report' (10 March, 1920).

¹⁶² 'The Need for New Towns', in *Transactions of the Manchester Statistical Society* (1926), pp. 125-133. See also, Manchester Archives, M14/1/1/3 (Papers of Lady Simon of Wythenshawe), 'Memo by Housing Committee' (1920). For more on local authorities infatuation with the healing powers of the countryside see, Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, pp. 99-100.

¹⁶³ D. Macfadayen, *Sir Ebenezer Howard and the Town Planning Movement* (Manchester, 1933), pp. 144-146. Peter Hall has even gone so far as to suggest that we should see it as the third pre-World War II Garden City after Letchworth and Welwyn: P. Hall, *Urban and Regional Planning: Second Edition* (London, 1982), p. 55.

Chief Architect, charging him with the task of supervising the construction of the new Wythenshawe Estate.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, although, as Andrzej Olechnowicz has shown, the Simons were certainly fans of the Garden City aesthetic, it is important too to appreciate that they were just as interested in the sanitary qualities of Howard's work, with Ernest Simon praising that fact that his schemes enabled working-class families to be 'brought up as healthy as in the mansion of a millionaire' and reiterating the fact that the main task for any local authority was 'to secure the health and welfare of its citizens.'¹⁶⁵

The overall plan for the Wythenshawe Estate certainly bore all the hallmarks of this sort of sanitary thinking. For instance, all the houses were spaciouly laid out in cul-de-sacs set well away from the main roads and all industry was confined to two separate zones so as to ensure that the Estate remained 'practically smokeless.'¹⁶⁶ Likewise, parkland and open spaces were also carefully cultivated and strict planning guidelines, including an obligation for builders to replant any trees damaged in the construction phase, were laid down by the Wythenshawe Estate Special Committee so as to 'preserve all natural woodlands' and provide ample 'healthy open spaces and playing fields'.¹⁶⁷ Just as had been the case during the nineteenth-century boom in public park building, the assumption was that the greenery and open space offered in these areas would not only benefit the health of the individual but also spiritually improve them by affording them

¹⁶⁴ Manchester Archives, Council Minutes, WESC 1927–51, vol. 1, (4 August 1927), p. 5.

¹⁶⁵ 'The Satellite Garden Town', in *The Contemporary Review*, vol. 146 (1934), pp.402-403; 'Address by Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Freedom of the City of Manchester, 25 November 1959', in *Manchester Review* vol. 9 (1960), p. 4; Olechnowicz, 'Civic Leadership', pp. 9–11.

¹⁶⁶ 'Municipal Housing at Wythenshawe', in *Town and Country Planning* vol.1 (1933), pp. 75–76; Olechnowicz, 'Civic Leadership', p. 10.

¹⁶⁷ Manchester Archives, Council Minutes, WESC, vol. 1 (26 June 1928), p. 1; Manchester Archives, Council Minutes, WESC, (7 September 1931), p. 188.

the chance to witness first-hand the wonders of nature at work.¹⁶⁸ Significantly, the tenants who actually moved onto the Estate in this period seem to have responded positively to these efforts, with one group of former residents recollecting with pleasure how ‘fresh’, ‘clean’, ‘green’ and ‘open’ the new Estate was in comparison with the ‘grim streets’ of central Manchester.¹⁶⁹ The local press were similarly impressed with the efforts the MCC had gone to, with one reporter describing how ‘it is a pleasure to see thousands of families enjoying the freshness of the park on a summer evening’ and proclaiming the scheme to be a model of ‘healthy community living.’¹⁷⁰

By contrast, the Downham Estate, despite providing homes to over 29,000 people at a cost of £3,575,000, received much less attention from the local and national press in period. For the most part, this was a reflection of the fact that the LCC’s house-building programme was so much bigger than any other local authorities at this time. The figures themselves were staggering, with one 1920 Report on living conditions in London concluding that around 184,000 people still lived in ‘unhealthy areas,’ with a further half-million living in ‘unsatisfactory districts.’¹⁷¹ In response, an immediate five-year plan was produced by the LCC’s Housing Department in which they outlined their

¹⁶⁸ See, H. Conway, *People’s Parks* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 26–29; H. Jordan, ‘Public Parks, 1885–1914’, in *Garden History*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1994), p. 85; H. A. Taylor, ‘Urban Public Parks, 1840–1900: Design and Meaning’, in *Garden History*, vol. 23, no. 2 (1995), p. 218; Simon and Inman, *The Rebuilding of Manchester*, p. 161

¹⁶⁹ Wythenshawe Forum Writers, *Stories From Round And About Wythenshawe* (Manchester, 1998), pp. 58–71.

¹⁷⁰ Manchester Archives, M14/6/11.24 (Newspaper Clippings Relating to Wythenshawe, 1932–5) ‘A Report by Victoria Mills, in *The Evening Chronicle* (29 August 1934).

¹⁷¹ Bodleian Library, AP.MSS.Addison.Dep.c.217 (Addison Papers), *Housing*, vol. 2, no. 37 (6 December 1920), pp. 153–154.

intentions to re-house some 145,000 people in 29,000 new suburban dwellings, and publicly declared there to be a need for a further 80,000 more new dwellings.¹⁷²

Nevertheless, the LCC were not just concerned with numbers; they were also keen to improve the quality of housing in London, with C. Topham Forrest, the Chief Architect in the LCC's Housing Department, drawing up a series of commodious standard housing plans, subsequently employed on all of the LCC's cottage-estates during the interwar period, which were comfortably in line with the recommendations that had been laid out in the Tudor Walters Report.¹⁷³ On top of this, Topham was also keenly interested in the housing experiments at Letchworth and Welwyn, and sought as much as possible to mimic the ideals of the Garden City Movement in his work, declaring that 'in the interests of the health of the community, the additional housing accommodation should, wherever possible, be provided, not in already crowded areas, but rather in the open districts adjoining London...a more radical solution has been proposed, namely that of creating garden cities.'¹⁷⁴

As this last quote suggests, interest in the Garden City ideas expressed by figures such as Howard and Unwin was once again stirred by fears over the damage that the dirty and insanitary conditions of the inner-city was doing to the population of London. Again, these fears were of both a physical and a moral nature, with figures such as George H. Gater, the Clerk of the LCC, warning that:

¹⁷² See, Porter, *London*, pp. 326–327.

¹⁷³ Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, pp. 228–229.

¹⁷⁴ Bodleian Library, AP.MSS.Addison.Dep.c.217 (Addison Papers), *Housing*, vol. 2, no. 37 (6 December 1920), p. 154. See also, A. A. Jackson, *Semi-Detached London: Suburban Development, Life and Transport, 1900–39* (Didcot, 1973), p. 163.

Mental health and physical health go hand in hand, and the psychological effect of living in mean surroundings, in houses which are dark, damp and dilapidated, and where privacy and cleanliness are obtained with difficulty if at all, cannot be neglected in any attempt to assess the effect of faulty environment on the mental, moral and physical fibre of the occupants.¹⁷⁵

This horror over the conditions that prevailed in central London meant that the LCC's housing programme was comprehensively based around the building of out-of-town housing estates, with 16,178 out of 17,203 of all LCC building being done on cottage estates between 1919 and 1927.¹⁷⁶ By far the largest of these was built at Beacontree, which was home to some 120,000 people by 1939.¹⁷⁷ The second largest scheme built by the LCC in this period was at St. Helier, with a population of 40,000 people, closely followed by the Downham Estate in third.¹⁷⁸

Architecturally, the layout of the Downham Estate certainly also bore all the characteristics of the Garden City approach to planning, with houses laid out in cul-de-sacs lined by a double rows of tress and spread out at densities of eight houses to the acre.¹⁷⁹ Great emphasis was also placed upon securing enough open space for outdoor activities like tennis, bowls and badminton and efforts were made to 'preserve and protect' what greenery already existed on the site.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, the dwellings, each of which came equipped with a sun-lit living room, hot and cold running water, large

¹⁷⁵ LCC, *London Housing* (London, 1937), p. 13

¹⁷⁶ Power, *Property Before People*, p. 23

¹⁷⁷ See, A. Olechnowicz, *Working-Class Housing in England between the Wars: The Beacontree Estate* (Oxford, 1997).

¹⁷⁸ A. Black, 'The Building of the LCC Downham Estate, Southeast London', (Birkbeck College, MA Thesis, 1981), pp. 13–15.

¹⁷⁹ Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, pp. 90–97.

¹⁸⁰ London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/HSG/GEN/1/30 (Bellingham Estate: Development Correspondence), 'Letter from the Architect' (26 February, 1927).

gardens, and separate bath and toilet - were designed in a vernacular cottage style that was very much reminiscent of that adopted at Letchworth.¹⁸¹

Overall, then, it is clear that both the Downham Estate and the Wythenshawe Estate were very much inspired by the Garden City ideals endorsed by Howard at the turn of the century. Congestion and confusion were the enemies and every effort was made to ensure that the sort of overcrowding found in the inner-city slum could be prevented. On top of this, both of the Estates also stood as material embodiments to the great faith that was invested in the healing and life-giving qualities of the natural world at this time, with every effort being made to preserve the already existing natural features and with every household being provided with an ample (front and back) gardens. Informing this approach was a heavily biopolitical, and strongly deterministic, approach to the notion of housing needs, with the prospective tenant understood in predominantly physiological terms as a biological subject whose physical and mental needs, it was assumed, could best be satisfied through the provision of clean and spacious sanitary homes in natural and open settings.

Managing the Sanitary Subject

Management Strategies

Thus far this chapter has predominantly looked at the ways in which the figure of the prospective tenant was conceptualised by those involved in the provision of public housing during the interwar period. What this next section does is to move on and look

¹⁸¹ Black, 'The Building of the LCC Downham Estate', p. 18.

in more detail at how these understandings actually impacted upon how the council estate tenant was *acted upon* by local authority housing managers and council estate supervisors during the interwar period. Focusing initially on the ideological foundations of public housing management in England and then moving on to examine the management strategies adopted on both the Wythenshawe and Downham Estates, it reveals how estate supervisors and housing managers at this time also tended to conceptualise the figure of the prospective in overwhelmingly biopolitical terms; doing all that they could to preserve the physical health and biological purity of the individual subject.

To begin to understand the strategies employed by interwar housing managers it is first necessary to appreciate that, as historians such as Anne Power have shown, a great many of their ideas about management were inspired by the work that Octavia Hill carried out during the second half of the nineteenth-century in London at her model homes in Paradise Place and Freshwater Place.¹⁸² Like a great many of her contemporaries, Hill's main obsession was with the insanitary conditions found in poor inner-city residential districts London and with the effects that these 'dirty' and 'evil' conditions were having on the physical and moral health of the Capital's poorer classes.¹⁸³ As a result, she placed a great deal of importance upon questions of hygiene, making sure that all the cleaning done by the tenants in her homes, over 3,000 by 1874, was 'sedulously supervised' by one of her many trained female volunteers (known as

¹⁸² See, Power, *Property Before People*, pp. 240–244; O. and S. Checkland, 'Housing Policy: The Formative Years', in *Town Planning Review*, vol. 46, no. 3 (1975), pp. 315–322; Merrett, *State Housing*, p. 231.

¹⁸³ O. Hill, *Homes of the London Poor: Essays* (London, 1883), p. 34.

‘Fellow Workers) and ensuring that all her properties were laid out so that ‘health [may] be secured by an abundance of air, light, and water.’¹⁸⁴

Moreover, Hill, who was herself very close to both William Morris and John Ruskin (who personally provided Hill with the funds to buy her first property), was similarly fervent in her belief that everyone should be given the opportunity to enjoy the natural world and campaigned tirelessly to preserve London’s recreational open spaces as well being influential in the creation of the Vauxhall Park, Lambeth, and Brockwell Park, Brixton. On top of this, she was also one of the judges at the 1905 Letchworth Cheap Cottage Exhibition and was one of the co-founders of The National Trust for the Preservation of Historic Buildings and Natural Beauty.¹⁸⁵ Again, like Howard and Unwin, her concern with the preservation of public parks and green areas was premised on the belief that sunshine, fresh air and open spaces were inherently beneficial to the individual’s physical and moral health, even going so far as to declare in one 1869 publication that ‘the poor of London need joy and beauty in their lives. There is no more true and eternal law.’¹⁸⁶

Yet, unlike many of her philanthropic contemporaries, Hill was much less deterministic in how she conceived of the housing problem, believing that bad physical conditions alone did not explain the (perceived) immorality and bad behaviour of so many slum-dwellers. Instead, her approach to the housing problem was much more person-centred, with the underlying assumption being that it was impossible to ‘deal with the people and the houses separately...the inhabitants and their surroundings must be improved

¹⁸⁴ O. Hill, *Letters to my Fellow Workers* (London, 1898–1899), pp. 2–3; Hill, *Homes of the London Poor*, p. 57.

¹⁸⁵ See, C. Hanson-Smith (Ed.), *Octavia Hill and Open Spaces* (Wisbeach, 1994).

¹⁸⁶ Hill, *Homes of the London Poor*, pp. 77–81.

together.’¹⁸⁷ Indeed, in her 1883 publication *Homes of the London Poor* she even went so far as to suggest that some slum-dwellers had habits and manners that were so bad that even if one were to ‘transplant them tomorrow to healthy and commodious homes...they would [still] pollute and destroy them.’¹⁸⁸

Consequently, in all her philanthropic work she placed a great deal of emphasis upon building up close personal relationships with tenants, claiming that ‘it is most helpful to strengthen by sympathy and counsel the energetic effort which shall bear fruit in time to come.’¹⁸⁹ On top of this, she also actively encouraged all her volunteers to educate and instruct tenants on the values of thrift and the practicalities of good housekeeping, reminding them that ‘sanitary improvement depends upon educational work among grown-up people.’¹⁹⁰ In other words, then, although Hill was firmly of the belief that slum-dwellers needed to be provided with clean and spacious new cottage-style homes in carefully planned-out estates, she was also convinced that many of them needed to be taught how to actually live in them first.

As Alison Ravetz has pointed out, it would be hard to overestimate the impact that Hill had on the housing management profession, and her distinctly paternalistic strategies and ideals certainly wielded a huge influence over the public housing sector during the interwar period.¹⁹¹ Addison, in particular, was a fan of Hill’s methods and was especially keen to expand and professionalise the housing management sector;

¹⁸⁷ O. Hill, ‘Four Years Management of a London Court’ (1869), pp. 102–103, quoted in Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, p. 27.

¹⁸⁸ Hill, *Homes of the London Poor*, p. i.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁹⁰ O. Hill, N. M. Jeffery and E. Neville, *House Property and its Management* (London, 1921), pp. 90–95; Hill, *Homes of the London Poor*, p. 59

¹⁹¹ Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, p. 30. See also, D. Clapham, ‘Trends in Housing Management’, in Clapham and English (Eds.), *Council Housing: Current Trends*, p. 108.

envisioning a time when each local authority would have its own staff of medically trained female inspectors to check up on tenants and even declaring in one 1920 article that ‘the success of working-class property depends very largely on its management.’¹⁹² Likewise, Hill’s distinctly paternalistic approach to housing management was also well respected, encouraging the Ministry of Health, for example, to remind local authorities that ‘some of the tenants have been forced in the past to live in conditions of overcrowding which have made the maintenance of proper standard of house-keeping impossible. Some may have never known, some will have to learn anew, how to keep their house in order.’¹⁹³

Nevertheless, despite this general approval of Hill’s approaches, the idea that housing management should be treated as a distinct profession still took a while to gain universal acceptance, with only 13% of local authorities having actually employed any sort of housing manager by 1935.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, a significant number of local authorities continued to parcel out management responsibilities between already existing departments rather than employ a professional manager or supervisor.¹⁹⁵ For instance, in Wythenshawe management responsibilities were basically split between the district Medical Officer, who was responsible for questions relating to the health of the family and the cleanliness of the home, and the Estate Supervisor, who was charged with maintaining the physical appearance of the Estate, both of whom were ultimately

¹⁹² Bodleian Library, AP.MSS.Addison.Dep.c.146 (Addison Papers), *Housing* (16 August 1919), p. 44; *Housing* (19 July 1920), pp. 1–6; ‘Minute Sheet: Stages of Housing Schemes’ (6 May 1919), p. 57.

¹⁹³ Bodleian Library, AP.MSS.Addison.Dep.c.146 (Addison Papers), *Housing* (1 March, 1921), p. 241.

¹⁹⁴ Power, *Property Before People*, p. 32.

¹⁹⁵ Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, p. 112.

answerable to the Estate's eight-man Special Committee, which was dominated at this time by Lord and Lady Simon.¹⁹⁶

By contrast, the centralised and bureaucratic management system, headed by a General Housing Estates Manager who supervised a staff of 28 resident Estate Superintendents, each of whom was responsible for 2000 dwellings, that the LCC adopted from 1919 onwards was certainly far ahead of its time.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, the LCC's system was far more expansive than most other management hierarchies at this time, with provisions made for Estate Superintendents to have under their command a Housing Manager, who was to work in cooperation with the Medical Officer of Health to see that tenants lived up to the standard expected of those in Council dwellings, as well as any number of Matrons, whose job was to carry out systematic visitations of the tenants in their houses and keep detailed records of each families details.¹⁹⁸ On top of this, the LCC also employed its own decorators, plumbers and gardeners to carry out maintenance work on its many housing estates, with one former Downham Estate tenant recollecting how there used to be 'armies of men, who used to come round once a year and cut the privets and mow the grass.'¹⁹⁹

Yet, despite these administrative differences, the management policies and tenancy regulations adopted on both the Wythenshawe Estate and the Downham Estate actually proved to be broadly similar. Most obviously, both authorities attached a great deal of

¹⁹⁶ Manchester Archives, Council Minutes, WESC, vol. 1. (26 June 1928), p. 23. (26th June 1928); vol. 5, (13 April 1938), p. 206.

¹⁹⁷ Olechnowicz, *Working-Class Housing*, p. 102.

¹⁹⁸ Building Centre, *Housing*, pp. 33–34.

¹⁹⁹ Testimony of Theresa Matthews, who lived on the Estate in 1929. Quoted in, A. Black, 'The Downham Estate, 1924–39: A Study In The Conception, Construction And Social Development Of The LCC Estate At Downham, SE London, With Reminiscences From Contemporary Residents' (Birkbeck University, 1985, deposited at Lewisham Local Studies Library), p. 67.

emphasis to the care and maintenance of the space around each tenant's house, with inspectors on both Estates instructed to make sure that tenants were keeping their gardens 'neat and cultivated'.²⁰⁰ Indeed, the Wythenshawe Estate's Special Committee even went so far as to appoint a separate 'Estate Overlooker', chosen because he was an 'experienced gardener' himself, to 'continually inspect the gardens' on the Estate.²⁰¹ Likewise, the tenancy agreements on both Estates served to reinforce these goals, with tenants on the Wythenshawe Estate instructed to 'cut all grass and trim or prune trees, shrubs, and hedges at the proper season and when necessary' and tenants on the Downham Estate informed that they had to give the Council's staff 'reasonable facilities for maintaining and cutting the hedges abutting on roads.'²⁰²

On top of this, strict regulations were also laid down in respect to the changes tenants could themselves make to their gardens. For instance, in the Wythenshawe tenancy agreement it was stipulated that any tenant wishing to make 'significant alterations' to their garden, such as chopping down or planting a new tree or erecting any sort of permanent structure (such as a shed), had first to gain written permission from the Committee.²⁰³ An almost identical policy was adopted on the Downham Estate, with the erection of sheds permitted only if they were less than 80ft square and 6ft high and with

²⁰⁰ See, London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/HSG/GEN/3/13, LCC Housing and Valuation Department, 'Housing Estates: Code of Instructions for the Guidance of Superintendents of Estates' (1936), p. 2; London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/HSG/GEN/3/12, LCC Valuation, Estates, and Housing Department, 'Bellingham And Downham Tenant's Handbook: A Handbook Of Useful Information For Tenants' (1934), pp. 13–14.

²⁰¹ Manchester Archives, M14/1/15/20 (Papers of Lady Simon of Wythenshawe), 'Letter from L. Heywood to Lady Simon (28 August 1933).

²⁰² A copy of the 'Conditions of Tenancy' is reprinted in B. A. Hill, *Memories of Wythenshawe from the 1930s to the 1960s* (Manchester, 1997); London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/HSG/GEN/3/12, LCC Valuation, Estates, and Housing Department, 'Bellingham And Downham Tenant's Handbook: A Handbook Of Useful Information For Tenants' (1934), pp. 13–14.

²⁰³ Manchester Archives, Council Minutes, WESC, vol. 2 (17 March 1932), pp. 4–5.

a tenancy agreement which stipulated that ‘no other structures should be erected without written permission having first been obtained from the Council.’²⁰⁴

From a managerial perspective, this great attention given to the domestic garden was based not just on the fact that it was, in practical terms, a much easier space to inspect than the inside of the house, but also upon a deep-rooted assumption that the condition of a domestic garden tended to serve as a good indicator for the general respectability of its occupants.²⁰⁵ Indeed, caring for a garden was sometimes portrayed at this time as being literally analogous to caring for a family, with one gardening publication declaring that ‘young tress and young shrubs only demand, like other children, to be loved and kept clean and tidy until they arrive at an age when they are able to keep themselves clean and tidy.’²⁰⁶ Tenants on the two Estates were certainly conscious of these assumptions and quickly became very adroit at reading deeper meanings into the way that their neighbours cared for their gardens. For instance, one former Downham resident remembered how her father was quick to identify their new neighbours as ‘rag and bone people’ by virtue of the fact that they did not have any roses or marguerites in their garden.²⁰⁷

At the same time, however, I would argue that the emphasis that was placed on caring for the gardens and open spaces on the two Estates also reveals something about just

²⁰⁴ London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/HSG/GEN/3/12, LCC Valuation, Estates, and Housing Department, ‘Bellingham And Downham Tenant’s Handbook: A Handbook Of Useful Information For Tenants’ (1934), p. 15.

²⁰⁵ See, Manchester Archives, M14/1/26 (Papers of Lady Simon of Wythenshawe), ‘Garden Competition Flyer’ (August 1935). See also, C. Alexander, ‘The Garden as Occasional Domestic Space’, in *Signs*, vol. 27, no. 3 (2002), pp. 858–861; M. Bhatti, “‘When I’m In The Garden I Can Create My Own Paradise’: Homes And Gardens In Later Life’, in *The Sociological Review*, vol. 54, no. 2 (2006), p. 323; R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum*. Manchester, 1971), p. 33.

²⁰⁶ C. C. Eley, *Twentieth-Century Gardening* (London, 1939), p. 12.

²⁰⁷ A. Rubinstein, *Just Like the Country: Memories of London Families who Settled the New Cottage Estates, 1919 – 1939* (London, 1991), p. 52.

how genuinely fearful the authorities in both London and Manchester were of messiness, confusion and overcrowding (and all the insanitary horrors that accompanied them).²⁰⁸ Indeed, it is possible to read the strict rules about erecting sheds and other ornamental structures as being indicative of the fact that the local authorities on both Estates wanted to maintain the open space around each house so as to keep dwellings, and by extension families, clearly independent and distinct from one another.²⁰⁹ Likewise, it could be argued that so much attention was focused on maintaining hedges and fences because they quite literally marked out and enforced the boundaries and open spaces between each house, ensuring that overcrowding did not occur and preventing families from living on top of one another.²¹⁰

In this respect, then, the management systems adopted on both the Wythenshawe Estate and the Downham Estate very much served to complement and reinforce the sorts of biopolitical policies discussed above. Above all else, both authorities were committed to ensuring that random or foreign elements did not intrude upon or spoil the general appearance of the two carefully laid out Estates, with the assumption once again being that space, sunlight and clean air were essential domestic needs.²¹¹ As a result, anything that threatened to confuse or contaminate this idealised purity was either prohibited or removed. Indeed, as I go on to show in the next section, the management authorities on

²⁰⁸ As Mark Francis and Randolph Hester have argued, gardens are often ‘an unconscious expression or a conscious concretion of an order that is important to us.’ See, M. Francis and R. T Hester, Jr. (Eds.), *The Meaning of Gardens: Idea, Place, and Action* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 12.

²⁰⁹ See, N. R. Fyfe, (Ed.), *Images Of The Street: Planning, Identity And Control In Public Space* (London, 1998), pp. 5–9; Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, p. 73.

²¹⁰ See: N. Blomley, ‘Making Private Property: Enclosure, Common Right And The Work Of Hedges’, in *Rural History*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2007), p. 5.

²¹¹ See, C. Otter, ‘The Vital City: Public Analysis, Dairies And Slaughterhouses In Nineteenth-Century Britain’, in *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 13 (2006), pp. 529–531; ‘Housing the People’, in *Transactions of the Manchester Statistical Society*, vol. 101 (1935), p. 2; Simon and Inman, *The Rebuilding of Manchester*, p. 89.

both Wythenshawe and Downham were so infatuated with achieving order and cleanliness on their Estates that they were sometimes quite prepared to adopt and apply punitive management tactics in order to maintain these standards.

Disciplinary Power?

For the most part, the (limited) literature on housing management in the interwar period has tended to paint the profession as one that was underpinned by a harsh disciplinary ethos, with writers such as Sean Damer arguing that ‘it was all about surveillance and control...punitive, repressive [and] draconian.’²¹² Alison Ravetz has suggested something similar in her most recent study of council housing, claiming that ‘the general orientation of estate management was towards regulation, education and control, while tenants were not expected to be in any way proactive in return.’²¹³ What this final section demonstrates, however, is that at least in terms of the management tactics adopted on both the Wythenshawe and Downham Estates during this period, the situation was rarely this simple. Indeed, as I go on to show, the authorities in both Wythenshawe and Downham were actually often quite willing to allow tenants to use a certain amount of initiative and creativity in how they ran their homes, with punitive measures tending only to be employed if and when the cleanliness or orderliness of the

²¹² Damer, “‘Engineers of the Human Machine’”, p. 2011.

²¹³ Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, p. 116. See also, Merrett, *State Housing*, p. 232; D. Cowan, C. Pantazis and R. Gilroy, ‘Social Housing as Crime Control: An Examination of the Role of Housing Management in Policing Sex Offenders’, in *Social and Legal Studies*, vol. 10, no. 4 (2002), pp. 435–457; A. Haworth and T. Manzi, ‘Managing the Underclass: Interpreting the Moral Discourse of Housing Management’, in *Housing Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1 (1999), pp. 153–165.

estate as a whole was threatened; demonstrating, more than anything else, just how much importance was attached to issues of physical, bodily health at this time.

One of the more popular ways in which in which the management authorities in both Wythenshawe and Downham endeavoured to maintain the pastoral appearance of their Estates was through the establishment of annual gardening shows. The first Downham Garden Show took place in July 1931, with prizes of champagne awarded for the best flower garden, the best vegetables, and the best flower and vegetable gardens, while in Wythenshawe the first ‘Garden Week’ was held in the summer of 1934, with the trophies being presented at the local primary school by Councillor C. R. W. Menzies and Lady Sheena Simon.²¹⁴ Regular pageants and garden fetes also took place in Wythenshawe, with Lady Sheena Simon once again on hand to crown both the ‘Rose Queen’ at the Rose Festival and the annual ‘Harvest Queen’ during the Harvest-Thanksgiving.²¹⁵

For the most part, these competitions seem to have been extremely popular with local tenants, with well over 650 households entering the inaugural show in Wythenshawe.²¹⁶ Indeed, judging from the recollections of former tenants on both Estates, gardening increasingly became a particularly popular pastime for many.²¹⁷ Theresa Matthews, for

²¹⁴ Bromley Local Studies Library, Local Newspaper Collection, ‘Garden Week’, in *Kentish Times* (17 July 1931); Manchester Archives, M14/6/11/27 (Newspaper Clippings Relating to Wythenshawe, 1932–5), ‘Garden Show Opens’, in *Manchester Guardian* (16 July 1934).

²¹⁵ Manchester Archives, M14/6/11/27 (Newspaper Clippings Relating to Wythenshawe, 1932–5), *The Evening Chronicle* (4 September 1934).

²¹⁶ See, Manchester Archives, M14/6/11/8 (Newspaper Clippings Relating to Wythenshawe, 1932–5), *Manchester Evening Chronicle* (1 March 1934); *Manchester Evening Chronicle* (17 August 1934).

²¹⁷ See, Tameside Central Library, Local Studies Department, MTC/TCL/LSD/Tape 56 (Manchester Studies Tapes Collection), ‘Transcript of Interview with Mr Pennington (conducted by Mike Harrison)’, p. 15. This also seems to have been the case across a number of local authority estates in this period. See, D. Bayliss, ‘Revisiting The Cottage Council Estates’, in *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 16 (2001), pp. 192–193.

example, recollected how much time people on the Downham Estate devoted to their gardens: ‘most of them potted about in their gardens, grew their roses and their asters...certainly my dad [did], he was always sawing up bits of wood and chopping up things and making fences.’²¹⁸ Similarly, in a questionnaire carried out in 1935, the Manchester and Salford Better Housing Council found that over 90% of Wythenshawe tenants approved of their gardens.²¹⁹

On neither Estate, however, were tenants given completely free rein over their gardens. Indeed, on both Estates the authorities were keen to make sure that tenants were very much aware of how they should be cultivating their gardens. In Wythenshawe, for example, flyers were posted around in early August, laying out the criteria that the judges would be using in the upcoming garden competition.²²⁰ Likewise, the authorities in Downham were just as keen to ensure that all tenants were on the same wavelength when it came to understanding what constituted an ‘attractive’ garden, with the 1934 *Handbook of Useful Information for Tenants* advising residents to ‘strive to obtain a natural, rather than artificial, effect [by] purchasing seedlings and young plants such as Stocks, Antirrhinums, Clarkia, Violas, Calceolarias, Marigolds, Dahlias, and Chrysanthemums.’²²¹

²¹⁸ Quoted in, Black, ‘The Downham Estate’, p. 69.

²¹⁹ Wythenshawe Local Studies Library, 331/83/Ma (Manchester and Salford Better Housing Council), ‘Wythenshawe: the report of an investigation’ (1934), p. 14.

²²⁰ They were as follows: (1) Best cultivated and cleanest gardens, front and back; (2) The nature of the soil and situation; (3) The length of time the house has been occupied; (4) Any assistance by professional gardeners; (5) The amount of money spent; points awarded in proportion to outlay. See, Manchester Archives, M14/1/15/23 (Papers of Lady Simon of Wythenshawe), ‘Garden Competition Flyer’ (August 1934).

²²¹ London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/HSG/GEN/3/12, LCC Valuation, Estates, and Housing Department, ‘Bellingham And Downham Tenant’s Handbook: A Handbook Of Useful Information For Tenants’ (1934), pp. 18–20.

In some respects, then, these management tactics can be said to have adopted a heavily constrained version of the sorts of self-disciplining forms of governance that social theorists such as Mitchell Dean and historians such as Patrick Joyce have identified as being characteristic of advanced liberal democracies.²²² In brief, these writings have suggested that modern modes of power have increasingly come to rely upon the creation of subjects who are able to regulate their own conduct in accordance with the constructed norms of behaviour (articulated and circulated through texts such as gardening advice manuals, for example) that have been established by those in power. As such, the fact that similar sorts of strategies were being adopted in both Wythenshawe and Downham at this time, albeit only in the highly controlled and rigidly defined structure of a garden competition, only serves to cast further doubt on the assertion that interwar housing management tactics were inherently draconian.

Alongside these sorts of self-disciplining approaches, the management authorities on the two Estates also sought to mould the conduct of the tenants under their supervision by consciously altering the physical and social structures within which tenants behaved and interacted.²²³ The most blatant example of this can be seen in the striking lack of public houses and drinking premises that were provided on both Estates. For instance, in Downham the 35,000 residents were provided with just one pub, an Arts and Crafts-style establishment called the 'Downham Tavern', which had 'family areas' instead of

²²² See, Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, p. 260; Dean, *Governmentality*; N. Rose, 'Community, Citizenship and the Third Way', in D. Merydyth and J. Minson (Eds.), *Citizenship and Cultural Policy* (London, 2001), pp. 1395–1411.

²²³ M Feeley and J Simon, 'The New Penology: Notes on the Emerging Strategy of Corrections and its Implications,' in *Criminology*, vol. 30, no. 4 (1992), p. 452.

stand-up bars and promoted lemonade over beer.²²⁴ The intention behind this very deliberate no-pubs policy was, of course, to try and discourage the sorts of disreputable and intemperate leisure pursuits that housing reformers associated with the inner-city slum, and encourage instead purer and healthier pursuits (such as gardening).²²⁵

Nevertheless, it would still be a mistake to pretend that tenants on Wythenshawe and Downham were not at times subjected to a certain amount of disciplinary supervision. Indeed, the management authorities on both sites strove to maintain a very visible presence on their Estates, with former Wythenshawe tenants recollecting how they ‘were extremely keen in those days’ and reminiscing how ‘we used to have a gardening inspector come round and have a look; look for any alteration’.²²⁶ Similarly, in Downham the Estate Superintendents, instructed by the LCC to ‘strictly enforce’ the conditions of tenancy, were always highly visible as they rode around the Estate on their bicycles each morning.²²⁷ Moreover, there is also ample evidence to suggest that the management authorities on both Estates were at times capable of acting in a punitive manner, especially when the much-cherished greenery of the two Estates was under threat. For example, one former Wythenshawe tenant recollected how in 1932 he received a notification informing him to remove a trellis that he had erected alongside

²²⁴ As one former tenant recollected; ‘it was cliquey; you couldn’t get to know people like you could in pubs.’ Rubinstein, *Just Like The Country*, p. 88. For more on the similar lack of public houses in Wythenshawe see, Tameside Central Library, Local Studies Department, MTC/TCL/LSD/Tape 67 (Manchester Studies Tapes Collection), ‘Interview with Mrs Hogan’, conducted by Dermot Healy.

²²⁵ S. Constantine, ‘Amateur Gardening And Popular Recreation In The 19th And 20th Centuries’, in *Journal of Social History*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1981), p. 390; Hughes and Hunt, ‘A Culture Transformed’, p. 96; Porter, *London*, pp. 376–377.

²²⁶ Tameside Central Library, Local Studies Department, MTC/TCL/LSD/Tape 146, no. 1 (Manchester Studies Tapes Collection), ‘Wythenshawe Remembered: Anonymous Interviews’, conducted by Mike Harrison; MTC/TCL/LSD/Tape 123, ‘Interview with Mr and Mrs Franland’.

²²⁷ Rubinstein, *Just like the country*, p. 42; London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/HSG/GEN/3/12, LCC Valuation, Estates, and Housing Department, ‘Bellingham And Downham Tenant’s Handbook: A Handbook Of Useful Information For Tenants’ (1934), pp. 6–7.

his path to grow his sweet peas on, which he ignored only to return home from work the next day and find 'it lying on the floor, they'd sent two men to pull it down and they'd just pulled it down because it stopped them seeing what was going on.'²²⁸ On a separate occasion, the Wythenshawe Estate Special Committee also brought eight boys before a juvenile court for damaging trees and flowers in the Park; subsequently fining them 1 shilling each.²²⁹

Nonetheless, these sorts of punitive punishments tended only to be employed as a last resort.²³⁰ Indeed, on occasions it would be the tenants themselves calling for more forceful measures to be adopted, as was the case in Downham when in 1937 the Chief Assistant Valuer of the LCC received an official complaint from one tenant who urged the 'Council [to] make itself more responsible for the supervision of those people [who] have no pride of place or decency...when they place them on the Estate.'²³¹ More often than not, however, the threat of disciplinary action proved to be sufficient to ensure tenants stuck to the rules.²³² As one former Wythenshawe tenant put it, 'there was, [a sense] you knew what hadn't to be done so you didn't do it.'²³³ Likewise, on the Downham Estate tenants would constantly be on the lookout for Estate Superintendents,

²²⁸ Tameside Central Library, Local Studies Department, MTC/TCL/LSD/Tape 56 (Manchester Studies Tapes Collection), 'Interview with Mr Pennington'.

²²⁹ Tameside Central Library, Local Studies Department, MA/M14/6/11/16 (Manchester Studies Tapes Collection), 'Transcript of an Interview with Mrs Ashworth', p. 23.

²³⁰ For example, only six notices to quit were actually served for 'non-cultivation of garden' in the whole of the Manchester District between 1921 and 1933.

²³¹ London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/CL/HSG/2/16, 'Letter from A J Scriven, Secretary of the Dowham Tenant's League, to the Chief Assistant Valuer' (10 June, 1937).

²³² See, J. Donzelot, *The Policing Of Families: Welfare State Versus The State* (London, 1979), p. 186.

²³³ Tameside Central Library, Local Studies Department, MTC/TCL/LSD/Tape 116 (Manchester Studies Tapes Collection), 'Interview with Mrs Sheppardson', conducted by Dermont Healy.

with one former resident remembering how her neighbours would pass the word round, ‘the inspectors are coming!’, every time one of them came down their street.²³⁴

In other words, then, the evidence from the Wythenshawe Estate and the Downham Estate suggests that it would be a mistake to characterise housing management in the interwar years as being overwhelmingly draconian. Instead, it seems that there was actually a general desire for tenants to regulate themselves if possible, with punitive measures only tending to be employed as a last resort when the orderliness and cleanliness of the Estate was under threat. Indeed, in many respects the maintenance of sanitary conditions was deemed to be of such importance that it was able to provide justification for actions that might otherwise have been taken as being excessively hostile and intrusive, with one contemporary noting how ‘on the whole a clean, sanitary and modern dwelling plus some supervision is better than the two, or even one, rooms in the slum.’²³⁵ In this way, it is possible to see how sanitary concerns came to not only influence the way that those involved in the provision of public housing in England during the interwar years conceptualised the people they were providing homes for, but also markedly affected how they acted upon them.

Conclusion

Although in this chapter I have purposefully focused on specific historical moments and figures rather than looking at the interwar period as a whole, it is nonetheless still

²³⁴ Rubinstein, *Just Like The Country*, p. 41.

²³⁵ ‘Municipal Housing in Germany’, in *Architect and Building News*, vol. 123 (14 February, 1930), p. 221.

worthwhile briefly acknowledging the massive social and political changes that were taking place at this time. Perhaps the most significant event, at least so far as the public housing sector was concerned, was the Wall Street Crash and the subsequent depression that took place between 1929 and 1932. The major fallout from this was the coming to power of the National Government in 1931 and the bringing to an end of the Labour Party's time in Parliament, meaning that support for Lloyd George's (and Addison's) 'Homes for Heroes' house-building programme began to dwindle as the emphasis came to be placed more and more upon slum clearance schemes and the rehousing of the poorest and neediest in cheaply-constructed homes.²³⁶ Yet, despite these upheavals, the sorts of sanitary issues that had so concerned politicians like Addison and architects like Unwin continued to feature prominently in debates over public housing. Partly, this was down to the fact that government documents such as the Tudor Walters Report continued to function as the standard reference texts for those involved in the provision of public housing.²³⁷ Moreover, it is also worth noting that many of the 214,000 houses funded by the 1919 Housing Act were not actually completed or occupied until well into the 1930s, meaning, as Marian Bowley has argued, that the housing problem remained 'still basically the problem of the health of towns.'²³⁸

As this chapter has shown, this great concern with the negative effects that overcrowded and insanitary living conditions were having on England's population was significant because it proved to have a profound effect upon how those involved in the provision of public housing during the interwar period conceptualised and acted upon the figure of

²³⁶ P. Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State: The Development of Housing Policy in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2005), p. 52; Clapham, 'Trends in Housing Management', p. 109.

²³⁷ Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, pp. 92–93.

²³⁸ Bowley, *Housing and the State*, p. 2.

the prospective tenant. Above all, it meant that the tenant's biological and physiological needs were elevated to a position of supreme importance, as politicians, architects and housing managers endeavoured to ensure that the social body remained physically strong, vigorous, morally upstanding and productive. As such, debates over public housing rarely got beyond the functional stage, with the assumption being that the provision and maintenance of clean and spacious new homes in fresh and airy surroundings would be more than adequate both in terms of resolving the housing crisis and in terms of satisfying the domestic needs of the prospective tenant.

2. Rational Housing: The Science of Living

*'We can, with confidence, look to physical science to provide new solutions in the future.'*²³⁹

*'Progress is to be sought neither in blind reversion to ancient practice nor in the hasty adoption of revolutionary methods, but by steady scientific development of the normal.'*²⁴⁰

In 1916 in one of his lesser-known books, *What is Coming? A Forecast of Things after the War*, H. G. Wells tried to forecast what lay ahead for the world after the end of the First World War. One of his central themes was the idea that the pre-war laissez-faire democratic regimes of the West had had their day, with one passage declaring that 'there never was before, there never may be again, so wonderful an opportunity for a cleaning-up and...for a profitable new start.'²⁴¹ What was needed instead, he argued, was a new kind of politics based upon scientific truths and empirical investigation. Central to this vision was the cultivation of a new kind of technocratic political elite who would be trained in the technical sciences, capable of rational thought and

²³⁹ O. E. W. Olsen, *Post-War Housing Problems: Geneva Studies*, vol. XI, no. 6 (Geneva, 1940), p. 21.

²⁴⁰ From the 1920–21 Advisory Report of the Building Research Station, quoted in F. M. Lea, *Science and Building: A History of the Building Research Station* (London, 1971), p. 16

²⁴¹ H. G. Wells, *What is Coming? A Forecast of Things after the War* (London, 1916), pp. 27–39.

committed to ordered reform; themes that were also in evidence in a great many other of Wells's futuristic novels.²⁴²

Political scientists and social theorists have long been interested in these sorts of ideas and have written in some depth about the feasibility of applying scientific principles to political problems.²⁴³ Indeed, according to a growing number of social theorists we are actually now living through an age in which Wells' prophetic musings have come to pass, with figures such as Frank Fischer claiming that 'Western society has evolved into a "professional society" dominated by expert disciplines that speak to and regulate all aspects of contemporary life...their skills are essential to the functioning of the complex institutions of industry, government, law, health care, and education, among others.'²⁴⁴ Similar arguments have been put forward by theorists like Bruno Latour, Terry Johnson and Karin Cetina, who, inspired in part by Foucault's writings on expertise and disciplinary power, have claimed that because of the increased prestige afforded to scientists we are now living in an age in which the 'whole world has been turned into a laboratory.'²⁴⁵ Based upon the assumption that scientific investigations and statistical theories can produce absolute truths and, thus, effectively solve social problems, these new technocratic approaches to governing overwhelmingly treat both the social body

²⁴² See, W. B. Rayward, 'H. G. Wells's Idea of a World Brain: A Critical Reassessment', in *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, vol. 50, no. 7 (1999), p. 570; W. W. Wagar, *H.G. Wells: Traversing Time* (London, 2004), pp. 135–161.

²⁴³ See, B. Latour, 'Mixing Humans and Nonhumans Together: The Sociology of a Door-Closer', in *Social Problems*, vol. 35, no. 3 (1988), pp. 298–310.

²⁴⁴ F. Fischer, *Democracy and Expertise: Reorienting Policy Inquiry* (Oxford, 2009), p. 18.

²⁴⁵ B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans., C. Porter (Harlow, 1993), pp. 13–21; M. B. Brown, *Science in Democracy: Expertise, Institutions, and Representation* (London, 2009), p. 17. See also, Johnson, 'Expertise and the State', pp. 139–152; K. K. Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge* (Harvard, 1999), pp. 1–2; J. F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans., G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minnesota, 1984), pp. 5–9.

and the individual body as quantifiable scientific facts to be dealt with and managed by an elite core of detached and specially trained technocratic experts.²⁴⁶

Historically, this increasing exaltation of scientific and professional disciplines of expertise is seen to be a uniquely twentieth-century phenomenon which, as writers like James Scott have argued, began in earnest in the years after the First World War as regimes all around the world sought to emulate and imitate the German state's technocratic wartime experiments in economic planning.²⁴⁷ Yet, so far as the history of public housing is concerned, there has been far too little thought given to the extent to which these emerging scientific forms of expertise impacted upon the public housing sector. Even in those studies in which some sort of passing acknowledgement is given to the role played by science, there is a lack of detailed information about what exactly the research organisations in question actually did, and even less thought given to the assumptions upon which they based their work.²⁴⁸ Similarly, the majority of historical writing on scientific research in the interwar period has tended to be written from a

²⁴⁶ See, D. Harvey, *The Condition of Post-Modernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Social Change* (Oxford, 1989); K. Tehranian, *Modernity, Space, and Power: The American City in Discourse and Practice* (New Jersey, 1995); F. Fischer, *Citizens, Experts, And The Environment: The Politics Of Local Knowledge* (Durham, 2000); W. E. Akin, *Technocracy and the American dream: the technocrat movement, 1900-1941* (Berkeley, 1977).

²⁴⁷ J. C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (London, 1998), pp. 97–99. See also, M. B. Brown, *Science in Democracy: Expertise, Institutions and Representation* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 9; D. Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain 1920–1970* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 15–39; H. P. Segal, *Technological Utopianism in American Culture: 20th Anniversary Edition* (New York, 2005); Y. Ezrahi, E. Mendelsohn and H. Segal (Eds.), *Technology, Pessimism, and Postmodernism* (London, 1994).

²⁴⁸ For example, Alison Ravetz describes state-funded public housing as a 'brave social experiment' yet nowhere gives any details of the work of the BRS or other related technocratic organisations. See, Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, pp. 2–7.

narrowly prescriptive perspective, with virtually no attention given to looking at the links that were forged with those in the house-building professions.²⁴⁹

This chapter goes some way to redressing these issues by providing a detailed investigation of the work that the Building Research Station (BRS), the first scientific research organisation in Britain specifically devoted to building issues, conducted on issues relating to public housing in the interwar period. Looking first at how and why the First World War proved to be such a great catalyst for state-sponsored technological research in England, it questions why the government, in its bid to resolve the housing crisis and provide sanitary homes for all, felt the need to establish an organisation like the BRS that would be solely devoted to the scientific investigation of building problems. It then moves on to investigate the actual experimental work that they carried out during the interwar years, looking specifically at the assumptions and understandings that informed their work and thinking about what these can reveal about how they conceptualised the figure of the prospective tenant. Finally, it evaluates the impact that their work really had upon the public housing sector at this time by looking at the links that the BRS built up with those involved in the provision of public housing in England.

Ultimately, what this chapter shows is that because of the work of specialist research organisations such as the BRS there was certainly an increased acceptance of and interest in abstract and statistically-verifiable approaches to questions of domestic need in this period, with bodies such as the Ministry of Health working to set minimum

²⁴⁹ See, Lea, *Science and Building*; M. Swenarton, 'Breeze Blocks and Bolshevism: Housing Policy and the Origins of the Building Research Station 1917–1921', in *Construction History*, vol. 21 (2005), pp. 69–80; G. Atkinson, 'Raymond Unwin: Founding Father of BRS', in *RIBA Journal*, vol. 78 (1971), pp. 446–448.

living standards and experimenting in the production of standardised homes. Moreover, because research organisations such as the BRS tended to approach housing issues from a heavily deterministic perspective, seeking to find the optimum physical conditions needed to satisfy the prospective tenant's physiological needs and basing their work on the presupposition that there was an objective and underlying physical reality that existed independently of humans yet could yield truths that were valid for all peoples, their work was very much in accordance with the sort of biopolitical approaches that, as the previous chapter demonstrated, were prevalent at this time.²⁵⁰ Nevertheless, despite these favourable conditions, the BRS did still encounter a great many problems when they attempted to work with local authorities, who often lacked the expertise to fully comprehend the BRS's work, meaning that the actual impact that scientific approaches to housing need exerted over the interwar public house-building programme proved to be less comprehensive than might otherwise have been the case.

The Politics of Scientific Housing

The Warfare State and the Emergence of the BRS

As John Pickstone noted in his 2001 study *Ways of Knowing: A New History of Science, Technology, and Medicine* there has been a tendency amongst historians to underestimate just how important the First World War was to the establishment of

²⁵⁰ M. Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca, 1989), p. 6.

large-scale state-funded research institutes in Britain.²⁵¹ David Edgerton argues something similar in his 2005 book *Warfare State: Britain 1920–1970*, claiming that the First World War played a major role in the ‘scientisation’ of the British state elite.²⁵² The purpose of this next section is to evaluate how applicable these propositions are to the history of public housing, by looking at the extent to which the upheavals generated by the First World War encouraged the English government to take a more technocratic approach to housing issues. Focusing primarily on the establishment of the BRS, it shows how, thanks largely to the wartime work of bodies such as the Ministry of Reconstruction and the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), the state increasingly looked to those in the scientific and technical professions when drawing up housing legislation in the hope that they might be able to provide accurate and efficient solutions to the housing issues of the time.

Perhaps the most influential body in terms of introducing scientific principles to the public housing sector was the Ministry of Reconstruction; a body that had been established by Lloyd George in July 1917 to assist in the task of ‘rebuilding the national life on a better and more durable foundation’ once the First World War was over.²⁵³ Chaired by Christopher Addison, the Ministry of Reconstruction embodied the coalition government’s general determination to replace the laissez-faire policies of the nineteenth-century with more proactive and interventionist forms of government which would have ‘increased responsibilities for the social condition and opportunities of its

²⁵¹ J. Pickstone, *Ways of Knowing: A New History of Science, Technology and Medicine* (Chicago, 2001), pp. 180–181.

²⁵² D. Edgerton, *Warfare State*, p. 3.

²⁵³ A. Orde, *British Policy and European Reconstruction After The First World War* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 5–6.

individual members.’²⁵⁴ Indeed, throughout the First World War the English government had, largely out of necessity, been taking a more hands-on-role in the running of the country, setting up new governmental departments to manage labour, shipping, food, national service and food.²⁵⁵ Thanks to the achievements of these new bodies, more and more questions were raised about pre-1918r approaches to social problems, with one 1918 Ministry of Reconstruction pamphlet suggesting that ‘people have begun to doubt whether, after all, the social and industrial system of the country in the pre-war days was so harmonious and so well-organised as to deserve to be revived in its entirety.’²⁵⁶

Thanks to the achievements of these new bodies, far more faith came to be placed in the capabilities of technically-trained experts and scientific workers to provide accurate solutions to political problems, with one 1919 Ministry of Reconstruction publication even going so far as to suggest that ‘without the chemists, physicists, engineers and others trained in pre-war days the war would not have been won.’²⁵⁷ Likewise, far more emphasis came to be placed on the production and distribution of appropriate technical data, with one Ministry of Reconstruction report stating that ‘the vitality of a country’s industries depends on the discoveries of the scientist. Science is ordered knowledge.’²⁵⁸

Addison was especially vocal in this respect, claiming that:

A Minister in charge of an Administrative Department must have at his disposal...a general survey of existing knowledge on any subject

²⁵⁴ MoR, ‘The Business Of Government III: The Civil Service’, in *Reconstruction Problems*, no. 38 (London, 1919), p. 1. See also, MoR, ‘The Aims Of Reconstruction’, in *Reconstruction Problems*, no. 1 (1918), pp. 1–2.

²⁵⁵ See, R. R. James, *The British Revolution: British Politics 1880–1939* (London, 1978), p. 359.

²⁵⁶ MoR, ‘The Aims of Reconstruction’, pp. 1–2.

²⁵⁷ MoR ‘Industrial Research’, in *Reconstruction Problems*, no. 36 (London, 1919), p. 25.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

within his sphere, with tables of statistics and comments upon such tables which will keep him in touch with the progress of any work that can be expressed in this form.²⁵⁹

Another important research body to emerge from the First World War was the DSIR which had been established in the autumn of 1916 by Lloyd George. Provide with an annual budget of £1,000,000, it was designed to act as ‘the principle body by means of which the government seeks to promote and organise scientific research.’²⁶⁰ Although initially concerned only with encouraging and supporting research in universities and technical colleges, the DSIR soon expanded its remit and, with Lloyd George’s blessing, began to take a more prominent role in issues relating to public housing; leading, ultimately, to the establishment of a permanent ‘Building Board’ designed to ‘carry out research on building materials and experimental work for the Ministry of Health.’²⁶¹

Despite some minor opposition from figures such as Lord Curzon, who felt that such a body placed too much emphasis on scientific research and not enough on hands-on building methods, the relationship proved fruitful and in June 1920 a Building Research Board was established; becoming a permanent research facility and changing its name to the “Building Research Station” in July 1921.²⁶² Chaired initially by H. O. Weller, the work of the newly created body was classified under two main headings: ‘general

²⁵⁹ MoR, *Report of the Ministry of Government Committee*, (London, 1918), Cd. 9230, pp. 32–33. See also, MoR, ‘Housing in England and Wales’, in *Reconstruction Problems*, no. 2 (1918), p. 1.

²⁶⁰ MoR, *Report of the Ministry*, p. 16.

²⁶¹ Bodleian Library, AP.MSS.Addison.Dep.c.146 (Addison Papers), ‘Minutes of the third meeting of the Housing Advisory Council’ (12 November 1919), pp. 150–151. Unwin was also influential in these developments. See, National Archives, DSIR 4/1, BM.265/18, Mr Hugh Davies, ‘Memorandum on Building Research’ (3 January 1919).

²⁶² National Archives, DSIR 4/1, BM.12.14, ‘Letter from Lord Curzon’, (23 April 1919).

research' and 'intelligence and special investigations'.²⁶³ The aim of the first was to increase the general level of scientific knowledge in the building sciences; the aim of the second to assist individual governmental departmental departments with specific problems. Of particular importance was the need to contribute to the public house-building programme, with one early report stating that 'the urgency and magnitude of housing problems make it essential that all matters affecting construction, supply of materials, organisation of labour and supply and dispatch in execution shall be reconsidered.'²⁶⁴

This preoccupation with issues related to public house-building continued throughout the 1920s, largely because of the guiding hand of Neville Chamberlain who, having been appointed Minister of Health in 1923, sought to enlist the support of the BRS to help him reduce building costs through the production of cheaper versions of the sorts of cottage-dwellings so idolised by politicians and architects at this time.²⁶⁵ Unwin too put pressure on the BRS to look at the viability of alternative (cheaper) building materials and construction techniques, writing in 1925 to Reginald Edward Straddling, the Director of the BRS from 1924 to 1939, to remind him that the most pressing problems for the Ministry of Health in terms of house-building were, '1. discovery of a satisfactory alternative to the brick wall; 2. satisfactory substitute for plaster; 3. definite

²⁶³ Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 26.

²⁶⁴ '1926 Published Report', quoted in Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 26. See also, National Archives, DSIR 4/1, BRB.5/2/1, 'Letter from MoH to Scientific and Industrial Research Department' (21 June 1920).

²⁶⁵ M. Swenarton, 'Houses Of Paper And Brown Cardboard: Neville Chamberlain And The Establishment Of The Building Research Station At Garston In 1925', in *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 22, no. 3 (2007), pp. 262–263.

specifications for the use of concrete breeze-blocks; 4. substitutes for present roof covering; 5. satisfactory alternative flooring materials.’²⁶⁶

To enable the BRS to fulfil these tasks it was decided that they should maintain close contact with the Ministry of Health so that they could quickly be informed of the specific problems that needed to be tackled most urgently.²⁶⁷ On top of this, the annual budget that the BRS received was increased from £4,743 to £15,000 and they were provided with a permanent headquarters in an old country house set in 37.5 acres of land at Garston, just to the south of London.²⁶⁸ In this way, the foundations were laid for the BRS to intervene in and contribute to the public house-building programme in England, with Straddling himself feeling secure enough to boast in one 1925 memorandum that ‘when once the full properties of materials are known there can be little doubt that more economic arrangements in construction can be devised.’²⁶⁹ As I go on to show in the next section, these sorts of claims only became more appealing to those in Whitehall as the full effects of the Wall Street Crash began to make themselves felt on the British economy during the 1930s.

²⁶⁶ National Archives, DSIR 4/130, ‘Letter from Unwin to Stradling’, (15 May 1925).

²⁶⁷ National Archives, DSIR 4/130, ‘Memo Of Discussion At MoH On Housing Research Programme’ (22 May 1925), p. 1.

²⁶⁸ National Archives, DSIR 4/130, ‘Building Research: Special investigational work to assist in the housing difficulty’ (12 February 1925), p. 5; National Archives, DSIR 4/4, BRB.2/2, ‘Approximate Estimate For Research From August 1st To March 31st 1921’, p. 1.

²⁶⁹ National Archives, DSIR 4/130, ‘Building Research: Special investigational work to assist in the housing difficulty’ (12 February 1925), p. 3.

Efficiency and Economy

Both politically and economically, the 1929 Wall Street Crash had a huge impact upon the English state.²⁷⁰ The government's public house-building programme was hit especially hard by the cutbacks and in 1933 a new Housing Act was passed which removed the housing subsidies that had been made available under the 1923 Wheatley Act. In their place came a renewed focus on slum clearance, as the government charged all local authorities with the task of clearing their slums within 5 years.²⁷¹ So far as the BRS's influence was concerned, however, these developments actually proved to have positive repercussions. Indeed, what this next section shows is that thanks to this increased pressure to cut back on spending, local authorities and government officials became far more willing to make use of research organisations such as the BRS in the hope that they might provide ways of cutting construction costs.

Significant steps were taken towards involving the BRS more closely in the public house-building programme which came about in December 1930 when the then Minister of Health Arthur Greenwood called together members from the RIBA, the Steelworks Association and the BRS to establish a Technical and Advisory Council for the building industry to look into new methods of construction, with the emphasis being on 'taking every possible advantage of new knowledge and research' in order to achieve 'more rational methods of building control, by which simplification and utmost uniformity might be achieved.'²⁷² The passing of the 1933 Housing Act only

²⁷⁰ See, A. Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s: The Deceptive Decade* (Oxford, 1992), p. 110; K. Morgan, 'The Problem of the Epoch? Labour and Housing, 1918–51', in *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2005), pp. 243–244; Merrett, *State Housing*, pp. 50–51.

²⁷¹ Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, p. 89; Swenarton, *Building the New Jerusalem*, p. 19.

²⁷² *Architect and Building News*, vol. 124 (12 December 1930), p. 782.

strengthened the BRS's position, with the Ministry of Health asking them to assist 'materially in the solution of problems involved in the design and construction of new buildings under the [1933] scheme [by] contributing to their efficiency and to economy in their erection.'²⁷³

Straddling for one was certainly not slow to take advantage of this situation and throughout the 1930s put pressure on the DSIR to increase the BRS's funding, reminding them that 'if the fullest advantage is to be taken of the help that science may be able to contribute in the urgent campaign for re-housing, it will be necessary for the work of the Station to be extended and accelerated.'²⁷⁴ These calls seem to have been effective, with more money being made available for the BRS to construct new research facilities, including a £1,500 DSIR-funded 'controlled-weather house' that was completed in 1936.²⁷⁵ On top of this, Straddling also sought to foster closer links between the Ministry of Health and the BRS by becoming a member of the Ministry of Health's Housing Committee in 1934.²⁷⁶

One of the largest projects undertaken by the BRS in relation to the public housing programme came in 1935 when the Ministry of Health charged Straddling with forming a committee to report on the construction of flats for the working classes; making another £61,000 available to assist in this process.²⁷⁷ Again the emphasis was very

²⁷³ National Archives, DSIR.4/2566, Research Board, 'Extracts from Meeting held on 9th May 1934', p. 1.

²⁷⁴ National Archives, DSIR. 4/2566, 'BRS Assistance On Scientific And Technical Matters Slum Clearance And Re-Housing' (1934), p. 2.

²⁷⁵ 'New Housing Laboratory at the BRS', in *Nature*, vol. 138 (25 July, 1936), p. 156.

²⁷⁶ National Archives, DSIR.4/2566, Research Board, 'Extracts from Meeting held on 9th May 1934', p. 4.

²⁷⁷ National Archives, DSIR 4/2566, 'Memorandum by the Director of Building Research on the BRS and Re-Housing' (1935), p. 3.

much on speed and efficiency, with Straddling suggesting that such research was needed because British methods of flat-building were ‘less efficient and more costly’ than their continental equivalents.²⁷⁸ Further funding was made available for the BRS to carry out work on the feasibility of alternative building materials and construction methods, with prototype steel, timber and concrete houses being erected on the Garston site.²⁷⁹

As these sorts of examples show, then, there was during the 1930s an increasing sense amongst politicians and policy-makers that technological and scientific innovations somehow held the key to ‘solving’ the housing crisis of the era; offering as they did the possibility of being able to provide good quality sanitary homes in ways that were both cheaper and more efficient.²⁸⁰ What I now want to do is to move on and look in more depth at the actual experimental work that was carried out by the BRS in the interwar period, focusing in particular upon how they conceptualised and endeavoured to provide for the domestic needs of the prospective tenant.

Domestic Experiments

Establishing Housing Standards

In his pioneering 1977 book *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change* Thomas Kuhn suggested that,

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²⁷⁹ See, National Archives, DSIR 4/212, ‘Textbook on Building Materials’ (21 June 1935).

²⁸⁰ See, Swenarton, *Building the New Jerusalem*, p. 19; Swenarton, *Homes for Heroes*, p. 191; G. Atkinson, ‘Urban Planning research at the Building Research Station’, in *Town Planning Review* vol. 33, no. 3 (1962), p. 171.

Despite the universal lip service paid by historians to the special role of science in the development of Western culture during the past four centuries, the history of science is for most of them still foreign territory...[they] observe science from afar, balking at the border which would give access to the terrain and the natives they discuss.²⁸¹

Nowhere is this aversion to the work actually done by scientists more in evidence than in the (limited) historical writing that has been produced on the BRS, a body of work in which the world of the laboratory is conspicuous only by its absence. This next section goes some way to redressing this weakness by providing an in-depth study of the experimental work that the BRS conducted on housing issues during the interwar period with a particular interest in thinking about they conceptualised the figure of the prospective tenant in these experiments. Looking primarily at the work that they did on establishing minimum housing standards for the building industry at this time, it reveals how the scientific workers employed by the BRS tended to be fixated upon isolatable, measurable and definable phenomena; reflecting the fact that they overwhelmingly conceptualised the figure of the prospective tenant in physiological and biological terms.

The need to establish the exact and universal standards for the different materials used in the building of a home was very early identified by the BRS as being one of their most important tasks, with Straddling declaring in one 1925 memorandum that ‘the Ministry of Health should be asked to give a list of building materials required for their work for which a scientifically accurate specification is not in existence.’²⁸² Moreover, it should also be noted that at this time the only building materials for which there were

²⁸¹ T. S. Kuhn, *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies In Scientific Tradition And Change* (Chicago, 1977), p. 128. For similar arguments see, Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 21; Vernon, *Hunger*, p. 96; Jerram, *Germany's Other Modernity*, pp. 6–9.

²⁸² National Archives, DSIR 4/130, ‘Building Research: Special Investigational Work To Assist In The Housing Difficulty’ (12 February 1925), p. 3.

British Standard specifications were Portland cement, structural steel sections and clay pipes.²⁸³ To rectify this situation, the BRS appointed a special committee to work out and define minimum standards for concrete and lime in 1926, while a Committee on Statistical Methods in Standardisation and Specification was also established in collaboration with the British Standards Institution in 1932.²⁸⁴ Further work was carried out upon the use of reinforced concrete, with a Reinforced Concrete Structures Committee established in 1931 in response to a request from the LCC for more information in this area.²⁸⁵ On top of this, the BRS also worked alongside the British Structural Steelworks Association to produce a code of practice for the use of steel structures.²⁸⁶

Central to all the BRS's work in this area was the idea that mastery over any given building material depended upon an in-depth technical knowledge of the various elements that it was composed of, with one 1921 Report declaring that 'no opinion of a given material is of value unless it is the outcome of scientific reasoning.'²⁸⁷ Significantly, this mechanistic sort of outlook also coloured the BRS's approach to housing issues, meaning that their chief aim was to uncover, understand and define 'the fundamentals underlying a comfortable home', understood in this instance to mean one that was 'weather-proof', 'well and soundly built on a site clean and properly drained', offering 'adequate shelter from heat and cold', 'constructed of suitable material', 'each

²⁸³ Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 81.

²⁸⁴ National Archive, DSIR 4/1524, 'Memorandum On The First Meeting Of The British Standards Institution Committee On Statistical Methods In Standardisation And Specification' (26 May, 1932).

²⁸⁵ Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 84.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 82–84.

²⁸⁷ '1921 Report', quoted in Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 2.

room of sufficient height and cubic capacity with proper means of ventilation and lighting', and supplied with 'an adequate and wholesome water supply.'²⁸⁸

In line with these objectives, a series of 32 detached cottages, each constructed using different materials, was erected at Garston so as to allow the BRS to test out the relative strengths and weaknesses of different building materials.²⁸⁹ Further experimental houses, each featuring a specially designed structural frame which enabled the interior walls to be quickly taken out and replaced, were erected in 1926, with the intention once again being to assist the Ministry of Health in the production of a 'house of new construction which would be a much more formidable competitor in every way to the brick house.'²⁹⁰ Additional experimental structures were also added during the 1930s; most notably the 1931 'Controlled Weather House', which was designed so as to be immune to the variable effects of the weather.²⁹¹ On top of this, a great deal of work was also carried out under the supervision of William Glanville into the properties of different kinds of concrete, enabling the BRS to set out precise guidelines for the most efficient compounds for house-building projects.²⁹²

The economic cutbacks of the 1930s also had a sizeable impact upon the work that the BRS carried out in this area, resulting in questions of efficiency and economy taking a more prominent role as the BRS, under pressure from the Ministry of Health, sought to

²⁸⁸ National Archive, DSIR 4/130, 'Building Research Board: Papers For Discussion Between Representatives Of MoH, Office Of Works And Director Of Building Research On Suggested Expansion Of Work To Assist On Housing Work' (April, 1925), p. 5; Bodleian Library, AP.MSS.Addison.Dep.c.120 (Addison Papers), MoR, 'Preliminary Memorandum on Slums' (March 1918), p. 6.

²⁸⁹ National Archives, DSIR 4/1, BM.5/2/1, 'Notes on Building Researches in Progress', (March 1920).

²⁹⁰ See, Swenarton, 'Houses of Paper', pp. 273–274.

²⁹¹ 'New Heating Laboratory at the Building Research Station', in *Nature*, vol. 138 (25 July 1936), pp. 156.

²⁹² T. Yorke, *The 1930s House Explained* (Berkshire, 2006), p. 47.

set housing standards as low as possible so as to save more money.²⁹³ For instance, in one 1937 report on the structural properties of concrete it was pointed out by F. G. Thomas, a structural engineer who eventually went on to become Deputy-Director of the Station, that ‘in the interests of economy, an unnecessarily high strength was to be avoided and it became important to decide what were the *minimum* structural requirements that needed to be fulfilled.’²⁹⁴ In fact, cost-cutting measures actually reached such a level that in 1936 housing standards in Britain actually reached their lowest ebb during the twentieth-century era.²⁹⁵

Yet, despite the changing economic situation, the figure for whom these standards and guidelines were being produced for remained, conceptually at least, very much the same throughout the interwar period, with the BRS continuing to prioritise physiological and biological domestic needs such as ‘warmth, light, or protection from noise to replace rules of thumb.’²⁹⁶ As such, the primary aim for the BRS throughout this period was to uncover and define a minimum set of objective and, hence, quantifiable factors that, once known, could be utilised to cater to the basic bodily needs of the figure of the prospective tenant. Indeed, throughout all of their research on domestic issues the BRS sought to maintain close contact with the Medical Research Council and often turned to them for advice when designing experiments.²⁹⁷

²⁹³ See, *Architect and Building News*, vol. 139 (17 August 1934), p. 178

²⁹⁴ ‘Structural Requirements For Houses’, in *National Building Studies: Special Reports*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1948).

²⁹⁵ Burnett, *A Social History Of Housing*, p. 245.

²⁹⁶ Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 3.

²⁹⁷ DSIR, *The Building Research Station: A Brief Explanation of the Work of the Station* (Hertfordshire, 1947), pp. 5–6.

It is also worth bearing in mind that this fixation with statistically defining and establishing the exact physiological needs of the prospective tenant was not something that was unique to the BRS, but was very much reflective of the concerns and outlook of housing reformers rights across Western Europe and North America at this time.²⁹⁸ For instance, in a 1940 Report by the Geneva Research Centre, an independent private research organization devoted to the study of international problems, it was claimed that ‘a definition of the physiological requirements of the individual is needed whenever measures are to be devised with a view [to] setting the standard of living of any group of people.’²⁹⁹ On top of this, the Geneva Research Centre also expressed that, thanks to the ‘scientific work performed by the specialized institutes and laboratories of various countries’ and ‘in spite of differences due to climate, national customs, and individual habits’, housing reformers were now in a position to be able to accurately define optimum standards of comfort that could be applied to any individual in any region anywhere in the world.³⁰⁰

In other words, then, because research organisations such as the BRS were so focused on uncovering the basic physiological and physical factors (such as space requirements and building standards) that prospective tenants needed from a home, they tended to overlook or brush over potentially awkward factors like personal tastes, individual values and local traditions in favour of transcendental scientific laws with universal applicability.³⁰¹ Indeed, as I go on to show in the next section, the scientists and researchers employed by the BRS during the interwar period were in fact so sure that

²⁹⁸ Lea, *Science and Building*, pp. 195–197.

²⁹⁹ Olsen, *Post-War Housing Problems*, p. 14.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³⁰¹ See, Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, p. 346.

personal and subjective factors were irrelevant to the defining of housing standards that they were often quite prepared to allow machines to take the place of humans in their experiments.

The Mechanical Tenant

Alongside the work that they carried out on alternative construction methods and the structural strength of different building materials, the BRS also devoted a great deal of time during the interwar period to looking at and defining the precise environmental factors that were needed to create a ‘comfortable’ living environment.³⁰² The purpose of this next section is to look in more detail at how the BRS actually went about identifying and evaluating these conditions, focusing upon the experimental work conducted in this area and questioning why they seemed to be so averse to using the opinions of potential tenants in their research. Ultimately, what it reveals is that for the BRS the figure of the prospective tenant was first and foremost a physiological being with certain biological needs whose personal thoughts or opinions were deemed to be irrelevant to the establishment and setting of comfortable and satisfactory living conditions.

So far as environmental factors were concerned, one of the main issues that the BRS looked at the interwar period was that of the varying levels of sunlight required in different sorts of buildings, with research into the minimum day-lighting standards required in the home beginning in 1934 after a special request from the Council for

³⁰² See for example, R. Fitzmaurice, *Building Research Station, Principles of Modern Building: Volume 1, Walls, Partitions and Chimneys* (London, 1938), pp. 87–98.

Research on Housing Construction.³⁰³ Results were determined through the use of a device, which the BRS had themselves designed, known as the 'Helidon' which featured a pivoted panel set atop a protractor with a time-of-day scale and which was used in conjunction with miniaturised models and an adjustable lamp (representing the sun) to measure and plot the route of the sun at different times of the day.³⁰⁴ A simple mathematical technique, based on both a building's height and density, was also developed and was used to produce what became known as the 'sky factor' for specific rooms.³⁰⁵ Thanks to these standardised techniques, the BRS felt confident enough to recommend that every domestic living room should receive at least one hour of sunshine every afternoon; a figure that was later incorporated into the British Standards Institute's post-1945 building regulations.³⁰⁶

Indeed, throughout the interwar period the BRS made use of scaled-down models in their experiments.³⁰⁷ Typically, the buildings under investigation were reduced using a 0.5 inch scale and were designed to be as adaptable as possible, with A. J. Butler (the BRS's chief modeller) explaining that 'model-making techniques should be straightforward, not exceeding simple carpentry and soft-soldering...in the initial stages of design a model must be flexible...so that arrangements can be set up easily and altered if necessary.'³⁰⁸ Precision was also important and some of the more complex

³⁰³ Lea, *Science and Building*, pp. 34–35.

³⁰⁴ 'The Heliodon: An Instrument For Demonstrating The Apparent Motion Of The Sun', in *Journal of Scientific Instruments*, vol. 9, no. 4 (1932), pp. 251–256.

³⁰⁵ 'Population Density and the Heights Of buildings', in *Transactions of the Illuminating Engineering Society*, vol. 7 (1942), p. 75.

³⁰⁶ Ministry of Works, *British Standards Code of Practice* (London, 1943), chapter 1(B).

³⁰⁷ See, Lea, *Science and Building*, pp. 122–123.

³⁰⁸ A. J. Butler, *Model Design Techniques: BRS Current Papers: Research Series, no. 21* (London, 1939), p. 4.

models were so detailed that they took months to complete.³⁰⁹ From a practical perspective, however, the main benefit of such structures was that they enabled experiments to be carried out in controlled environments and ‘idealized conditions’ in which physical factors could be brought ‘under control’ and in which the social world could be stripped of its variable context and anomalies.³¹⁰

Yet, even when the BRS’s scientists conducted experimental work outside of the laboratory environment they were still reluctant to incorporate real-life human subjects into their experiments. For instance, when conducting work on the panoramic effects of different building styles in the 1930s the BRS, rather than relying on the human eye, opted instead to utilise a new photographic method known as the ‘full-field photogrammetric technique’ which made use of specially designed cameras with wide-angled lenses that were capable of ‘capturing the entire visual field [as] seen from that point’; easily surpassing the visual capabilities of the human eye and enabling BRS scientist’s to overcome the imagined vagaries of the subjective perspective.³¹¹ Likewise, when conducting work on comfortable air temperatures in domestic dwellings the BRS, rather than ask people for their opinions, made use of a tiny device known as the ‘Mark II Eupatheoscope’ which was able to measure air temperature, radiation and air movement in any given structure, with one of the researchers proudly explaining how it

³⁰⁹ National Archives, DSIR 4/3270, ‘Robert Matthew And Johnson Marshall: Lighting Problems In Designing An Art Gallery For The Commonwealth Institute’ (March 1960).

³¹⁰ ‘Model Techniques’, in *Transactions of the Illuminating Engineering Society*, vol. 15, no. 39 (1950), p. 203. For more on the idea of the laboratory as a ‘placeless place’ see, R. Kohler, ‘Place and Practice In Field Biology’, in *History Of Science*, vol. 50 (2002), p. 191.

³¹¹ J. Longmore, *The Full-Field Camera Photogrammetric Technique in Lighting Research: BRS Current Papers: Research Series, no. 3* (London, 1946).

‘was in effect a dummy man; it recorded a condition of comfortable warmth [that] could be defined in terms of a certain rate of heat loss from the human body.’³¹²

In other words, then, what this aversion to incorporating human subjects into experimental procedures shows is that, in the main, the BRS tended to conceptualise the prospective tenant in overtly mechanistic and simplified terms, with little consideration given to considering the possibility that they might have individual or personal preferences.³¹³ Furthermore, the fact that the BRS remained so fixated upon statistically defining physical and environmental factors (such as sunlight and temperature) also suggests that they, like other sanitary-minded reformers of the time, tended to approach concepts like ‘comfort’ and ‘satisfaction’ through a strongly biopolitical framework; believing that the key to domestic happiness lay in the fulfilment of one’s physiological needs. The aim in the next section, then, is to look at why, despite the fact that the assumptions underpinning their outlooks seem to have been broadly similar, the BRS actually found it very hard to get local authorities to adopt or apply their scientific methods during the interwar period.

Technical Expertise

Spreading the Message

Thus far, this chapter has been concerned with the legislative and experimental work that the BRS, at the behest of the Ministry of Health, conducted on issues relating to

³¹² Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 65. See also, National Archives, DSIR 4/2708, ‘The Manufacture of the Eupatheoscope: An Instrument for Measuring the Equivalent Temperature of an Environment’ (March, 1932).

³¹³ For other examples of this governmental outlook see, Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, pp. 115–122.

housing standards and levels of comfort in the home. What I now want to do in this final section is to move on and look at the extent to which the BRS were able to transmit their ideas and practices to those involved in the provision and administration of public housing at the local authority level. Looking both at the sorts of people employed by the BRS in this period and at the channels via which they attempted to engage with local authorities, it reveals that, despite their best efforts, the BRS actually struggled to get local authorities to come round to their 'scientific' way of thinking, meaning that technocratic approaches to public housing provision actually proved to be far less influential than might otherwise have been the case.

In terms of staff numbers, Straddling was from the very start insistent in his belief that the BRS were underequipped, informing Chamberlain in February 1925 that if the BRS was to be expected to substantially assist in the government's housing programme then it would need 'a provision of a special staff for research work, living in close association with our pure research men so that a rapid and constant exchange of ideas can take place.'³¹⁴ He repeated these sentiments again in 1929, informing the Ministry of Health that he needed at least seventeen more permanent scientific staff (eight chemists, two analysts, one engineer, one architectural assistant, two physicists and three observers) and ten more administrative members of staff (one head clerk, one draughtsman, one shorthand typist, one messenger, five tradesmen, and one labourer).³¹⁵

³¹⁴ National Archives, DSIR 4/130, 'Building Research: Special Investigational Work To Assist In The Housing Difficulty' (12 February 1925), p. 5.

³¹⁵ National Archives, DSIR 4/63.021/4, 'Memorandum on staff at Building Research Station' (29 June 1925).

Skills-wise, the sorts of employees that Straddling was looking for were those who had been educated to a high academic level and he made repeated requests to the Ministry of Health for more money to be made available so that he could offer competitive salaries and attract the ‘best men’ in the academic professions.³¹⁶ On top of this, he also put forward proposals for putting a select number of men with a general scientific background through a two to three year course on building research and then absorbing them into the teaching professions so as to bring about a general elevation in the levels of technical knowledge throughout the industry.³¹⁷ Typically, those with backgrounds in chemistry, physics or engineering tended to be the most sought after, with a number of prominent academics, including figures such as Dr W. N. Thomas, who arrived from the engineering sciences department at Oxford University; Dr S. C. Redshaw, an engineering professor from Birmingham University; and Dr A. W. Skempton, another engineer from Imperial College, London, being recruited to the BRS’s ranks during this period.³¹⁸

Alongside this predilection for academic expertise, the BRS also placed great score on fitness and dynamism and actively sought to recruit ‘young’ and ‘active’ staff who would be able to contribute to the ‘pioneering spirit’ that Straddling was attempting to cultivate at the Garston headquarters.³¹⁹ Straddling himself was something of a role model in this respect, having served with the Sixteenth Division of the Royal Engineers during the First World War, as was Mr C. G. T. Dean, the man responsible for the

³¹⁶ National Archives, DSIR 4/66. 5/2/8, ‘Minute Sheet On Proposals For Expanding The Senior Staff Of The BRS’ (18 May 1928).

³¹⁷ National Archives, DSIR 4/130, ‘Building Research: Special Investigational Work To Assist In The Housing Difficulty’ (12 May 1925), p. 2.

³¹⁸ Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 25.

³¹⁹ Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 24; National Archives, DSIR 4/1.B.15/1, ‘Letter from E. M. Paul to Sir Frank Heath’ (12 January 1920).

records section of the BRS, who had distinguished himself with his services in the North Lancashire Regiment during the conflict.³²⁰ Male recruits were also overwhelmingly favoured over female ones, reflecting the widespread chauvinism rife in the scientific disciplines at this time.³²¹ The Gladstone Committee's 1919 Report on Women in Industries offers one of the more striking examples of this prevailing sexism, suggesting as it did that 'whilst it would appear that for routine work women were as suitable generally as men...a doubt existed as to their equal capacity for the more responsible and complex duties...they could not stand sudden or prolonged strain as well as men.'³²²

As a result of this recruitment policy, the BRS were able to put together a youthful staff who were highly competent in technical and scientific disciplines like chemistry, physics and engineering; as demonstrated by the fact that a number of them subsequently went on to become academics in Britain's top universities.³²³ Yet, for all their specialist training and technical expertise, what these employees lacked was any real first-hand experience of the building or construction trades; meaning that there was a huge gap in terms of outlook between those working for the BRS and those employed at the local authority level. This was something that the DSIR were wary of right from the start, with one 1919 memorandum warning that 'the standard of scientific

³²⁰ National Archives, DSIR 4/63.021/4, 'Memorandum on Staff at Building Research Station' (29 June 1925).

³²¹ See, M. Arnot, 'Male Hegemony, Social Class, and Women's Education', in L. Stone (Ed.), *The Education Feminism Reader* (London, 1994), pp. 84–104.

³²² MoR, 'The Business Of Government III', p. 26. See also, M. Zimmeck, 'Strategies and Stratagems for the Employment of Women in the British Civil Service, 1919-1939', in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 27, no. 4 (1984), pp. 901–924.

³²³ Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 25.

knowledge amongst those responsible for the direction of the industry generally is astonishingly low.’³²⁴

In order to go about bridging this intellectual divide, the BRS established separate Information Bureau and Publications in 1926 to deal with the Station’s external contacts.³²⁵ P. W. Barnett (or “PWB” as he was referred to within the BRS), a young architect who had joined the BRS in 1921 after completing his training at the Bartlett School of Architecture, was the man appointed to oversee these departments. Aiding him was Mr A. Zaiman, the Senior Assistant in the Publications Department, whose duties included taking care of the library, ensuring that the Station was stocked with the most up-to-date reports, editing the BRS’s findings for publication, and maintaining close contacts with other governmental departments. Straddling in particular, valued his contribution, describing him as a ‘brilliant’ and ‘efficient’ worker, and made repeated requests to the DSIR to grant him a pay rise.³²⁶

On top of this, Straddling also pushed his research staff to establish close contacts with other research organisations and encouraged them to attend and participate in academic conferences around the country; as was the case, for instance, on the 4 May 1932 when Mr B. H. Wilsdon, the Assistant Director of the BRS, accompanied representatives from the British Engineering Standards Association, the British Standards Institute, the Manchester Cotton Industry Research Association and the Royal Statistical Society to hear the renowned American statistician Dr Walter A. Shewart of the Bell Telephone Laboratories give a talk at the University of London on the use of statistical methods in

³²⁴ National Archives, DSIR 4/1, BM.265/18, Mr Hugh Davies, ‘Memorandum on Building Research’ (3 January 1919). See also, National Archives, DSIR 4/59, ‘First Report of Committee’ (1926).

³²⁵ National Archives, DSIR 4/59, ‘First Report of Committee’ (1926).

³²⁶ National Archives, DSIR 4/66, ‘Letter of Recommendation for Mr A Zaiman’, (October 1930).

the control of production standards.³²⁷ Similarly, a great number of the BRS's staff also attended a large-scale conference on health and comfort conditions in housing that was held at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine on the 7 November 1936; again reflecting their ideologically preoccupation with physiological and biological issues at this time.³²⁸

The problem with these sorts of meetings, however, was that they tended only to take place behind closed doors and were attended by fellow specialists with similar levels of scientific knowledge, meaning that little headway was made in terms of forging contacts with those working at the local authority level.³²⁹ In a bid to overcome this intellectual isolation, Straddling decided to convene a meeting on the 21 June 1935 to discuss the possibility of producing a textbook on building materials for the benefit of those in the building trades.³³⁰ The suggestion had itself come from the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Chartered Surveyors Institute, although according to Straddling the question of the need for such a book had already received some attention within the BRS.³³¹ The Editorial Board that was made up to consider this publication was intentionally made up of both specialists and non-specialists, and included 'members who could speak from the experience of the engineer (civil and structural) as well as

³²⁷ National Archives, DSIR 4/1524, 21/2/2, 'Letter from C. Dresser to W. H. Wilsdon' (7 May 1932); National Archives, DSIR 4/1524, 'Memo On The First Meeting Of The British Sub-Committee On Statistical Methods In Standardisation And Specification (26 May 1932), p. 1.

³²⁸ 'Committee On Health And Comfort Conditions In Housing', in *The British Medical Journal*, vol. 2, no. 3957 (1936), p. 925.

³²⁹ For more on the spaces within which scientific debates have historically taken place see, C. W. J. Withers, 'Towards a History Of Geography Of The Public Sphere', in *History of Science*, vol. 36 (1998), p. 49; R. Mayhew, 'Mapping Science's Imagined Community: Geography As A Republic Of Letters, 1600–1800', in *British Journal For The History Of Science*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2005), p. 74; T. F. Gieryn, 'City as Truth-Spot: Laboratories And Field-Sites In Urban Studies', in *Social Studies Of Science*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2006), p. 7; S. Schaffer, *Physics Laboratories and the Victorian Country House* (London, 1998), pp. 152–153.

³³⁰ This would lead to the production of the first volume of *the principles of modern building* (1938).

³³¹ National Archives, DSIR 4/212, 'Letter from R. F. Straddling to MoH' (12 December 1935).

from that of the architect and surveyor.’³³² Straddling in particular was keen to incorporate men with practical hands-on experience whose ‘help would be useful, would commend themselves generally to the profession [and] would be willing to take and real active interest in the work.’³³³ Unwin, who was appointed to chair the Board, was similarly convinced of the need for men who ‘represented the ordinary experience and views of the architect profession.’³³⁴ In the end the book did not see the light of day till after the Second World War, but the make-up of the Editorial Board, featuring four local authority architects (all members of the RIBA), four engineers (two civic and two structural), two representatives from the Ministry of Health and two employees of the Office of Works, showed that the BRS were at least trying to engage with those in the building and construction professions.

Alongside these efforts, the BRS also began publishing a monthly feature in *The Architect and Building News* entitled “Notes from the Information Bureau” in which they published all of the public enquiries (along with the answers) that they had received that month.³³⁵ On top of this, Straddling and Unwin were also influential in the establishment of the National Building Centre in London in 1932; an institution that endeavoured ‘to make it possible for all interested to see at all times and inspect under one roof all that was best and latest in modern fitments, equipment, and building materials.’³³⁶ The BRS even had their own permanent exhibit in the new building,

³³² National Archives, DSIR 4/212, ‘Textbook on Building Materials’ (21 June 1935).

³³³ National Archives, DSIR 4/212, ‘Letter from R. F. Straddling to R. Unwin’ (7 August 1935).

³³⁴ National Archives, DSIR 4/212, ‘Letter from R. Unwin to R. F. Straddling’ (22 August 1935).

³³⁵ See, *Architect and Building News*, vol. 124 (12 December 1930), p. 782.

³³⁶ *Architect and Building News*, vol. 129 (1932), p. 331; Jackson, *Sir Raymond Unwin*, pp. 137–138.

which provided actual examples of diseases in stone, timber and other building materials.

Yet, despite these efforts, the BRS still found it hard to build up any sort of rapport with local authority officials, who for the most part remained unwilling to make use of the BRS's expertise. To give some example of the lack of communication, in 1934 only 218 of the 2,089 enquiries that the BRS dealt with that year were from local authorities.³³⁷

In part, this reluctance on the part of local authorities may have stemmed from the fact that the BRS had a tendency to adopt a fairly high-handed and dismissive attitude, as was the case, for example, when the LCC wrote to the BRS on the 28 April 1931 asking for their help and assistance on a recently set-up committee that had been put together to assess what amendments needed to be made to the 1930 London Building Act.³³⁸ In response the BRS produced a six-page written report outlining their recommendations which was highly dismissive in its tone and was scathing of the 'imprecise' and 'uninformed' methods that the LCC were currently using to grade the fire resistance of their buildings.³³⁹ Moreover, they also, somewhat patronisingly, felt the need to point out that the new test procedures they were advocating would not require the LCC's officers to 'perform any unduly hard scientific tasks'.³⁴⁰

As this example implies, then, there remained throughout the interwar period a tacit sense amongst those involved in the provision of public housing that there was an unbridgeable intellectual divide between the abstract world of the scientist and the

³³⁷ National Archives, DSIR 4/1617, 'Request from Royal Institute of British Architects Special Committee for information on work of BRS' (1935), p. 8.

³³⁸ National Archives, DSIR 4/2439, 'Letter from M. H. Fox to DSIR' (28 April 1931).

³³⁹ National Archives, DSIR 4/2439, 'Recommendations by Building Research Station for Revisions' (11 June 1931).

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 5.

practical and hands-on world of the manual worker.³⁴¹ As a result, and despite the fact that politicians and officials in Whitehall were generally in favour of the idea of greater levels of scientific involvement in the public house-building programme, very few of the BRS's suggestions or methods for dealing with the domestic needs of the figure of the prospective tenant actually filtered down to those at the local authority level, meaning that the BRS's practical influence over the public house-building was less than might have been anticipated.

Conclusion

Looking back at the interwar period in his official history of the BRS, *Science and Building* (1971), Frederick Lea, who had worked on the BRS's concrete research team during the interwar period and who later went on to become Director of the Station from 1946 to 1965, noted that the chief problem in the public housing sector at this time was the fact that, because 'in public housing the prospective tenant is unknown,' too many local authorities had been obliged to make speculative decisions 'as to the design and equipment that will provide the most suitable house within a given cost for the kind of life the occupants are thought to desire.'³⁴² As this chapter has demonstrated, the BRS actively sought to rectify this situation by conducting a series of scientific experiments on issues related to public housing in the hope that this would produce a reliable and 'systematic body of knowledge' that would provide basic information about 'the needs and preferences of the people for whom they design', assisting 'both in the formation of

³⁴¹ Kohler, 'Place and Practice', pp. 189–210.

³⁴² Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 112.

housing policies and in specific decisions on design and also [in] assessing the standards of comfort and amenity desired.’³⁴³

From a conceptual perspective, their work was very much a product of its time, with the emphasis being firmly centred on ensuring that future public housing schemes would be structurally sound, spacious and, above all else, hygienic. Furthermore, this emphasis on physiological factors also reflects the fact that they too predominantly conceptualised the prospective tenant in biopolitical terms as a standardised’ biological entity, without gender, age, tastes or opinions, whose housing needs could best be met through the rigid and methodological application of universal standards of the sort that the BRS sought to produce. Yet, despite the fact that their outlook chimed so closely with those of a great many contemporaries, the BRS still found it hard to convince local authorities to take on board and adopt their scientific procedures. This was largely due to the fact that many local authorities lacked either the expertise or know-how to fully comprehend the BRS’s highly abstract methodologies. As a result, and despite the favourable intellectual climate, the sort of technocratic style of governing that Wells identified as being the key to solving societies’ problems failed to fully take hold in the field of public housing during the interwar period.

³⁴³ W. V. Hole and J. J. Attenburrow, *Houses and People: A Review of User Studies at the Building Research Station* (London, 1966), p. 2; Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 112.

3. Utopian Urges: Plans and Proposals for Post-World

War II Housing

*'Like a dream, a utopia has its own logic: it is a self-enclosed and a self-enclosing reality.'*³⁴⁴

*'Utopias are real in the sense that they have material, pedagogical, and ultimately political effects, shaping the ways people understand and, as a consequence, act in their worlds.'*³⁴⁵

With the outbreak of war in Europe on the 1 September 1939 the public house-building programme in England quickly ground down to a halt as construction materials and equipment were redirected away from the house-building sectors to be used by the military instead.³⁴⁶ Conscription also had a severe effect upon the public house-building programme as it meant that the labour force in the building and civil engineering industry was run down from 1,264,000 in 1938 to 623,000 by 1944 (most of whom had been enlisted by the government to help with construction work for the armed forces).³⁴⁷ As a result, there were only about 150,000 local authority houses actually

³⁴⁴ M. Nicoletti, 'Flash Gordon and the Twentieth-Century Utopia', in *Architectural Review*, vol. 140 (1966), p. 88.

³⁴⁵ P. E. Wegner, *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation and the Spatial Histories of Modernity* (London, 2002), p. xvi.

³⁴⁶ B. Finnimore, *Houses From the Factory: System Building and the Welfare State, 1942–1974* (London, 1989), p. 16.

³⁴⁷ Holmans, *Housing Policy*, p. 91.

constructed during the Second World War; most of which had already been under construction when the conflict broke out.³⁴⁸

Perhaps because of this lack of building activity, historians of public housing in England have tended to give little attention to the period between 1939 and 1949.³⁴⁹ Those that have done so have tended to write in dismissive terms about how planners and architects became caught up at this time in utopian daydreams about the future. For instance, in Ravetz's *Council Housing and Culture* it is suggested that this period represented the 'ultimate episode of utopianism in British council housing,' while Nicholas Pronay's work on postwar reconstruction it is claimed that the wartime public was treated to 'visions of a grandiose postwar utopia, which exceeded anything promised during World War One.'³⁵⁰ Typically, these sorts of accounts have used the term 'utopian' in an uncritical way; applying it simply to emphasise the unrealistic nature of the plans put forward at this time.³⁵¹ For instance, in Alice Coleman's *Utopia on Trial* the label 'utopian' is simply attached to any plan or proposal that, in her opinion, was 'unrealisable' or 'far-fetched,' functioning as little more than a subjective value judgement.³⁵² Likewise, in Peter Hall's *Urban and Regional Planning* the term is

³⁴⁸ Merrett, *State Housing*, p. 237; Holmans, *Housing Policy*, p. 91.

³⁴⁹ A point made by Peter Malpass in *Housing and the Welfare State*, pp. 54–56.

³⁵⁰ Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, p. 104; N. Pronay, 'The Land of Promise: The Projection of Peace Aims in Britain', in K. R. M. Short (Ed.), *Film and Radio Propaganda in World War II* (London, 1983), pp. 53–54. Similar points are made in, Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, p. 96.

³⁵¹ For more on this (mis)use of the term see, J. Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments in the 20th Century* (London, 2006), pp. 4–10.

³⁵² Coleman, *Utopia on Trial*, pp. 103 and 158. For other examples of this usage of the phrase see, Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p. 224; S. Leighton, *The 1950s Home* (Oxford, 2009), p. 10.

used retrospectively to refer to those postwar plans that he sees as being too detached from reality.³⁵³

Analytically, the main problem with these sorts of approaches is that they have tended to produce overly polemical arguments, with the implication being that the ‘idealistic’ hopes of the 1940s were responsible for making ‘criminals out of potentially law-abiding citizens, and victims out of potentially secure and happy people.’³⁵⁴ Furthermore, the uncritical way in which these studies have dealt with the utopian visions and proposals of the 1940s has also served to deprive the concept of utopianism of any real analytical value in debates over public housing in England.³⁵⁵ Consequently, this has meant that the discursive foundations and ideological assumptions upon which these projections for the future were based, along with the complex ways in which these visions were worked out in practice, have been largely overlooked. This is a significant oversight because, as Frank Mort has noted, visions of future, re-planned urban spaces can, and often do, shed a great deal of light upon the ideological foundations of their protagonists as well as revealing much about the representational and cultural traditions within which they were generated.³⁵⁶

This following chapter goes some way to redressing this imbalance in the literature by looking in more detail at the ideas and assumptions that underpinned the utopian visions and proposals of the 1940s. Taking on board the ideas of theorists such as Frederick Jameson, Ernst Bloch, and Louis Marin, it treats the ‘utopian’ elements of these

³⁵³ See, Hall, *Urban and Regional Planning*, pp. 80–81.

³⁵⁴ Coleman, *Utopia on Trial*, p. 22. See also, Ravetz, *Remaking Cities*, pp. 212–229; Fishman, *Urban Utopias*, pp. 227–230.

³⁵⁵ See, Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom*, pp. 4–10.

³⁵⁶ F. Mort, ‘Fantasies of Metropolitan Life: Planning London in the 1940s’, in *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2004), p. 124.

visualisations as windows through which to come to a better and fuller understanding of how those involved in postwar reconstruction conceptualised the prospective tenant and his/her domestic needs at this time.³⁵⁷ In the first section the focus is on the extent to which planners, architects and politicians involved in the provision of public housing continued to show an interest in the sorts of sanitary and biopolitical issues that had been so dominant in the interwar years. The following section then moves on to investigate the most original and innovative ideas put forward during this period for the housing estates of the future, focusing in particular upon how they differed from their interwar forerunners. The final section then looks at how this mixture of old ideas and new ideas came together in built form by looking in closer detail at the design and layout of one of the few estates built during this period; the Lansbury Estate in Poplar.

Overall, what this chapter reveals is that, despite the fact that so little local authority house-building actually took place, this was still a hugely influential period in terms of the history of public housing in England. This was especially true in terms of how the figure of the prospective tenant was conceptualised and acted upon. Indeed, by forcing architects, planners and politicians to step back from the day-to-day practicalities of house-building, the Second World War not only encouraged those involved in the provision of public housing to assess and review the successes and failures of the interwar years but also led to more thought being given to what domestic needs the council estates of the future should meet. The result was that, although sanitary concerns certainly remained important, far more thought also began to be given to issues such as neighbourhood structures, community development, shopping and other

³⁵⁷ See, E. Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia* (California, 2000); F. Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York, 2005); L. Marin, *Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces*, trans., R. A. Vollrath (New York, 1984).

leisure facilities. Likewise, while great faith continued to be invested in the capabilities of technocratic organisations such as the BRS, there was also an increasing interest in more personal and individualised approaches to house-building. As such, we are able to see the first signs of the foundations being laid for the major changes that were to take place during the 1950s and 1960s in terms of how the figure of the prospective tenant was conceptualised and acted upon.

The Interwar Legacy

Sanitary Concerns

As the previous two chapters have demonstrated, underpinning much of the work carried out in the public housing sector during the interwar period was a heavily physiological, deterministic attitude towards the figure of the prospective; one that was overwhelmingly focused upon securing bodily health and maintaining physical productivity. What this next section does is to look at how far these sorts of ideas continued to exert an influence on planners, architects and politicians during the 1940s as they went about drawing up plans and proposals for the council estates of the future. Ultimately, what it reveals is that despite the often brash rhetoric and bold imagery used in these blueprints for the future, there was still a great deal of importance attached to the sanitary and physiological needs of the figure prospective tenant; reflecting the fact that, ideologically at least, those involved in the provision of public housing were in many ways still very much wedded to the biopolitically-derived ideals of the interwar period.

Before looking at the ideas underpinning the plans put forward by architects and planners during the 1940s, however, it should be borne in mind that these proposals would probably not even have been drawn up if it were not for the Luftwaffe's systematic bombing campaign during the Blitz which not only destroyed an estimated 2,000,000 houses, but also provided vast flattened-out 'socially-empty' spaces in the centres of England's main cities.³⁵⁸ As such, it transformed the idea of 'rebuilding Britain' from a loosely defined and vaguely desirable objective into an immediate imperative; compelling figures such as Eric de Maré, a hugely influential architectural photographer and freelance writer, to declare that 'we need a new vision, a new and vivid dream that cuts across the Hitler nightmare. A Britain rebuilt must form a vital part of that vision.'³⁵⁹

Historically, writings on postwar reconstruction have tended to see the proposals for the rebuilding of England's bombed-out cities as being a representative part of a wider movement to construct a 'fairer and more perfect society', with the assumption being that underpinning these sentiments was a strong yet naïve utopian impulse to see the 'New Jerusalem' made real.³⁶⁰ This is perhaps unsurprising given the bold rhetoric of so many of these proposals, with prominent figures such as Lewis Mumford, the outspoken American polymath, declaring at this time that 'our task is a heavy one [our] Utopia can

³⁵⁸ J. B. Cullingworth, *Town and Country Planning in England and Wales* (London, 1967), pp. 23–31. For more on the concept of 'socially empty' spaces see, M. Beaumont, *Utopia Ltd.: Ideologies of Social Dreaming in England, 1870–1900* (London, 2009), pp. 184–209.

³⁵⁹ E. S. de Maré, *Britain Rebuilt* (London, 1942), p. 11.

³⁶⁰ See, C. Barnett, *The Audit of War* (London, 1986), pp. 246–247; P. Ackroyd, *London: The Biography* (London, 2001), pp. 753–755; A. Saint, 'The New Towns', in B. Ford (Ed.), *The Cambridge Cultural History of Britain, Volume 9: Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 147; D. Kynaston, *A World to Build: Austerity Britain, 1945–51* (London, 2007), p. 29. See also, Cullingworth, *Town and Country Planning*, pp. 23–31; J. Hasegawa, 'The Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction in 1940s Britain', in *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1999), p. 138. For more on the links between planning and utopianism see, K. Kumar, 'Aspects of the Western Utopian Tradition', in *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2003), pp. 64–69.

no longer be an unknown land on the other side of the globe [instead] it must be the land one knows best, re-apportioned, re-shaped, and re-cultivated for permanent human occupation.’³⁶¹ Similar sentiments were expressed by Frederic Osborn, the acting Secretary of the Town and Country Planning Association, who wrote in the foreword to the *Picture Post*’s special issue on postwar planning that ‘we need to outline a fairer, pleasanter, happier, more beautiful Britain than our own.’³⁶²

Yet, despite this bold rhetoric, it is important not to overlook just how much of an influence the long-standing sanitary concerns of the interwar era continued to wield over those in the planning and architectural professions. Indeed, in many of the plans put forward at this time the domestic dwelling was still predominantly seen in sanitary terms as a place of shelter and warmth. For example, in E. J. Carter and Ernö Goldfinger’s *County of London Plan*, a condensed version of Forshaw and Abercrombie’s hugely influential 1943 plan, it was suggested a well-built house, ‘with all the amenities necessary for a full and healthy life, is the primary need for everyone.’³⁶³ Similar sentiments were expressed by the Hygiene Committee of the Women’s Group on Public Welfare, who stated in their 1943 publication *Our Towns: A Close-Up* that ‘a high sanitary standard for both home and person must be made possible for all.’³⁶⁴ Moreover, just as had been the case during the interwar period, their calls for action were premised on the assumption that insanitary conditions, especially

³⁶¹ L. Mumford, *The Social Foundations of Post-War Building: Rebuilding Britain Series, no. 9* (London, 1943), p. 17.

³⁶² F. Osborn, ‘A Plan for Britain’, in *Picture Post* (4 January 1941), p. 4.

³⁶³ E. J. Carter and E. Goldfinger (Eds.), *The County of London Plan Explained* (London, 1945), p. 21.

³⁶⁴ Women’s Group on Public Welfare, *Our Towns: A Close-Up: A Study Made in 1939-42 with Certain Recommendations by the Hygiene Committee of the Women’s Group on Public Welfare* (London, 1943), p. vii.

overcrowding, were likely to encourage ‘bad feeling’, ‘low social standards’ and ‘coarse habits’ as well as ‘warping character’ and ‘degrading family life’.³⁶⁵

Conceptually, as historians such as Jose Harris and James Vernon have suggested in other contexts, this continuing concern with questions of bodily health and physical wellbeing can be taken as evidence of the fact that many of the ideas that fed into the welfarist policies of the postwar period were actually premised on long-established notions of the individual citizen.³⁶⁶ Indeed, as Fiona Williams has pointed out, many of the welfarist sentiments voiced during the Second World War continued to be premised upon the premise that the maintenance of the healthy and productive family unit was essential to the health and wellbeing of the nation.³⁶⁷ For example, in the hugely influential 1942 ‘Beveridge Report’, which set out a series of proposals and recommendations in regards to the provision of a new national insurance scheme for both workers and the unemployed, it was noted that ‘restoration of a sick person to health is a duty of the State prior to any other consideration.’³⁶⁸ Likewise, the Report also placed a great deal of stress upon the physical health of the child, who was viewed as the ‘foundation of the State’ and whose health and vigour was taken to be both

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 103–104.

³⁶⁶ J. Harris, ‘Political Ideas and the Debate on State Welfare, 1940–1945’, in H. L. Smith (Ed.), *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War* (Manchester, 1986), 256; Vernon, *Hunger*, p. 278. See also, K. Jefferys, ‘British Politics and Social Policy During the Second World War’, in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 30, no. 1 (1987), p. 123; H. L. Smith, *Britain in the Second World War* (Manchester, 1996), p. 1; S. Pedersen, *Family, Dependence and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914–1945* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 349; J. Gardiner, *Wartime: Britain 1939–1945* (London, 2004), pp. 501–503.

³⁶⁷ See, F. Williams, ‘Racism and the Discipline of Social Policy’, in *Critical Social Policy*, vol. 20, no. 3 (1987), pp. 135.

³⁶⁸ W. H. Beveridge, *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (London, 1942), p. 159.

representative of the health of the nation at large and a 'precious national asset' that would, quite literally, strengthen the social body by enlarging it.³⁶⁹

Central to this commitment to the welfare of the family unit was the domestic dwelling, with one Medical Officer in the Ministry of Health even going so far as to claim that 'it is in the home and in family life that the future prosperity and happiness of this country rest.'³⁷⁰ Similar views were expressed in a 1943 Ministry of Reconstruction pamphlet on the architecture of the home, in which it was claimed that 'the family is, after all, the fountain from which all social life and civilisation spring; the environment and health of the family is, therefore, of urgent concern.'³⁷¹ In Manchester too, the local authorities continued to place great stress on the health of the family, declaring in one 1945 publication that 'the planning of homes that will make for healthy and happy families [is] the starting-point of our design for living.'³⁷²

Further impetus was given to these sorts of sanitary concerns by the falling birth rate at this time, which sparked fears within both the media and governmental circles about the effects that a declining and ageing population might have on England's military and industrial strength.³⁷³ Planners and architects were certainly under no illusion as to the role that they could play in encouraging reproduction, with one speaker at the Town and Country Planning Association's National Conference in 1943 stating that 'any policy

³⁶⁹ 'The Family and the State', in *Political Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 4 (1940), p. 402; R. Davison, *Social Security: The Story of British Social Progress and the Beveridge Plan (Visualised by Isotype)* (London, 1943), p. 24.

³⁷⁰ A. S. Macnalty, 'Influence of War on Family Life', in J. Marchant (Ed.), *Rebuilding Family Life in the Post-War World: An Enquiry with Recommendations* (London, 1944), p. 136.

³⁷¹ A. Whittick, *Civic Design and the Home: Rebuilding Britain Series, no. 10* (London, 1943), p. 33.

³⁷² R. Nicholas, *City of Manchester Plan: Abridged Edition* (Norwich, 1945), p. 16.

³⁷³ 'The Debate on the Declining Birth Rate in Britain: The "Menace" of an Ageing Population', in *Continuity and Change*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1990), pp. 245–267.

designed to restore the birth-rate must include the provision for British families of dwellings and towns suitable for children and favourable to family life.’³⁷⁴ Mumford too was insistent on this point, stating that ‘we must think not simply in terms of industrial rehabilitation but of biological survival’ and insisting that ‘the first consideration of town planning must be to provide an environment which will not be hostile to biological survival [but] to create one which...by sympathetic magic will encourage the woman of child bearing age the impulse to bear.’³⁷⁵

Spurred on by these demographic worries, wartime town planners and architects continued to place great score on providing clean, spacious and well-lit sanitary homes surrounded by greenery, in the belief that these conditions were conducive to improving public health. For instance, in the modernist architect Ralph Tubbs’ 1942 treatise *Living in Cities* it was pointed out that ‘environment plays a very important part in health, and this is a problem for the architect and town-planner...the need is urgent for homes and workplaces admitting sunshine and fresh air, for quiet open spaces, for playing fields near every home.’³⁷⁶ The Association of Building Technicians were of a similar biopolitical mind-set, declaring in one 1944 publication that the ‘planning authorities must give increased attention to finding practical solutions [to the housing shortage] in the interests of health, well-being and efficient output.’³⁷⁷ Eric de Maré even went so far

³⁷⁴ D. Tyerman (Ed.), *Ways and Means of Rebuilding* (London, 1943), p. 50. See also, ‘The Report and Statutory Planning’, in *Town and Country Planning*, vol. 8, no. 30 (1940), p. 20.

³⁷⁵ Mumford, *The Social Foundations of Post-War Building*, p. 34; L. Mumford, *The Plan of London County: Rebuilding Britain Series, no 12* (London, 1943), p. 33.

³⁷⁶ R. Tubbs, *Living in Cities* (London, 1942), p. 46. See also, W. Segal, *Home and Environment* (London, 1948), pp. 174–183.

³⁷⁷ Association of Building Technicians, *Housing Problems: The Present Position* (London, 1944), p. 5.

as to predict that in the future ‘health preservation’ would be taught to tenants and encouraged through ‘interesting propaganda methods’.³⁷⁸

Ultimately, then, what such sentiments reveal is that, despite their bold rhetoric and brash imagery, many of the visions and proposals of the 1940s actually drew on a long evolution of social and political thought that stretched back to well before the First World War; especially as regards the way in which they both conceptualised and sought to cater to the physiological and biological needs of the prospective tenant.³⁷⁹ The result was that great score continued to be placed upon the provision of clean, well-built sanitary homes in spacious and green settings, with the assumption being that these conditions would protect the bodily health of the domestic subject and, ultimately, the nation as a whole.

New Concerns

Social Needs

Thus far this chapter has been concerned with looking at the degree to which the ideas and assumptions of the interwar period were carried over into the 1940s, looking in particular at the extent to which politicians and architects remained concerned with the bodily health and physiological efficiency of the domestic subject. What this next

³⁷⁸ de Maré, *Britain Rebuilt*, p. 52.

³⁷⁹ J. Stevenson, ‘Planners Moon? The Second World War and the Planning Movement’, in H. L. Smith (Ed.), *War and Social Change*, p. 59. See also, P. Mandler, ‘New Towns for Old: The Fate of the Town Centre’, in B. Conekin, F. Mort and C. Waters (Eds.), *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945–64* (London, 1999), pp. 209–210. For more on these debates see, J. B. Cullingworth, *Environmental Planning, Volume 1: Reconstruction and Land-Use Planning 1939–1947* (London, 1975), pp. 2–5; Hasegawa, ‘The Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction’, pp. 158–160.

section does is to move on and look in more depth at those elements of the utopian visions and proposals put forward during the 1940s that broke with the approaches adopted during the interwar period. Focusing initially on how those involved in the architectural and planning professions retrospectively assessed the work of their predecessors, it reveals how wider social and communal issues began to enter into debates over public housing provisions as serious questions began to be raised as regards the adequacy of the communal and recreational facilities on interwar public housing estates; reflecting the fact the social wants of the prospective tenant were starting to be identified and targeted as legitimate domestic ‘needs’ in their own right.

Surprisingly, this shift in terms of how the domestic needs of the prospective tenant were conceptualised and identified is one that for the most part has been overlooked by historians of public housing in England, who have instead tended to treat the interwar and postwar periods as two discrete entities.³⁸⁰ This is all the more remarkable given the fact that so many wartime planners and architects were so explicit in their condemnations of the work of their predecessors, with figures such as Clough Williams-Ellis, the prolific architect and champion of the rural preservation movement, showing little reservation in their criticisms:

I had to regard the destruction, not with the excitement of the eyewitness or the indignation of the outraged citizen, but with the cool detachment of the professional town planner...today [our homes] are all swept away, to the undisguised delight of the more enlightened citizens and of the very able city architect.³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ See for example, Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*; Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*; Hanley, *Estates*.

³⁸¹ C. Williams-Ellis, *Plan for Living: The Architect's Part: Rebuilding Britain Series, no. 5* (London, 1943), pp. 18–19. See also, W. A. Robson, *The War and the Planning Outlook: Rebuilding Britain, Series 4* (London, 1943), p. 9; de Maré, *Britain Rebuilt*, p. 13.

Particularly strong distain was directed towards the sort of out of town cottage-estates that local authorities had built in places like Downham and Wythenshawe. This was especially true amongst the younger generation of architects and town planners entering the professions at this time who did little to disguise their revulsion for the idea of suburban living, with figures such as Ralph Tubbs declaring that ‘today the town is diseased and the tentacles of sickness are creeping out and destroying the countryside...let us put a stop to this suffocating expansion now.’³⁸²

Underpinning these criticisms was a growing sense that interwar public housing schemes had failed to provide adequate opportunities for new communities to develop, with figures such as Thomas Sharp, the hugely influential town planner and author of *Town and Countryside Planning* (1932), declaring that ‘the problem of providing a great number of urgently needed homes was solved, but solved without regard to making well-balanced communities.’³⁸³ Similar reservations were raised by Patrick Abercrombie, who suggested that ‘the relationship between housing and community was almost entirely ignored’; claiming that ‘the lack of focal points for the new community life became tragically evident.’³⁸⁴ Osborn came to similar conclusions, stating in 1943 that ‘you’ve only got to look at where we went wrong in the past to see that that it was always because we thought of one important thing and forgot others...after the last war we forgot about industry and community life.’³⁸⁵ Similar sorts

³⁸² Tubbs, *Living in Cities*, p. 27. For more on the generational debates that divided the architectural and planning professions in this period see, Kynaston, *A World to Build*, p. 31; P. Carolin, ‘Sense, Sensibility and Tower Blocks: The Swedish Influence on Post-War Housing in Britain’, in *Housing the Twentieth Century Nation*, pp. 107–108; L. C. B. Seaman, *Post-Victorian Britain, 1902–1951* (London, 1989), pp. 456–457.

³⁸³ F. J. Osborn, *Making Plans: Based on the BBC Series of Discussions* (London, 1943), p. 40.

³⁸⁴ J. H. Forshaw and P. Abercrombie, *County of London Plan* (London, 1944), p. 2.

³⁸⁵ Osborn, *Making Plans*, p. 33.

of concerns were also being raised at a local level as local authorities began making their own plans for the future.³⁸⁶ For instance, in the Manchester City Council's 1945 *Redevelopment Plan* there was a significant amount of criticism aimed at the lack of communal facilities that had been provided on interwar housing estates, with cottage-estate schemes such like Wythenshawe being portrayed as having an 'anaemic social atmosphere' and a 'lack of robust community life'.³⁸⁷

Thus, from being conceived of as a solitary unit with isolatable needs, the figure of the individual domestic subject was slowly coming to be reconfigured as a social citizen whose domestic desires were to be realised in relation to the community in which they resided.³⁸⁸ This shift in outlook can be seen in that fact that far greater emphasis started to be given to thinking about how to provide for the social and communal wants of the prospective tenant, with bodies such as the RIBA recommending that 'every new housing development should, from its inception, be regarded and planned as a social unit.'³⁸⁹ Again, the unique social circumstances produced by the Second World War only seemed to encourage this approach, with figures such as Roland Nicholas, the City Surveyor for the Manchester City Council, suggesting that 'the comradeship of war has reawakened a sense of community...it must be surely be a primary objective of any plan

³⁸⁶ See, P. Shapely, D. Tanner and A. Walling, 'Civic Culture and Housing Policy in Manchester, 1945–1979', in *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 15, no. 4 (2004), pp. 418–419.

³⁸⁷ Nicholas, *City of Manchester Plan*, p. 24. See also, City of Manchester Housing Department, *Municipal Housing Schemes* (Manchester, 1939), p. 5.

³⁸⁸ Rabinow, *French Modern*, 67; N. Rose and P. Miller, 'Political Power beyond the State: Problematics of Government', in *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 43, no. 2 (1992), pp. 174–177.

³⁸⁹ RIBA, *Housing: A Report* (London, 1944), p.19.

for Manchester to create a civic structure that will nourish it and give it a peace-time outlet.’³⁹⁰

Increasingly, these sorts of sentiments were also being expressed at a national level, with the Ministry of Health declaring that among ‘the many serious mistakes made in the planning and layout of housing estates during the interwar period’ was the insufficient attention given to communal and social facilities and the lack of consideration given to how far dwellings were from a tenant’s place of work.³⁹¹ Similar sentiments were expressed by a deputation from the London Royal College of Physicians in 1942 who, in a special report produced for the Ministry of Health, recommended that all future housing estates should be grouped on ‘a community basis,’ with adequate playgrounds, shopping centres, schools, libraries, health centres, and places of worship.³⁹² Likewise, in a 1944 report produced The Ministry of Health’s Joint Study Group on Town Planning, chaired by Thomas Sharp and including amongst its members town planners such as William Holford, architects such as Louis de Soissons, and building scientists such as W. A. Allen (from the BRS), it was suggested that all future housing developments should be planned as discrete and self-contained ‘neighbourhood units’ with sufficient social facilities.³⁹³

Indeed, throughout this period a great deal of emphasis was placed on the idea of the ‘neighborhood unit’, with the National Council for Social Services recommending that

³⁹⁰ Nicholas, *City of Manchester Plan*, p. 16. See also, ‘The Family House’, in *The Spectator* (3 January 1941), p. 10.

³⁹¹ MoH, *Design of Dwellings: Report of the Design of Dwellings Sub-Committee of the MoH Central Housing Advisory Committee* (London, 1944), p. 11.

³⁹² Royal College of Physicians of London, *Memorandum drawn up at the request of the Central Housing Advisory Committee of the MoH on the Design of Dwellings* (London, 1942), p. 20.

³⁹³ MoH, *Dudley Committee’s Joint Study Group: The Relationship of Housing to Town Planning* (London, 1944), p. 1.

all new houses should be built in groupings of up to 2,000 dwellings and situated so that every resident could be within 10, 15 minutes walking distance of a communal centre.³⁹⁴ Increased attention was also given to thinking about the siting of housing schemes in relation to nearby civic centres and rural amenities, with Herbert Manzoni, Birmingham's City Surveyor and Engineer from 1935 to 1963, arguing that, if council estates were to provide 'a fuller and more purposeful life after the war', then 'every single building' had to be 'coordinated with national and local plans.'³⁹⁵ Key figures such as Patrick Abercrombie also maintained that housing areas needed be treated as part of city-wide regeneration schemes.³⁹⁶ As such, then, whereas in the interwar period council estate dwellings had tended to be treated as isolated and self-contained units, by the 1940s they were increasingly coming to be contextualised within the social milieu of the estate as a whole.

One effect of this shifting outlook was that far more interest began to be shown towards the possibility of providing council houses in inner-city housing schemes. Ralph Tubbs was especially vocal in this respect, declaring that 'the cities of the future should be places of beauty where everyone can live happily, and where everyone will have a high standard of living...let us reconstruct the centres of our cities so that we can again live in them and glory in them.'³⁹⁷ L. H. Keay, the Liverpool City Council's Chief Architect, was similarly keen to break with the Garden City traditions of the interwar period, asserting that 'it's time to try and bring people back to the towns again by making them

³⁹⁴ National Council of Social Services, *The Size and Structure of a Town* (London, 1943), pp. 5–8. See also, Nicholas, *City of Manchester Plan*, p. 24; Stepney Reconstruction Group, *Living in Stepney: Past, Present and Future* (London, 1946), pp. 45–46.

³⁹⁵ Osborn, *Making Plans*, p. 73.

³⁹⁶ Forshaw and Abercrombie, *County of London Plan*, pp. 78–83. For more on the 'organic' aspects of this work see, Mort, 'Fantasies of Metropolitan Life', pp. 135–137.

³⁹⁷ Tubbs, *Living in Cities*, pp. 25–30.

more attractive to live in.’³⁹⁸ The Ministry of Health also helped in this respect by passing a number of measures designed to encourage and stimulate urban residential development, including relaxing the regulations on housing densities and replacing the old ‘12-houses-to-the-acre’ policy with a more flexible figure of 120 persons to the acre.³⁹⁹

Overall, then, what these changing approaches to the design and layout of public housing schemes lay bare is a newly emerging interest in, and identification of, the social and communal requirements of the figure of the prospective tenant. Indeed, as shown above, for many planners and architects these social requirements were actually coming to be defined and treated as legitimate social ‘needs’ that were as equal in importance as the prospective tenant’s sanitary and physiological needs.⁴⁰⁰ Underpinning this shift in emphasis was a growing sense that in order to be happy and, ultimately, healthy domestic subjects needed something more than the clean, well-lit and spacious sanitary homes of the interwar years, with figures such as Mumford suggesting that interwar planners and architects had been ‘too concerned with a set of narrow physical, technical and economic questions,’ conceiving the housing problem ‘in a purely mechanical fashion...not social terms.’⁴⁰¹ The reasons for this shift in emphasis and the ideas underpinning it will be discussed in much more detail in the next chapter, but for now it is important just to note that the retrospection brought about by

³⁹⁸ Osborn, *Making Plans*, p. 38. See also, Electrical Association for Women (Ed.), *Housing Digest* (London, 1946), pp. 25–27.

³⁹⁹ See, MoH, *Design of Dwellings*, p. 55; MoH, *Housing Manual 1944* (London, 1944), p. 15.

⁴⁰⁰ Osborn, *Making Plans*, p. 34.

⁴⁰¹ Mumford, *The Social Foundations of Post-War Building*, pp. 24–25.

the Second World War was significant because it provided an opportunity for these sorts of ideas to be discussed and debated at a national and local level.

Individual Needs

As shown in the previous two chapters, throughout the interwar period the prospective tenant was for the most part conceptualised as an undifferentiated member of the ‘masses’ or ‘working classes’ with standard, universally-applicable domestic needs. What this next section does is to look at the extent to which these mechanistic assumptions continued to influence those involved in the provision and administration of public housing during the 1940s, focusing once again on how those in the architectural and planning professions retrospectively assessed the work of their predecessors and looking at the plans and proposals that they drew up for the council estates of the future. Ultimately, what these sources show is that the notion of the prospective tenant being a unitary domestic subject with universal needs increasingly came to be challenged and replaced by one that placed far more emphasis upon subjective and individual factors, reflected most clearly in the fact that far more thought started to be given to the differing domestic requirements of different sorts of tenants (children, the elderly, single parents, etc.).

Again, the unique circumstances brought about by the Second World War proved to be crucial in bringing about these changes as they encouraged and stimulated greater levels of debate regarding domestic issues, with radio programmes such as the BBC’s 1941 “Making Plans” series, designed to ‘open up all technical issues relating to postwar reconstruction in a clear and simple way without going into too much detail’, providing

public forums within which these ideas could be discussed.⁴⁰² In terms of domestic issues, the most relevant of the broadcasts was the “New House” show which brought together a Housing Consultant (Elizabeth Denby), an architect (J. L. Martin) and an engineer (Richard Llewellyn Jones) to discuss what was needed from the postwar home. So far as this thesis is concerned, the most noteworthy point to emerge from this live discussion was the fact that, although the three participants came from very different vocational backgrounds, they were all united in their condemnation of the ‘deadly uniformity’ and ‘blandness’ of interwar local authority cottage-estates like Downham and Wythenshawe.⁴⁰³ Denby, who had actually sat on the LCC’s Housing Committee during 1936, was especially vehement in her criticisms, stating that ‘I think one of the chief criticisms of the houses put up since the last war is that there is so little difference between them...the blocks of flats look the same, the cottage estates look the same, the equipment doesn’t vary much.’⁴⁰⁴ In particular, she was unimpressed by the limited extent to which interwar planners and architects had taken into account the specific needs and requirements of the people for whom they were designing, claiming that ‘we’ve concentrated on the need for shelter, and forgotten what human beings *really* need...it’s no longer a question of fitting the family to the house, but the house to the family.’⁴⁰⁵ This was a point she in fact raised again in an article for the *Spectator* a few months later, arguing that ‘people should not be compelled to live on a totalitarian plan

⁴⁰² Osborn, *Making Plans*, p. 2.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 10–13.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

for want of a choice of alternatives, both in type of dwelling and in density of dwelling.’⁴⁰⁶

Importantly, Denby seems not to have been alone in these sentiments. Indeed, in the same BBC radio programme J. L. Martin argued that ‘[we] don’t want to live as we do now all in the same kind of house...we must have houses which suit ourselves and our families as individuals.’⁴⁰⁷ Similar sentiments were expressed in a 1943 pamphlet on housing design published by the Ministry of Reconstruction:

To design well for homes we cannot employ methods that embrace housing and many other things as mere elements in geometric schemes of town planning...the starting point is to consider the needs of the individual and of the family and then to reason logically about how best to satisfy those needs.⁴⁰⁸

Tied up with these criticisms, then, was an increased interest in the specific lifestyles and living arrangements of different sorts of domestic subjects as the concept of a domestic subject with universal needs, advocated most fervently during the interwar period by groups such as the BRS, increasingly came to be questioned. Again, Denby was especially critical of the notion that all people everywhere required the same thing from a house, declaring that ‘you can’t plan the same kind of house for a fisherman who comes home in water-sodden clothes, exhausted and wet and cold, as you would for a miner who’s been working underground in great heat.’⁴⁰⁹ However, she was not alone in these views. Figures such as Ralph Tubbs, E. J. Carter and Ernö Goldfinger were also calling for more recognition to be given to the differing domestic needs of different

⁴⁰⁶ ‘Facts as Foundation’, in *Spectator* (24 October 1941), p. 303.

⁴⁰⁷ Osborn, *Making Plans*, p. 13.

⁴⁰⁸ Whittick, *Civic Design*, p. 9.

⁴⁰⁹ Osborn, *Making Plans*, pp. 10–12.

sorts of people, arguing that ‘different people have different requirements, according to age, whether single or married or with children.’⁴¹⁰ Mumford too was vocal on this issue, pointing out that ‘different races, different nations, different regions, different temperaments and occupations, all have many minor differences in their head’ and suggesting that ‘to achieve balance, a variety of social groupings must be open to the individual.’⁴¹¹

Indeed, arguments of this sort only increased as the 1940s progressed. For instance, in the 1945 *City of Manchester Plan* it was suggested that in the future ‘dwellings of each type and size should be mingled in proportion to the family units to whose needs they are most appropriate.’⁴¹² Local groups like the Stepney Reconstruction Group were making similar recommendations, noting how their ‘district has suffered in the past from [having] houses that do not fit the families that have had to live in them’ and suggesting that ‘in the future we must build for different needs.’⁴¹³ A great deal of attention also came to be focused on catering to the differing domestic needs of different sized families and tenants of different ages, with groups like the National Council for Social Services suggesting that in the future ‘it will be important to have more houses of different sizes on an estate, so as to allow for changing family needs.’⁴¹⁴ The Electrical Association for Women argued something similar in their 1943 report on postwar

⁴¹⁰ Tubbs, *Living in Cities*, p. 25. See also, Carter and Goldfinger (Eds.), *The County of London Plan*, p. 31.

⁴¹¹ Mumford, *The Social Foundations of Post-War Building*, p. 26.

⁴¹² Nicholas, *City of Manchester Plan*, p. 6.

⁴¹³ Stepney Reconstruction Group, *Living in Stepney*, p. 42. See also, City of Leicester Development Committee, *Leicester: Post-War Civic Affairs* (Leicester, 1945), pp. 4–6.

⁴¹⁴ National Council of Social Services, *The Size and Structure of a Town*, p. 22.

housing needs, claiming that ‘no housing estate is complete unless it offers accommodation for men and women at every period of their life.’⁴¹⁵

A great deal of emphasis was also placed on the domestic needs of elderly tenants, with the Conservative Sub-Committee on Housing pointing out in one 1945 Report that ‘in the past too many old people have been compelled to surrender their independence because of lack of housing accommodation suitable to their years.’⁴¹⁶ Demographic shifts, with England’s elderly population increasing by over 50% between 1931 and 1951, only added greater impetus to such calls.⁴¹⁷ In response, the Ministry of Health stipulated that far more dwellings specifically designed for elderly people were needed, ranging from small care-provided dwellings grouped together around communal day rooms to self-contained ground floor flats and bungalows in sheltered sites which were to be within easy distance of churches and shops.⁴¹⁸ Similar calls were made for special provision to be given to other ‘special occupants,’ such as spinsters, bachelors and bigger-than-average families.⁴¹⁹

In many ways, this increasing atomisation of the social body was reflective of the general political mood at the time, as increasing numbers of politicians and social commentators began to focus their attentions on the welfare of specific sub-groups within society. The clearest example of this came with the publication the Beveridge Report on Social Insurance in 1942, which not only identified housewives for the first time as a ‘distinct insurance class’ with ‘special needs’, but also acknowledged the

⁴¹⁵ Electrical Association for Women, *Interim Report on Post-War Reconstruction* (London, 1943), p. 19.

⁴¹⁶ Conservative and Unionist Party Organisation: Central Committee on Post-War Reconstruction, *Looking Ahead: A Policy for Housing in England and Wales* (London, 1945), p. 47.

⁴¹⁷ Davison, *Social Security*, pp. 42–43.

⁴¹⁸ MoH, *Housing Manual 1944*, pp. 22–23.

⁴¹⁹ Electrical Association for Women, *Interim Report*, p. 19.

elderly as a distinct and separate sub-section of society with their own unique requirements.⁴²⁰ In total the Report divided the English population up into six separate castes: employees in full-time work; others gainfully employed; housewives; others of working age not gainfully employed; those below working age; and those who were retired and over the working age, with one contemporary commentator explaining how this ‘classification corresponds to real differences of need between various types of people.’⁴²¹

Overall, then, what seems to have been taking place during the 1940s was a gradual undermining of the notion that all of the domestic needs of the prospective tenant were reducible to quantifiable and universal laws. Instead, there was a growing interest in how the needs of prospective tenants might vary according to their age, sex and family size as planners, architects and housing reformers started to seriously consider the feasibility of designing more age/gender-appropriate homes. Although, due to the lack of resources and manpower, there were few opportunities for these ideas to move past the drawing-board phase this should not detract from the fact that, conceptually at least, far more attention was coming to be given to the more subjective and personal emotional and psychological wants of the prospective tenant, with prominent figures such as Abercrombie starting to suggest that ‘[although] all humans’ need water, food,

⁴²⁰ For instance, the Report claimed that retired people needed 25% less calories than working people and 33% less money for clothing, though they did require about 15% more money for heating and fuel, meaning that, in total, the average OAP couple needed 29/8 per week. Beveridge, *Social Insurance*, pp. 48–52.

⁴²¹ R. W. B. Clarke, ‘The Beveridge Report and After’, in W. A. Robson (Ed.), *Social Security* (London, 1943), p. 276.

shelter, and sustenance...there should also be scope for spiritual, mental, and physical development.’⁴²²

Scientific Solutions

Having looked in the previous sections at the extent to which those in the planning professions based their proposals for the future on the ideas and approaches of their interwar predecessors, I now want to move on and look at how far building research during this period continued to be based upon the sorts of biopolitical and environmentalist principles and understandings that, as the previous chapter showed, had tended to prevail during the interwar period. From a historical perspective, this is an area that has received next to no attention from historians who, aside from a few passing references to the wartime government’s increasing interest in prefabricated and standardised building methods, have tended to pay little heed to the ways in which relations between the building industries, the scientific professions and the government developed in this period.⁴²³ This next section goes some way to redressing these issues by providing a historical assessment of the work carried out by the BRS on issues related to public housing in England. Overall, what it shows is that, just as was the case for those in the planning and architectural professions, the upheavals caused by the Second World War actually seem to have provided an opportunity for those in the building sciences to step back and reassess their work; resulting in much more thought

⁴²² Mass Observation Archive (Topic Collection), Part 4: Reel 49, TC2/1/P, ‘Report of the 1940 Council’ (September 1940).

⁴²³ See, Hayes, ‘Making Homes by Machines’, pp. 282–284; C. G. Powell, *An Economic History of the British Building Industry 1815-1979* (London, 1980), p. 170; M. Bowley, *The British Building Industry* (London, 1966), pp. 236–237; Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing*, pp. 102–103.

being given to the wider range domestic needs of the figure of the prospective tenant as the foundations were laid for the innovative and expansive technical research work that was to follow in the postwar years.

In terms of staff numbers, however, the BRS, like so many other organisations in this period, suffered greatly because of the Second World War as increasing numbers of their workers were drafted into military service, providing the armed forces with much sought-after mechanical and engineering know-how.⁴²⁴ As a result, the BRS's non-industrial staff fell from 170 in 1939 to 145 by 1943, even though the Building Research Board had estimated that there was a need for some 230 full-time employees at Garston.⁴²⁵ Likewise, the research work of the BRS was thrown into turmoil as the armed forces put more pressure on them to direct their work towards the military campaign; as was the case, for example, in 1943 when the RAF asked them to construct a scale model of the Ministry of Healthne Dam to assist in the planning of the infamous 'bouncing bomb' air-raid of that same year.⁴²⁶

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that these difficulties held the BRS back in terms of their ambitions for the postwar period. Instead, they took this opportunity to think about, assess, and (re)define the role that they envisioned playing in the light of anticipated needs and opportunities in the postwar house-building programme. These organisational re-evaluations took place during a series of meetings and conferences that were held both internally, amongst those who were left within the BRS, and

⁴²⁴ National Archives, DSIR 4/196, 'Committees Of The BRS Which Are At Present Active' (26 January 1944).

⁴²⁵ Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 94.

⁴²⁶ R. Courtney, 'Building Research Establishment: Past, Present and Future', in *Building Research and Information*, vol. 25, no. 5 (1997), p. 285.

externally, in conjunction with prominent academic and industrial figures from outside the organisation, during the summer of 1944.⁴²⁷ Among the key points to emerge from these discussions was the need to establish more effective and secure lines of communication with local authorities and the wider public so as to get the results of their ‘scientific work out to those who can use the results and to the man in the street.’⁴²⁸ Special mention was also made of the need to establish closer links with research organisations from abroad, especially those in America, and on the need to think about new and more effective ways of translating the scientific findings of the BRS into formats that the ‘non-specialist’ would be able to understand.⁴²⁹ The results of these discussions were eventually collated into a 12-point statement that affirmed, amongst other things, the need to ‘examine problems from the local point of view’ and the desirability of forging closer links with the Ministry of Health.⁴³⁰

Another one of the more influential documents produced during this period was a memorandum on the future of the organization written in September 1944 by the eminent chemist Dr Edward F. Armstrong (1878, 1945), a former professor at the Royal College of Science and an ex-chairman of the British Standards Institute. Although recognising the great value of the BRS’s earlier work, Armstrong was also quick to stress the need for the BRS to adopt a more expansive outlook; one that would take into account how new domestic materials and layouts actually functioned, with a particular

⁴²⁷ The bringing together of so many titled and officially qualified men provides yet another example of the importance of thinking about the role of ‘networks’ for the understanding of socio-technical organisations. See, B. Latour, *Science in Action* (Cambridge, 1987).

⁴²⁸ Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 2.

⁴²⁹ National Archives, DSIR 4/255, ‘Memorandum of Discussion Held in Sir Lawrence Bragg’s Room, Cavendish Laboratory, Cambridge’ (16 August 1944).

⁴³⁰ National Archives, DSIR 4/225, ‘Report of the Sub-Committee to Review Post-War Research Activities’ (13 October 1944), pp. 1–2.

emphasis on how inhabitants used them.⁴³¹ Likewise, he was also keen to see the BRS pay more attention to the internal layout of the house, especially the kitchen, reminding them that:

As the actual building of small houses is an outstanding national problem of the first magnitude it seems to me that the BRS cannot avoid acting as an authority for some measure of design in regard to [domestic] equipment instead of restricting its advice to materials...there is a need for guidance on the ideal arrangements of units which could be widely adopted by local authorities who would otherwise be forced to design themselves.⁴³²

Another key player in the BRS at this time was Frederick Lea, who was appointed as the BRS's new Director in 1946; a position he would hold for the next twenty years. Originally appointed as a laboratory assistant in 1925, he came from a background in chemistry and had been heavily involved in the BRS's work on concrete during the interwar period.⁴³³ Personable and hardworking, he was a firm believer in collaborative research and encouraged the BRS to work alongside and learn from experts in other fields, with one of his former co-workers recollecting how 'his enthusiasm was infectious and helped to establish contact [with] other centres of excellence.'⁴³⁴ In this respect, he was also undoubtedly helped by the fact that a number of his former colleagues were themselves beginning to achieve positions of authority in many of Britain's top universities and engineering firms. For example, John Baker, who had joined the BRS in 1928, had been appointed as Professor of Mechanical Sciences at Cambridge University, while the head of the Chalk Lime and Allied Industries Research

⁴³¹ National Archives, DSIR 4/225, 'Memorandum by Dr E. F. Armstrong, FRS' (12 July 1944), p. 1.

⁴³² *Ibid.* 2.

⁴³³ See, 'Investigations on a Portion of the Quaternary System CaO-Al₂O₃-SiO₂-Fe₂O₃: The Quaternary System CaO-2CaO. SiO₂-5CaO. 3Al₂O₃-4CaO. Al₂O₃. Fe₂O₃,' in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London: Series A, Mathematical and Physical Sciences*, vol. 234, no.731 (1934), pp. 1-41.

⁴³⁴ 'Sir Frederick Lea (1900-1984)', in *Materials and Structures*, vol. 18, no. 1 (1985) p. 77.

Association, G. E. Bessey, was also a former BRS employee. Likewise, Sir Donald Gibson, the architect who redesigned Coventry city centre after the war and later became head of the Ministry of Public Building and Works, had worked for the BRS in the late 1930s, as had Colin Lucas, an influential figure in the Architects' Office of the LCC's Housing Department.⁴³⁵ From a practical perspective, then, these friendly faces in high-up positions proved to be crucial in helping the BRS expand their 'networks of influence' in the postwar period.⁴³⁶

The other important thing to note about Lea was that he was much more open and willing to take on new ideas than his predecessors. This was especially evident in terms of how he approached domestic issues. Indeed, right from the start of his tenure as Director of the BRS he showed an interest in other factors besides mere physical comfort, suggesting in one 1948 memorandum, for example, that there was a need to pay closer attention to 'the extent to which the dwelling with its services and equipment meets the needs of those who live in it.'⁴³⁷ Moreover, he also believed that designers of mass housing needed to have access to more 'information on the user's way of life and everyday activities in the home as well as on many other matters such as how rooms are used.'⁴³⁸

Ideologically, this desire to expand the nature of the BRS's research work was significant not only because it shows how there was a growing willingness in this period

⁴³⁵ Other notable ex-BRS employees from this period included; Dr W. N. Thomas, F. L. Brady, F. G. Thomas, Dr L. F. Cooling, A. R. Collins, and Dr S. C. Redshaw. See, J. Stevens (Ed.), *A Dictionary of Architecture* (Oxford, 2000), p. 435.

⁴³⁶ See, Latour, *Science in Action*, p. 91

⁴³⁷ National Archives, DSIR 4/3452, 'Note no. B. 100: an Investigation into Kitchen Planning' (1944), p. 1.

⁴³⁸ Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 115.

to branch out and look into new areas, but also because it shows how the way in which the BRS conceived of the figure of the prospective tenant was beginning to change as questions relating to the prospective tenant's 'way of life' and 'everyday activities' were beginning to register on the BRS's radar as issues that could and should be studied.⁴³⁹ Furthermore, the BRS were also encouraged in this respect by the fact that they received a massive boost in funding following the cessation of hostilities, being granted over £250,000 by the DSIR in 1947, as well being granted the use of far more research facilities.⁴⁴⁰ Taken together, these factors paved the way for the BRS to adopt an increasingly expansive approach to questions of domestic need in the postwar period.

Exhibiting the Brave New World

As mentioned previously, the upheavals brought about by the Second World War meant that local authority house-building all but ground to a halt in England during the 1940s. Unfortunately, from an analytical point of view, this means that it is harder to get a sense of how the sorts of ideas discussed above would have been translated into built form. To overcome this problem I have in this final section decided to turn my attention to the designs and models that were on display at the many large public spectacles and exhibitions held during the 1940s as they provided one of the few spaces within which planners, architects and designers were able to put their ideas of the practice at this time. Focusing in particular upon the "Live Architecture Exhibition" that was held on the

⁴³⁹ 'Operational Research in the Building Industry', in *Operational Research Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1951), p. 5.

⁴⁴⁰ National Archives, DSIR 4/601, 'Resume of Proposed Discussion on Design of Physics Laboratories' (3 November 1947); National Archives, DSIR 4/3670, 'A Proposed New Wall Laboratory' (August 1958).

Lansbury Estate in Poplar, East London, I look at the extent to which the ideological shifts traced in the preceding sections coalesced into different sorts of built forms. Overall, what my analysis shows is that, despite the fact domestic architecture still remained heavily indebted to the Garden City and cottage-estate movements, wider social issues along with problems related to the specific needs of different sorts of tenants were nonetheless still able to make themselves felt in terms of the design and layout of public housing schemes at this time.

Historically, as writers such as Deborah Ryan have shown, the idea of publicly exhibiting the latest innovations in architecture and home design can be traced back to the first *Daily Mail* “Ideal Home Exhibition” that was held in 1908 at the Olympia Exhibition Centre.⁴⁴¹ Bright and cheerful, the show was immensely popular throughout the interwar period and would regularly attract well over a million visitors annually. In terms of content, it not only offered practical tips on how to care for their own home, but also gave visitors the chance to glimpse the latest interior designs and trends. On top of this, a number of new gadgets, including the electric kettle, the vacuum cleaner and the electric toaster, were also first unveiled to the English public at the Exhibition.⁴⁴² In fact, from a conceptual perspective, it could be argued that there was something almost ‘utopian’ about the way in which the Ideal Home Exhibition afforded visitors the opportunity to escape from the mundane reality of everyday life and enter into fantastical worlds filled with the possibilities of new and exciting experiences.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴¹ See, D. S. Ryan, *The Ideal Home Through the Twentieth Century* (London, 1997), pp. 12–13.

⁴⁴² Leighton, *The 1950s Home*, p. 7.

⁴⁴³ See, S. Gunster, “‘On the Road to Nowhere’”: Utopian Themes in Contemporary Auto Advertising’, in *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, vol. 29 (2007), pp. 211–212; Kumar, ‘Aspects of the Western Utopian Tradition’, p. 65; A. J. Clarke, ‘The Aesthetics of Social Aspiration’, in D. Miller (Ed.), *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 26–29; B.

Indeed, it has even been suggested by some theorists that because all ‘utopian’ projections for the future need to be both comprehensive and total in their scope, the utopian thinker is necessarily ‘under an obligation to present a fully developed and detailed picture of the happy world that is expected to result from the application of particular principles [so that] we can therefore judge of both the plausibility and the desirability of the life so presented.’⁴⁴⁴

As a result of the upheavals caused by the Second World War, however, the Ideal Home Exhibition was temporarily suspended from 1940 to 1946. In its place came a plethora of temporary exhibitions and shows that were organised and funded by the state or other public-spirited bodies. Some of the most notable included: the British Institute of Adult Education’s 1941 “Living in Cities Exhibition” (organised by Ralph Tubbs), the Council for Art and Industry’s 1942 “Homes to Live in Exhibition” (designed by Elizabeth Denby), and the Council of Industrial Design’s 1946 “Britain Can Make It Exhibition”.⁴⁴⁵ Many local authorities were similarly active, with the LCC putting on a special exhibition in the London County Hall to showcase Patrick Abercrombie’s *County of London Plan* to the public through the use of scaled-down models, diagrams and aerial photographs.⁴⁴⁶ Even the BRS got in on the act, establishing regular ‘open days’ at their Garston laboratories, during which members of the public could be taken

Highmore, ‘Richard Hamilton at the *Ideal Home* Exhibition of 1958: Gallery for a Collector of Brutalist and Tachiste Art’, in *Art History*, vol. 30, no. 5 (2007), pp. 273–275.

⁴⁴⁴ Kumar, ‘Aspects of the Western Utopian Tradition’, p. 70. See also, Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, pp. 12–15.

⁴⁴⁵ See, Mass Observation Archive (Topic Collection), Part 5: Reel 76, TC1/8/J, ‘Report on Homes to Live in Exhibition’ (1942).

⁴⁴⁶ ‘The Britain of Tomorrow’, in *Picture Post*, vol. 14, no. 1 (3 January 1942), pp. 26–28. See also, LCC, *Replanning the County of London: A Brief Account of the County of London Plan for Use in Schools* (London, 1944), p. 24.

on guided tours of the research facilities, as well as producing their own educational films, which were distributed to local libraries all around the country.⁴⁴⁷

As a result of this increased publicity, questions and issues related to the provision of public housing, which had often been neglected in the more commercially driven interwar exhibitions, came much more to the fore. For example, at the 1946 “Modern Homes Exhibition” there was a new ‘system-built’ bungalow, which had been specifically designed to match the criteria proposed in the Ministry of Health’s 1944 Dudley Report on the design and layout of council estate houses, along with a photographic exhibit of the LCC’s new £5 million Loughton Housing Estate.⁴⁴⁸ Indeed, even when the Ideal Home Exhibition made its long-awaited return in 1947 there was a much stronger emphasis on affordable housing, with both the Ministry of Supply and the Ministry of Health each having their own stands.⁴⁴⁹

Without doubt, however, the largest and most influential exhibition of this period was the “Festival of Britain” which, after years of planning, was officially opened to the public in 1951.⁴⁵⁰ Planned and directed by Gerald Barry, a leading Labour politician and one of the founding members of the Political and Economic Planning group, the Festival, which cost over £11 million, brought together the expertise of architects, industrial designers, politicians, artists, and scientists to outline a vision for a modern

⁴⁴⁷ National Archives, DSIR, 4/227, ‘Summary of Points Made at Meeting of Publicity Committee’ (5 July, 1945); National Archives, DSIR 4/555, ‘Report by the Publicity Sub-Committee on the Means to be adopted to Secure Wider Dissemination of the Results of the Work of the BRS’ (16 October, 1946), p. 4.

⁴⁴⁸ Mass Observation Archive (Topic Collection), TC1/9/A, ‘Press Release for the Modern Homes Exhibition’ (20 March, 1946).

⁴⁴⁹ Ryan, *The Ideal Home*, pp. 91–93.

⁴⁵⁰ See, B. Conekin, *The Autobiography of a Nation: The 1951 Festival of Britain* (Manchester, 2003).

and socially progressive future.⁴⁵¹ Although much of the focus both at the time and in subsequent years has been centred upon the futuristic South Bank Site, with its iconic “Dome of Discovery” and 300 feet high “Skylon”, there were also a number of other less-prominent sites dotted throughout London as well as in a number of other cities around Britain.⁴⁵² One of these was the “Live Architecture Exhibition”, which was located in the Poplar district of East London. Formerly a working-class neighbourhood, the area, which had been all but destroyed during the Second World War, was chosen by the Festival’s organisers as the site upon which to build a model council estate to ‘demonstrate the possibilities inherent in good town planning, architecture, and building.’⁴⁵³

Named after local Labour politician George Lansbury, the new estate, which was based upon the recommendations that Abercrombie had set forth in the 1943 *County of London Plan*, was one of the largest housing schemes built in this period, providing 1,495 desperately needed new dwellings in a 124-acre site.⁴⁵⁴ As with the main Festival site, the aim was to educate the public in as entertaining a manner as possible. On show was a large red and white striped “Town Planning Pavilion”, which was intended to inform the public about the principles of good town planning, and an equally large “Building Research Pavilion” in which there was a specially designed “Gremlin Grange” that demonstrated through a series of full-size models all the things that could

⁴⁵¹ A. Forty, ‘Festival Politics’, in M. Banham and B. Hillier (Eds.), *A Tonic to the Nation: The Festival of Britain 1951* (London, 1976), pp. 30–35; London Metropolitan Archives, 4061/C/03/006, ‘Festival of Britain: A News Chronicle Souvenir in Pictures’ (May, 1951).

⁴⁵² For more on these lesser-studied aspects of the 1951 Festival see the upcoming conference, ‘The 1951 Festival of Britain in the Regions and Nations’ (University of Huddersfield, 15 September, 2011).

⁴⁵³ B. Taylor, *The Festival of Britain: The Official Book* (London, 1951), p. 34.

⁴⁵⁴ London Metropolitan Archives, HSG/GEN/2/28LCC, ‘Progress Section: Housing Handbook’ (31 December, 1952), p. 8.

go wrong in buildings (such as cracked walls, smoky fireplaces, damp ceilings, etc.) when scientific principles were not adhered to.⁴⁵⁵ Access was achieved either via road on one of the Festival's specially-commissioned shuttle buses or by way of a riverboat service that operated between the Estate and the South Bank and, upon arrival, visitors were presented with a guide-map to the site that transformed the spatial reality of the council estate into a narrative story, leading them from the Festival Enclosure, through the housing on the East Site, past the rebuilt Trinity Church, around the central shopping precinct, past the Ricardo Street Primary School, and then finally back through the terraced-housing on the West Site.⁴⁵⁶

Architecturally, one of the most striking things about the Lansbury Estate was the wide range of houses on display. On the East Site, for example, the commissioned architect (G. A. Jellicoe) had made use of sixteen different sorts of house plans, including: three-bedroomed two-storey houses; three-bedroomed three-storey houses; two and four-bedroomed maisonettes in four-storey houses; two-storey maisonettes in three-storey houses; one-bedroomed flats in two-storey maisonettes; and one-roomed old-people's flats in ground-floor houses.⁴⁵⁷ Indeed, much more use was made of flats than had been the case on interwar cottage estates such as Downham and Wythenshawe. On the West Site, for example, there were 158 pitched-roofed flats ranging from one-bedroomed

⁴⁵⁵ London Metropolitan Archives, 4061/C/03H, M. G. Dunnett (Ed.), 'Guide to the Exhibition of Architecture, Town Planning, and Building Research' (London, 1951), pp. 9–10.

⁴⁵⁶ London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/HSG/PP/64, 'Lansbury Estate: Stepney and Poplar' (1948); London Metropolitan Archives, GLC/AR/G/22/5, File 17: Part 1, I. Cox, 'The South Bank Exhibition: A Guide To the Story it Tells' (1951), p. 93; London Metropolitan Archives, 4061/C/03/005, 'A Visitors Guidebook to the 1951 Festival' (1951), p. 13.

⁴⁵⁷ London Metropolitan Archives, 4061/C/03H, M. G. Dunnett (Ed.), 'Guide to the Exhibition of Architecture, Town Planning, and Building Research' (London, 1951), pp. 12–13.

maisonettes to four-bedroomed family dwellings, whilst a further 30 flats of various sizes were provided in the Central District.⁴⁵⁸

One of the reasons behind this increasing use of different layouts was a growing acceptance of the fact that different sorts of tenants might have different sorts of domestic needs, with the guidebook explaining that ‘the lives of a baby, a schoolchild, a teenager, a single worker, a married woman with a job, a mother, and an elderly person are very different, [but] all have to be provided for.’⁴⁵⁹ Particular concern was also shown towards the domestic needs of the elderly, as shown by the provision of a specially designed old people’s home in the Central District of the Estate. Providing accommodation for 49 people, the home was built on two-storeys and featured five large shared sitting areas (one with a television, the others with a radio) along with a common dining area that could be turned into a cinema. Non-slip flooring was also fitted throughout the home and handrails were provided along all the corridors.⁴⁶⁰

On top of this, a great deal of importance was also attached to ensuring that tenants would be able to lead a full and active social life; reflecting the fact that this was coming to be seen as a fundamental domestic need in its own right. The focal point in this respect was the central shopping centre and market place which was designed by Frederick Gibberd and was intended to be the ‘focus of social activities’ and the ‘heart of the new community’.⁴⁶¹ Fully pedestrianized, the plaza was flanked by two rows of shops situated beneath blocks of flats to give protection from the weather; while on the

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

south side was a covered market with stalls for meat and fish. Overlooking the whole development was an eight-storey clock tower with an observation platform at the top.⁴⁶² Provision was also made for the construction of four public houses around the Estate; a policy which stood in stark contrast to that adopted by the authorities in Downham and Wythenshawe.⁴⁶³

Despite these innovative features, however, there was a lot about the Lansbury Estate that was still very conservative. Architecturally, for instance, it was certainly far less striking than the brazenly modernist South Bank Exhibition Site. Indeed, because the LCC had wanted to ensure that the new Estate fitted in with the surrounding area, most of the buildings had been constructed using yellow London stock bricks and purple-grey Welsh slates.⁴⁶⁴ As a result, the Lansbury Estate received a fairly lukewarm response from the architectural press.⁴⁶⁵ Reyner Banham, the prominent architectural critic and champion of the New Brutalist movement, was especially critical, condemning the designers for their cautiousness and lack of imagination.⁴⁶⁶ Indeed, some particularly cruel detractors even went so far as to suggest that the most dramatic structure on the site was the 200 feet high crane that was being used in the construction of the final few houses.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

⁴⁶³ London Metropolitan Archives, GLC/AR/G/12/12, 'Lansbury Estate: Location Plan' (1951).

⁴⁶⁴ 'Lansbury Estate', in *Architectural Review*, vol. 109 (March, 1951), p. 651.

⁴⁶⁵ See, 'Lansbury Estate', in *Town and Country Planning* (June 1951), p. 286.

⁴⁶⁶ R. Banham, 'The Style: Flimsy...Effeminate?', in Banham and Hillier (Eds.), *A Tonic to the Nation*, p. 191.

⁴⁶⁷ S. Porter and H. Hobhouse (Eds.), 'The Lansbury Estate: Introduction and the Festival of Britain Exhibition', in *Survey of London, Volumes 43: Poplar, Blackwall and Isle of Dogs* (London, 1994), p. 218.

In many ways, this aesthetic conservatism reflected the fact that conceptually the designers of the Lansbury Estate were still clinging on to many of the assumptions and understandings that had informed the work of their interwar predecessors. Indeed, despite the presence and novelty of the old people's home, there continued to be a great deal of emphasis on securing comfortable living conditions for the idealised nuclear family. Nothing demonstrates this better than the "Lansbury Show House", a terraced three-bedroom home on the Eastern Site that was open to the public. Serviced by the North Thames Gas Board and fully furnished with items from the Council of Industrial Design's 'Utility' range, it was intended to 'demonstrate in life-size and in permanent form...how a typical Lansbury family can achieve pleasant home conditions within the budget at its disposal.'⁴⁶⁸ Indeed, so keen were the Exhibition's designers to make the house as realistic as possible that they even conjured up a fictional family to inhabit it. The father (Bill) was imagined to be a forty-year-old dockworker on a wage of £10 - £12 a week, who, having apparently served with the Navy during the War, was keen to 'see everything shipshape and Bristol fashion'; his wife (Mary) was thirty-five years old, had worked in the services during the War, and 'understands good housekeeping'; and their four children (Jack, Jane, Jill, and Baby Tom) were 13, 8, 6, and 1 years old respectively.⁴⁶⁹ As this cosy arrangement suggests, then, traditional prewar ideas about the family, with the father as the 'breadwinner' and the mother as the carer of the children, continued to exert a strong influence over how the organisers of the Exhibition understood the nature of the housing problem.

⁴⁶⁸ London Metropolitan Archives, 4061/C/03/007, 'Memorandum on Festival of Britain 1951: The Lansbury Show House' (1 May, 1951), p. 1.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-4.

This conservative approach to family life was not the only thing to be carried over from the interwar era. Indeed, right from the start there was a strong emphasis upon cleanliness and good hygiene, with the guidebook emphasising that the overriding aim was ‘to release each one of us from the restrictions imposed by squalor...it is slow and costly, but it pays dividends in health and happiness.’⁴⁷⁰ Likewise, in the “Lansbury Show House” all the furniture in the children’s bedrooms was selected ‘so as to be easily washed and cleaned’ whilst all of the bed-heads were made of a “Tygan” spongeable material that meant that they did not leave marks on the walls.⁴⁷¹ Elsewhere on the Estate, great importance was also attached to making sure that tenants were provided with ample open space and fresh air, with large playing fields, open parks, playgrounds, and ornamental gardens provided for recreational use.⁴⁷² Indeed, the designers even so far as to import trees from the surrounding countryside in their efforts to achieve a bucolic atmosphere on the new Estate.⁴⁷³

In many ways, then, the Lansbury Estate neatly encapsulates the contradictions and ambiguities inherent in the utopian visions and proposals being put forward during the 1940s. Above all else, it reflects the fact that although the social and individual domestic needs of different sorts of prospective tenants were clearly beginning to enter onto planners’ and architects’ radars, there was still a reluctance or unwillingness to completely abandon the sorts of sanitary understandings and approaches that had tended to dominate during the interwar period. Nevertheless, the presence of structures such as

⁴⁷⁰ London Metropolitan Archives, 4061/C/03H, Dunnett (Ed.), ‘Guide to the Exhibition of Architecture’, p. 5.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

the specifically designed old people's home and the elaborate central shopping plaza reveals that changes were afoot in respect of how the figure of the prospective tenant was being conceptualised; laying the groundwork for the major ideological shifts that were to take place during the 1950s and 1960s.

Conclusion

In a recent paper on the history of utopianism in Western societies Zygmunt Bauman has argued that the twentieth-century utopian imagination was 'essentially architectural and urbanistic', claiming that 'the purpose was to design a spatial arrangement in which there would be a right and proper place for everyone for whom a right and proper place would have been designed.'⁴⁷⁴ Certainly, the bold rhetoric used by those in the architectural and town planning professions, with their talk of 'replacing an outworn civilisation' with a 'happy and gracious way of life', during the 1940s when discussing housing in the postwar world would seem to support these arguments.⁴⁷⁵ Moreover, it should be borne in mind that architects and town planners remained predisposed to using utopian rhetoric and drawing up fantastic visions of the future throughout the postwar period and well into the 1960s.⁴⁷⁶

Yet, what I have tried to show in this chapter is that these sorts of proposals were much more than naïve and unrealistic fantasies about a more perfect future. Indeed, as one

⁴⁷⁴ Z. Bauman, 'Utopia with no Topos', in *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2003), p. 14. See also, Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 4.

⁴⁷⁵ See, Mumford, *The Social Foundations of Post-War Building*, p. 17; D. B. Williamson, *New Beginnings and New Towns* (London, 1946).

⁴⁷⁶ See, Nicoletti, 'Flash Gordon and the Twentieth-Century Utopia', p. 18; A. Konstantinidis, 'Architecture', in *Architectural Design* (May, 1964), p. 212; J. M. Richards, 'High London', in *Architectural Review*, vol. 124 (1958), pp. 5–8.

contemporary scornfully noted, '[too many] accept the vulgar delusion about the "reality" of some political concepts and the "unreality" of others, and then illicitly argue that a policy concerned with the former is "utopian" and a policy concerned with the latter is "realist".'⁴⁷⁷ Instead, like all utopian projections, the visions that those in the architectural and town planning professions were putting forward during the 1940s for the council estates of the future were very much grounded in the reality of the time.⁴⁷⁸ As such, they can and do tell us a great deal about how the domestic needs of the prospective tenant were coming to be reconceptualised in this period. What emerges above all else is a growing sense that the council estate tenant was a more complex and multi-faceted figure than their predecessors had acknowledged, with domestic needs that extended beyond the provision of well-built homes that were clean and cheap to build. As we shall see in the next two chapters, this shift in emphasis would go on to have a profound impact upon the way that the housing problem was tackled in the postwar era.

⁴⁷⁷ 'Utopia and Reality', in *Political Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1940), p. 175.

⁴⁷⁸ See, Kumar, 'Aspects of the Western Utopian Tradition', p. 65; T. Widdicombe, 'Utopia, Historiography, and the Paradox of the Ever-Present', in *Rethinking History*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2009), p. 307.

4. Housing: A Sociological Subject?

‘Social policy without social theory and research is liable to become meaningless and eventually unacceptable.’⁴⁷⁹

‘That planning thinking is now also ‘people centred’ is a measure of the degree to which the social sciences have influenced it.’⁴⁸⁰

‘Anthropology, sociology, and social psychology...provide us with an understanding of what people need in buildings.’⁴⁸¹

In a 1996 interview on the influence that sociology had had in postwar Britain, Anthony Giddens, the hugely influential British sociologist who is perhaps most famous for his ‘theory of structuration’ as developed in works such as *The Constitution of Society* (1984), proudly noted how modern society had become ‘deeply sociological’ going on to claim that ‘sociological thinking and research’ had become ‘intrinsic to our society.’⁴⁸² Continuing with his reflections, he went on to argue that this influence really began to be felt in Britain from 1945 onwards, suggesting that ‘sociologists filled

⁴⁷⁹ ‘The Evaluation of Planning: Some Sociological Considerations’, in *UNESCO International Social Science Journal*, vol. 11, no. 3 (1959), p. 408.

⁴⁸⁰ J. Forbes (Ed.), *Studies in Social Science and Planning* (London, 1974), p. 3.

⁴⁸¹ A. C. Brothers, M. E. Drummond and R. Llewelyn-Davies, ‘The Science Side’, in *Architectural Review*, vol. 127 (March, 1960), p. 189.

⁴⁸² A. Seldon, ‘The Influence of Sociology in Post-War Britain: Anthony Seldon Interviews Anthony Giddens’, in *Contemporary British History*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1996), pp. 144–149.

in the institutional side of...the Keynesian 'welfare-state compromise' and made it 'look feasible for the time that it did indeed look feasible.'⁴⁸³

From a historical perspective, this is an area that has only relatively recently begun to be given much consideration. Albert H. Halsey, himself an Emeritus Professor of Social and Administrative Studies at the University of Oxford, in his recent book *A History of Sociology in Britain* (2004) provides a comprehensive overview of the academic and intellectual changes that have taken place in the sociological disciplines in Britain since 1945.⁴⁸⁴ Alternatively, Mike Savage's recent study *Identities and Social Change in Britain* (2010) provides a ground-breaking analysis of the impact that sociological ideas and practices have had on the way that individuals have been conceived of and acted upon in Britain between 1940 and 1970; building on the pioneering work done by Nikolas Rose in *Governing the Soul* (1989).⁴⁸⁵ Overall, what his work on the changing sampling and surveying methods adopted during this period shows is that 'the processes by which knowledge, in the forms of tools, data, methods and accounts, is generated' can reveal much about the 'nature of modern identities' and 'tell us a lot about what can, and cannot, be said in different times and places, by different kinds of agents.'⁴⁸⁶

Yet, so far as the history of public housing in England is concerned, there is still far too little consideration given to the wider socio-political influence of contemporary

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁴⁸⁴ A. H. Halsey, *A History Of Sociology In Britain: Science, Literature, And Society* (Oxford, 2004). See also, A. H. Halsey and W. G. Runciman (Eds.), *British Sociology Seen from Without and Within: British Academy Occasional Papers* (Oxford, 2005); M. Bulmer, K. Bales and K. K. Sklar (Eds.), *The Social Survey in Historical Perspective, 1880-1940* (Cambridge, 2011); M. Bulmer (Ed.), *Social Science Research and Government: Comparative Essays on Britain and the United States* (Cambridge, 2010).

⁴⁸⁵ M. Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method* (Oxford, 2010).

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

sociological theories and practices, with most histories remaining fixated upon housing policies and a select few key architects and politicians.⁴⁸⁷ Miles Glendenning and Stefan Muthesius do break with this trend somewhat by including a chapter on ‘The Sociology of Community’ in their 1994 book *Tower Block*, which shows how the pressure put on the planning and architectural professions by sociologists in the immediate postwar period encouraged far greater lip-service to be given to the idea of ‘community architecture’.⁴⁸⁸ However, there is still no real consideration of the ideas or assumptions underpinning these demands. Likewise, in *Council Housing and Culture* Ravetz at one point mentions that after the Second World War architects increasingly looked to the social sciences to provide answers on community layout, but provides no further details of what sort of surveys were being carried out at this point nor what those conducting them hoped to discover.⁴⁸⁹

This chapter seeks to redress this imbalance by looking in more depth at the increasing amount of sociological work carried out in the field of public housing after the Second World War, with a view to thinking about what this can reveal about the changes that were taking place in the way that the figure of the prospective tenant was conceptualised and acted upon in the 1950s and 1960s. In the first section I show how the increased interest in and respect for the findings of sociological surveys that began to emerge in housing circles in the postwar period can be traced back to the anxieties over civic morale that were generated by the Second World War. The next section looks in more depth at the actual tactics, techniques and methods adopted by sociological researchers

⁴⁸⁷ See for example, Cole and Furbey, *The Eclipse of Council Housing*; Hanley, *Estates*; Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing*.

⁴⁸⁸ Glendenning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, pp. 94–100.

⁴⁸⁹ Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, p. 138.

working on issues related to public housing, focusing in particular on how they conceptualised and identified the domestic needs of prospective tenants. Finally, I look at what sort of impact these sociological insights had on public housing in England during the 1950s and 1960s; looking first at the changes that took place in housing legislation and then at the way that council estates were planned and designed during this period.

Overall, what this chapter reveals is that the ideas, concerns and assumptions of postwar social scientists had a far greater affect upon the field of public housing than has previously been recognised. This was especially true in terms of how the figure of the prospective tenant was conceptualised. To summarise; whereas in the interwar period physical and biological determinants had been the chief concern, by the 1960s housing reformers were doing their utmost to extract individual tenants from the environmental milieu and relocate them in categorical terms (such as age, gender and family size) within specific social groupings. Far greater attention was also shown towards the wider social and communal needs of the individual tenant than had been the case before the Second World War. Central to this shift in emphasis was an increased interest in and receptiveness to the personal opinions of individual tenants; an interest both fuelled by and premised upon the sorts of ideas, tactics and methods that were being pioneered by the different branches of the social sciences at this time.

World War Two and Public Opinion

The Birth of the Opinion Survey

As the previous chapter demonstrated, the upheavals caused by the Second World War proved to be hugely significant in terms of how the figure of the prospective tenant was conceptualised as it provided an opportunity for politicians, planners and architects to step back and reassess what was required from a council estate house. What this next section shows is that the Second World War was also significant because, by virtue of the fact that it was such an all-encompassing ‘total’ conflict that imposed great hardships on civilians as well as soldiers, it caused politicians and government officials to give far more consideration to monitoring the mood of the public.⁴⁹⁰ As such, far more public opinion surveys and questionnaires were conducted as various sociological practitioners began to undertake research for different branches of the state. Focusing in particular on the work carried out by Mass Observation (MO) and the Wartime Social Survey Unit, this next section shows how this increased interest in questions of public morale proved hugely significant in terms of the changes that subsequently took place in the way that the figure of the prospective tenant was conceptualised and acted upon as it meant that sociological concerns and practices for the first time really began to enter into debates over housing need.⁴⁹¹

As is the case with so many other branches of twentieth century British sociology, the origins of public opinion polling techniques have received relatively little attention from

⁴⁹⁰ R. Mackay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain during the Second World War* (Manchester, 2002), pp. 2–6.

⁴⁹¹ For more on how ideas of morale influenced social policy see, D. Ussishkin, ‘Morale, Citizenship and the Social in Modern Britain’, A Paper Presented at the Mellon Consortia Conference (23 September, 2005), Center for British Studies, University of California, Berkley.

historians. Those accounts that have been written have tended to be little more than factual records of the ways in which the different political parties used polling techniques in postwar elections.⁴⁹² Historians like Lawrence Black, Andrew Taylor and Laura Beers have also looked in more depth at how the respective debates that took place within the Labour Party and the Conservative Party, arguing that in both cases there was often a quite marked hostility to and fear of the idea of the public opinion poll in postwar British politics.⁴⁹³ What is lacking from these studies, however, is any real consideration of the assumptions and ideas underpinning this increased interest in opinion polling techniques, nor any real thought given to the constitutive role played by the opinion poll in what Ian Hacking has called the ‘making up people’; by which he means the processes through which the social sciences are able to ‘create kinds of people that in a certain sense did not exist before.’⁴⁹⁴

In order to overcome this oversight, it is necessary to get back to the roots of the opinion survey and look in more depth at the assumptions that it was based upon. Perhaps the first significant date in this respect was the winter of 1936 when three young men, Tom Harrison (an amateur anthropologist), Charles Madge (a surrealist poet), and Humphrey Jennings (a documentary film maker), came together to establish a new organisation devoted to finding out and documenting the feelings and opinions of the British public or, as Harrison put it in an article in the *New Statesman*, to producing

⁴⁹² See, R. M. Worcester, *British Public Opinion: A Guide to the History and Methodology of Public Opinion Polling* (Oxford, 1991).

⁴⁹³ See, L. D. Beers, ‘Whose Opinion? Changing Attitudes Towards Opinion Polling in British Politics, 1937–1964’, in *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2006), pp. 177–205; L. Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951–64* (Basingstoke, 2003), p. 174; A. Taylor, ‘“The Record of the 1950s is Irrelevant”: The Conservative Party, Electoral Strategy and Opinion Research, 1945–1964’, in *Contemporary British History*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2003), pp. 81–110.

⁴⁹⁴ I. Hacking, ‘Making Up People’, in *London Review of Books*, vol. 28, no. 16 (2006), pp. 23–26.

an ‘anthropology of ourselves.’⁴⁹⁵ The initial impetus for establishing MO came from the dissatisfaction felt towards the descriptions that the national press had given of the public’s mood in relation to the coronation of King George VI. In response Madge and Jennings produced their own version of the day’s events, *May the Twelfth: Mass-Observation Day-Surveys 1937*, which was the product of over 200 anecdotes, overheard comments and ‘man-in-the-street’ interviews.⁴⁹⁶ Through these surveying methods and techniques, Harrison, Madge and Jennings aimed to produce a body of work that would lay bare the opinions, moods, and desires of the British public, promoting ‘realistic, enlightened and scientific attitudes’ in social and political life.⁴⁹⁷

Prior to the establishment of MO, opinion surveying in England had been extremely limited, with only a handful of individual studies covering a narrow number of topics.⁴⁹⁸ Harrison, Madge and Jennings tried to rectify this by providing those in positions of power with more information about the everyday lives, habits, rituals and beliefs of the British public.⁴⁹⁹ In particular, they remained committed to overcoming the academic aloofness associated with many sociological studies by seeking to engage with the people they were studying, as Tom Harrison explained: ‘the people [we] study are

⁴⁹⁵ C. Madge and T. H. Harrison, *Mass Observation* (London, 1937), p. 10. Tom Harrison was also very close to Raymond Unwin and Ernest Simon through their work together for the Political and Economic Planning Movement in the late 1930s.

⁴⁹⁶ C. Madge and H. Jennings (Eds.), *May the Twelfth: Mass-Observation Day-Surveys 1937, By Over Two Hundred Observers* (London, 1937).

⁴⁹⁷ J. Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (Oxford, 2010), p. 2.

⁴⁹⁸ I. McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London, 1979), pp. 262–263.

⁴⁹⁹ ‘Mass Observation’, in *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 48, no. 4 (1943), p. 445.

people who can be interested immediately in our results, which often directly concern their everyday lives.’⁵⁰⁰

Initially, they relied on the reports of voluntary observers, who were instructed to record all that happened to them and all they saw, heard and talked about, but as their staff increased a further six full-time field workers were dispatched to the northern industrial town of Bolton in early 1937 with instructions to accurately record the routines and habits of working-class life.⁵⁰¹ Sometimes MO’s surveyors would directly question people in the street, typically with open-ended questions, but occasionally using Gallup-Poll-Style ‘alternative-answer’ or multiple-choice questions.⁵⁰² More often than not, however, they would use informal interviewing techniques, whereby the topic under investigation would be introduced with a predetermined question, but in such a way that, once the initial question had been asked, the interviewer was given the freedom to conduct the interview in a much more relaxed and ‘chatty’ way. On occasions researchers would also conduct interviews in which the subjects were not told that they were being interviewed.⁵⁰³

Unsurprisingly, the new movement captivated the imagination of the public and attracted a great deal of attention from the mass media; doing much to popularise the social sciences in the process.⁵⁰⁴ In this respect, it also helped that MO came into existence at roughly the same time as the Gallup Poll made its first appearance in

⁵⁰⁰ Mass Observation, *An Enquiry into People’s Homes: A Report Prepared by Mass-Observation for the Advertising Service Guild* (London, 1943), p. iv.

⁵⁰¹ Much of their findings related to social habits, such as smoking, pub-going, and the filling out of football coupons. See: C. Madge and T. H. Harrison, *First Year’s Work* (London, 1938).

⁵⁰² ‘Planning a Mass Observation Investigation’, in *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 51, no. 1 (1945), p. 1.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

⁵⁰⁴ A. Calder, *The People’s War: Britain 1939–45* (London, 1969), p. 470.

Britain.⁵⁰⁵ MO was also to gain support from a surprising number of academics, despite its non-institutional background, including from prominent anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski.⁵⁰⁶ Indeed, in many ways its emergence marked the beginning of a new chapter in the way that the self was conceived by social researchers in twentieth-century England, as rather than focusing on environmental factors, it brought to the fore the emotional and subjective preferences and opinions of the individual subject; laying bare the rituals of everyday life in the process.

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 only served to increase public and governmental interest in the surveying techniques that MO were pioneering as obtaining information about popular ‘morale’ became increasingly important. Defined by Dr F. C. Bartlett, a Cambridge psychologist, as ‘a lively and not too serious spirit of adventure which meets emergencies clear-eyed and calmly,’ the maintenance of ‘morale’ became seen as being central to the war effort because so many politicians felt that the government was so dependent upon the public’s willingness to fight and bear the hardships of total warfare.⁵⁰⁷ As a result, public morale increasingly became something that had to be both cultivated and, more importantly, measured, with one contemporary sociologist claiming that ‘those of us who believe that the future must belong to the democratic society, rather than any form of oligarchy, must be on the alert to find new

⁵⁰⁵ S. Taylor, ‘The Study of Public Opinion: An Aid to Administrative Action’, in *Public Administration*, vol. 19 (1943), pp. 115–117.

⁵⁰⁶ A. Kuper, *Anthropology and Anthropologists: The British School, 3rd Edition* (London, 1996), pp. 18–33.

⁵⁰⁷ F. C. Bartlett, *Political Propaganda* (Cambridge, 1942), p. 110.

ways of making democracy more effective...the new social science of public opinion is [an] important step forward.’⁵⁰⁸

Initially, however, the government were somewhat wary of enlisting the support of MO. This was despite the fact that a Ministry of Information had been formed on 4 September 1939 with a remit that specifically included setting up means for gauging the mood of the public.⁵⁰⁹ Nevertheless, its first Director, Lord Macmillan, remained reluctant to enlist the support of MO as he felt their methods to be too ‘unscientific,’ whilst Richard Crossman was wary of their ‘leftist’ political outlook.⁵¹⁰ Indeed, despite the fact that the idea for a Ministry devoted to the censoring and controlling of news during wartime had first been mooted in late 1935, there was much confusion at the start about how best to go about uncovering and measuring the mood of the public. John Beresford, who was appointed Provisional Director of the embryonic organisation in the summer of 1937, initially intended to obtain information on the public’s feelings from ‘enlightened public bodies,’ such as the national press, the BBC, government departments, Rotary Clubs, Worker’s Educational Associations, school teachers, the Labour Movement and even Communist Party Cells.⁵¹¹ Tentative enquiries were also made to the British Institute of Public Opinion, who had pioneered the use of Gallup

⁵⁰⁸ Taylor, ‘The Study of Public Opinion’, p. 109.

⁵⁰⁹ McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, pp. 51–52.

⁵¹⁰ National Archives, INF 1/261(Ministry of Information Committee Minutes and Memoranda), ‘Memorandum by Richard Crossman’ (26 October 1939); ‘Memorandum by Richard Crossman’ (26 October 1939).

⁵¹¹ National Archives, INF 1/331(Ministry of Information Committee Minutes and Memoranda), ‘Collecting Division Minutes’ (27 March 1939).

Poll techniques in the surveys they had conducted for the *News Chronicle* in the 1930s.⁵¹²

Serious interest in opinion surveying methods only began to develop within the Ministry of Information after the appointment of Mary Adams, a former television producer at the BBC, to the post of Director in Intelligence in January 1940. In her mind, the Intelligence Department existed because ‘a knowledge of public opinion is essential to democracy, a necessity in which in wartime becomes doubly apparent...thoroughgoing opinion studies are therefore vital.’⁵¹³ Thanks to her influence, a Wartime Social Survey Unit was established in the spring of 1941. Designed by Arnold Plant, Professor of Commerce at University of London, and placed under the supervision of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, the new body was initially made up of a handful of researchers, mostly recruited from the new field of market research, and some 50 interviewers, who were distributed around the country. Primarily it was intended to assist in the investigation of social problems by ‘establishing facts and the attitudes of the public towards these facts [so as] to provide any department with information needed for the formation and administration of policy.’⁵¹⁴ In other words, then, the aim was to find ways of analysing, identifying and targeting different strata of the social body so as to make it more amenable, knowable and, ultimately, controllable.⁵¹⁵

⁵¹² National Archives, INF 1/711, (Ministry of Information Committee Minutes and Memoranda), ‘Home Publicity Enquiry Minutes’ (20 March 1939).

⁵¹³ National Archives, INF 1/848, (Ministry of Information Committee Minutes and Memoranda), ‘Memorandum by Mary Adams’ (26 January 1940).

⁵¹⁴ K. Box and G. Thomas, ‘The Wartime Social Survey’, in *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, vol. 108, no. 3(1944), p. 151.

⁵¹⁵ See, Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, pp. 22–26.

Although Adams sought to collaborate with MO, appointing Tom Harrison onto an independent committee designed to assess the value and accuracy of the information obtained, and encouraging researchers to make reference to their findings, she nonetheless remained committed to developing her own, more quantitative method of social surveying.⁵¹⁶ Surveys were carried out by 55 trained fieldworkers, all women, who were divided into two teams: mobile investigators who travelled around the country and regional investigators who focused on their hometown or place of work.⁵¹⁷ A further 35 administrative staff were appointed to file and filter the results centrally.⁵¹⁸ Representative samples were sought through stratified methods of sampling, dividing the population into categories based upon census data and information obtained from ration cards (such as age, income, residency, etc.). Samples were typically made up of 2000 to 5000 respondents, usually from a specific city or region.⁵¹⁹ Moreover, unlike the MO approach, each individual was to be subjected to the same questions and answers were made to be as regulated as possible.⁵²⁰

These contrasting surveying techniques reflect the fact that at this stage there remained little consensus over how best to conduct surveys of public opinion, as Kathleen Box and George Thomas, two of the Wartime Social Survey's researchers and former investigators for MO, explained: 'social research is still a very young science, and there

⁵¹⁶ National Archives, INF 1/263 (Ministry of Information Committee Minutes and Memoranda), 'Home Intelligence Memorandum' (12 May 1940).

⁵¹⁷ National Archives, FD 1/4161, 'Memorandum on Design of the Social Survey' (17 April 1945).

⁵¹⁸ Many of these staff had previously worked for either MO or for the British Institute of Public Opinion. See: Box and Thomas, 'The Wartime Social Survey', p. 152.

⁵¹⁹ National Statistics Department, *Sixty Years of Social Survey: 1941–2001*, (London, 2001), pp. 15–16.

⁵²⁰ L. Moss, 'The War-Time Social Survey', *Public Administration*, vol. 21 (1943), pp. 121–122.

are few rules which can be laid down as applicable on all occasions.’⁵²¹ In part, this was because the study of public opinion was so fluid, bringing together ideas and theories from sociology, statistics, psychology, and physiology, to name but a few.⁵²² Indeed, heated debates were common amongst different practitioners. For example, Dr Bradford Hill, a statistician from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, criticised the Wartime Social Survey’s methodology for failing to study change over time, providing instead only fleeting glimpses of the public’s mood, whilst Professor Major Greenwood, a colleague of Hills and President of the Royal Statistical Society, felt that the Ministry of Information were guilty on occasion of confusing objective facts with subjective opinions.⁵²³ One of MO’s full-time researchers, Mr Ferraby, also suggested that personal opinions were hard to measure and did not lend themselves to numerical manipulation of the sort favoured by the Wartime Social Survey Unit.⁵²⁴

Often debates would hinge upon the relative strengths and weaknesses of ‘quantitative’ methods over ‘qualitative’ ones. On 11 April 1942, for example, Tom Harrison engaged in a live debate with Henry Durant of the British Institute of Public Opinion on different approaches to sociological research; reflecting the fact that there were a number of competing discourses around at this time which all claimed to be able to accurately and objectively measure an individual’s state of mind.⁵²⁵ In the ensuing debate, Durant argued that researchers should strive to obtain quantitative results that were objective and capable of being handled by any investigator, comparing the work of the social

⁵²¹ Box and Thomas, ‘The Wartime Social Survey’, p. 152. For more on these debates see, R. D. Gillespie, *Psychological Effects of War on Citizen and Soldier* (London, 1942), pp. 18–22.

⁵²² Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, p. 2.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 179–181.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 184–185.

⁵²⁵ See, Martin, ‘Public Opinion’, p. 252.

scientist to that of the biologist. Framing his argument within a narrative of socio-technical advancement, he suggested that ‘the history of science indicates that progress is most rapid when there is the most vigorous insistence upon exact statistical measurement.’⁵²⁶ In contrast, Harrison stressed that whilst complete objectivity was undoubtedly desirable the fact that the social sciences were so young a discipline meant that quantitative approaches remained crude, overlooking many vital factors, and remained dependent upon more in depth and personal work of the sort being carried out by MO.⁵²⁷

Despite these difficulties and disagreements, however, governmental interest in opinion surveying continued unabated, and by the end of 1943, the Ministry of Information’s Information Department employed over 1,700 people, all of whom were in some way involved in measuring the mood of the public. In total, the Wartime Social Survey Unit had by 1944 conducted over one hundred studies involving a total of 290,000 interviews on topics ranging from cooking habits to responses to films to outbreaks of venereal diseases. MO expanded at a similar rate and by 1950 they had published twenty-five books on various different social issues, ranging from studies of factory work to activities in the pub. This increased interest in gauging the mood of the public was significant because it reflected a growing sense amongst politicians and social reformers at this time that governmental institutions should be more in tune with and receptive to the needs of different social groups.⁵²⁸ As one contemporary put it: ‘[the] politician [needs] to take the major relevant social facts into consideration in framing his policy,

⁵²⁶ ‘Quantitative and Qualitative Method in Sociological Research’, in *Nature*, vol. 149, no. 3784 (1942), p. 517.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 517–518.

⁵²⁸ Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, p. 189.

to measure the extent to which his policy has been successful...and to decide what changes, if any, are necessary to ensure its success.’⁵²⁹ As I now go on to show, for organisations such as MO and the Social Survey Unit nowhere was this need for more sociologically-derived data more evident than in the field of public housing.

Enquiring into People’s Homes

As James Hinton has shown in his 2010 study *Nine Wartime Lives*, opinion-polling groups such as MO had quite profound effects upon the way that individual citizens evaluated and conceived of their own subjective feelings, encouraging them to ‘articulate the ambiguous, unresolved [and] contradictory...thoughts and feelings involved in their own ongoing projects of self-fashioning.’⁵³⁰ Alternatively, Martin Rosebaum has suggested that the emergence of these sorts of organisations can be tied in with the growth of advertising and spin-culture in British politics.⁵³¹ Yet, up until now, what historians of groups such as MO have failed to account for is the great impact that opinion surveying methods and ideas had on the field of public housing, particularly in respect of how the domestic needs of the prospective tenant were conceptualised and acted upon. Looking now in more detail at the work that MO and the Social Survey Unit did in the domestic sphere, this next section begins to address this oversight by showing how questions relating to domestic need were evident right from the start.

⁵²⁹ Moss, ‘The War-Time Social Survey’, p. 121

⁵³⁰ Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives*, p. 3.

⁵³¹ M. Rosebaum, *From Soapbox to Soundbite: Party Political Campaigning in Britain since 1945* (London, 1997), pp. 147–177.

Traditionally, social surveys related to housing issues in England had tended to be fairly limited in terms of the issues that they explored, mostly focusing upon physical and environmental factors (such as the size of families, housing densities and internal layouts) and giving little consideration to individual residents' views or opinions. For example, in the University of Liverpool's 1934 *Social Survey of Merseyside* there was a great deal of information about the different types of houses that local people lived in and the densities at which they were spaced, but nothing about the feelings or sentiments of the people who actually lived in these houses.⁵³² Other contemporary surveys by researchers such as Terrance Young and Percy Ford were just as one-dimensional.⁵³³

MO played a crucial role in breaking this mould. They first began investigating issues related to the home in the summer of 1941, sending surveyors to twelve separate residential locations around England, three of which were municipal housing estates (Beacontree, Roehampton and Watling).⁵³⁴ In total, over 1,100 door-to-door interviews were conducted, with every eleventh house on each site visited. Sample wise, 90% of those interviewed were housewives; 30% were aged 20, 40; 50% were aged 40, 60; and the remaining 20% of the sample were over 60. MO surveyors were also asked to make

⁵³² D. C. Jones, *The Social Survey of Merseyside: Vol. 1*. (Liverpool, 1934), pp. 263–269.

⁵³³ See, T. Young, *Becontree and Dagenham: A Report Made for the Pilgrim Trust* (London, 1934); P. Ford, *Work and Wealth in a Modern Port: An Economic Survey of Southampton* (London, 1934); Political and Economic Planning, *The Exit from Industry*, (London, 1935), pp. 15–21; Bournville Village Trust, *Bournville Housing: A Description of the Housing Schemes of Cadbury Brother Ltd. and the Bournville Village Trust* (Birmingham, 1926).

⁵³⁴ Mass Observation Archives (Topic Collection), TC2 Reconstruction, Box 1, 'Memorandum to *An Enquiry into People's Homes*' (1941).

their own notes about the area and to give a brief description of each subject's personality.⁵³⁵

The topics that MO covered in these surveys included peoples' sleeping arrangements, their eating habits, their heating and lighting preferences, their views on domestic gardens, their leisure activities, and their individual fantasies for homes of the future, with loosely phrased questions that were designed to 'bring out wider views' and to encourage housewives to 'spontaneously raise points [of concern].'⁵³⁶ In general, they found that the most important factors affecting peoples' feelings were connected with the site of the house, including its surroundings and its nearness to work and shops.⁵³⁷ Questions of comfort and convenience inside the home were also found to be important, with many of the housewives in the housing estates complaining about a lack of built-in cupboard space for example.⁵³⁸ Overall, then, their findings, which were published in 1943 under the title *An Enquiry into People's Homes*, seemed to indicate that 'peoples' reasons for liking their homes were usually general ones, such as convenience, comfort, or comparison with their previous home, whereas reasons for disliking a home were usually specific.'⁵³⁹

Underpinning all of MO's work in this area was a strong sense that those involved in the provision of public housing had failed to adequately take into account the feelings and opinions of those individuals whom they were supposed to be providing houses for. Part of the problem as they saw it was that many of the individuals interviewed

⁵³⁵ MO, *An Enquiry into People's Homes*, pp. 6–14.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

appeared to ‘have never thought of *having a home they wanted*, but took their present home for granted, and did not give the problem much further thought.’⁵⁴⁰ This was especially true for those living in local authority housing, as Harrison noted:

Investigators have always encountered the difficulty of really getting at what ordinary people like and dislike in their housing...the lower down the economic scale, the more people are prepared to accept what they have and the less they are able to visualise what they have and the less they are able to visualise or discuss any alternative.⁵⁴¹

The task for MO, then, was not simply just to assist in the ‘great task of rebuilding and rehabilitating Britain’ by providing architects and planners with more information about the ‘needs and wishes of the people for whom they are going to build new homes,’ but also to encourage and stimulate people, particularly those in affordable housing, to think more critically and carefully about what they themselves really wanted from their homes.⁵⁴² This was something that Harrison was especially vocal about, claiming in one 1940 memorandum that ‘the form and manner of urban redevelopment will depend very considerably on the active interest taken in it by the general public.’⁵⁴³

By contrast to MO, the Social Survey Unit tended to be much more conservative in terms of how they approached domestic issues, preferring to focus on quantifiable and definite factors rather than personal opinions. For example, in 1943 they began work on two huge surveys, each based on samples of over 11,000 people, to uncover national

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

⁵⁴¹ Mass Observation Archives (Topic Collection), TC2 Reconstruction, Box 1. 2/1/P, ‘Memorandum for the 1940 Council’ (20 January 1941).

⁵⁴² MO, *An Enquiry into People’s Homes*, pp. iii–2.

⁵⁴³ Mass Observation Archives (Topic Collection), TC2 Reconstruction, Box 1. 2/1/P, ‘1940 Council; A Council to Promote the Planning of the Social Environment, Correspondence’. See also, T. H. Harrison, ‘What is Public Opinion?’, in *Political Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 4 (1940), p. 369.

trends in household compositions.⁵⁴⁴ Further surveys were conducted on family sizes, room requirements, cooking facilities, and heating and lighting arrangements.⁵⁴⁵ Unlike MO, the Social Survey Unit's questions were closed, with subjects being offered the choice of answering "yes," "no," or "unsure" to each question. In total, they interviewed people in over 3,000 locations around the country during the Second World War using a sampling method that was related to the spatial distribution of the English population.⁵⁴⁶

Despite these differences in methodology, however, the goals of the Social Survey Unit were broadly similar to those of MO. Like them, they felt that those involved in housing design and provision during the interwar period had been too detached from the people they were meant to be serving. As Professor Carr-Saunders, a social scientist at the University of Liverpool who was an advisor for the Unit, put it during one 1942 BBC radio broadcast:

Take the housing shortage; we were often told that enough new homes had almost been built...in fact we never managed to measure the need for new houses properly. Houses are for families, and we had no information on how many families there were with one child, how many with two, and so on. So we tended to build houses of a standard size, too small for many families and larger than necessary for some...it is quite evident that many of these errors could have been avoided by social research...much of the burden can be eased by the use of social research, and the methods developed by the Wartime Social Survey to meet wartime needs.⁵⁴⁷

Work on domestic issues only increased in the immediate postwar years as more thought began to be given to questions of reconstruction. For example, on the 5 March 1946 a meeting with the Ministry of Works was convened at Lambeth House Bridge to

⁵⁴⁴ National Statistics Department, *Sixty Years of Social Survey*, p. 13.

⁵⁴⁵ Box and Thomas, 'The Wartime Social Survey', p. 177.

⁵⁴⁶ National Archives, RG 23/28, 'Wartime Social Survey: Lighting of Dwellings' conducted by Dennis Chapman and Geoffrey Thomas (March 1943), p. 1.

⁵⁴⁷ Quoted in Moss, 'The War-Time Social Survey', p. 125.

discuss how the Social Survey Unit might be able to assist in the forthcoming house-building drive. On the agenda were proposals to conduct surveys in relation to water heating usage (looking at 'bathing and laundry habits' at the same time) and space utilisation in the home (focusing in particular on 'homework conditions' and the 'dispersal of activities').⁵⁴⁸ Just as had been the case with their wartime work, the questionnaire that was to be distributed to tenants was designed to be as closed and prescriptive as possible, with concise questions on things such as marital status, number of rooms in the house, working hours and family size that featured multiple-choice answers to be circled by the subject.⁵⁴⁹ A further suggestion put forward at this time was to undertake research into problems of resettlement and tenant morale on new housing estates in a bid to tackle 'neglect of house and garden, misuse of equipment, destruction of amenity, bad debts in rent...bad social relations between neighbours...lack of positive social life [and] neurotic illness amongst housewives', problems that the Social Survey team believed had been rife within interwar public housing estates, and, ultimately, help 'design a rehousing policy that would produce positive results in terms of individual human happiness.'⁵⁵⁰

As this last passage suggests, therefore, the hope for groups such as MO and the Social Survey Unit was that, as a result of improved social surveying methods, in the future the state would be able to provide housing that would be more in tune with the specific domestic needs of the individual prospective tenant. This represented a fairly major shift

⁵⁴⁸ National Archives, DSIR 4/2130, 48D/2/5, Ministry of Works Scientific Advisory Committee, 'Report of the First Meeting of the Building Requirements Sub-Committee Social Survey Panel' (5 March, 1946).

⁵⁴⁹ National Archives, DSIR 4/2130, 'Use of Water Heater Appliances Sample Questionnaire' (19 February 1946).

⁵⁵⁰ National Archives, DSIR 4/2130, Appendix 4D, Chapman, 'A Proposal for Research into Problems of Resettlement and Tenant Moral in New Housing' (20 May, 1947).

in attitude in respect of how to go about satisfying the domestic needs of the prospective tenant as it implicitly challenged the notion that detached ‘experts’, be they medical, scientific or political, knew what was best for the household by granting far more credence to the subjective opinions and thoughts of the individual domestic subject, treating them less like ‘an isolated automaton to be dominated and controlled’ and more as ‘a free citizen endowed with personal desires.’⁵⁵¹ As I now go on to show, this shift in outlook proved to have profound implications in the sphere of public housing, as it encouraged postwar politicians, architects and planners to devote more care and thought to identifying, measuring and, ultimately, satisfying the individual domestic needs of different sorts of prospective tenants.

Postwar Expansion

New Questions, New Answers

As the previous section demonstrated, underpinning the work that opinion surveying groups such as MO and the Social Survey Unit conducted in the public housing sphere during the 1940s was a strong sense that politicians, architects and planners needed to be both more aware of and responsive to the specific opinions and feelings of different sorts of prospective tenants; a view that was expressed most vociferously by Harrison: ‘if people are to have the houses they like, their views should be heard by architects and planners.’⁵⁵² What these next two sections do is look at the extent to which these calls impacted upon the way that politicians, architects and planners conceived of and

⁵⁵¹ Rose, *Governing the Soul*, p. xxvii;

⁵⁵² MO, *An Enquiry into People’s Homes*, p. ix.

responded to the domestic needs of the prospective tenant. Looking first at some of the most influential sociological studies carried out in relation to public housing during the 1950s and 1960s and then moving on to look at the sociological work conducted by the BRS, these next two sections reveal that as a result of the sorts of opinion surveying ideas and methods that groups such as MO and the Social Survey Unit had pioneered during the Second World War far more attention began to be given to tenants' personal and subjective thoughts and feelings.

As Glendinning and Muthesius have suggested, for many architects and planners the emerging discipline of sociology seemed to hold out the promise of enabling them to provide vastly superior houses to those built during the interwar period.⁵⁵³ For example, Lewis Keeble, a lecturer in Town and Country Planning at the University of Manchester who later went to become the President of the Town Planning Institute, suggested in one 1952 piece that planners needed to pay more attention to the work of the sociologist, claiming that because '[he] is [an] expert at assessing present desires...he can perform an invaluable service in stating present conditions and probable trends and in indicating ways in which social activities can most readily be facilitated.'⁵⁵⁴ Anne Buttimer, now the Emeritus Professor of Geography at Dublin University College, held out similar hopes, claiming in one of her earliest articles that 'the sociologist could have a very valuable contribution to make in the communication between planners and people [either] as a precipitant or facilitator of expressing community ideas about planning.'⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵³ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, pp. 100–102.

⁵⁵⁴ L. Keeble, *Principles and Practice of Town and Country Planning* (London, 1952), pp. 57–58.

⁵⁵⁵ A. Buttimer, 'Sociology and Planning', in Forbes (Ed.), *Studies in Social Science*, p. 124. For similar views see, Mas Observation Archives (Topic Collection), TC1, Box 5, R. M. Titmuss, 'Planning and the Birth-Rate' (1941), pp. 83–85.

Part of the reason why architects and planners were so keen to utilise the social sciences was that it seemed to offer a way of overcoming the problems of the interwar years, particularly in respect of dealing with the perceived rigidity and sameness that was seen to characterise too many interwar estates. For example, in one 1949 article in the *Town Planning Review* it was argued that interwar housing plans had been ‘unacceptable to the societies whose welfare they were supposed to promote’ because they were too ‘partial’ and ‘static’, covering ‘only a small part of the economic or physical area with which they are concerned’ and failing to ‘extend to the total context of the society in which the planning process has taken place.’⁵⁵⁶ Significantly, Harrison had been just as vocal in this respect, claiming in one 1941 article for *Town and Country Planning* that interwar local authority housing had been characterised by an ‘abject poverty of imagination in social matters.’⁵⁵⁷ These sorts of criticisms continued right up into the 1960s, with Raymond N. Morris, a sociology lecturer at Birmingham University, reminding architects and planners in one 1963 publication that ‘the housing problem does not consist merely of a shortage of physical shelters.’⁵⁵⁸

Underpinning these criticisms, then, was an increasing sense that the figure of the prospective tenant might be more complex and multi-layered than had previously been assumed. Again, this was something that MO had been especially vocal about, with Harrison arguing that because ‘the range of personal wants is immense’ planning needed to be sufficiently ‘elastic’ so as to ‘satisfy the healthy, contradictory categories

⁵⁵⁶ ‘The Sociological Approach to Planning’, in *Town Planning Review*, vol. 20, no. 2 (1949), pp. 162–164.

⁵⁵⁷ ‘Houses or Flats’, in *Town and Country Planning*, vol. 9, no. 36 (1941), p. 35.

⁵⁵⁸ R. N. Morris and J. Mogeey, *The Sociology of Housing: Studies at Berinsfield* (London, 1963), p. 173.

of human need.’⁵⁵⁹ Similar sentiments were expressed in a 1961 article in the *Architectural Review*: ‘Man is incomparably the most complicated subject matter...and it is only very gradually that the human sciences, such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, etc., are beginning to form a picture of his nature.’⁵⁶⁰ Indeed, it was even coming to be accepted that the domestic needs of the prospective tenant might not necessarily be stable either, with one contemporary pointing out that in the domestic sphere ‘needs appear, are satisfied, and fade out, only to make place for new needs.’⁵⁶¹

In this respect many planners and architects were influenced by developments taking place in America at this time, where the rigidity of interwar housing was similarly being questioned.⁵⁶² Alvin Schorr, a highly vocal New York-based social worker who later went on to become General Director of the New York Community Service Society, was particularly forthright on this point, claiming in one 1964 publication that ‘we are now only emerging from a period of absorption in psychological man’ and going on to suggest that ‘improvement has to go beyond the simplest physical facilities... we [left] ourselves free to think we were meeting human needs through technology [and] overlooked the possible human costs of material progress.’⁵⁶³ Similar views were expressed in a 1954 report by the New York University Centre for Human Relations:

Today housing represents much more than physical structures. [It] has become a subject of highly charged emotional content: a matter of strong feeling. It is the symbol of status, of achievement, of social acceptance. It seems to control, in a large measure the way in which

⁵⁵⁹ MO, *An Enquiry into People's Homes*, p. 226.

⁵⁶⁰ ‘Towards a Scientific World’, in *Architectural Review*, vol. 130 (July 1961), p. 12.

⁵⁶¹ Riemer, ‘Architecture for Family Living’, p. 148.

⁵⁶² See, ‘Committee on Housing Research, Social Science Research Council’, in *Town Planning Review*, vol. 22, no. 2 (1951), pp. 163–164.

⁵⁶³ A. L. Schorr, *Slums and Social Insecurity* (London, 1964), p. 21.

the individual, the family, perceive him/itself, and is evaluated by others.⁵⁶⁴

As a result of these shifting expectations, far more attention began to be given to thinking about how to provide housing that would be more in tune with the individual requirements of different sorts of tenants, with one 1963 article in *The Architect's Journal* stating that 'the success or failure of our work may depend on our ability to predict human behaviour with reasonable accuracy.'⁵⁶⁵ Consequently, far more pressure was put on those involved in the provision of public housing to ascertain the thoughts and wishes of prospective tenants. Primarily, this was to be achieved through sociological opinion surveys of the sort pioneered by MO and the Social Survey Unit, with one 1966 study into high-rise living pointing out that 'only through a prolonged and close investigation by sociologists, housing managers, and others concerned can we expect anything like the reliable factual data necessary for the designers to know in advance how to establish conditions which are acceptable to a majority of future occupants.'⁵⁶⁶ A similar point was made during a debate on 'The Future of Universal Man' hosted by the *Architectural Review* in 1960: 'it seems to me very important that architects in training should be in contact with sociologists...the sociologist should be the chap who tells them what the problems are.'⁵⁶⁷

Doctors and other medical practitioners were also starting to be influenced by the work of opinion-surveying groups. Professor J. M. Mackintosh's, a lecturer in Public Health

⁵⁶⁴ R. M. Arter, *Living in Chelsea: A Study of Human Relations in the Area served by the Hudson Guild* (New York, 1954), p. 60.

⁵⁶⁵ 'The How and Why of Behaviour: Social Psychology for the Architect', in *The Architect's Journal*, vol. 137 (1963), p. 546. See also, 'The Measurement of Housing Need', in *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 9, no. 4 (December, 1958), pp. 25–27.

⁵⁶⁶ R. Jensen, *High Density Living* (London, 1966), p. 13.

⁵⁶⁷ 'The Future of Universal Man: Symposium with Anthony Cox, Gordon Graham, John Page, Raynor Banham, and Lawrence Alloway', in *Architectural Review*, vol. 127 (April, 1960), p. 255.

at the University of London, 1952 study *Housing and Family Life* is exemplary in this respect, as it shows how new sociologically-derived ideas about the individual could co-exist quite comfortably alongside well-established biopolitical understandings of the domestic subject.⁵⁶⁸ Indeed, in many respects Mackintosh's book echoed many of the sanitary sentiments discussed in the first chapter, outlining in the first few pages that 'the general biological purpose of the home' was to 'favour family life and the nurture of children' and 'provide opportunities for healthy living.'⁵⁶⁹ Yet, at the same time, Mackintosh was keen to 'get rid of one or two illusions' from the interwar period, including the notion that 'any single expert on housing is the best judge of what should be provided.'⁵⁷⁰ Instead, he continued, planners and architects needed to consider the needs and wants of different sorts of tenants, with the housewife's point of view to be considered first as 'she is most deeply concerned with the success or failure of the plan.'⁵⁷¹ References were also made to the specific domestic needs of the husband, '[who] looks on his home primarily as a place for relaxation [and] as a place where he can do jobs and teach his son to become a good handy man'; the elderly, who needed special accommodation with 'no shared front doors, small entrance halls, open fires in living room [and] heated bedrooms'; and single people, who needed 'separate bedrooms [in] well-designed hostels with wash basins, wardrobes, mirrors, and common restaurants.'⁵⁷²

⁵⁶⁸ See also, F. A. E. Crew, *The British Way and Purpose 10: The Health of the Citizen* (London, 1943).

⁵⁶⁹ J. M. Mackintosh, *Housing and Family Life* (London, 1952), pp. 10–11.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 142–143.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 170–190.

Another indication of this shift in attitude can be seen by the fact that at this time there was a significant increase in the number of sociological studies devoted to uncovering the specific domestic needs of different sorts of tenants. For example, bodies such as the Women's Advisory Housing Council, the Women's Gas Council, the National Council of Women, the National Federation of Women's Institutes, and the Standing Joint Committee of Working Women's Organisations all conducted sociological research specifically focused on ascertaining what the housewife needed and required from a home.⁵⁷³ Increased pressure was also put on the government to employ and take into consideration the opinions of women, with groups such as the Women's Advisory Committee on Solid Fuel arguing that 'housewives must urge that more women shall serve on Housing Committees so that the new houses will be better planned and therefore easier to run.'⁵⁷⁴ Underpinning these inquiries was a realisation on the part of planners and politicians that although there was 'a necessity to find mass solutions to mass problems' they still could not 'ignore the particular needs of particular people.'⁵⁷⁵

Sociological surveys were also undertaken to uncover the specific domestic needs of the elderly who were deemed to be the social group who were most dependent upon their immediate surroundings.⁵⁷⁶ In 1947, for example, the trustees of the Nuffield Foundation, Oxford, established a new Survey Committee on the Problems of Ageing and Care of Old People with instructions to 'gather as complete information as possible with regard to the various problems, individual, social and medical, associated with

⁵⁷³ See, MO, *An Enquiry Into People's Homes*, p. 2.

⁵⁷⁴ Mass Observation Archives (Topic Collection), TC 1/8/K, 'Letter from the Women's Advisory Committee on Solid Fuel' (1945).

⁵⁷⁵ A. Stevenson, E. Martin, and J. O'Neill, *High Living: A Study of Family Life in Flats* (Cambridge, 1967), p. 135.

⁵⁷⁶ 'Council Housing: The Social Implications of Layout and Design in an Urban Fringe Estate', in *Town Planning Review*, vol. 41, no. 1 (1970), p. 85.

ageing and old age.’⁵⁷⁷ One of their largest surveys took place in Wolverhampton, where a sample of 583 elderly people (made up of 186 men and 397 women aged over 60) was interviewed between January and April 1945. Interviews were carried out on the doorstep and each participant was asked to fill out simple multiple-choice social and medical questionnaires, which alongside basic personal information (such as age, sex, marital status etc.) included questions about dietary requirements, sleep patterns, feelings of loneliness, nearness of relatives, ability to use stairs, holidaying patterns and housework.⁵⁷⁸ A similar survey was carried out by Dr Trevor Howell, a Medical Officer at the Royal Chelsea Hospital, in the Lambeth area, which pointed out that although there was ‘no such thing as a pattern of ideal homelife for old people’ there were still ‘certain underlying characteristics’ to good accommodation for the elderly; including, warmth, handrails, bells, indoor toilets, kitchen shelves in easy reach and good lighting.⁵⁷⁹

Furthermore, there was also an increasing awareness that the individual’s domestic needs were unlikely to remain static, leading to ambitious attempts being made to identify the different sorts of domestic needs that would be most relevant at different stages in the life-cycle. Lewis Mumford was especially keen for planners and architects to adopt this framework, claiming in one 1949 article that ‘the planner has not yet come to realise the full nature of his task: the provision of an environment suited to every

⁵⁷⁷ J. H. Sheldon, *The Social Medicine Of Old Age: Report of an Inquiry in Wolverhampton* (London, 1948), p. 2. See also, Nuffield Foundation, *Old People: Report of a Survey Committee on the Problems of Ageing and the Care Of Old People* (London, 1947).

⁵⁷⁸ Sheldon, *The Social Medicine of Old Age*, pp. 199–205.

⁵⁷⁹ T. H. Howell, *Our Advancing Years: An Essay on Modern Problems of Old Age* (London, 1953), pp. 72–76.

phase of life and growth.’⁵⁸⁰ In his eyes at least, this meant making sure that every future housing scheme was able to provide facilities suitable for infants, school children, adolescents, working adults, young parents, working parents and the elderly.⁵⁸¹ Peter H. Mann, an urban sociologist at the University of Sheffield, adopted a similar perspective in his 1965 study *An Approach to Urban Sociology*, arguing that planners and architects needed to be more flexible in their designs because ‘the needs of an individual vary tremendously according to sex, age, and family status.’⁵⁸²

Issues related to the wider social needs of the prospective tenant also began to gain significance for many planners and architects. In particular, there was an increasing recognition that too many interwar housing schemes had lacked sufficient communal facilities and an acceptance that architects and planners ‘must take social factors into account.’⁵⁸³ As discussed in more length in the previous chapter, this perspective was premised on the notion that, when designing a home, social factors ought to be treated with as much seriousness and care as purely biological and physiological ones. Ruth Glass, a sociologist who had worked with the Social Survey Unit during the Second World War, was especially forthright in this respect, writing in one 1950 piece that ‘the word “house” embraces not only consideration of the physical structures in which human dwell but also the relations of house to house, house to neighbourhood and

⁵⁸⁰ L. Mumford, ‘Planning for the Phases of Life’, in *Town Planning Review*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1949), p. 5.

⁵⁸¹ Mumford, ‘Planning for the Phases of Life’, pp. 6–8. See also, L. Mumford ‘The Neighbourhood and the Neighbourhood Unit’, in *Town Planning Review*, vol. 24, no. 4 (1954) p. 269.

⁵⁸² P. H. Mann, *An Approach to Urban Sociology* (London, 1965), p. 165. See also, ‘Neighbourhood and Community (Book Review)’, in *Town Planning Review*, vol. 26, no. 1 (1955), p. 65. See also, F. Gibberd, *Town Design* (London, 1953), p. 218.

⁵⁸³ J. and R. Darke, ‘Physical and Social Factors in Neighbour Relations,’ in Centre for Environmental Studies (Ed.), *Working Papers, no. 41* (London, 1969), p. 40. See also, E. Robinson and L. Keeble, *The Development of Building Estates* (London, 1952), p. 68; G. Scott Williamson, ‘The Individual and the Community’, in J. Tyrwhitt, J. L. Sert, and E. N. Rogers (Eds.), *The Heart of the City: Towards the Humanisation of Urban Life* (London, 1952), pp. 30–35.

community, and house to the social, political, and financial complexes which affect our daily life.’⁵⁸⁴

The findings of a great many of the sociological opinion surveys conducted in this period only helped to encourage these sorts of views. For example, a 1954 joint report by the Universities of Sheffield and Liverpool into municipal estates in their respective areas found that the social cohesion on the two estates was much weaker than would have been deduced from planning theory alone, leading the authors to recommend that in the future more work should be done on the ‘community building’ aspects of estate designs.⁵⁸⁵ Similar results were also returned from a survey conducted into people’s views on the newly built Peckham Health and Social Services Centre: ‘it proved one thing, that the deficiencies of modern urban life, not only in terms of health but in terms of happiness also, can largely be offset by an institution which gives people the practical and psychological advantages of belonging to a community.’⁵⁸⁶

As these findings suggest, then, sociological opinion surveys of the sort discussed in this section can be seen to not only have reflected the shifting ways in which those involved in the provision of public housing conceived of the domestic subject, but also to have provided much of the terminology, methodology and legitimacy upon which these new ideas about social needs and individual preferences were based. In fact, as this section has shown, it is clear that many of the questions that planners, architects and

⁵⁸⁴ R. Glass, ‘Social Aspects of Town Planning’, in Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction (Ed.), *Town and Country Planning Textbook* (London, 1950), p. 211. See also, ‘Sociological Aspects of Urban Structure’, in *Town Planning Review*, vol. 39, no. 4 (1969) p. 296.

⁵⁸⁵ University of Liverpool Social Science Department and the University of Sheffield School of Social Studies, *Neighbourhood And Community: An Enquiry Into Social Relationships On Housing Estates In Liverpool And Sheffield* (Liverpool, 1954), pp. 129–137.

⁵⁸⁶ ‘Experiment in Health’, in *Harper’s Magazine*, vol. 194 (May 1947), p. 431.

politicians were beginning to ask in this period were actually both derived from and inspired by the work that opinion-surveying groups such as MO and the Social Survey Unit had conducted during the 1940s. Indeed, as I argue below, so pervasive and influential were these new sociologically-derived perspectives in the field of public housing that even organisations such as the BRS, who had been overwhelmingly opposed to the idea of opinion surveying methods throughout the interwar years, began to make efforts to devote more attention and consideration to the individual preferences and feelings of the prospective tenant.

Opinion Surveying in the BRS

As discussed in the previous chapter, the BRS underwent a great many infrastructural and interpersonal changes during the Second World War. Chief among these was the appointment of the young and ambitious Frederick Lea as the Station's new Director in 1946. One outcome of these changes was that the BRS became increasingly amenable to the idea of using opinion surveys in their experimental work. Indeed, although their surveying methods and techniques remained far more rigid and prescriptive than those adopted by more anthropologically-inclined groups such as MO, by the 1960s the BRS had become widely recognised as one of the more influential groups conducting opinion surveys in the public housing sector. That such a change could occur in an organisation that had been so rigidly opposed to the idea of asking prospective tenants for their thoughts and opinions during the interwar period is indicative of the extent to which ideas and tactics derived from the pioneering work of opinion-surveying groups such as

MO and the Social Survey Unit came to influence how the figure of the prospective tenant was conceived of and acted upon.

Although the idea of conducting a sociological study of user opinions had first been mooted within the BRS in 1934, it was not until after the Second World War that the BRS really began to devote any serious thought to this area.⁵⁸⁷ Evidence of this shift in attitude can be seen in the sorts of topics touched upon in the series of internal educational lectures that Lea set up in 1946 for staff of the BRS. Intended to ‘provide a good background of knowledge to the Station’s work, give some description of the industry [and] provide some elementary instruction on building technology,’ the monthly talks included topics such as ‘The History of Building’, ‘The Building Crafts’ and ‘The Application of Results’.⁵⁸⁸ Significantly, however, there was also a great deal of attention given to the problems associated with identifying and uncovering the individual preferences of the client. For example, in the inaugural lecture on 30 November 1946, Lea stated sought to remind the audience that:

The prime purpose of the Station is research for the benefit of the user...buildings exist to serve various human needs...we must be interested in the reaction of individuals to their environment and we want to know something of the individual’s requirements. This takes us into the field of Sociology. We at the Station have not yet got very far into that.⁵⁸⁹

A similar point was made in a later lecture about ‘Functional Requirements’ on 21 April 1948, in which it was pointed out that ‘considerable value is to be attached to social

⁵⁸⁷ Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 32.

⁵⁸⁸ National Archives, DSIR 4/564, ‘Memorandum on Proposed Series of Lectures’ (21 April 1945).

⁵⁸⁹ National Archives, DSIR 4/564, ‘Lecture by Dr F. M. Lea on the Station and the Building Industry’ (30 November 1946), p. 4.

surveys through the accurate interpretation that becomes possible of people's behaviour in respect to problems of building design.'⁵⁹⁰

Underpinning this shift in attitude was a realisation that mechanical and formulaic approaches to domestic problems might not by themselves be adequate. William 'Bill' Allen, a Canadian-born architect who joined the BRS's Physics Department in 1945 before taking on the role of Chief Architect within the BRS from 1954 to 1961, was especially clear on this point, stating that 'the criteria for comfort and even of efficiency are not only or mainly physical; they reside in the human sensory system and have to be considered in terms of physiological and psychological functions.'⁵⁹¹ A similar point was made by F. J. Langdon, one of the BRS's sociologists who later went on to become a lecturer at the University of Southampton, who argued that whilst 'it is of course perfectly possible to specify norms and design criteria on an empirical basis without resort to the human sciences...the evidence from the last fifty or sixty years suggests that [this] represents a retrograde step in design quality.'⁵⁹² Lea also was supportive of this more complex and multi-layered approach to domestic issues, noting that 'designers of mass housing have to seek information on the user's way of life and everyday activities in the home as well as on many other matters such as how rooms are used.'⁵⁹³

⁵⁹⁰ National Archives, DSIR 4/564, 'Lecture by Dr William Allen on the Study of Functional Requirements' (21 April 1948), p. 12.

⁵⁹¹ National Archives, DSIR 4/564, 'Lecture by Dr William Allen on the Study of Functional Requirements' (21 April 1948), p. 11.

⁵⁹² F. J. Langdon, *The Social And Physical Environment: A Social Scientist's View: BRS Current Papers: Design Series, no. 61* (London, 1966), p. 1.

⁵⁹³ Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 115. See also, A. A. Oglivy and J. A. Cook, *A Review Of Social Research Relevant To Urban Planning: BRS Current Papers: Design Series, no. 22* (London, 1967), pp. 2-4; National Archives, DSIR 4/3452, Note no. B. 100, 'An Investigation Into Kitchen Planning' (1948), p. 1.

‘Answers to such questions,’ another BRS worker concluded, ‘lie with the human sciences in the field of social research.’⁵⁹⁴

Progress in this area was helped considerably when, following a 16% cut in their budget, the Social Survey Unit were forced to lay off 20% of its staff in 1952.⁵⁹⁵ Significantly, many of these workers went on to be recruited by the BRS who, as a result of the assistance they had provided during their wartime studies of heating, lighting and noise in domestic buildings, had built up a close relationship with the Social Survey Unit.⁵⁹⁶ In total, they were eventually able to employ over 200 workers who had had experience working with the Social Survey Unit.⁵⁹⁷ A number of other researchers from sociological backgrounds, including natural scientists, sociologists and anthropologists, were also employed as the BRS continued to expand.⁵⁹⁸ As Anthony G. Atkinson, a physicist who later went on to become the Colonial Liaison Officer at the BRS, saw it, the BRS needed these sorts of employees because ‘sociological research work on problems of interest to planners will in future form a growing part of the programme of the Building Research Station.’⁵⁹⁹

In practical terms, however, the BRS were initially still somewhat wary of bringing such subjective factors as ‘user needs’ into their experiments and test procedures. The

⁵⁹⁴ Atkinson, ‘Urban Planning Research at the Building Research Station’, p. 179. See also, P. H. M. Stevens, *Densities in Housing Areas* (London, 1960), p. 8.

⁵⁹⁵ National Statistics Department, *60 Years of Social Survey*, p. 21.

⁵⁹⁶ For more on the influence of Social Survey Unit-trained sociologists in the postwar period see, L. Stanley, ‘It Has Always Known, And We Have Always Been ‘Other’: Knowing Capitalism And The ‘Coming Crisis’ Of Sociology Confront The Concentration System And Mass-Observation’, in *The Sociological Review*, vol. 56, no. 4 (2008), pp. 535–551.

⁵⁹⁷ Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 97.

⁵⁹⁸ W. V. Hole, ‘Social Research in Housing: A Review of Progress in Britain since World War II’, in *Local Government Studies*, vol. 5, no. 6 (1979), p. 24.

⁵⁹⁹ Atkinson, ‘Urban Planning Research at the Building Research Station’, p. 183.

main problem as they saw it was that there were too few social surveys that were conducted on a sufficiently scientific basis to yield results that could usefully be applied to mass public housing schemes. For example, in the opinion of A. A. Oglivy and J. A. Cook, two of the BRS's main sociological researchers, the main problem was that too much previous sociological research in public housing had been 'uncoordinated and incomplete: there have been few attempts to develop systematic theories, to reconcile conflicting conclusions, or to integrate results into a suitable frame of reference.'⁶⁰⁰ Lea was similarly sceptical about the value of many contemporary opinion surveys in the field, claiming that rather than yielding 'absolute answers' they too often only provided an 'estimate of what is more commonly desired.'⁶⁰¹

One of the ways in which the BRS endeavoured to overcome these problems was to treat the individual human subject as a 'meter' for their surroundings. In practical terms, this meant 'working through the human as one would a machine' by training them to identify and respond to specific changes in their physical environment (such as changes of temperature or different room layouts).⁶⁰² For example, when in the late 1950s the BRS decided to investigate the relative merits of different sorts of domestic floor coverings they decided that rather than directly asking tenants' for their thoughts and opinions they would instead construct an elaborate replica corridor (elevated some 2ft off the ground and fitted with see-through glass-plated panels in the floor) in their own laboratories and invite specially selected participants in to test out different

⁶⁰⁰ Oglivy and Cook, *A Review of Social Research*, p. 3.

⁶⁰¹ Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 116.

⁶⁰² R. G. Hopkinson, *Architectural Physics: Lighting* (London, 1963), p. vii.

arrangements.⁶⁰³ To ‘facilitate the comparison of data,’ each individual was asked to walk in time to a metronome beating one hundred times per minute.⁶⁰⁴ Strict guidelines were also issued in relation to what sort of shoes participants were allowed to wear, with the men instructed to wear flat-heeled brogues and the woman offered a choice of different sorts of heeled shoes.⁶⁰⁵

On top of this, the BRS also made efforts to ensure that the individuals involved in their experiments were ‘intelligent people [able to] express sensations in forms of words whose precise significance is fully understood...they must be patient and willing.’⁶⁰⁶ Furthermore, it was also noted that ‘subjects with experience of the phenomena under investigation gave observations with greater repetition accuracy than those of inexperienced subjects.’⁶⁰⁷ Indeed, one of the problems that the BRS often seemed to come across in their research into public housing was that many tenants failed to fully comprehend the questions that they were being asked, with one researcher pointing out that many ‘housewives were unaccustomed to discuss such matters and often lacked the powers of expression to do so.’⁶⁰⁸ This was especially evident in the series of tests that the BRS conducted on kitchen layouts and equipment between 1949 and 1956 where questions relating to efficiency and ease of use were ‘often dimly perceived by many local authority tenants [who] have little knowledge of the idea of work sequence and do

⁶⁰³ F. C. Harper and J. W. Warlow, *The Forces Applied To The Floor By The Foot In Walking 1: Walking On A Level Surface: National Building Studies: Technical Papers, No. 32* (London: 1961), p. 14.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p. 11.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁰⁶ Hopkinson, *Architectural Physics*, p. 9.

⁶⁰⁷ ‘The Dvorine Pseudo-Isochromatic Plates’, in *British Journal of Psychology*, vol. 46, no. 2 (1955), p. 141.

⁶⁰⁸ Hole and Attenburrow, *Houses and People*, pp. 17–22.

not usually work to a tight time schedule.’⁶⁰⁹ As a result of these problems, the BRS put in place measures to ensure that each participant was first ‘assessed’ by one of the interviewers in terms of their intelligence, character and reliability.⁶¹⁰ Furthermore, the BRS were also quite conscious of the fact that personal pride or fear of shame could taint the responses given by local authority tenants. For instance, when asking about habits relating to putting out rubbish it was noted that ‘the housewife who realises she may have been negligent in this respect is perhaps inclined to give replies which are not entirely truthful.’⁶¹¹ Similar problems were noted when the BRS launched an inquiry into tenants’ ‘bathing habits.’⁶¹²

To overcome these problems, the BRS would sometimes encourage those being interviewed to express their opinions and thoughts in numerical form using an ‘operational research’ approach that provided subjects with a ‘quantitative basis for decisions regarding the operations under their control.’⁶¹³ In this way, the results obtained could much more easily be expressed in statistical terms, enabling the BRS to (hopefully) produce clearer guidelines and advice.⁶¹⁴ Great efforts were also devoted to the training and filtering of fieldworkers so as to ensure that they were being as accurate and methodological as possible in their work. For example, it was expected that each researcher would at some point during their tenure spend some time assisting in the

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶¹⁰ National Archives, DSIR 4/3452, Note no. B.100. 5, ‘Stage 3: Tests In The Mock-Up Kitchens With Housewives From The Flats’ (1949).

⁶¹¹ Box and Thomas, ‘The Wartime Social Survey’, p. 159.

⁶¹² W. Allen, *An Inquiry Into Domestic Hot Water Supply In Great Britain: Part II: National Building Studies: Special Reports, No. 14* (London, 1952), p. 13.

⁶¹³ ‘Operational Research: A New Tool For Management’, in *The Journal Of Industrial Economies*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1953), p. 175.

⁶¹⁴ ‘Operational Research in the Building Industry’, in *Operational Research Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1951), p. 10.

drawing up of a research schedule. Detailed guidelines were also printed out on the back of each survey sheet, instructing the surveyor on what to ask, how to go about asking, and how to fill out the reply sheet.⁶¹⁵

Despite these concerns over the reliability of data collected from public surveys, however, it is clear that the BRS were becoming much more amenable and committed to the idea of bring the personal opinions of the prospective tenant into their research on issues relating to public housing, with Lea declaring that ‘subjective reactions are the ultimate criteria for judging the conditions which give, or fail to give, satisfaction.’⁶¹⁶ Consequently, the BRS became much more interested in the idea of conducting opinion surveys, which were seen to be useful and ‘realistic’ in that ‘they refer to the experience of the users in relation to their own home [and] provide insights into his needs in terms of space, and the way in which this space is divided, equipped and heated.’⁶¹⁷ Furthermore, in this respect it also helped that that more times than not the subjective responses given by prospective tenants seemed to correlate fairly closely to those worked out in the BRS’s laboratories.⁶¹⁸

In total the BRS interviewed over 4,000 tenants on local authority housing estates between 1945 and 1965; publishing the results of their findings in the 1966 title *Houses and People: A Review of User Studies at the Building Research Station*.⁶¹⁹ The first major project that the BRS undertook in this area looked into tenants’ responses to different sorts of heating arrangement; the results of which were published in a series of

⁶¹⁵ D. Chapman, *An Inquiry Into Domestic Hot Water Supply In Great Britain: National Building Studies: Special Reports, No. 8* (London, 1950), pp. 3–4.

⁶¹⁶ Lea, *Science and Building*, p. 118.

⁶¹⁷ Hole and Attenburrow, *House and People*, pp. 3–5.

⁶¹⁸ Hole, ‘Social Research’, p. 26.

⁶¹⁹ Hole and Attenburrow, *House and People*, p. 4.

academic articles during the 1950s and early 1960s.⁶²⁰ Among the many points to emerge from this research was a realisation that too often tenants' did not actually know how to use their heating systems properly and were thus not making full use of their capabilities.⁶²¹ Further research was carried out in relation to problems of noise in inner-city council estates and as regards the problems of refuse disposal in local authority blocks of flats.⁶²² Efforts were also made to gauge old-peoples' reactions to the design and layout of local authority housing schemes.⁶²³

As was the case with most opinion surveys on domestic themes at this time, the housewife was often the one who provided surveyors with the answers. This was something that the BRS were quite comfortable with as they continued to assume that the interior of the house was a distinctly feminine domain, believing that 'those daytime household tasks concerned with running the home and looking after the family are normally the prerogative of the housewife.'⁶²⁴ Indeed, despite the fact that an increasing number of women were entering full-time employment, the BRS continued to look to the housewife when conducting opinion surveys on domestic issues right up to the end of the 1960s.⁶²⁵ For instance, when the BRS conducted a survey on user attitudes to

⁶²⁰ 'House Heating and the Tenant: Experiments at Abbots Langley', in *Journal of the RIBA*, vol. 59, no. 11 (1952), pp. 402–9; 'Heating Research in Occupied Houses', in *Journal of the Institute of Heating and Ventilation Engineers*, vol. 19 (1951), pp. 47–108; 'Warm Air Heating: User Experience in Local Authority Flats and Maisonettes', in *Architectural Journal*, vol. 140 (November 1964), p. 22.

⁶²¹ See, F. W. Black and E. A. Milroy, *Warm Air Heating in Local Authority Flats: BRS Current Papers: Research Series, no. 11* (London, 1961), pp. 4–5.

⁶²² P. G. Gray, A. Cartwright and P. H. Parkin, *Noise in Three Groups of Flats with Different Floor Insulations: BRS Current Papers: Research Papers, no. 27* (London, 1958); 'Refuge Disposal in Blocks of Flats', in *Housing Review*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1960), pp. 36–40.

⁶²³ 'The Rehousing of Old People: Some Planning Implications', in *Architect's Journal*, vol. 138 (January 1964), pp. 75–82.

⁶²⁴ Hole and Attenburrow, *Houses and People*, p. 6. See also, D. Chapman, *A Survey of Noise in British Homes: National Building Studies: Technical Papers no. 2* (London, 1948), p. 1.

⁶²⁵ See, D. S. Smith, 'The Curious History Of Theorizing About The History Of The Western Nuclear Family', in *Social Science History*, vol. 17, no. 3 (1993), pp. 326–327.

gardens and open spaces on two local authority housing estates in Sheffield in 1964 they again got most of their answers from the housewife.⁶²⁶ Similar assumptions informed the work that the BRS conducted on different kitchen layouts, where all the answers were obtained from housewives.⁶²⁷

Taking inspiration from the work of groups such as MO and the Social Survey Unit, the BRS also conducted a number of sociological surveys into wider social and communal issues. Again, underpinning these inquiries was an increasing acceptance of the idea that social needs should be treated on an equal footing with purely physical and biological ones. As Vera Hole put it: ‘a house is at once a physical structure and an economic commodity, but the social dimensions of the house as a setting for family life, and the social implications of the availability (or otherwise) of suitable housing [need to] be recognised.’⁶²⁸ This emerging conceptualisation of the prospective tenant as a social subject was reflected in the fact that the BRS began to look at wider social issues such as children’s play facilities on new housing estates, communal laundry facilities and the ‘social effects’ of planned rehousing.⁶²⁹ The results of these surveys only served to strengthen the BRS’s interest in this area, convincing them of the need to ensure that all

⁶²⁶ J. A. Cook, ‘Gardens on Housing Estates: A Survey of User Attitudes and Behaviour on Seven Layouts’, in *Town Planning Review*, vol. 39, no. 3 (1968), p. 219.

⁶²⁷ National Archives, DSIR 4/3452, ‘Experiments in Kitchen Planning: Field Test Unit’ (23 February 1950).

⁶²⁸ Hole, ‘Social Research in Housing’, p. 23.

⁶²⁹ ‘Social Effects of Planned Rehousing’, in *Town Planning Review*, vol. 30, no. 2 (1959), pp. 161–173; J. C. Wilson, *An Inquiry Into Communal Laundry Facilities: National Building Studies, Special Reports, no. 9* (London, 1949); W. V. Hole and A. Miller, *Children’s Play on Housing Estates: A Summary of Two BRS Studies: BRS, Current Papers: Design Series, no. 46* (London, 1959).

public housing estates had provisions for ‘neighbours to meet on neutral ground’ so as to ‘widen the choice of contact and help people live amicably with one another.’⁶³⁰

Like so many other planners and politicians at the time, therefore, the BRS was heavily influenced by the opinion surveying ideas and techniques of pioneering sociological groups such as MO and the Social Survey Unit. In particular, they became far more open to the idea of asking prospective tenants’ for their thoughts and opinions. Indeed, despite some initial wariness about the abilities of the prospective tenant to provide useful and accurate information, by the 1960s the BRS had almost overwhelmingly come round to the idea of using opinion surveys and user studies in their research.⁶³¹

The significance of this shift in perspective should not be underestimated either, as the BRS continued to be hugely influential in the public housing sector. From 1945 to 1952, for instance, they prepared and provided advice for 56 separate public housing schemes around Britain.⁶³² How this actually impacted upon the shape of the council estate home is the key issue explored in the next section as I go on to look at what sort of impact these sociologically-informed perspectives had on postwar public housing legislation and estate design.

⁶³⁰ Cook, ‘Gardens on Housing Estates’, p. 233.

⁶³¹ See, F. J. Langdon, and E. C. Keighley, *User Research in Office Design: BRS Current Papers: Design Series, no. 18* (London, 1967), pp. 1–2.

⁶³² Lea, *Science and Building*, pp. 127 and 184.

Sociology and Public Housing

Postwar Housing Legislations

Traditionally, discussions about housing policy in the years after 1945 have tended to be framed in relation to larger debates about the rise and fall of the welfare state in Britain, with the main priority being to explain how and why the social and collectivist ideals of the immediate postwar years came to be replaced by the neo-liberal and market-orientated policies of the 1980s.⁶³³ Whilst, as Peter Malpass points out, these sorts of inquiries are useful for what they can tell us about the extent to which welfarist political ideologies came to the fore at this time, they do tend to overlook the wider and more subtle non-political ideas and assumptions informing these legislations.⁶³⁴ This next section breaks with this mould and instead treats these legislations as case studies through which to investigate the impact that sociology had on public housing in England. Focusing on the extent to which the sociological concerns and ideas discussed earlier began to enter into the policies and guidelines that were laid out by the government, it reveals how, despite the continuing importance that was attached to questions of health and efficiency, the figure of the prospective tenant was coming to be reconceptualised as a social subject with needs that could only be satisfied through the provision of adequate communal facilities.

As books such as C. Leslie Andrew's *Tenants and Town Hall* and J. B. Cullingworth's *Housing and Local Government* have highlighted, the period from 1945 to 1987 saw the central state assume a considerable influence over local policy opportunities and

⁶³³ See, Cole and Furbey, *The Eclipse of Council Housing*, pp. 3–6; Lowe and Hughes (Eds.), *A New Century of Social Housing*, p. 2.

⁶³⁴ Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, p. 17.

freedoms.⁶³⁵ Indeed, issues relating to public housing were often top of the agenda in general elections, especially in the immediate postwar years when, for example, in a survey carried out at the time of the 1945 election it was found that some 41% of the electorate sampled stated that housing was the single most important issue.⁶³⁶ Structurally, control over housing design and quality was once again ceded to the Ministry of Health, whilst money from the Public Works Loan Board was made available to local authorities in the form of low-interest loans.

In terms of the design and layout of the council estate home, however, the first significant government document of the postwar years was the 1944 *Housing Manual*. Jointly prepared by the Ministry of Works and the Ministry of Health, the report was largely based upon the recommendations that had been laid out by a CHAC-appointed sub-committee, under the Chairmanship of Lord Dudley, to ‘make recommendations as to the design, planning, layout, standard of construction and equipment of dwellings for people throughout the country.’⁶³⁷ Significantly, the Ministry of Health were also keen to point out that much of the evidence for the Committee’s subsequent 1944 report *The Design of Dwellings* came from the housewife’s point of view, again reflecting the fact that the opinion survey was coming to be seen as a valid and useful tool in the administering of public housing.⁶³⁸

In general terms, the 1944 *Housing Manual* was critical both of the lack of variety of dwelling types that had been provided on interwar council estates and the standards of

⁶³⁵ C. L. Andrews, *Tenants and Town Hall* (London, 1979); J. B. Cullingworth, *Housing and Local Government* (London, 1966).

⁶³⁶ See, L. C. B. Seaman, *Post-Victorian Britain, 1902–1951* (London, 1966), p. 456.

⁶³⁷ MoH, *Housing Manual 1944*, p. 7.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

space found in the average council estate home.⁶³⁹ Particular emphasis was laid on the need for more thought to be given to neighbourhood planning, with local authorities being reminded that:

The scheme must not be planned as a dormitory without a recognisable centre...due regard must be paid to industrial, social, educational and recreational centres and their relation to the new development as well as to accommodation...so as to meet practical needs and at the same time lead to a sense of neighbourliness among the families who go to live there.⁶⁴⁰

In other words, then, social and communal factors were not only coming to be reconceptualised as legitimate domestic *needs* that should be catered to and provided for, but also as positive and beneficial elements of council estate life that could and should be cultivated.⁶⁴¹ Such sentiments are explicitly revealed later on in the *Manual* when it is pointed out that alongside the ‘needs, traditions and preferences of the occupier and his family’ there are also ‘the wider social and aesthetic relations of the house to its environment.’⁶⁴²

Prominence was also given to the idea that different sorts of prospective tenants had different sorts of needs that required specific treatment.⁶⁴³ This point was again emphasised in the 1949 *Housing Manual*, which stated that ‘the long-term housing problem calls for a much greater variety of types of houses, some larger, some smaller, than the normal family house, in order to meet in a balanced way the varying needs of

⁶³⁹ Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p. 298.

⁶⁴⁰ MoH, *Housing Manual 1944*, p. 11.

⁶⁴¹ See, T. Osborne, N. Rose and M. Savage, ‘Reinscribing British sociology: Some critical reflections’, in *The Sociological Review*, vol. 56, no. 4 (2008), p. 527; Rabinow, *French Modern*, p. 67; Rose and Miller, ‘Political Power beyond the State’, pp. 174–177.

⁶⁴² MoH, *Housing Manual 1944*, p. 73. See also, MHLG, *The Needs of New Communities* (London, 1967).

⁶⁴³ MoH, *Housing Manual 1944*, p. 11.

the population as a whole.’⁶⁴⁴ Indeed, the government even went so far as to produce a supplementary report to the 1949 *Housing Manual* entitled *Housing for Special Purposes*. Intended to provide advice for local authorities on ‘the erection of houses of different sizes for different purposes,’ the report laid out a series of designs and recommendations for dwellings for ‘those people who require something different the normal family dwelling,’ including homes for old people, flats for couples with children and hostel units for single persons.⁶⁴⁵

Just like with MO and the Social Survey Unit, particular stress was placed on catering to the specific needs of the elderly who, so the report claimed, had domestic needs that were more ‘real’ and ‘urgent’ than other social groups.⁶⁴⁶ Pointing out that ‘population trends are towards an increase in the number of old people,’ the report advised local authorities to ensure that they planned accommodation for old people as part of their programmes of house-building, suggesting that housing for the elderly should be provided in one-storey or two-storey self-contained dwellings, in two-storey blocks of flats, flats on the lower floors of taller blocks or in specifically designed hostels and providing a selection of sample plans for each.⁶⁴⁷ Further recommendations included: providing permanent communal heating (as the elderly were deemed be more likely to feel the cold); ensuring that facilities were made available so that they could still do their own laundry; providing communal restaurants in housing blocks; making

⁶⁴⁴ MoH, *Housing Manual 1949*, (London, 1949), p. 11.

⁶⁴⁵ MHLG, *Housing for Special Purposes: Supplement to the Housing Manual 1949* (London, 1949), p. 5.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

opportunities for home help and medical assistance easily available; and providing fittings that simplified housework.⁶⁴⁸

Informing these recommendations, then, was an understanding of the prospective tenant that was based upon the notion that one's domestic needs were related to and dependent upon one's age, sex and living arrangements. As such, they implicitly challenged the idea that the tenant could be defined in universalistic terms. Subsequent legislation passed during the 1950s and 1960s only served to reinforce this outlook. For example, in a 1962 report by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG) on flatlets for old people, based once again on an extensive sociological opinion survey, it was pointed out that 'it is essential not only to build more [homes], but also to provide different types of dwelling to suit different needs.'⁶⁴⁹ Similar points were made in the studies that the MHLG also made into single peoples' living arrangements and into the specific domestic needs of young families who had been rehoused from clearance areas.⁶⁵⁰

Although, as historians such as Ian Cole and Robert Furbey have shown, the economic downturns of the period, along with the budget cuts that ensued, meant that during the 1960s there was something of a retreat from the high standards laid out in the immediate postwar years, this should not diminish the fact that, conceptually at least, the way in which the state conceived of the prospective tenant was undergoing some

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 7–12.

⁶⁴⁹ MHLG, *Grouped Flatlets for Old People: A Sociological Study: Design Bulletin 2* (London, 1962), p. 3.

⁶⁵⁰ See, MHLG, *House Planning: A Guide to User Needs With a Check-List: Design Bulletin 14* (London, 1968); MHLG, *Moving Out of a Slum: A Study of People Moving From St Mary's, Oldham: Design Bulletin 20* (London, 1970); MHLG, *Housing Single People: How They Live at Present: Design Bulletin 23* (London, 1971); MHLG, *Housing Single People 2: A Design Guide with a Description of a Scheme at Leicester: Design Bulletin 29* (London, 1974).

fairly major changes.⁶⁵¹ From being an undefined and anonymous member of the working class prior to the Second World War, the figure of the prospective tenant was increasingly coming to be identified as a social subject with specific domestic needs, both physical and social, that were dependent upon and linked to their age, sex and living arrangements. What I want to do now is move on to consider how far these sorts of ideas percolated down to the local authority level by looking in more detail at the design and layout of the renowned Park Hill Estate in Sheffield.

Postwar Estate Design

Previous historical accounts of the design and layout of postwar public housing estates have tended to be fixated upon questions relating to high-rise flat building; focusing in particular upon how the high-rise flat came to be associated with ideas of progress and the expression of a new technological age.⁶⁵² A great deal of ink has also been spilled in relation to the failures of the postwar council estate to provide desirable and sustainable living environments.⁶⁵³ By contrast, far less has been said about the impact that sociologically-derived ideas had upon the shape and layout of the postwar housing estate. What little has been written in this area has tended to focus on the influence that sociological concepts had over the design and layout of overtly ‘communal’ facilities

⁶⁵¹ Cole and Furbey, *The Eclipse of Council Housing*, pp. 72–73. See also, Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, pp. 300–301.

⁶⁵² See, P. Nuttgens, *The Home Front: Housing the people, 1840-1990* (London, 1989), p. 68; Finnimore, *Houses from the Factory*, pp. 100–1; Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, p. 2; Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, p. 106; Shapely, *The Politics of Housing*, p. 8; Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing*, pp. 102–103.

⁶⁵³ See, S. Yorke, *The Domestic Revolution Explained: From Brainwave to Microwave* (Newbury, 2008), p. 113; A. Sutcliffe (Ed.), *Multi-Storey Living: The British Working-Class Experience* (London, 1974), p. ix; Coleman, *Utopia on Trial*, p. 119; Hanley, *Estates*, pp. 6–11.

(such as shopping centres and community centres), rather than considering the impact that these sorts of ideas had over the public housing estate as a whole.⁶⁵⁴ This next section goes some way to redressing this oversight by focusing explicitly on the extent to which the Housing Department of the Sheffield City Council took inspiration from the sociological ideas and approaches discussed above and then considering what impact this had on the housing estates that they subsequently produced. Focusing primarily on the Park Hill Estate, it reveals that the local authorities in Sheffield were not only coming to see it as beneficial to construct housing schemes that could satisfy the differing social needs of the various tenants who were to be housed in them, but were increasingly viewing this as an essential element of their job as providers of satisfactory homes.

Having had over 78,000 of its homes damaged during the so-called ‘Sheffield Blitz’ of December 1940, the Sheffield City Council were certainly under no illusions as to the scale of the reconstruction task before them and proceeded to draw up a hugely ambitious postwar housing programme.⁶⁵⁵ The bulk of the responsibility for carrying out the Council’s house-building plans fell on the shoulders of John L. Womersley, who was appointed as the City Architect in 1953. Previously employed by the Northampton Borough Council, where he had won *The Builder’s* low-cost housing competition in 1946, he was a staunch advocate of modernist architecture and quickly set about trying to modernize the Council’s Housing Department.⁶⁵⁶ In 1955 he organised a tour around

⁶⁵⁴ See, Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, pp. 94–96; Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, pp. 137–145.

⁶⁵⁵ See, Sheffield Town Planning Committee, *Sheffield Replanned: A Report* (Sheffield, 1945); Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, 331.833, S. R. Hebblewaite, ‘The Municipal Housing Programme in Sheffield Before 1914’, pp. 143–144.

⁶⁵⁶ See, Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, p. 55.

Europe so as to give Sheffield's Councillors the opportunity to see the latest developments taking place in the field of mass-housing on the Continent, visiting schemes in Copenhagen, Hamburg, Rotterdam, Antwerp, Zurich and Strasbourg.⁶⁵⁷ So impressed were the deputation with the efficiency of the continental schemes that they returned convinced that flats offered an attractive, modern and satisfactory alternative to the conventional house and in the winter of that same year they pushed through plans to develop the disused Park Hill area of land on the hills overlooking the city centre into a high-rise council estate.⁶⁵⁸

The men that Womersley chose to design the new Park Hill scheme were Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith. Young and ambitious, the pair had first worked together only a few years before on a well-received but ultimately unsuccessful submission for the LCC's Golden Lane Estate Competition in 1952.⁶⁵⁹ Ideologically, they typified the new generation of newly qualified architects that were emerging at this time in that they were eager to question and challenge the assumptions and practices of their predecessors.⁶⁶⁰ In particular, Lynn and Smith were heavily influenced by the New Brutalist theories of Alison and Peter Smithson; who had actually taught both of them at the Architectural Association's School of Architecture during the 1950s. Although difficult to pin down and define precisely, the New Brutalism was essentially a school of thought or approach to design that was premised around the notion that the old architectural establishment

⁶⁵⁷ Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, Local Pamphlets 205:10, J. L. Womersley, 'Multi-Storey Housing in Some European Countries: Report of the City of Sheffield Housing Deputation' (March 1955).

⁶⁵⁸ Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, CA 655 (15), City of Sheffield Housing Department, 'Housing Compulsory Purchase Order' (5 June, 1956).

⁶⁵⁹ See, R. Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic* (London, 1966), p. 42; A. and P. Smithson, 'An Urban Project: Golden Lane', in *Architect's Yearbook 5* (London, 1953), pp. 48–55.

⁶⁶⁰ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, p. 127.

was 'bankrupt' and needed to be challenged and shaken up.⁶⁶¹ As Alison Smithson put it at the time: '[we] need a new beginning...concerned with inducing, as it were, into the bloodstream of the architect an understanding and feeling for the patterns, the aspirations, the artefacts, the tools, the modes of transportation and communications of present-day society.'⁶⁶²

Stylistically, one of the design features that is most often associated with the New Brutalism is the 'street-deck.' First showcased by the Smithsons in their widely-publicised proposal for the LCC's Golden Lane Housing competition in 1952, the street-deck system was intended to provide the answer to the problem of how to provide those living off the ground with all the facilities that the ground-level street had offered.⁶⁶³ Elevated and sheltered, it was designed to enable everyone to walk up to their own front door, as the Smithsons explained: 'at all densities streets are possible by the creation of a true street-mesh in the air, each street having a large number of people dependent upon it for access [for it] to become a social entity...the flat block disappears and vertical living becomes a reality.'⁶⁶⁴ Although the LCC eventually rejected the Smithsons' proposal, the idea of building 'streets in the sky' stuck, leaving a big impression on Lynn and Smith in particular.⁶⁶⁵ Consequently, when appointed to draw up plans for the Park Hill scheme they too turned to the idea of the street-deck, drawing up plans for a system of twelve-foot wide decks (meaning that milk floats could gain

⁶⁶¹ 'The New Brutalism', in *Architectural Review*, vol. 118 (December, 1955), pp. 356; 'Apropos the Smithsons', in *New Statesman*, vol. 62 (September 1961), p. 318.

⁶⁶² 'The Aim of Team 10', in *Architectural Design* (August, 1964), p. 373.

⁶⁶³ See, Webster (Ed.), *Modernism without Rhetoric*, pp. 48–50.

⁶⁶⁴ A. and P. Smithson, 'An Urban Project: Golden Lane', p. 55.

⁶⁶⁵ It should be noted that Goldfinger was also heavily influenced by the idea of the street-deck and applied his own version of the design in his 1967 Carradale House housing project. See, R. Elwall, *Ernö Goldfinger* (London, 1996), p. 17.

access) that would run the whole length of the complex and provide sheltered access to every flat.⁶⁶⁶

Although brazenly modernist in appearance, the street-deck was actually premised upon a fairly romantic and nostalgic infatuation with the social life of the traditional working-class street. Indeed, throughout all of their work the Smithsons remained committed to the ideal of the inner-city working-class street, envisioning it as the central hub around which all working-class life took place; ‘in it children learn for the first time the world outside the family...people stop and talk, dismantled vehicles are parked...the shops are around the corner; you know the milkman, you are outside your house in your street.’⁶⁶⁷

This interest in the street-life of the working-classes can be traced back to the work of Nigel Henderson, a documentary photographer whom they had worked alongside as part of the so-called ‘Independent Group’ between 1952 and 1955, whose influential anthropological 1952 study of working-class life in Bethnal Green did so much to convince the Smithsons of the importance of the street to community relations.⁶⁶⁸

Informing these interests, therefore, was an assumption that an active and vibrant local community was not only desirable, but positively *essential* for working-class people; who, it was argued, had a deep-rooted and innate desire to be close to their neighbours.⁶⁶⁹ Free movement and ease of access to communal spaces was seen to be crucial in this sense, with the Smithsons arguing that ‘community [and] social cohesion

⁶⁶⁶ Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, CA 655 (15), City Architects Department, ‘Park Hill Redevelopment Scheme, Development Area 1’ (March, 1955), p. 6.

⁶⁶⁷ A. and P. Smithson, ‘An Urban Project: Golden Lane’, p. 52.

⁶⁶⁸ See, D. Robbins, *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty, Exhibition Catalogue* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 4–17; N. Henderson, *Photographs of Bethnal Green, 1949–1952* (Nottingham, 1978). See also, Z. Cheatle (Ed.), *The Street Photographs of Roger Mayne* (London, 1993).

⁶⁶⁹ See, ‘Statement’, in *Architectural Design* (May, 1960), p. 202; I. Smith, ‘Architect’s Approach to Architecture’, in *Journal of the RIBA*, vol. 74 (1967), p. 277.

can only be achieved if ease of movement is possible...real social groups cut across geographical barriers, and the principle aid to social cohesion is looseness of groupings and ease of communications.’⁶⁷⁰ Jack Lynn shared these sentiments too, writing in one 1962 piece how ‘centuries of peace have given us the open street...a simple arrangement which gives complete freedom to come and go, to meet or avoid whom we please.’⁶⁷¹ Finally, the desire to imitate and recreate the working-class street was also partly based on an assumption that this would help to discourage criminal and delinquent behaviour, with the Smithsons claiming that ‘in a tightly knit society inhabiting a tight-knit development there is an inherent feeling of safety and social bond which has much to do with the simple order of the form of the street.’⁶⁷²

Lynn and Smith certainly took these ideas on board and actively sought to do all that they could to preserve as many of the patterns of behaviour as possible that had existed on the traditional terraced streets in which most tenants had grown up. The street-decks on the Park Hill scheme were central to accomplishing this aim, as Lynn explained: ‘the creation of a “streets in the air” allows the patterns of behaviour of people who mainly come from condemned nineteenth-century dwellings to survive [and] the virtues of social contact, which existed in the old streets, [to] be retained.’⁶⁷³ Womersley shared these sentiments and similarly envisioned that Park Hill’s street-decks would assist in the development of communal relations on the new estate, describing how they ‘provide ideal places for daily social contact...housewives can stand at their doors and chat to

⁶⁷⁰ ‘Fix. P. S.’, in *Architectural Review*, vol. 23 (December 1960), p. 437.

⁶⁷¹ ‘The Development of the Design’, in *Journal of the RIBA* (December, 1962), p. 447

⁶⁷² A. and P. Smithson, *Urban Structuring*, p. 15. See also, A. and P. Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, p. 81.

⁶⁷³ ‘Park Hill Redevelopment’, in *Architect’s Journal*, vol. 135 (1961), pp. 271–272.

each other, young children can play in safety outside their homes and tradespeople have an easy route to each flat.’⁶⁷⁴ He was also keen to ensure that each deck retained as much of the ‘character’ of an individual street as possible and encouraged Lynn and Smith to sequentially number each of the flats along the deck like houses along a street and to use different coloured bricks on each deck, arguing that these ‘individualising aspects of the design’ enabled each tenant to feel as if they ‘belonged to a certain part of the scheme.’⁶⁷⁵

In other words, then, it is important to realise that Park Hill’s famous ‘streets in the air’ were much more than a colourful design stunt. Instead, they represented a deeply held conviction on the part of the Lynn, Smith and Womersley that wider social and communal issues needed to be seriously and comprehensively dealt with.⁶⁷⁶ Again, this was an outlook that was very much premised on the New Brutalist theories of the Smithsons, who had long argued that architects and planners needed to pay closer attention to the ‘whole problem of human associations and the relationship that building and community has to them.’⁶⁷⁷ Indeed, one of the central tenets of the Smithson’s philosophy on architecture and design was that form was an ‘active force’ and that ‘valid social entities can result from architectural decisions.’⁶⁷⁸ As such, they placed great emphasis on the idea of different sized ‘social groupings’ and the idea of

⁶⁷⁴ ‘Sheffield Rehousing’, in *The Municipal Journal* (1 April, 1960), p. 1077.

⁶⁷⁵ Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, CA 655 (15), ‘Letter from the City Architect to the City Engineer,’ (13 February, 1958); ‘Meeting on Park Hill, Part 1: Postal Addresses’ (13 February, 1958).

⁶⁷⁶ See, Smith, ‘Architect’s Approach to Architecture’, p. 274.

⁶⁷⁷ ‘Thoughts in Progress: The New Brutalism’, in *Architectural Design* (April, 1957), p. 112.

⁶⁷⁸ ‘Decisions’, in *Architectural Design* (June, 1956), p. 173.

‘hierarchies of association’, arguing that ‘the basic group is obviously the family; traditionally the next grouping is the street; the next the district; and finally the city.’⁶⁷⁹

Coming from this sort of intellectual background, then, it is unsurprising to find that Lynn and Smith devoted so much time and effort to thinking about the wider social and communal facilities available on the Park Hill Estate. Indeed, they even held out hope that the new Estate would be like ‘a city within a city’, envisioning it as a place for ‘living on an intensive social scale.’⁶⁸⁰ In total there were 31 shop units provided on the ground floor ‘shopping square’ of the Park Hill Estate along with four pubs; a communal laundry; separate nursery and infant schools; tenants’ hall and a youth club.⁶⁸¹ A great deal of attention was also given to the design and layout of the play spaces provided on the estate, with John Forrester, a renowned abstract artist, brought in to help design the strikingly geometric equipment in the junior playground.⁶⁸² Plans were also put in place to provide a separate play area for toddlers, a series of playing fields both for the public and schoolchildren and an adventure playground for older children in a wooded area near the Estate, equipped with sandpit, blocks, boards and carpentry tools.⁶⁸³

As this great attention given to the play spaces available to children on the Park Hill Estate suggests, closely tied up with the care given to the social and communal facilities

⁶⁷⁹ A. and P. Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light: Urban Theories 1952–1960 and their Application in a Building Project 1963–1970* (London, 1970), p. 43. See also, A. and P. Smithson, *Urban Structuring: Studies of Alison and Peter Smithson* (London, 1967), p. 21.

⁶⁸⁰ Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, 331.833 SF, W. L. Clunie, ‘The Hyde Park Redevelopment Scheme (1966), p. 1; J. L. Womersley, ‘Park Hill Redevelopment’ (1961), p. 1.

⁶⁸¹ ‘Housing in Sheffield’, in *Architect and Building News* (25 July, 1962), pp. 115–120.

⁶⁸² See, Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, 52/2008, English Heritage, ‘Historic Buildings in Sheffield: Park Hill’ (n.d.), p. 18.

⁶⁸³ Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, CA 655 (15), ‘Draft Proposal of Park Hill, Part 2: Sent by the City Architect to the City Engineer’ (7 August, 1956), p. 4.

on the Estate was a concerted effort to try and provide facilities and amenities for a 'wide range of families, for small children and for aged persons.'⁶⁸⁴ Indeed, within two years of opening, arrangements had already been made to provide dances for the young, ladies socials for the women, and pensioners' socials and tombolas for the elderly.⁶⁸⁵ This atomisation of the social body into separate social groupings can be seen to have been inspired by and founded upon the tactics and methodologies of sociological surveyors of public opinion. The result was that, rather than assuming that there was such a thing as a 'standard domestic subject,' the Park Hill Estate was instead premised on the notion that different sorts of tenants required different sorts of social and communal facilities. Womersley was especially firm on this point, arguing that 'the needs of housewives, husbands and children, as well as of old persons and childless couples, have [all to] be considered in different ways,' taking these ideas with him when working on other public housing schemes, like the 1966 Hulme V Development in Manchester.⁶⁸⁶

Indeed, so keen was Womersley to ensure that the differing social needs of the Park Hill community were being catered to that he actually decided to appoint a sociologist, Joan Demers, to be the first resident on the new Estate.⁶⁸⁷ Officially given the title of 'Assistant Estate Manager,' the idea was that Demers would be able to assist tenants during the moving-in phase, help deal with any problems they might have and generally

⁶⁸⁴ 'Sheffield Redevelopment', in *The Builder*, vol. 57 (1955), p. 698.

⁶⁸⁵ Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, CA 655 (15), 'Ready to Help Flat Tenants', in *Sheffield Telegraph* (14 October, 1959), p 4.

⁶⁸⁶ 'Sheffield Rehousing', in *The Municipal Journal* (1 April, 1960), p. 1077. See, Shapely, 'Civic Culture and Housing in Manchester', pp. 424–426.

⁶⁸⁷ Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, MP 17385M, 'Park Hill Brochure' (16 June 1961), p. 6.

provide a link between the council and the tenants.⁶⁸⁸ Central to these tasks was finding out and establishing how the new tenants viewed the Estate. Consequently, Demers quickly began conducting her own opinion-survey, interviewing the occupants of every fifth flat (providing a sample of 197 people) and publishing the findings of her early investigation in 1962.⁶⁸⁹

Overall, the results were fairly positive, with Demers claiming that ‘not merely has a high quality, high density housing development taken place, but its occupants live a life equally as rich as in a long settled area.’⁶⁹⁰ Pleasingly for Womersley, Lynn and Smith, she also reserved special praise for the design of the scheme, particularly the street-deck system, describing in glowing terms how ‘on fine days those residents with time on their hands would sit either in the entrance of their flat or lean on the specially designed balustrading.’⁶⁹¹ Indeed, she later went on to explain that the only reason why she took the appointment was because she felt that Womersley and his team had been serious about wanting to provide for the social needs of new tenants, claiming that ‘there seemed to be a thoroughly thought-out approach to social needs’ right from the start.⁶⁹²

As Demer’s work confirms, then, the Park Hill Estate was very much influenced and shaped by the sorts of sociologically-informed understandings of both the social body and the individual subject’s relationship to it that were discussed in previous sections.

⁶⁸⁸ J. F. Demers, ‘Social Work in Housing’, in *Social Services Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 2 (1962), pp. 49–51.

⁶⁸⁹ Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, 331.833 SQ, J. F. Demers, ‘Park Hill Survey’ (1962). The MHLG also conducted an opinion survey on the Park Hill Estate in the late 1960s; see, MHLG, *The Estate Outside the Dwelling: Reactions of Residents to Aspects of Housing Layout: Design Bulletin 25* (London, 1972).

⁶⁹⁰ Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, 331.833 SQ, J. F. Demers, ‘Park Hill Survey’ (1962), p. 10.

⁶⁹¹ ‘Park Hill Victory’, in *New Society*, vol. 26, no. 576 (November, 1973), p. 421.

⁶⁹² Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, 331.833 SQ, J. F. Demers, ‘Park Hill Survey’ (1962), p. 9.

Design-wise, the most striking examples of this were the iconic street-decks, which were premised on the notion that vibrant and active communities were not only desirable, but also designable.⁶⁹³ This emphasis placed upon the wider social needs of the prospective tenant also explains why the Sheffield City Council devoted so much time and thought to the provision of communal facilities on the Park Hill Estate and why they felt it to be necessary to employ a residential sociologist for the scheme. For these reasons, therefore, the design and layout of the Park Hill suggests that the figure the local authorities were designing for was undergoing something of a major transformation; conceptualised no longer from an inherently biopolitical perspective, but conceived of as a social subject with specific social needs that were to be satisfied within the communities in which they resided.

Conclusion

Although this chapter has been solely focused on the impact that sociologically-derived ideas and tactics had upon the field of public housing in the postwar years, it is nonetheless important to remember that there was still a great deal of intellectual baggage carried over from the prewar years. In particular, a great deal of emphasis continued to be placed on the biological health and bodily productivity of the individual. For example, when discussions took place about housing or domestic ‘needs’ it was still commonplace to hear references being made to overtly sanitary issues of the sort discussed in the previous chapters, with dedicated sociologists such as Harrison even declaring that ‘the basic human needs may be briefly summarised as:

⁶⁹³ See, ‘The Vertical Community’, in *New Statesman* (30 June 1961), p. 1056.

water, food, shelter, sustenance, happiness, and scope for spiritual, mental, and physical development.’⁶⁹⁴

As this suggests, then, rather than replacing or superseding the biopolitical tactics of the interwar years, new sociologically-inspired techniques for investigating, aggregating and managing domestic subjects tended to emerge unevenly and alongside more established ways of knowing; suggesting at the very least that older guidelines and practices continued to be perceived as having some enduring value despite the emergence of new ways of thinking about domestic needs and subjectivity.⁶⁹⁵ For example, despite the introduction of many more sociologically-inclined employees into their workforce, the BRS continued to devote a great deal of time and thought to physiological issues, such as the optimum amount of sunlight needed in the home and the movement of hot air inside domestic living spaces.⁶⁹⁶ Likewise, government bodies continued to be concerned with sanitary issues, with the MHLG’s 1960 Report on Local Government in London declaring, for example, that ‘light and air round the house, somewhere where a few things can be grown, somewhere where the family can sit around out of doors, are all healthy things...they are essentially natural and healthy.’⁶⁹⁷ This overlapping of ideas is something that can be overlooked in more generalised and abstract discussions on the relationship between modernity and sociology which oversimplify the processes by which ideas and assumptions actually underwent

⁶⁹⁴ Mass Observation Archive (Topic Collection), TC.2/1/P, ‘Report to the 1940 Council’ (September, 1940).

⁶⁹⁵ Poovey, *Making a social body*, p. 52.

⁶⁹⁶ See, National Archives, DSIR 4/847, ‘Effect Of Diffusion On The Light Distribution In A Room’ (1947); Black and Milroy, *Warm Air Heating in Local Authority Flats*.

⁶⁹⁷ Report of the Royal Commission on Local Government in Greater London, *Report Presented to Parliament (October 1960)* (London, 1960), Cmnd. 1164, p. 98.

transformations by trying to define a sequential series of discrete governmental epochs.⁶⁹⁸

Nevertheless, this persistence of prewar ideas should not detract from the significance of the changes that were certainly taking place in this period. Indeed, the mere fact that social and communal concerns were coming to feature alongside biological and physiological ones as legitimate domestic ‘needs’ reveals just how much of an impact the rapidly expanding sociological disciplines of the postwar years were coming to exert over the way in which those in the public housing field conceived of the people they aimed to house. No longer conceived of in solely biopolitical terms, the figure of the prospective tenant was increasingly coming to be seen as an inherently social subject with needs that varied according to age, sex and living arrangements. As a result, the notion of there being such a thing as a singular or unitary domestic subject was increasingly questioned as more time and effort was given to thinking about how to design homes and estates that would be more in tune with and adaptable to the full spectrum of prospective tenants’ needs. Informing this shift in outlook, I have argued, was an increased interest and responsiveness to the individual preferences and opinions of the prospective tenant; an interest both fuelled by and premised upon the sorts of ideas, tactics and methods that had been pioneered in England by opinion surveying groups such as MO and the Social Survey Unit. Consequently, although it would be wrong to talk of a ‘sanitary outlook’ being replaced by a ‘sociological outlook,’ it is clear that the social sciences did have a far greater impact over the field of public

⁶⁹⁸ See, O’Malley, Weir and Shearing, ‘Governmentality, Criticism, Politics’, pp. 501—527.

housing, especially in terms of how the figure of the prospective tenant was conceptualised and acted upon, than has previously been recognised.

5. ‘The Age of Affluence’: Council Estates and the

Consumer Society

‘Let’s be frank about it; most of our people have never had it so good. Go around the country, go to the industrial towns, go to the farms, and you will see a state of prosperity such as we have never had in my lifetime, nor indeed in the history of this country.’⁶⁹⁹

‘There is all around us today a kind of fantastic conspicuousness of consumption and abundance...[our] daily dealings are now not so much with fellow men, but rather with the reception and manipulation of goods and messages.’⁷⁰⁰

In 1958 John Kenneth Galbraith, an Economics Professor at Harvard University, published a ground-breaking and widely-read new book entitled *The Affluent Society* in which he sought to show how present day politics was premised on a set of outmoded assumptions about peoples’ spending power.⁷⁰¹ The days of mass unemployment and widespread poverty were, he suggested, a thing of the past and in their place had come societies within which everyone was able to gain easy access to the basic necessities of life. The extent of the change was unprecedented he argued: ‘today, the ordinary individual has access to amenities, foods, entertainments, personal transportation, and

⁶⁹⁹ ‘More Production the only Answer to Inflation’, in *The Times* (22 July, 1957), p. 4.

⁷⁰⁰ J. Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London, 1998), p. 25.

⁷⁰¹ At present the book has been through five editions and well over a million copies have been sold worldwide. For more on its impact at the time see, N. Thompson, ‘Socialist Political Economy in an Age of Affluence: The Reception of J.K. Galbraith by the British Social-democratic Left in the 1950s and 1960s’, in *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2010), pp. 50–79.

plumbing, in which not even the rich rejoiced a century ago.’⁷⁰² Abundance rather than scarcity was the defining feature of this way of life; this, he suggested, was the challenge that lay at the heart of the newly emergent ‘affluent society’.

Although Galbraith may have been somewhat premature in predicting an end to poverty and unemployment, his idea of an ‘affluent society’ has proved to be remarkably enduring. British historians, in particular, have long been interested in the effects that rising levels of affluence had in the postwar period. Some, such as Avner Offer, have tried to link increasing levels of affluence with the breakup of the traditional ‘working classes’, whilst others, such as Arthur Marwick, Richard Weight, Dominic Sandbrook and Peter Hennessey, have seen it as being central to the rise of the kinds of consumerist cultures that have come to characterise modern Britain.⁷⁰³ More recent work by Matthew Hilton and Christopher Beauchamp has also highlighted how increasing affluence led to greater attention being given to the rights and responsibilities of the figure of the consumer.⁷⁰⁴ Consequently, we now have a much clearer picture of the impact that these changes in income levels and spending power had upon the British economy and upon modern-day class relations.⁷⁰⁵ Similarly, we are in a much better

⁷⁰² J. K. Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (London, 1958), pp. 1–3.

⁷⁰³ See, A. Offer, *The Challenge of Affluence: Self-control and Well-being in the United States and Britain since 1950* (Oxford, 2006); A. Marwick, *British Society Since 1945* (London, 1992); R. Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain 1940–2000* (London: Pan Books, 2003); D. Sandbrook, *Never Had It so Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London, 2005); J. H. Goldthorpe, D. Lockwood with F. Bechhofer and J. Platt, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* (Cambridge, 1968).

⁷⁰⁴ See, M. Hilton, ‘The Polyester-Flannelled Philanthropists: The Birmingham Consumer’s Group and Affluent Britain’, in L. Black and H. Pemberton (Eds.), *An Affluent Society? Britain’s Post-War “Golden Age” Revisited* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 149–165; C. Beauchamp, ‘Getting Your Money’s Worth: American Models for the Remaking of the Consumer Interest in Britain, 1930s–1960s’, in M. Bevir and F. Trentmann (Eds.), *Critiques of Capital in Modern Britain and America: Transatlantic Exchanges 1800 to the Present Day* (London, 2002), pp. 127–150; R. Whiting, ‘Affluence and Industrial Relations in Post-War Britain’, in *Contemporary British History*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2008), pp. 519–536.

⁷⁰⁵ See, K. Jeffreys, ‘Social Class, Affluence and Electoral Politics, 1951–64’, in S. James and V. Preston (Eds.), *British Politics Since 1945: The Dynamics of Historical Change* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 51–76;

position to compare and contrast the English postwar experience of affluence with that of America and the rest of Europe.⁷⁰⁶

Yet, as Mike Savage and Shinobu Majima have surmised, the most significant thing about the idea of the ‘affluent society’ was that, regardless of whether or not it was simply an invention of economist theorists, it seemed to mark a distinctly new kind of conception of national society, ‘one which placed a social principle – in this case, affluence – as its immanent, inner principle.’⁷⁰⁷ However, up until now, there has been a tendency to assume that this way of viewing social issues was one that was largely confined to the private and commercial sectors of the economy, with little thought given to what impact rising levels of affluence and increased spending power might have had on the way that those involved in the public and welfare sectors went about their work.⁷⁰⁸ Furthermore, there has too often been a propensity to talk about affluence in abstract and generalised terms rather than focusing on specific historical sites within which consumption took place, leading historians such as Frank Trentman to suggest that we need to give more attention to discrete and historically specific examples of

I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, ‘Living Standards and Consumption’, in P. Addison and H. Jones (Eds.), *Blackwell Companion to British History: Contemporary Britain, 1939-2000* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 226–244; A. Offer, ‘British Manual Workers: From Producers to Consumers, c. 1950-2000’, in *Contemporary British History*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2008), pp. 537–571.

⁷⁰⁶ T. Judt, *Post War: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London, 2005), pp. 353–355; S. Strasser, C. McGovern, and M. Judt (Eds.), *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 3–8; S. Nixon, ‘Apostles of Americanization? J. Walter Thompson Company Ltd, Advertising and Anglo-American Relations 1945-67’, in *Contemporary British History*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2008), pp. 477–499.

⁷⁰⁷ S. Majima and M. Savage, ‘Contesting Affluence: An Introduction’, in *Contemporary British History*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2008), p. 445. See also, M. J. Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare: An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1851–1951* (Oxford, 2007), p. 432;

⁷⁰⁸ See, J. K. Watson, ‘Towns and Consumerism’, in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, p. 719; R. Lowe, ‘Modernizing Britain’s Welfare State: The Influence of Affluence, 1957–64’, in L. Black and H. Pemberton (Eds.), *An Affluent Society? Britain’s Post-War “Golden Age” Revisited* (Aldershot, 2004), p. 36.

consumption and the issues surrounding them rather than just focusing on macro socio-economic theories.⁷⁰⁹

This chapter begins to redress this imbalance by looking at how those involved in the provision of public housing responded to the idea of the ‘affluent society’. Looking at the assumptions underpinning the work and ideas of architects, planners, government officials and housing managers, it uses the act of consumption as a prism through which to analyse the changes that took place in the way that council estate tenants were conceptualised and acted upon during the 1950s and 1960s. The first section looks at how far rising levels of affluence actually impacted upon the council estate tenant by assessing how far they were able to participate in the so-called ‘revolution’ that was taking place in the domestic appliance market at this time; considering also how these shifting demands challenged established ideas about what was ‘needed’ in the working-class home. In the following section, I look at the extent to which newly emerging market-orientated ideas about the rights and responsibilities of the figure of the consumer impacted upon the public housing sector, looking in particular at the effect that ideas relating to ‘accountability’ and ‘customer satisfaction’ had upon local authority officials and those in the housing management professions. Finally, I examine what sort of impact rising levels of affluence actually had upon the shape and layout of the council estate home in this period, focusing in particular upon ideas linked to ‘flexible living.’

⁷⁰⁹ F. Trentman, ‘Bread, Milk, and Democracy: Consumption and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Britain’, in M. Daunton and M. Hilton (Eds.), *The Politics of Consumption: Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 145–146. See also, D. Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 158–161; M. Paterson, *Consumption and Everyday Life* (London, 2006), p. 11; J. Hearn and S. Roseneil (Eds.), *Consuming Cultures: Power and Resistance* (Basingstoke, 1999), p. 3.

In the end, what this chapter demonstrates is that increasing levels of affluence in postwar England had profound effects, both material and ideological, upon the public housing sector. Indeed, far from being sheltered from changes that were taking place in the commercial and private sectors, those involved in the provision of public housing were keenly aware of the impact that rising levels of affluence were having upon wider society at this time and did their utmost to modify the forms and practices through which they defined, assessed and met the domestic needs of the prospective tenant in an effort to ensure that their work was in tune with the shifting expectations of the postwar 'affluent society'. At the most basic level, this meant that efforts were made to provide tenants with much better equipped and up-to-date homes in a bid to ensure that they were provided with living conditions that were as close as possible to those enjoyed by the rest of society. On an ideologically level, meanwhile, it meant that far more attention began to be given to the individual hopes and personal preferences of prospective tenants as emotional and psychological factors came more to the fore, significantly undermining the idea that there was such a thing as a standard domestic subject with universal needs.

The Domestic Revolution

New Home Appliances

In economic terms, the key to the 'affluent society' of the 1950s and 1960s was sustained full employment and a dramatic rise in workers' wages. To give some sense of the transformation that took place, in 1950 the average weekly wage was £6.8s; by 1959 it was £11.2s.6d. Consumer spending also increased by about 20% during the

same period, while economic growth remained at about 3%.⁷¹⁰ Other important factors included the lifting of food rations in 1954 and the relaxation of hire-purchase controls in the same year.⁷¹¹ As a result of these socio-economic changes, consumer markets expanded rapidly as the accessibility of consumer goods began to transcend social classes.⁷¹² What this next section does is to look at what sort of impact this increased wealth and spending power had upon the public housing sector. Focusing primarily upon the burgeoning domestic appliance market, it shows how the increasing availability and affordability of cheap domestic appliances meant the council estate house increasingly became seen as a site of consumption, leading those involved in the provision of public housing to try and provide prospective tenants with dwellings that were as up-to-date and comfortable as those enjoyed by the rest of society.

Firstly, it is necessary to outline the scale of the changes that were taking place in the domestic appliance market at this time. To give one example, in the ten years following the cessation of hostilities in the Second World War national expenditure on refrigerators, stereos, cookers and electrical appliances increased from £189 million to £1,268 million.⁷¹³ In real terms, this meant that spending on household items increased by nearly 115% during the 1950s.⁷¹⁴ In 1933, for example, only 20% of the population

⁷¹⁰ Sandbrook, *Never Had it so Good*, pp. 206–209; P. Hennessy, *Having it so Good: Britain in the Fifties* (London, 2006), p. 520.

⁷¹¹ S. Todd, 'Affluence, Class and Crown Street: Reinvestigating the Post-War Working Class', in *Contemporary British History*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2008), p. 506; S. O'Connell and C. Reid, 'Working-Class Consumer Credit in the UK, 1925–60: The Role of the Check Trader', in *Economic History Review*, vol. 58, no. 2 (2005), pp. 378–405.

⁷¹² S. Miles, *Consumerism as a Way of Life* (London, 1998), p. 8. See also; Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, pp. 280–285.

⁷¹³ B. R. Mitchell and P. Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 371. See also, J. Obelkevich and P. Catterall, *Understanding Postwar British Society* (London, 1994), p. 144.

⁷¹⁴ J. Gardiner, *From the Bomb to the Beatles* (London, 1999), p. 88.

owned a vacuum cleaner, yet by 1961 over 75% of the population did.⁷¹⁵ Contemporaries were certainly conscious of the scale of the changes afoot, with figures such as Mark Abrams, a British sociologist who founded and chaired the market-research body 'Research Services Ltd', describing how 'much more money is now being spent on household goods...all this means that for the first time in modern British history the working-class home has become a place that is pleasant to live in.'⁷¹⁶

Surveys conducted at the time revealed that electrical appliances such as washing machines, vacuum cleaners and refrigerators tended to be the most popular items. During 1960, for example, sales of refrigerators trebled in the North East of England.⁷¹⁷ As a result, domestic consumption of electricity increased dramatically with electric companies recording record profits during this period.⁷¹⁸ Even those who lived in relatively small homes were able to participate in this domestic revolution as, thanks to rapid advances in design and production methods, almost everything in the home became not only cheaper but also smaller and more compact.⁷¹⁹ Sealed compression units for refrigerators were introduced into Britain following the end of the Second World War, whilst twin-tub and spin-dryer washing machines were brought over from Germany in the 1950s.⁷²⁰ 'Dual-purpose' equipment, such as the combined vacuum-cleaner and floor-polisher and the fridge-freezer, also emerged alongside a number of

⁷¹⁵ S. Bowden and A. Offer, 'Household Appliances and the Use of Time: The United States and Britain since the 1920s', in *The Economic History Review*, vol. 47, no. 4 (1994), pp. 730–731.

⁷¹⁶ 'The Home-Centred Society', in *The Listener* (26 November 1959), pp. 914–915.

⁷¹⁷ 'The Pattern of Electricity Sales', in *Electrical Review*, vol. 167, no. 15 (1960), p. 622.

⁷¹⁸ 'Developments and Trends in Appliance Design', in *Electrical Times*, vol. 167, no. 17 (1960), p. 695; 'Appliances for the Home Supplement', in *Electrical Review*, vol. 167, no. 17 (1960), p. 1.

⁷¹⁹ Yorke, *The Domestic Revolution Explained*, p. 111.

⁷²⁰ T. A. B. Corley, *Domestic Electrical Appliances* (London, 1966), pp. 106–110.

new, more compact electrical products, such as the toaster, the coffee-percolator, the hair-dryer, and the electric razor.⁷²¹

Although many contemporaries seemed to assume that all sections of society were able to participate in this domestic revolution, there is actually surprisingly little evidence available to confirm whether or not the poorest and most needy sections of society were actually able to purchase these sorts of domestic appliances.⁷²² One of the few available sources in this area was provided by the BRS, who conducted an in-depth survey in 1958 into the uses that tenants in 120 council estate homes were making of their electrical sockets. The results were striking: every house had an electric iron, 106 had a vacuum cleaner, 101 had a television, and 96 a radio. On top of this, a significant number of kettles, hair-dryers, sewing-machines, toasters, and razors were also found along with a handful of tropical fish tanks. In fact, the only area in which the council estate home could be said to be slightly lagging behind the rest of the housing market was in the kitchen, where the BRS only found 50 washing machines and a, comparatively, paltry 19 refrigerators.⁷²³ Nevertheless, as the two researchers noted; ‘the amount of equipment compared with that of even a few years ago is surprisingly high and is indicative of both technical advances and a rising standard of living.’⁷²⁴

Furthermore, it was apparent that many of the tenants would have undoubtedly owned more electrical appliances if only their homes had been equipped with more sockets.

⁷²¹ ‘Home Appliances: Trends in Design and Construction’, in *Electrical Review*, vol. 161, no. 15 (1957), p. 634.

⁷²² See, Jeffreys, ‘Social Class, Affluence and Electoral Politics’, p. 52.

⁷²³ J. Crisp and K. J. Noble, ‘Socket-Outlets in Public Authority Housing’, in *Electrical Times*, vol. 136, no. 3542 (1959), p. 533. These results were not necessarily reflective of national trends; indeed one survey estimated that over 80,000 council homes had built-in refrigerators by 1956: ‘Domestic Appliances, in *Municipal Journal*, vol. 64 (1956), p. 1510.

⁷²⁴ Crisp and Noble, ‘Socket-Outlets in Public Authority Housing’, p. 534.

Particular annoyance was expressed by most of the tenants interviewed at the fact that there was only one socket in the kitchen (the BRS suggested that there should be a least three).⁷²⁵ A number of housewives also criticised the lack of sockets in the hallways, explaining that this made cleaning particularly difficult, whilst others complained about the height and positioning of certain sockets. In response to these findings, the two BRS researchers concluded that the minimum number of sockets required in a council estate home was fifteen (more than double the amount provided at that time), suggesting that they at least expected the number of electrical appliances in the council estate home to carry on increasing.⁷²⁶

Joan Demers, the resident sociologist on the Park Hill Estate discussed in the previous chapter, obtained similar sorts of results from her 1962 social survey, describing, for instance, how 48% of the new tenants had brought their own washing machines, even though there was a large communal laundry on-site.⁷²⁷ As these brief glimpses into tenants' homes reveal, then, even the poorest and most neediest sections of English society were beginning to feel the effects of the so-called 'domestic revolution' of the 1950s and 1960s. The result was that previously undreamed of luxuries such as washing machines, refrigerators and vacuum cleaners were increasingly coming to be within the reach of prospective tenants. What I now want to do is move on and consider what impact this increasing availability of high-tech, labour-saving home appliances had upon the way that those involved in the provision of public housing defined and identified what was 'essential' in the working-class home.

⁷²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 535.

⁷²⁶ 'The Statistics of Wiring', in *Electrical Times*, vol. 136, no. 3542 (1959), p. 531.

⁷²⁷ Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, 331.833 SQ, J. F. Demers, 'Park Hill Survey' (1962), p. 5.

New Needs

In a recent article on the growth of the domestic appliance market in postwar Finland, Dr Mika Pantzar, an economics professor at the Finish National Consumer Research Centre, suggested that the need for specific household products is ‘invented through social and material processes in historically specific times and particular places, including public articulation and social sharing of the idea of the product’s necessity,’ arguing that, in the Finish case at least, these needs were ‘invented, shaped, normalised, and legitimised through a social interaction process in which the media was the central vehicle.’⁷²⁸ Selina Todd makes a similar point in a 2008 paper on working-class life in Liverpool between 1956 and 1964, claiming that definitions of ‘necessities’ and ‘luxuries’ are liable to significantly change during periods in which peoples’ living standards are rapidly changing.⁷²⁹ The purpose of this next section is to investigate the extent to which these sorts of processes were at work in the context of the English council estate home during the 1950s and 1960s. Looking at both the way in which the sorts of domestic appliances discussed above were portrayed by advertisers and the ways in which they were conceived of by those involved in the provision of public housing, it shows how previously considered luxury items such as washing machines, refrigerators and vacuum cleaners had by the 1960s increasingly come to be seen as essential and necessary items in the council estate home.

⁷²⁸ M. Pantzar, ‘Tools or Toys? Inventing the Need for Domestic Appliances in Postwar and Postmodern Finland’, in *Journal of Advertising*, vol. 32, no. 1 (2003), p. 83.

⁷²⁹ Todd, ‘Affluence, Class and Crown Street’, p. 505. See also, Ravetz, *Remaking Cities*, p. 179.

The first thing to note in this respect, is that many of those involved in the provision of public housing in the postwar period were certainly coming to see the sorts of domestic appliances discussed in the previous section as being more and more essential for working-class households. Indeed, as early as 1945 the Political and Economic Planning group were declaring that ‘there is reason to suppose that the [post-war] house will contain a good deal more equipment of the type wanted by the tenant than was normally the case before the war’ and themselves suggesting that ‘mechanical appliances for washing, wringing and ironing clothes, for cleaning and sweeping, and for space heating, water heating, and cooking are most essential.’⁷³⁰ Reyner Banham was similarly sensitive to these changes, noting dryly in 1960 how with ‘shavers, clippers and hair dryers...automatic cookers, washing machines, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, polishers...a housewife alone often disposes of more horsepower today than an industrial worker did at the beginning of the century.’⁷³¹ The boom that took place in the domestic appliance during the 1950s did little to dampen these expectations, and by the 1960s it was not uncommon to find commentators referring to products such as washing machines and refrigerators as ‘necessities,’ with one 1965 publication even suggesting that, ‘whilst it would be difficult to list all the pieces of equipment needed in a home, a range, refrigerator, washer, vacuum cleaner, ironing board and iron [should be] part of the “standard package”.’⁷³²

Increasingly, these sorts of sentiments also began to appear in government publications.

For instance, in the 1957 Housing Act local authorities were given the right to provide

⁷³⁰ Political and Economic Planning, *The Market for Household Appliances* (Oxford, 1945), p. 39.

⁷³¹ R. Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (London, 1960), p. 12. See also, R. Banham, *The Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment* (London, 1969), p. 242.

⁷³² B. J. Johnston, *Equipment for Modern Living* (London, 1965), p. 3. See also, ‘Adequate Installations’, in *Electrical Review*, vol. 167, no. 17 (1960), p. 697.

council estate households with domestic appliances, either outright or via hire-purchase, if they saw fit.⁷³³ Pressure was also put on local authorities to improve the quality of their public housing so that it was more in tune with the rising living standards of the time, with particular emphasis placed upon ensuring that all rooms, especially kitchens, were made larger so as to be able to accommodate the increasing number of domestic appliances that tenants were likely to own in the future.⁷³⁴ The Parker Morris Committee's influential 1961 Report, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* was particularly clear in this respect:

Housewives now increasingly look to machinery to lighten the household tasks...teenagers want to listen to records; someone else wants to watch the television...these changes in the way that people live [and] the things which they own and use...make it timely to re-examine the kinds of homes we ought to be building, to ensure that they will be adequate to meet the newly emerging needs of the future as well as the basic human needs which always stay the same.⁷³⁵

Central to these rising expectations was the role played by the media in advertising and glamorising these sorts of domestic appliances, with researchers such as Ferdinand Zweig, a lecturer in the Law Department at Oxford University, noting how, thanks to television and radio, the worker's 'appetite is whetted, he wants more. He has a good life, but he wants more of it...the traditional standard of living is outmoded.'⁷³⁶ Peter Smithson was of a similar opinion, suggesting that 'television has opened people's minds and made a new class conscious of its existence as a group with a need for a

⁷³³ National Archives, DSIR 4/3452, 'Memorandum of a Meeting held at the Field Test Unit' (30th April 1952); J. D. James (Ed.), *Housing: Being the Annotated Text of the Housing Act of 1957 and the Housing (Financial Provisions) Act of 1958* (London, 1958), pp. 241–257.

⁷³⁴ DoE, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* (London, 1961), p. 21; MHLG, *Space in the Home: Design Bulletins 6* (London, 1963), pp. 7–8.

⁷³⁵ DoE, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, p. 2.

⁷³⁶ F. Zweig, *The Worker in an Affluent Society* (London, 1961), pp. 205–206.

lifestyle of its own.’⁷³⁷ Indeed, in their influential 1956 article “But Today We Collect Ads,” the Smithsons’ even went so far as to claim that ‘mass production advertising is establishing our whole pattern of life, principles, morals, aims, aspirations and standard of living,’ imploring their fellow architects to ‘somehow get the measure of this intervention if we are match its powerful and exciting impulses with our own.’⁷³⁸

Typically, the target audience in adverts for labour-saving domestic appliances such as washing machines, refrigerators and vacuum cleaners was the housewife. Presented as ‘a skilful cook, dedicated mother, committed cleaner, and kitchen goddess,’ she was presumed to be the one who performed most of the domestic duties in the house and, as such, stood to gain the most from these new devices, with *The Economist* observing in 1959 how ‘ten years ago the ordinary housewife was a slave in an antiquated kitchen...today mechanical servants have sprung up around her as she works only in non-telly hours.’⁷³⁹ As this passage suggests, the ideal that was propagated in the media was very much based on the premise that housewives of all income levels wanted to lead the sort of leisured lifestyle that had previously only been available to the wealthy. For instance, in one 1959 advert for Main kitchen equipment it was professed that, ‘living modern means living more leisurely and more graciously. Let modern appliances do the work.’⁷⁴⁰

Increasingly, adverts such as these began to fill the pages of tenants’ handbooks and other official publications aimed at the council estate household, breaking down many

⁷³⁷ A. Smithson (Ed.), *Team 10 Primer* (London, 1968), p. 6.

⁷³⁸ ‘But Today We Collect Ads’, in *Ark*, vol. 23 (November, 1956), p. 50.

⁷³⁹ Quoted in, Sandbrook, *Never Had it so Good*, p. 111.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ideal Home and Garden*, vol. 79, no. 4 (April, 1959), p. 1.

of the barriers that had previously separated the public housing market from the private one. The 1954 edition of the LCC's Tenant's Handbook, for example, already featured full-page spreads for laundry equipment, radios, refrigerators, cookers, cleaning products, televisions, and vacuum cleaners as well as adverts for electrical repair companies.⁷⁴¹ Typically, these adverts would attempt to 'normalise' the domestic appliances they were selling by dispelling any doubts customers may have had and highlighting the benefits that these products offered.⁷⁴² For instance, in one of the adverts featured in the 1954 LCC Handbook the blurb stated: 'the Astral refrigerator safeguards the family food, provides plenty of ice and offers opportunities for many exciting cold dishes...*you need an Astral nowadays.*'⁷⁴³ On top of this, new companies, including Colston, Duomatic, and John Bloom's Rolls Razor, also came onto the market, targeting working-class consumers through increasingly generous hire-purchase schemes, such as that offered by Electrolux, for example, who gave council estate tenants the chance to have the latest MB.16 Refrigerator fitted in their kitchens at a cost of only 1/6 s. per week.⁷⁴⁴

Moreover, local authority handbooks and tenancy agreements also began to include larger and more detailed sections on how to care for household appliances, reflecting the fact that even in those situations where tenants were not actually provided with these

⁷⁴¹ LCC Housing Management Department, *Tenant's Handbook* (London, 1954), pp. 3–7.

⁷⁴² See, 'How to Sell Appliances', in *Electrical Review*, vol. 167, no. 17 (1960), p. 698; 'What's New?' at Olympia', in *The Architect and Building News*, vol. 221, no. 9 (1962), p. 297; Pantzar, 'Tools or Toys?', p. 83; Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, p. 128; Y. Gabriel and T. Lang, *The Unmanageable Consumer: Contemporary Consumption and its Fragmentation* (London, 1995), p. 17.

⁷⁴³ LCC Housing Management Department, *Tenant's Handbook*, p. 7.

⁷⁴⁴ 'Over 200,000 Electrolux Refrigerators now Installed in Housing Estates', in *The Municipal Journal* (2 June, 1961), p. 1826. See also; Corley, *Domestic Electrical Appliances*, pp. 50–59.

items it was assumed that they might well purchase them themselves.⁷⁴⁵ In Sheffield, for example, tenants were reminded, amongst other things, to ensure that they wiped and dried their washing machines after every wash; kept the sole-plates of their irons clean; kept water and wet hands away from appliances; and did not use portable appliances in the bathroom.⁷⁴⁶ Indeed, it often seemed as if the tenancy agreements were actively trying to promote the latest electrical goods on behalf of the domestic appliance industry. In the Dagenham Tenants Handbook, for example, it was noted that ‘the electric refrigerator [is] an essential piece of domestic equipment, it is dependable in operation...it is independent of permanent pipework, costs very little to run and requires little attention beyond regular cleaning.’⁷⁴⁷

Underpinning these sorts of guidelines, therefore, was an increasingly consumerist conceptualisation of the council estate tenant; one that was based on the premise that prospective tenants’ deserved to be not only physically fit and productive, but also emotionally fulfilled and personally happy. As such, rather than just aiming to fulfil the prospective tenant’s basic bodily and biological needs, far greater emphasis came to be placed upon satisfying their personal and individual consumerist aspirations by enabling them to either purchase or have access to domestic appliances such as washing machines, refrigerators and vacuum cleaners; appliances that were coming to be seen as essential to modern modes living. In other words, therefore, council estate homes were no longer just conceptualised as spaces for healthy family life, but as active

⁷⁴⁵ LCC Housing Management Department, *Tenant’s Handbook*, pp. 21–23.

⁷⁴⁶ City of Sheffield Housing Management Committee, *Municipal Tenant’s Handbook* (Gloucester, 1963), pp. 37–41.

⁷⁴⁷ Dagenham Borough Council, *The Municipal Tenants Handbook* (Gloucester, 1961), p. 35.

sites of consumption within which domestic subjects could and should be able to realise their materialistic desires.⁷⁴⁸

The Consumer Revolution

Accountability

As the previous sections demonstrated, central to the emergence and proliferation of domestic appliances such as washing machines, refrigerators and vacuum cleaners within council estate homes was an increasingly consumerist and market-orientated approach to the figure of the prospective tenant; one that placed great score on granting the individual subject the freedom to express themselves through the purchasing and exhibiting of the most up-to-date consumables.⁷⁴⁹ What I want to move on and do in this next section is look in more depth at the sorts of ideas that were put forward to protect and safeguard these newly emerging consumerist rights and freedoms within the public housing sector during the 1950s and 1960s. Again, this has been an area that has received very little attention from historians, who have presumably assumed that questions relating to consumer rights have little relevance to paternalistic public sector services like public housing.⁷⁵⁰ This next section redresses this oversight by showing that, as a result of consumerist concerns, far more scrutiny came to be placed on the efficiency, productivity and proficiency of those involved in the provision of public

⁷⁴⁸ Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare*, p. 431.

⁷⁴⁹ See, Z. Bauman, *44 Letters from the Liquid Modern World* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 67; Bauman, *Consuming Life*, p. 12.

⁷⁵⁰ For instance, Cole and Furbey maintain that in the public housing sector there was a 'huge gulf between powerful producer interests and relatively powerless users of the service.' See, Cole and Furbey, *The Eclipse of Council Housing*, p. 116.

housing, with concepts such as ‘value for money’ and ‘accountability’ entering into the lexicon of the public housing sector for the first time.

Firstly, it must be borne in mind that, away from public housing, debates surrounding the responsibilities and duties of sellers and producers were certainly coming to the fore in England at this time, with Martin Daunton and Matthew Hilton suggesting that what was taking place at this time was the ‘replacement of the worker with the consumer in the appeals of mainstream politics; the replacement of a politics based on individual and group identities in the sphere of production with one of individual rights in the sphere of consumption.’⁷⁵¹ Evidence for this shifting outlook can be seen in the proliferation of new consumer rights groups being formed (such as the Consumer’s Association, the Consumer Advisory Council, the Women’s Advisory Committee, and the Research Institute of Consumer Affairs) and in the establishment and popularity of product buying-guides (such as *Which?* and *The Shopper’s Guide*).⁷⁵²

Underpinning these initiatives was a commitment to the concept that everyone should have the freedom to spend their money as they saw fit.⁷⁵³ Key to achieving this goal was ensuring that sellers and producers provided customers with enough reliable and accurate information to ensure that they were able to make informed purchasing

⁷⁵¹ Daunton and M. Hilton (Eds.), *The Politics of Consumption*, p. 6. See also, Miles, *Consumerism as a Way of Life*, p. 9.

⁷⁵² See, M. Hilton, ‘Consumer Politics in Post-War Britain’, in Daunton and Hilton (Eds.), *The Politics of Consumption*, pp. 249–250; Black and Pemberton (Eds.), *An Affluent Society?*, p. 6; Beauchamp, ‘Getting Your Money’s Worth’, p. 127; Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare*, p. 449; Whiting, ‘Affluence and Industrial Relations’, pp. 519–520; M. Savage, ‘Ordinary, Ambivalent and Defensive: Class Identities in the North-West of England’, in *Sociology*, vol. 35, no. 4 (2001), pp. 875–892.

⁷⁵³ See, Gabriel and Lang, *The Unmanageable Consumer*, p. 1.; Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, p. 72; M. Featherstone, *The Body in Consumer Culture* (London, 1991), p. 83; Z. Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 12.

choices.⁷⁵⁴ As such, far more concern began to be shown towards issues such as product labelling, advertising descriptions and manufacturing quality, with figures such as Eirlys Roberts, the editor of *Which?* and the initiator of the Consumer's Association, claiming that 'people should be shown how to choose among the multitude of strange competing goods so that they can spend their money well.'⁷⁵⁵ In other words, then, the underlying ethos of the consumer rights movement was that, in order to establish and encourage successful and competitive markets, sellers and producers needed to be held accountable for the quality of the products and services that they were offering to customers.⁷⁵⁶

Increasingly, these sorts of ideas began to have an impact upon the architectural and planning professions. For instance, in one 1954 publication on modernist homes readers were reminded that 'the architect is to give the best advice he can on your requirements and design a house to your satisfaction...[he] is paid by you and is therefore accountable to you.'⁷⁵⁷ Similar sorts of ideas were being expressed in relation to the role of local authority officials, with one 1964 article in the *Social Service Quarterly* declaring that 'officials and council-members...must be accountable to the taxpayers and ratepayers, who have the right to know that their money, which has been collected for public purposes, is wisely spent.'⁷⁵⁸ Alison Smithson was similarly effusive on this point, reminding local authority-employed architects that they had a duty to produce

⁷⁵⁴ Hilton, 'Consumer Politics in Post-War Britain', p. 245; Offer, 'British Manual Workers', p. 544.

⁷⁵⁵ E. Roberts, *Consumers* (London, 1966), p. 77.

⁷⁵⁶ See, M. Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Search for a Historical Moment* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 209; Beauchamp, 'Getting Your Money's Worth', pp. 127–133.

⁷⁵⁷ C. Penn, *Houses of Today* (London, 1954), p. 152.

⁷⁵⁸ M. Broady, 'Community Power and Voluntary Initiative', in *Social Service Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 3 (1964), p. 90.

designs of superior quality because they were ‘financed with public money; everybody’s money.’⁷⁵⁹

In the eyes of a number of contemporaries, however, too many local authorities were failing in these areas as they were too detached and aloof from the people whom they were meant to be providing for.⁷⁶⁰ For instance, in Michael Young and Peter Wilmott’s hugely influential 1957 sociological study of working-class life in East London, *Family and Kinship in East London*, it was noted that the planning professions needed to ‘do more than they are at present doing to meet the preferences of the people.’⁷⁶¹ In particular, it was noted that many local authority architects and planners used overly technical language, framing their work in ‘terms that met their professional goals, but excluded the concerns of their clients.’⁷⁶² As a result, claimed the National Joint Consultative Committee of Architects, Quantity Surveyors and Builders, too many ‘prospective customers [did] not know enough of the services available to them.’⁷⁶³ Finally, there was also a great deal of concern expressed about just how commercially savvy local authority architects actually were, with some critics accusing them of wasting the public’s money on ‘architecturally extravagant’ housing projects.⁷⁶⁴

⁷⁵⁹ Smithson (Ed.), *Team 10 Primer*, p. 14.

⁷⁶⁰ See, G. E. Cherry, *The Evolution of British Town Planning* (Bedfordshire, 1974), pp. 139–160; ‘John Citizen and the Planners’, in *Journal of the Town Planning Institute*, vol. 43 (1957), p. 472; A. Marwick, *Culture in Britain since 1945* (Oxford, 1991), p. 50; A. Ravetz, *The Government of Space: Town Planning in Modern Society* (London, 1986), pp. 86–90.

⁷⁶¹ M. Young and P. Wilmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London, 1957), p. 131.

⁷⁶² H. J. Gans, *People and Plans: Essays on Urban Problems and Solutions* (London, 1968), p. 2. See also, I. Nairn, ‘Outrage’, in *Architectural Review*, vol. 117, no. 2 (1955), p. 451.

⁷⁶³ G. Higgin and N. Jessop, *Communications in the Building Industry: The Report of a Pilot Study* (London, 1965), p. 75.

⁷⁶⁴ See, ‘The Status of the Architect’, in *Architectural Design* (March, 1958), p. 129.

Perhaps the most damning attack, however, came from the 1957 Royal Commission on Local Government in Greater London. Chaired by Sir Edwin Herbert, a lawyer who had been knighted during the Second World War, the Commission was charged with the task of evaluating the distribution and structure of local government functions in the London area. Although some praise was reserved for the improvements that had taken place in the design of council estates, the Report was for the most part scathing in its evaluation of how local authority officials, particularly the architects and planners, had gone about their duties. By and large, their criticisms were premised upon the belief that greater levels of accountability would bring about improved service. Particular criticism was centred on the fact that local authority employees were too far removed from the people whom they were meant to be serving, with the Report describing how employees ‘seemed to think that routine consultation between officers and, if necessary, conferences at member level would be adequate’; warning that ‘their desire to get as far away as possible from amateur control, administratively and physically, is a factor to beware of.’⁷⁶⁵

Criticisms of this sort were also being directed at other governmental bodies and figures during this period as public faith in Britain’s political elite began to waver. John Lawrence has flagged up the Lady Chatterly trial, the debacle of the 1956 Suez intervention, and the growing recognition of Britain’s ebbing global and imperial power as key factors in, what he sees as, this growing challenge to ‘patrician authority’ that marked the beginning of the end of unregulated paternalistic power in Britain.⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶⁵ Report of the Royal Commission on Local Government in Greater London, *Report*, pp. 45 and 62.

⁷⁶⁶ J. Lawrence, ‘Paternalism, Class, and the British Path to Modernity’, in S. Gunn and J. Vernon (Eds.), *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Imperial Britain* (London, 2011), pp. 157–163. See also, M.

Certainly such factors were important, but what I have stressed in this chapter is that, at least in the public housing sector, it is important to appreciate that informing these attacks was an increasingly consumerist conceptualisation of the relationship between the citizen and the state; one that was premised on the belief that in an affluent society it was no longer acceptable for government officials to be unaccountable to the people they were serving. What I now want to do is move on and look at the measures that were put in place in a bid to remould the public housing and set it on a more open, accountable and, above all else, consumer-friendly footing.

Consumers and Customer Satisfaction

In his pioneering second book *The Long Revolution* (1961), Raymond Williams noted that the term ‘consumer’ was becoming increasingly popular in contemporary culture, arguing that this was significant because it unconsciously ‘materialized’ the individual subject as a ‘person with needs which he goes to the market to supply’ and going on to warn how this encouraged people to think of ‘needs’ and ‘patterns of use’ in individual rather than social terms by focusing solely on ‘spending and satisfaction.’⁷⁶⁷ While Williams may have been trying to get at the cultural dialectic at the heart of modern modes of power, his analysis is of relevance to this next section because it is suggestive of the changes that were taking place in the way that individual citizens were being conceptualised and acted upon at this time. What this next section does is to look in more depth at how far this idea of the individual as a ‘consumer’ impacted upon the

Jarvis, *Conservative Governments, Morality and Social Change in Affluent Britain, 1957–64* (Manchester, 2004).

⁷⁶⁷ R. Williams, *The Long Revolution: Reprint* (London, 2001), pp. 322–324.

field of public housing. Showing how architects, planners, local authority employees and housing managers all made adjustments in terms of how they went about catering to the domestic needs of the prospective tenant, it reveals how the increasingly prevalence of concepts such as ‘customer satisfaction’ and ‘consumer needs’ resulted in public housing provision becoming much more responsive to, and dependent upon, the variable preferences and whims of the individual tenant.

One of the first problems that those in the public housing sector faced whenever they turned their attentions to issues related to consumption was the fact that their customer base was so vast and unknown. Robert Furneaux-Jordan, a fellow of the RIBA and architectural correspondent for *The Observer*, was certainly aware of these problems, noting in one 1956 article how the local authority architect’s employer is ‘no longer his client...he deals with the lives of very ordinary men and women to whom he can never fully explain himself [raising] the very difficult problem of how best to serve the client.’⁷⁶⁸ A similar point was made in a 1967 article in the *Architectural Review*: ‘requirements are hard to meet when the client is the most numerous sector of the population.’⁷⁶⁹

Moreover, it was suggested that these sorts of problems were compounded by the fact that council estate tenants were, according to a number of contemporary writers, not as capable the rest of society at expressing their needs and desires. Arthur Ling, the Director of the Town Planning Division of the LCC’s Architect’s Office, was certainly of this opinion, describing in one 1952 article how many local authorities found it

⁷⁶⁸ ‘LCC: New Standards in Official Architecture’, in *Architectural Review*, vol. 120 (November, 1956), pp. 303–304.

⁷⁶⁹ ‘Inside Housing: A Problem for the Furniture Industry’, in *Architectural Review*, vol. 141 (February, 1967), p. 160.

difficult 'to interpret the aesthetic wishes of the community they represent because either it has no views or no means of expressing them.'⁷⁷⁰ Edward T. Hall, an American specialist on the anthropology of space, provided further weight to these claims, suggesting in one 1966 article that 'putting together a home is difficult...it calls on complex skills, user requirement specification, value analysis, estimation of wear, plus all the obvious visual judgements...Parker Morris homemakers have less opportunity or ability to develop these consumer skills.'⁷⁷¹

Nevertheless, as these passages demonstrate, there was a clear desire on the part of a great many architects, planners and local authority officials to give more attention to the specific preferences of individual tenants. Again, the language of consumerism was important as it provided a framework within which these ambitions could be articulated. The result was that tenants increasingly came to be referred to as 'customers', 'clients', 'users', or 'consumers'. For instance, in one 1952 piece on human needs in domestic architecture it was suggested that architecture 'depends for its vitality on healthy cooperation between client and architect.'⁷⁷² Similar terms and ideas were used in a 1961 article in the *Municipal Journal* written by one architect for the Cornwall County Council, who suggested that 'for an architect to produce his best he must be constantly kept in touch with the client's needs, must be given a thorough understanding of the problems of the client and must be kept fully conversant with the life of the people who are going to be using the building.'⁷⁷³ Likewise, in one 1966 article in the *Architectural*

⁷⁷⁰ A. Ling, 'Satisfying Human Needs at the Core', in J. Tyrwhitt, J.L. Sert and E.N. Rogers (Eds.), *The Heart of the City: Towards the Humanisation of Urban Life* (London, 1952), p. 96.

⁷⁷¹ E. T. Hall, 'The Anthropology of Space', in *Architectural Review*, vol. 140 (1966), p. 158.

⁷⁷² Ling, 'Satisfying Human Needs', p. 96.

⁷⁷³ 'Architects Must Become More Businesslike', in *The Municipal Journal*, vol. 69 (May 1961), p. 1629.

Review it was claimed that ‘the creation of an interior is a process, not an act, in which the user’s contribution must be recognised and anticipated...the client must be encouraged to add his own powerful contribution. The designer by himself cannot create success.’⁷⁷⁴

Underpinning these ideas, then, was what Lizabeth Cohen has termed a ‘citizen-consumer’ understanding of the state-citizen relationship, which was based on the premise that more democratic, relational and egalitarian systems of government would ultimately be of benefit both to the individual consumer and to wider society.⁷⁷⁵ The Smithsons were particularly keen on this idea, stressing that ‘freely made choices are the re-directive factors in society’ and pointing out that ‘a mechanical democratic society is one in which the individual has no say in how his money is to be spent for society’s good...the choice should be the individual’s not the state’s.’⁷⁷⁶ Likewise, the Report of the Commission on Local Government in London was also based upon the premise that consumer empowerment was desirable, arguing ‘there must be proper control of professional activities; [this] is the key to the whole of our system of government.’⁷⁷⁷ Similar sorts of ideas were also expressed in Jane Jacob’s hugely influential 1961 study *The Life and Death of Great American Cities*.⁷⁷⁸

⁷⁷⁴ ‘Inscape’, in *Architectural Review*, vol. 139 (May 1966), p. 333. See also, M. Empson, ‘The Housing Manager’s Contribution to Estate Planning’, in R. J. Rowles (Ed.), *Housing Management* (London, 1959), p. 37; ‘Your Master Plan’, in *Ideal Home and Gardening*, vol. 77, no. 4 (1958), p. 33; J. Habraken, *Supports: An Alternative to Mass Housing* (London, 1972), p. 3.

⁷⁷⁵ L. Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York, 2003), p. 32. See also, Majima and M. Savage, ‘Contesting Affluence: An Introduction’, p. 445.

⁷⁷⁶ A. Smithson (Ed.), *Team 10 Primer*, p. 5; A. and P. Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, p. 83.

⁷⁷⁷ Report of the Royal Commission on Local Government in Greater London, *Report*, p. 62.

⁷⁷⁸ J. Jacobs, *The Life and Death of Great American Cities* (London, 1961), p. 422.

Unsurprisingly, a great many in the sociological disciplines were supportive of the idea of more democratic forms of control, with figures such as Norman Dennis, a sociology lecturer at the University of Newcastle, arguing that ‘planning by a hidden hand does not accurately reflect the preferences of citizens’ and going on to suggest that ‘remedies are to be sought in new forms of democratic political procedures.’⁷⁷⁹ Joan Demers was also quick to point out that ‘architects are usually at a loss to know ‘consumer reaction’ which is very important.’⁷⁸⁰ More often than not, arguments of this sort would be used to lend credence to the idea of using opinion-studies of the sort discussed in the previous. For instance, at the end of one 1967 sociological study into low-cost housing Anne Stevenson, a senior Social Worker, and Elaine Martin, a Lecturer in the Social Sciences, concluded that ‘there is a need for government to pay more than lip-service to the idea of accountability’ and suggested that ‘more use must be made of evaluative techniques.’⁷⁸¹ Edward T. Hall made a similar point in the pages of the *Architectural Review*, stressing that ‘we need more accurate understandings of user needs of every kind that the various low-cost living studies will have to provide.’⁷⁸² Likewise, Maurice Broady, a senior sociology lecturer at Southampton University, also sought to champion the sociological opinion-survey, suggesting that ‘civic officials cannot always be

⁷⁷⁹ N. Dennis, *People and Planning: The Sociology of Housing in Sunderland* (London, 1970), pp. 21–22; See also; H. J. Gans, *People and Plans: Essays on Urban Problems and Solutions* (London: Basic Books, 1968), p. ix.

⁷⁸⁰ Demers, ‘Social Work in Housing’, p. 51.

⁷⁸¹ Stevenson, Martin and O’Neill, *High Living*, p. 150.

⁷⁸² Hall, ‘The Anthropology of Space’, p. 162.

expected to be omni-competent...investigation, appraisal and criticism are necessary and desirable adjuncts to the statutory services.’⁷⁸³

In response to these criticisms a number of new legislations were passed which sought to make the planning and architectural professions more open and accountable to members of the public.⁷⁸⁴ For instance, in the 1959 Town and Country Planning Act it was stipulated that before erecting any structure in a residential area the developer had to first advertise their plans in the local press for at least two consecutive weeks as well as be open to considering any objections which may arise from the local community.⁷⁸⁵ Similarly, it was noted in the MHLG’s 1967 report on “The Needs of New Communities” that ‘the first need of families moving to a new community is for information, about tenancy agreements, schools, shops, bus services, local facilities and so forth.’⁷⁸⁶ The effects of these new legislations can be seen in the case of Park Hill, where measures were put in place to provide prospective tenants with ample information on the new estate through public meetings and exhibitions at which the public were informed about progress on the site, and through the publication of a steady stream of sketches and plans in both the local and national press.⁷⁸⁷

On top of this, the 1961 Housing Act and the 1963 White Paper on Housing both set in place measures to encourage the growth of housing associations in the hope of

⁷⁸³ Broady, ‘Community Power and Voluntary Initiative’, pp. 90–91. See also, J. Carmichael (Ed.), *Vacant Possession: A Study of Britain’s Fifty Year Old ‘Housing Problem’* (London, 1964), p. 29; Morris and Moge, *The Sociology of Housing*, p. 10.

⁷⁸⁴ See, E. S. Morris, *British Town Planning and Urban Design: Principles and Policies* (Harlow, 1997), pp. 172–174.

⁷⁸⁵ *Town and Country Planning Act 1959 c.53* (1959), sections 23 and 36.

⁷⁸⁶ MHLG, *The Needs of New Communities*, p. 86.

⁷⁸⁷ Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, SLS/HLG 331.8335F, J. L. Womersley, *Park Hill Redevelopment* (1960), p. 1.

preventing the emergence of local authorities as monopoly landlords.⁷⁸⁸ Proposals for a *Which?*-style publication for the building trade, which would provide customers with information on different materials and construction methods, were also mooted during the winter of 1961.⁷⁸⁹ Likewise, efforts were made to devise regulatory systems within which prospective tenants would be given a greater say in planning decisions. For instance, the recommendations laid out in 1964 by the specially appointed Planning Advisory Group of the MHLG were centred around the principle that ‘increased public participation can improve the quality of decisions made by public authorities and give personal satisfaction to those affected by the decisions’, recommendations which were to be subsequently endorsed in the Town and Country Planning Act of 1968.⁷⁹⁰ At the same time, the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the RIBA, launched their ‘Housing Medal’ scheme (later renamed the ‘Housing Design Awards’) which awarded prizes to the best designed council estates in the hope that this would ‘provide a means by which public opinion may be brought to bear upon the housing programme.’⁷⁹¹

Another area within which this increased emphasis upon gauging the mood of the public had a profound effect was in the housing management sector. For instance, in the MHLG Housing Management Sub-Committee’s 1959 report *Councils and their Houses* a great deal of importance was placed on improving the relationship between tenants and local authorities, with the Committee stressing that ‘easy communication between

⁷⁸⁸ Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, pp. 90–91; Merrett, *State Housing*, pp. 252–253.

⁷⁸⁹ ‘Which? for Building’, in *The Architect and Building News*, vol. 221, no. 10 (1962), p. 334

⁷⁹⁰ See, MHLG, *People and Planning: Report of the Committee on Public Participation* (London, 1969), pp. 1–3.

⁷⁹¹ See, ‘Housing Medal Awards: Their Significance for Further Developments’, in *Town Planning Review*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1951), p. 72; ‘Housing News’, in *The Architect and Building News*, vol. 22, no. 10 (1962), p. 335; ‘Award Show Houses and their Sites’, in *Ideal Home and Gardening*, vol. 81, no. 1 (1960), p. 49.

the landlord and tenant is important' and noting that 'what every tenant wants is to be able to get in touch with his landlord quickly.'⁷⁹² Again, the assumption was that in an increasingly affluent society the state should be more accountable to its citizens, with paragraph 108 stating, for example, that 'the tenant...expects fair and decent treatment from the representative body, and if dissatisfied, can make complaints either individually or collectively to any council member.'⁷⁹³

Furthermore, although historians like Alison Ravetz have highlighted the ways in which paternalistic attitudes continued to colour housing management techniques throughout the postwar period, it is important not to overlook the far greater levels of freedom that many council estate tenants, especially those in the larger municipalities, were able to enjoy during this period.⁷⁹⁴ For example, in one 1958 survey it was found that, unlike in the interwar years, well over 80% of local authorities were willing to grant tenants the freedom to decorate their own houses.⁷⁹⁵ On top of this, a number of local authorities also tried to disassociate themselves from the punitive tactics of their interwar predecessors, looking instead to the client-centred techniques and practices that were coming to dominate the commercial and private sectors in this period. For instance, in the Sheffield Housing Management Committee's 1963 Tenants Handbook it was pointed out that 'the rules are made not with the intention of restricting the freedom of tenants but solely so that the few who forget them can be prevented from interfering

⁷⁹² MHLG, *Councils and their Houses: Management of Estates: Eighth Report of the Housing Management Sub-Committee of the Central Housing Advisory Committee* (London, 1959), pp. 8–9.

⁷⁹³ MHLG, *Councils and their Houses*, pp. 24–25. See also, D. Miskin, 'The Staff of a Housing Department', in Rowles (Ed.), *Housing Management*, pp. 38–40.

⁷⁹⁴ Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, pp. 113–116.

⁷⁹⁵ MHLG, *Councils and their Houses*, p. 20.

with the enjoyment of the many.’⁷⁹⁶ The Dagenham Borough Council were just as keen to emphasise their benign qualities, stating in the 1961 *Municipal Tenants’ Handbook* that ‘it is not intended to convey the impression that a Corporation tenancy is hemmed in by a series of commandments and “thou shalt not”.’⁷⁹⁷

Another sign of the impact that consumerist ideas and practices were exerting over the housing management professions at this time can be seen in the much greater importance that came to be attached to the teaching and training that housing managers and estate staff received. For example, in local authorities with large housing departments, such as Bristol and Manchester, practical training schemes for housing managers were introduced that provided instruction on things such as how to go about conducting opinion surveys and how to provide good customer service.⁷⁹⁸ A similar approach was adopted on the University of London’s new B.Sc in Estate Management, which was established in 1955.⁷⁹⁹ Again, the emphasis was on trying to establish more egalitarian and relational systems of control, with the Salford Housing Committee even considering it expedient to rename their housing managers “Housing Visitors,” reminding tenants that ‘it is their duty and desire to know you, to understand your housing difficulties, and to do all within [their] power to ensure your comfort and happiness.’⁸⁰⁰ Likewise, in Poplar the borough council decided that their housing

⁷⁹⁶ City of Sheffield Housing Management Committee, *Municipal Tenant’s Handbook*, p. 13.

⁷⁹⁷ Dagenham Borough Council, *The Municipal Tenants Handbook*, p. 20.

⁷⁹⁸ Rowles (Ed.), *Housing Management*, pp. 314–316.

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

⁸⁰⁰ City of Salford Housing Committee, *Municipal Tenant’s Handbook* (Gloucester, 1964), p. 16

managers should adopt the title of “Home Helps” in an attempt to emphasise the cooperative and egalitarian nature of their relationship with the tenant.⁸⁰¹

As these inventive new titles demonstrate, then, those involved in the provision of public housing certainly seem to have been conscious of the fact that many of the tactics and practices that had been adopted during the interwar period might be unsuitable in the increasingly affluent society of the 1950s and 1960s. Above all else, it was accepted that in a society of plenty it was no longer acceptable to simply treat tenants as passive recipients of welfare provision. Instead, the emphasis came to be focused much more firmly upon satisfying the specific preferences and demands of individual tenants, as the prewar notion of the tenant simply being a physiological being with definite physical and bodily needs continued to be challenged. The fact that terms and labels such as ‘client’, ‘user’, ‘customer’ and ‘consumer’ were increasingly being used to express these views reveals not only the scale of the changes taking place as regards the way in which the figure of the prospective tenant was coming to be conceptualised, but also indicates how much of an influence external, market-derived ideas surrounding the figure of the consumer were coming to exert over the public housing sector. What I now want to do in the final section is to move on and look at more detail at how these sorts of ideas impacted upon the design and layout of council estate homes during the 1950s and 1960s.

⁸⁰¹ Poplar Borough Council, *Municipal Tenant's Handbook* (Gloucester, 1956), p. 20.

Homes for Today and Tomorrow

Individual Homes

As shown in the previous chapter, the increasing use of sociological surveys in the public housing sector meant that far more attention came to be given to assessing and defining the specific needs of different sorts of tenants (the young, the elderly, single housewives etc.). This dissolution of the figure of the unitary subject was only accelerated by the increasing influence of the sorts of market-derived, consumerist notions of the individual subject discussed so far in this chapter which placed far more score on satisfying the specific wishes and preferences of the individual user or client. What this next section reveals is that, increasingly, this more user-specific approach also began to have an impact over the council estate home as architects, planners and local authorities began to experiment with the idea of producing more individual and personalisable dwellings; demonstrating yet again how bankrupt the notion of there being such a thing as a unitary domestic subject with universal needs was becoming.

One of the clearest signs that consumerist understandings of the individual subject were coming to exert an influence over the architectural and planning professions was that far more questions began to be asked about the design principles that had been used on interwar public housing estates, with the idea that there was a such a thing as a 'standard' family house coming in for a great deal of criticism. Raymond Morris was most clear on this point, noting how 'council tenants have very little freedom in the choice of their own homes' and suggesting that 'it is difficult to justify the idea that clearance families are obliged to accept without any hesitation any property which the

council decides to offer.’⁸⁰² Anne Stevenson and Elaine Martin raised similar concerns, noting that rooms in local authority dwellings tended to have rooms with functions that were fixed, meaning that there were no areas that could have their functions determined by the tenant.⁸⁰³

On top of this, there was also a general recognition that growing levels of affluence were likely to impact upon the space standards that could be considered to be ‘acceptable’ in the council estate dwelling. For instance, in the BRS’s 1969 Annual Report it was noted that ‘there is an evident demand for more floor space than was wanted in the fifties, a reflection of increasing affluence.’⁸⁰⁴ J. B. Cullingworth, a lecturer in Social Administration at the University of Manchester who later went on to become Chairman of the CHAC’s 1969 Housing Management Sub-Committee, made a similar point in one of his many publications on problems relating to public housing, describing how ‘the rising standard of living will bring about an increasing demand for more and better housing.’⁸⁰⁵ Theo Crosby, the technical Editor of *Architectural Design*, shared these sentiments too, declaring in one 1965 publication that ‘affluence, not poverty, is the problem of the sixties...no longer must cities be rebuilt to alleviate chronic housing conditions; they must be regenerated to provide for the high and growing aspirations of a young, plump, and greedy new generation.’⁸⁰⁶ Finally, the MHLG were also conscious that working-class expectations were likely to rise, noting

⁸⁰² Morris and Moge, *The Sociology of Housing*, p. 10.

⁸⁰³ Stevenson, Martin and O’Neill, *High Living*, pp. 146–147.

⁸⁰⁴ BRS, *Annual Report 1969* (London, 1970), p. 3.

⁸⁰⁵ J. B. Cullingworth, *Housing Needs and Planning Policy: A Restatement of the Problems of Housing Need and ‘Overspill’ in England and Wales* (London, 1960), p. xii.

⁸⁰⁶ T. Crosby, *Architecture: City Sense* (London, 1965), p. 20.

in one 1963 report that ‘the rising standard of living will have a profound impact upon housing standards [as] people will expect better accommodation.’⁸⁰⁷

Despite these shifts in expectation levels, however, the vast majority of architects and planners remained convinced that it was both possible and desirable to continue building state-subsidised affordable housing. The Smithsons were especially proactive in this sense, arguing that ‘we must aim to understand and use the new possibilities offered by a ‘throw-away’ technology.’⁸⁰⁸ The first opportunity they got to express these ideals came in 1956 when they were commissioned by the Daily Mail to produce an exhibit of what they thought domestic life might be in 1980 for the “Ideal Homes Exhibition”. Their final piece, the space-age “House of the Future”, was remarkable not because of its outlandish design but also because of its positive acceptance of the realities of consumer culture; providing the public with a product that was as ‘exciting’ and ‘novel’ as a new car, declared Banham enthusiastically.⁸⁰⁹ Designed as a plastic structure that could be mass-produced in its entirety, rather than in parts, the House was intended to be both disposable and flexible. All kitchen utensils were stored in a ‘rolling kitchen’ unit which could be wheeled around the house and, at the touch of a button, while the ‘blanketless bed’, which was heated by a single nylon sheet, could be sunk back into the floor when not in use.⁸¹⁰ Also incorporated into the design was an electrostatic dust collector, a mobile washing machine, a small fridge, a free-standing oven designed by Hotpoint, self-heating titanium frying pans, an infra-red griller, and a

⁸⁰⁷ MHLG, *Space in the Home*, p. 8.

⁸⁰⁸ ‘CIAM: Team 10’, in *Architectural Design* (May, 1960), p. 179.

⁸⁰⁹ See, N. Whiteley, *Reyner Banham: Historian of the Immediate Future* (London, 2002), pp. 133–136; ‘Things to Come? Architects and Industry Look Into the Future’, in *Design*, vol. 90 (1956), p. 25.

⁸¹⁰ ‘British House of the Future’, in *Mechanix Illustrated* (September, 1956), pp. 61–63.

sunken bath constructed of plastic and glass fibre, all of which, the Smithsons explained, had been ‘moulded to suit the client’s particular requirements.’⁸¹¹

Underpinning the design of the “House of the Future”, then, was a belief that in a society of plenty there was a need to recast the occupant of the council estate home as a discriminating and style-conscious consumer rather than simply treating them as an undifferentiated member of a visually illiterate proletariat.⁸¹² In particular, there was a sense that occupants should be afforded the freedom to be creative in how they wanted to use the space within their home, with Peter Smithson declaring in an interview some years later that ‘the architect should stop at a point...the occupier has to perform his work of art within yours.’⁸¹³ This emphasis on allowing for individual creativity was also reiterated in the 1967 checklist that Alison Smithson drew up of criteria for all mass-housing projects: ‘Can it adapt itself to various ways of living? Does it liberate the occupants from old restrictions or straightjacket them into new ones?...Can the individual add ‘identity’ to his house or is the architecture packaging him in?...Are the spaces moulded exactly to fit their purpose?’⁸¹⁴

This desire to grant the prospective tenant the freedom to express themselves was something that was also shared by a great many of the Smithsons’ contemporaries. For example in one 1966 study of multi-storey residential units it was noted that ‘what is

⁸¹¹ ‘House of the Future’, in *Architect and Building News* (15 March, 1956), p. 250.

⁸¹² See, Whitley, *Reyner Banham*, p. 138; ‘Who is this Pop?’, in *Motif*, vol. 10 (1962), p. 13; ‘1960 1: Stocktaking—Tradition and Technology’, in *Architectural Review* (February, 1960), p. 94.

⁸¹³ F. Samara, ‘An Interview with Peter Smithson’, in H. Webster (Ed.), *Modernism without Rhetoric: Essays on the Work of Alison and Peter Smithson* (London, 1997), p. 177.

⁸¹⁴ ‘Byelaws for Mental Health?’, in *Architectural Design* (September, 1960), p. 357. See also, ‘Cluster City: A New Shape for the Community: Suggestions to Make CIAM’s Ideals More Flexible’, in *Architectural Review* (November, 1957), p. 332; J. Hearn and S. Roseneil (Eds.), *Consuming Cultures: Power and Resistance* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 2–3.

important is not so much the dwelling as such, but the facilities offered to the residents to live as freely and individually as possible.’⁸¹⁵ Indeed, throughout this period architects and planners were becoming more convinced of the need to ensure that the homes they provided were adaptable and responsive to the specific domestic needs of the user or client. For instance, in one 1963 article Guy Oddie, an architect who worked in the City of Coventry’s Architect’s Department, suggested that domestic architecture needed to be ‘comprehensively’ reconceptualised as a ‘matter in which dimensions and inter-relationships are governed primarily by human activities rather than by canons of proportion or taste.’⁸¹⁶ Similar views were expressed by Eric Lyons, the architect who came up with “Span Housing System” and who later went on to design the World’s End Estate for Chelsea Borough Council, who argued that ‘we need to make our houses and flats more responsive to the user to make into a home.’⁸¹⁷ Crosby too was of a similar mindset, declaring in 1965 that ‘dwellings should be identifiable, individual, and cater for a complete range of family size and activity.’⁸¹⁸

Increasingly, these sorts of client-centred sentiments also began to appear in government policies and legislations as the concept of the ‘standard’ working-class home began to give way. The most striking example of this came with the publication of the MHLG’s hugely influential 1961 Report *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*. Drawn up by a committee chaired by Sir Parker Morris and including amongst its members J.

⁸¹⁵ K. W. Schmitt, *Multi-Storey Living* (London, 1966), p. 1.

⁸¹⁶ ‘The New English Humanism: Prefabrication in its Social Context’, in *Architectural Review*, vol. 135 (September, 1963), p. 182. See also, ‘Housing and Planning’, in *The Municipal Journal* (3 November, 1961), p. 3451

⁸¹⁷ ‘The Span View of Neighbours’, in *Ideal Home and Gardening*, vol. 81, no.1 (1960), p. 59.

⁸¹⁸ See, Crosby, *Architecture*. See also, Hole and Attenburrow, *Houses and People*, pp. 4–5; Hall, ‘The Anthropology of Space’, p. 166; Jensen, *High Density Living*, p. 39; ‘Statement’, in *Architectural Design* (May, 1960), p. 191.

L. Womersley, the Report recommended ‘improved standards of design and equipment acceptable to family dwelling’ for all new houses in the light of postwar economic and social trends.⁸¹⁹ As John Burnett and Alison Ravetz have both pointed out, the emphasis throughout the Report was upon providing spaces within which households could express themselves.⁸²⁰ Indeed, whereas previous reports of this ilk had tended to be fixated upon minimum floor spaces and room sizes, the Parker Morris Report was overwhelmingly supportive of more flexible planning that broke with conventional allocations of space, declaring that:

The right approach to design is first to define what activities are likely to take place in it...and then to design around these needs...housing standards should therefore as far as possible be couched in terms which concentrate on the activities that the occupiers will pursue, and not on the numbers and sizes of the usual rooms.⁸²¹

In other words, then, rather than just being treated as a place to rest and eat, the domestic dwelling was increasingly coming to be reconceptualised as a site of consumption, a space within which individuals should be able to express themselves, with the Parker Morris Report noting, for example, how ‘an increasing proportion of people are coming to expect their home to do more than fulfil the basic requirements. It must be something of which they can be proud; and in which they must be able to express the fullness of their lives.’⁸²² Underpinning this more flexible approach to house design was an increasingly individualistic understanding of the domestic subject; one that placed far more emphasis on ensuring that individuals were provided with the facilities and opportunities through which to express their personal consumer

⁸¹⁹ DoE, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, pp. iv–4.

⁸²⁰ See, Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, pp. 304–306; Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, p. 97.

⁸²¹ DoE, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, p. 5.

⁸²² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

preferences through the purchasing, arranging, displaying and consuming of inanimate materialistic goods.⁸²³ Indeed, so infatuated were planners and architects becoming with satisfying the personal desires of the domestic subject that they even began to experiment with the idea of producing flexible homes, as I now go on to show in the final section.

Flexible Living

Although a handful of adventurous architects had experimented with the notion of ‘flexible living’ in the interwar period, the idea only really began to be practically discussed in architectural and planning circles in the late 1950s and early 1960s.⁸²⁴ In simplified terms, it was based around the premise that because interior walls, partitions and other dividing objects did not necessarily have to be permanently fixed they could be designed so as to be easily adjustable and modifiable. This following section does not offer a critical assessment of the desirability or practicality of these sorts of ideas, however. Instead, it uses the idea of ‘flexible living’ as a locus through which to view the changes that were taking place in how the needs of the domestic subject were coming to be reconceptualised at this time, revealing yet again just how much more attention was coming to be given to the specific and materialistic aspirations of the domestic subject at this time.

⁸²³ For more on the historical roots of this sort of consumption see, D. Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions* (London, 2006); C. Lury, *Consumer Culture* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 75–81.

⁸²⁴ See, T. Schneider and J. Till, *Flexible Housing* (London, 2007), pp. 25–31.

Conceptually, the growing interest in ideas of flexibility and adaptability that was being shown by architects and planners at this time was very much a reflection of the increased attention that was coming to be devoted to the specific and individualistic consumerist aspirations of the domestic subject, with figures such as Francis Yorke, a regular contributor to the *Architect's Journal* and the man responsible for designing the school on the Lansbury 1951 Exhibition site, declaring that 'the old arrangement of the home is ineffectual...the architects of today are concerned with the creation of a new plan for a new mode of life.'⁸²⁵ Indeed, one of the chief reasons why flexible living arrangements seemed to be so attractive to postwar planners, architects and politicians was that they offered the possibility of providing structures that could be potentially be modified so as to keep pace with rising consumer expectations. For instance, in one 1964 survey of public housing carried out by the Town and Country Planning Association it was suggested that because 'people have widely different requirements for what they want in their home,' and because 'these requirements can change quite quickly,' it was desirable to make homes 'as flexible as possible.'⁸²⁶ Similar sentiments were made by John Madin, a Birmingham-based local authority architect, who suggested in one 1966 design proposal that homes in the future 'must be sufficiently flexible to accept changing standards from phase to phase in order that they can be re-orientated whenever necessary.'⁸²⁷

⁸²⁵ F. R. S. Yorke, *The Modern House* (London, 1956), p. 9.

⁸²⁶ O. W. Roskill, *Housing in Britain: A Survey Commissioned by the Town and County Planning Association and Carried* (London, 1964), p. 10.

⁸²⁷ J. H. D. Madin and Partners, *Dawley: Wellington: Oakengates: Consultants' Proposals for Development* (London, 1966), p. 44. See also, J. Tyrwhitt (Ed.), *Patrick Geddes in India* (London, 1947), p. 48; Schmitt, *Multi-Storey Living*, p. 48.

Government legislation also reflected this growing interest in the idea of ‘flexible living,’ with the Parker Morris Report stating that because of the ‘greatly increased rate of social and economic change the adaptable house is becoming a national necessity...the sooner it is started the better.’⁸²⁸ These sentiments were echoed in the MHLG’s 1963 publication *Space in the Home*, which stated that ‘adaptability to allow alternative uses of space in the one house is essential...living spaces are needed that can be kept open for use together or closed off into separate rooms.’⁸²⁹ Indeed, at the *Daily Mail*’s 1962 “Ideal Homes Exhibition” the MHLG even went so far as to present two new prototype “adaptable houses” that they had been working on. Featuring internal moveable partitions, which were designed by Phoebe de Syllas (wife of the influential architect Stelios Syllas and a well-respected interior designer), and equipped with adjustable wardrobes and shelving units, the two life-size homes sought to provide physical proof of how ‘the changing needs of a family might be met by simple alterations [inside] the home.’⁸³⁰

As this last passage suggests, then, these experiments in flexible living were again premised on the belief that it was necessary to produce homes that could be modified in light of rising consumer expectations, with the Parker Morris Report noting how it ‘would allow much easier and perhaps more satisfactory adaption to the changing general needs.’⁸³¹ The significance of these calls should not be underestimated, for, although the Parker Morris Committee’s recommendations were not actually made

⁸²⁸ DoE, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, p. 9.

⁸²⁹ MHLG, *Space in the Home*, p. 7.

⁸³⁰ ‘Ideal Home Exhibition’, in *The Architect and Building News*, vol. 221, no. 6 (7 February, 1962), p. 192; Ryan, *Daily Mail Ideal Home*, p. 138; ‘Your Master Plan’, in *Ideal Home and Gardening*, vol. 77, no. 4 (1958), p. 33; ‘Ideal Olympia’, in *The Architect and Building News*, vol. 221, no. 11 (1962), p. 368.

⁸³¹ DoE, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, p. 9.

mandatory for all local authority housing till 1969, their Report, as historians such as Alison Ravetz have shown, was certainly seen by many in the architectural and planning professions to be something of a blueprint for the future.⁸³² In the *Town Planning Review*, for example, the Report was praised for being ‘obviously sound in its assessment of needs and in its recommendations as to the best ways of meeting those needs,’ whilst in *The Listener* it was described as ‘the most exciting thing on housing published since the War.’⁸³³

Indeed, one need only look at the increasing number of local authorities who were beginning to experiment with flexible and adaptable house designs to get some sense of the impact that these sorts of ideas had. For example, in 1961 the Lewes Borough Council completed a small-scale housing scheme in Landport, East Sussex, which provided tenants with homes that made use of open-plan designs, incorporating open-screen divisions between kitchens and dining rooms and sliding partitions between dining rooms and lounges.⁸³⁴ Similarly, the dwellings on the Alton Gardens Estate in Bromley, which were constructed of brick cross walls and single stack plumbing and plasterboard on stud partitions, were designed so as to enable residents to easily make adjustments; such as changing the number of bedrooms, boxing-in the staircase, or removing built-in wardrobes.⁸³⁵

⁸³² See, Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, p. 97; Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, pp. 15–18; Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p. 304.

⁸³³ “‘Homes for Today and Tomorrow’” (Book Review), in *Town Planning Review*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1962), p. 158; ‘Homes for Today and Tomorrow’, in *The Listener* (28 December, 1961), p. 1109.

⁸³⁴ ‘Lewes Puts Private Enterprise Touch into Latest Council Houses’, in *The Municipal Journal* (21 April, 1961), p. 1273.

⁸³⁵ ‘Housing, Beckenham Place Park, Kent’, in *Architect and Building News* (October, 1966), pp. 300–302. For more examples see, Schneider and Till, *Flexible Housing*, pp. 42–59; E. R. Scoffham, *The Shape of British Housing* (London, 1984), pp. 150–152.

In Sheffield too efforts were made to improve the flexibility and adaptability of local authority housing. In 1962, for example, space was given over on the newly constructed Gloucester Street Estate for the MHLG's Research and Development Group to put up four prototype homes using an innovative prefabricated construction technique known as 5M, which was designed so as to provide tenants with homes that could be easily put up and reconfigured to suit their exact specifications.⁸³⁶ On top of this it was also decided that flats in the Hyde Park residential block, comprising Phase II of the Park Hill scheme, should come fitted with a sliding door between the living room and the kitchen so as to allow tenants greater freedom over how they wanted to use the space within their home.⁸³⁷ Similarly, all the flats in the later constructed Halfway Estate, in the south-east of the city, came fitted with flexible partition walls so as to allow for variations to be made in internal arrangements on the ground floors.⁸³⁸

Perhaps the first real attempt to fully implement these ideas into a major council housing scheme, however, came in 1961 when John Darbourne, a young architect who had been taught by Eric Lyons at the Bartlett School of Architecture and was at the time completing his Masters in Landscape Design at Harvard University, beat 67 other competitors to win an open competition organised by the Westminster City Council to design a new estate to house 2,000 people in the Pimlico area of Westminster, later to

⁸³⁶ Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, 331.833 SF, J. L. Womersley, 'Sheffield Housing' (1961), p. 391.

⁸³⁷ Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, 331.833 SF, W. L. Clunie, *The Hyde Park Redevelopment Scheme* (1966), p. 5.

⁸³⁸ Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, MP 2395 M, Sheffield Housing Department, *50,000 Homes in 30 Years* (Sheffield, 1975), p. 6.

be known as the Lillington Gardens Estate.⁸³⁹ The competition itself was judged by Philip Powell, a well-respected architect who had a good relationship with the Westminster City Council having designed and overseen the development of the award-winning Churchill Gardens Estate (also in Pimlico) for them during the late 1940s and 1950s.⁸⁴⁰ Sometimes referred to as the ‘father of human modernism’, Powell, who went on to be knighted in 1975, was a firm believer in the need for a more reserved and less monumental style of modernist domestic architecture.⁸⁴¹ Such views evidently influenced his thinking in 1961 as well. As he explained to the crowd that had gathered in Caxton Hall to inspect the entries; ‘the winning entry [displays] an apparent casualness on a domestic scale, concentrating on the proportions and on the variety of buildings...the exteriors of the buildings are [also] refreshingly free from fussiness and the tricks of applied pattern making.’⁸⁴²

Yet if the exteriors of Darbourne’s homes were refreshingly simple the same could not be said for the interiors. Brazenly modern and meticulously planned, they were intended to set new standards in terms of flexibility and adaptability.⁸⁴³ In the two-bedroomed houses, for example, the larger bedrooms were designed so that they could be subdivided into two smaller ones at a later date as and when the family needed separate

⁸³⁹ For more on the Darbourne and Darke architectural firm, which was established in 1961 as a result of Darbourne winning the competition to build the Lillington Gardens Estate, see; K. Allinson, *The Architects and Architecture of London* (London, 2008), p. 362.

⁸⁴⁰ Westminster City Archives, f352.0421, City of Westminster Council Minutes and Agendas (17 December 1959), p. 331(6).

⁸⁴¹ ‘Nice, modern and British!’, in *New Society* (18 July, 1974), p. 160; K. Powell, *Powell and Moya: Twentieth Century Architects* (London, 2009), pp. 11–29.

⁸⁴² Westminster City Archives, PAM 942.13512, Westminster City Council Information Office, ‘Lillington Gardens Estate’ (1962), p. 3.

⁸⁴³ See, ‘Building Revisited: Housing at Lillington Street’, in *Architect’s Journal* (1 December 1976), pp. 1031–1039.

rooms for their children.⁸⁴⁴ Likewise, a moveable unit with sliding doors was fitted between the lounge and the kitchen, allowing families to choose whether to have two separate rooms or one large living space ('ideal for parties and entertaining').⁸⁴⁵ Similar ideas influenced the design of the specially-designed old-peoples home that was located right in the centre of the estate and which provided elderly residents with a wide variety of different accommodation, from single rooms with nursing staff to self-contained service flatlets, so that they had the freedom and flexibility to 'select the degree of isolation or involvement that suits them, and they can modify this at will.'⁸⁴⁶

In line with the recommendations laid out in the Parker Morris Report, Darbourne was also keen to ensure that tenants on the Lillington Gardens Estate were provided with the most up-to-date domestic appliances, again, reflecting the extent to which rising levels of affluence were impacting upon what was considered 'necessary' in the council estate home. Consequently, each household was given access to an Electrolux Miele automatic washing machine, a fitted electric fire and multiple television sockets, whilst a specialist heating consultant was also employed to offer advice on the heating system for the estate.⁸⁴⁷ The system they eventually came up with utilised a central heating facility that allowed tenants to heat their rooms up to 60°F. Flexibility was again considered important and each dwelling was fitted with individual meters and adjustable radiators,

⁸⁴⁴ Westminster City Archives, PAM f728.0942, Darbourne and Darke, 'Appraisal of Lillington Gardens Estate' (1970), p. 2.

⁸⁴⁵ See, *Westminster and Pimlico News* (26 July, 1961), p. 1.

⁸⁴⁶ Westminster City Archives, PAM 942.13512, G. K. Payne, 'Urban Community, High Density in Pimlico: A Prize Winning Design by Darbourne and Darke' (November 1969), p. 1347.

⁸⁴⁷ Westminster City Archives, f352.0421, City of Westminster Council Minutes and Agendas (2 February, 1970), p. 287(18); (12 October 1961), p. 198(6).

enabling tenants to use as much or as little heating as they saw fit, with rebates offered to those who used less than average.⁸⁴⁸

Thanks in no small part to this sort of attention to detail the Lillington Gardens Estate went on to receive a great deal of praise, receiving a Housing Design Award in 1969 as well as collecting a MHLG Award for Good Design in 1970 and an RIBA Commendation in 1973.⁸⁴⁹ Nevertheless, despite this professional acclaim, both Darbourne and the Westminster City Council were keen to ensure that the scheme still met with the approval of the tenants themselves; showing just how much the producer-consumer relationship was coming to be reconfigured in favour of the consumer. As a result, the construction process was split into three phases so as to give Darbourne and his colleagues a chance to undertake user studies and make personal observations on the original design when the first tenants moved in.⁸⁵⁰ Furthermore, as Darbourne reminded one local journalist, one of the major advantages of his staggered, unit-based design was that it gave ‘great flexibility, you are free to add things to it, and provide more amenities, and take things away,’ enabling him to be more responsive to the individual preferences of the tenants.⁸⁵¹

Underpinning the design and layout of the Lillington Garden Estate, therefore, was a heavily consumerist understanding of the prospective and his or her domestic needs. Central to this conceptualisation was a belief that, in a society of growing affluence, it

⁸⁴⁸ Westminster City Archives, PAM 942.13512, G. K. Payne, ‘Urban Community, High Density in Pimlico: A Prize Winning Design by Darbourne and Darke’ (November 1969), p. 1347.

⁸⁴⁹ Today the whole estate has been listed as a protected conservation area by the Westminster County Council. See; D. Crawford (Ed.), *A Decade of British Housing, 1963–1973* (London, 1975), p. 232.

⁸⁵⁰ Westminster City Archives, PAM 942.13512, G. K. Payne, ‘Urban Community, High Density in Pimlico: A Prize Winning Design by Darbourne and Darke’ (November 1969), p. 1347.

⁸⁵¹ Westminster City Archives, PAM 942.13512, A. Balliol, ‘Housing Comes Down to Earth’ (1969), p. 2.

was necessary to provide tenants with domestic spaces in which they would be able to realise and display their individual consumerist ambitions, with Darbourne himself stating that ‘spatial flexibility and extensibility [are] important...in the design process because in addition to his basic needs, stimulus must be provided for the individual to exercise his own initiative.’⁸⁵² In other words, therefore, what flexible housing schemes such as Lillington Gardens reveal is that, because of growing levels of affluence, factors such as the individual subject’s right to choose were coming to be seen and treated as just as relevant and important as the more established biopolitical domestic needs discussed in earlier chapters; reflecting yet again just how great an influence market-derived notions of individual subjectivity were coming to exert over the public housing sector.

Conclusion

Writing in 1962 about the influence that popular culture and mass advertising were coming to exert over contemporary architectural designs, Reyner Banham made the point that ‘the question of where to draw a line between architecture and commerce becomes almost unanswerable as soon as one tries to draw it...in a capitalist society every architect, even those in public service, must operate at times within the terms of commercial enterprise.’⁸⁵³ While Banham was primarily concerned with questions relating to style and aesthetics, his argument can just as easily be applied to a great many other areas of public housing provision. Indeed, as this chapter has repeatedly

⁸⁵² RIBA, *An Interim Report on the Architecture of Darbourne and Darke* (London, 1977), p. 43.

⁸⁵³ ‘Towards a Pop Architecture’, in *Architectural Review*, vol. 132 (July, 1962), p. 46.

demonstrated, the impact that increased levels of affluence, and the consumerist ideals that accompanied it, had upon the public housing sector proved to be far greater than previous historical accounts of postwar affluence and consumerism have acknowledged.

This overlapping of ideas was especially evident in respect of how the figure of the prospective tenant was coming to be conceptualised and acted upon by planners, architects, politicians and housing managers. This shifting outlook manifested itself in two main ways: firstly, expectations about the sorts of domestic appliances and equipment ‘needed’ in the council estate home underwent major changes; secondly, far more attention began to be given to the democratic rights of the prospective tenant as efforts were made to provide tenants with greater scope to determine how they wanted their homes to look and operate. Underpinning both these outlooks was an increased interest in the personal aspirations, specific wishes and general ‘happiness’ of the individual tenant, reflecting the fact that emotional and psychological domestic needs were progressively beginning to enter onto the radars of those planners, architects, politicians and housing managers who were involved in the provision and administration of public housing in England during the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s.⁸⁵⁴

⁸⁵⁴ For more on this developing idea that governments should promote happiness through housing policy see, D. Clapham, ‘Happiness, Well-Being And Housing Policy’, in *Policy and Politics*, vol. 38, no. 2 (2010), pp. 253-267.

Conclusion

*'More slums are likely to be built in the next five years than in the past twenty.'*⁸⁵⁵

*'After a century of housing policies the position has become so complex and counter-productive that a radical reorientation [has] become imperative.'*⁸⁵⁶

*'Architects are beginning to question who really is their ultimate client.'*⁸⁵⁷

The Backlash against Public Housing

As stated in the introduction, I decided not to take this study of the changing ways in which the figure of the prospective council estate tenant has been conceptualised and acted upon beyond 1970. To reiterate, this decision was based on a number of factors: firstly, I felt that the fifty-year period between 1920 and 1970 would provide a long enough timeframe within which to trace both the continuities and changes in the outlooks and approaches of those involved in the provision of public housing; secondly, I wanted to try and break with the rigid prewar/postwar dichotomies that had been adopted in most previous studies of public housing; and thirdly, I wanted to use a

⁸⁵⁵ N. Taylor, 'The Failure of Housing' in *Architectural Review*, vol. 142 (November, 1967), p. 341.

⁸⁵⁶ J. B. Cullingworth, *Essays on Housing Policy: The British Scene* (London, 1979), p. xiv.

⁸⁵⁷ K. Campbell, 'Foreword', in Lever (Ed.), *Home Sweet Home*, p. 9.

timeframe that would enable me to critically engage with current debates in the burgeoning governmentality-inspired literature on subjectivity and the nature of the social in England during the twentieth-century.

Alongside these reasons, however, I also chose 1970 as the cut-off date for this thesis as in many ways it seemed to represent a seminal and decisive moment in the history of public housing in England, marked most clearly by the coming to power in 1970 of Edward Heath's Conservative Government and the slashing of the housing budget by some £82 million.⁸⁵⁸ This backlash against the public housing sector was reinforced by the passing of the 1972 Housing Finance Act which put a stop to interest rate subsidies for local authorities and replaced Exchequer grants with low-interest loans of 4% in a bid to bring the public housing sector more in line with the private sector.⁸⁵⁹ On top of this, larger grants were also made available for the rehabilitation of existing, older property through the 1971 House Improvement Grants and the 1974 Housing Act.⁸⁶⁰

Another significant facet of the 1972 Housing Finance Act was that the control of housing rents was taken out of the hands of local authorities in an attempt to raise rents to economic or 'fair' levels.⁸⁶¹ The effects of these changes were immediately felt, with local authority rents in London rising by some 70% over a three year period.⁸⁶² In response to these changes, there was also a rapid and nationwide upsurge in protest

⁸⁵⁸ See, Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, pp. 287–289; National Community Development Project, *Whatever Happened to Council Housing?* (London, 1976), pp. 24–25; A. Cairncross, *Years of Recovery* (London, 1985), pp. 163–171.

⁸⁵⁹ See, Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p. 287; Power, *Hovels to High Rise*, p. 196.

⁸⁶⁰ Pooley, *Local Authority Housing*, pp. 22–23.

⁸⁶¹ See, J. Goudie, *Councils and the Housing Finance Act* (London, 1972); Merrett, *State Housing*, pp. 259–268.

⁸⁶² S. Lowe, *Urban Social Movements: The City after Castells* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 89. See also, Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, pp. 151–155.

campaigns and marches, with one source estimating that well over 11,000 council households within the GLC area were on rent strike during 1972.⁸⁶³ In Sheffield too, numerous tenants' associations also sprang up 'almost literally overnight' in response to these rent increases.⁸⁶⁴

The coverage that council estates received from the national media also began to turn gradually more hostile during the 1970s, with catastrophes like the 1968 Ronan Point disaster, in which the whole southeast corner of one of the LCC's 'system-built' high-rise towers collapsed following a gas explosion, killing four and injuring seventeen people in the process, providing ample ammunition for those wanting to attack the English public housing system.⁸⁶⁵ Inevitably, a great deal of this criticism was directed at the high-rise, with figures such as the Chairman of the Liverpool Housing Committee even going so far as to declare the high-rise tower blocks built by his predecessors to be 'the curse, the greatest mistake Liverpool ever made.'⁸⁶⁶ Yet, increasingly tales of squalor, despair, crime, neglect, and even suicide also began to fill the pages of the national and local press as critics placed the blame for these social ills upon the poor design and layout of England's council estates.⁸⁶⁷ For instance, in one 1974 study by the influential journalist Jeremy Seabrook it was argued that too many public housing

⁸⁶³ 'Rent Strikes: Direct Action and the Working Class', in *The Socialist Register*, vol. 9 (1972), pp. 140–141.

⁸⁶⁴ S. Lowe, 'Tenant Participation in a Legal Context', in C. Cooper and M. Hawtin (Eds.), *Housing, Community and Conflict: Understanding Resident Involvement* (Aldershot, 1997), p. 124.

⁸⁶⁵ See, Power, *Hovels to High-Rise*, pp. 196–197; Lever (Ed.), *Home Sweet Home*, p. 68.

⁸⁶⁶ Westminster City Archives, PAM 942.13512, A. Balliol, 'Housing Comes Down to Earth' (1969), p. 2. See also, H. Griffiths, A. G. Pugsley, and O. Saunders, *Report of the Inquiry into the Collapse of Flats at Ronan Point, Canning Town* (London, 1968); 'Gas Ban Revolt', in *Daily Mirror* (16 August, 1968), p. 1; 'A New Ban on Sky-Flats Gas,' in *Daily Mirror* (24 April, 1969), p. 9; 'More Cash Demanded in Skyscraper Flat Storm,' in *Daily Mirror*, (7 June, 1969), p. 20; 'Britain Tightens Building Standards: Moves to Stem "Progressive collapse"', in *Engineering News-Record* (16 April, 1970), p. 12.

⁸⁶⁷ See, Marwick, *Culture in Britain since 1945*, p. 50; Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, p. 106; Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing*, pp. 353–355.

schemes were ‘sketchy, spare and denuded’ and had been ‘constructed with the greatest parsimony of compassion and amenity’, inviting ‘violence and negation’ and producing ‘sullen and passive indifference’ amongst tenants.⁸⁶⁸ Moreover, a growing number of critics were starting to link the poor design of public housing schemes to incidents of mental health and anxiety, while pressure groups such as the NSPCC also accused local authorities of designing schemes that were a danger to young children.⁸⁶⁹

Despite the coming to power of the Labour Party in 1974, this backlash against public housing continued unabated, and in 1976 the housing budget was once again slashed as cutbacks of just over £150 million were pushed through parliament.⁸⁷⁰ The return of the Conservatives to power in 1979 only accelerated this process, leading to further cuts and resulting in total government expenditure on housing falling by some 30% between 1979 and 1984.⁸⁷¹ The scale of the subsequent withdrawal was dramatic, with public sector house completions falling from 95,400 in 1979 to 44,600 by 1981.⁸⁷² These trends continued into the 1980s as the Thatcher-led Conservative regime continued to pursue a market-orientated approach to social housing, explicitly rejecting the idea of housing as a social service and encouraging the selling-off of the nation’s public

⁸⁶⁸ J. Seabrook, *City Close-Up* (London, 1971), p. 14. See also, ‘Britain’s Failure to make use of its Architects’, in *The Times* (29 November, 1968), p. 20.

⁸⁶⁹ See, *Municipal Journal* (14 February, 1964), p. 467; W. Stewart, *Children in Flats: A Family Study* (London, 1970); B. Adams and J. Conway, *The Social Effects of Living off the Ground: DoE Information Paper No. 9* (London, 1975); ‘Mental Health in the High-Rise’, in *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, vol. 62 (1971), pp. 426–431.

⁸⁷⁰ Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p. 289.

⁸⁷¹ ‘Finance’, in *Social Trends*, vol. 15 (1985), p. 130.

⁸⁷² Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p. 290.

housing stock through legislation such as the 1980 Housing Act and the accompanying 'Right-to-Buy' scheme.⁸⁷³

As regards the issue of how ideas about the domestic needs of the prospective tenant have altered over time, however, the most interesting aspect of this backlash against public housing was the fact that so many different reasons were put forward to explain the apparent 'failure' of the council housing experiment. Some, such as the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, argued that the root of the problem was the 'piecemeal', 'confusing', and 'self-defeating' legislative framework within which local authorities were forced to operate.⁸⁷⁴ Others attributed the failures to the design of the buildings themselves, claiming that the unimaginative and 'soulless' designs employed on many council estates restricted 'tenants' opportunities for choice, self-expression and personal freedom.'⁸⁷⁵ Further factors put forward by critics during this period included the inefficient social research carried out by local authorities, poor relations between housing managers and local councillors, the high levels of mortgage interest rates, the fact that too many tenants were left isolated, and the increasing levels of unemployment in this period.⁸⁷⁶

⁸⁷³ See, Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, pp. 109–111; Association of Metropolitan Authorities, *100 Years of Council Housing 1885–1985* (London, 1985), pp.15–16.

⁸⁷⁴ See, Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, *Better Housing for Britain* (London, 1984), p. 3. See also, National Community Development Project, *The Poverty of the Improvement Programme* (London, 1975), p. 23; G. Burke, *Housing and Social Justice: The Role of Policy in British Housing* (London, 1981), p. 148.

⁸⁷⁵ See, P. Jephcott and H. Robinson, *Homes in High Flats: Some of the Human Problems Involved in Multi-Storey Living* (Edinburgh, 1971), pp. 130–131.

⁸⁷⁶ See, P. Malpass (Ed.), *The Housing Crisis* (London, 1986), p. 3; D. Donnison and C. Ungerson, *Housing Policy* (London, 1982), pp. 285–289; W. van Vliet, E. Huttman, and S. Fava, *Housing Needs and Policy Approaches: Trends in Thirteen Countries* (Durham, 1985), pp. 23–38; J. Clegg, *Problems in Housing Policy* (London, 1975), pp. 30–31.

Conceptually, this wide divergence in views reflects the fact that there was at this time a great deal of confusion and disagreement both in Whitehall and in the national media over what exactly council housing was supposed and expected to achieve. Primarily, this was down to the fact that because, as shown throughout this thesis, public housing in England was such a broad and all-encompassing social service it tended to attract comment and criticism from an incredibly wide array of commentators and critics who all approached the housing problem from different positions. This was certainly a problem that contemporaries were aware of, with one commentator noting in a 1976 article in the *Political Quarterly* that there was a ‘growing influence of professionals in local government in the design and management of council housing,’ which, he suggested, was leading to ‘growing conflict over the actual role and purpose of council housing.’⁸⁷⁷ Kenneth Campbell, the Chief Housing Architect in both the LCC’s and the GLC’s Housing Departments between 1959 and 1974, was similarly conscious of the multiplicity of views in debates over public housing, dolefully noting that:

Our own achievements [are] nearly always forgotten when considering the many errors and shortcomings in our performance over the years...blame and credit are attached variously to one or the other or to all the major parties involved in the process of public housing, the government which controls, the authorities which direct, the architects who design and the industry which builds.⁸⁷⁸

Underpinning these differing opinions was an increasingly complex and multifaceted understanding of what prospective tenants actually needed from a council estate home, with the early-twentieth century notion of the domestic dwelling being little more than a private space within which families could shelter and rest having been almost

⁸⁷⁷ P. Lowen, ‘Freedom and Local Authority Housing’, in *The Political Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 2 (1976), p. 216.

⁸⁷⁸ Campbell, ‘Foreword’, in Lever (Ed.), *Home Sweet Home*, p. 9.

completely superseded as those involved in the provision of public housing increasingly began to accept that the 'housing question was not to be answered solely by the building of new dwellings.'⁸⁷⁹ In particular, and as shown in this thesis, there was a growing sense that the council estate dwelling should not only be situated so as to provide tenants with easy access to adequate social and communal facilities, but should also be specifically tailored to, or, at least, flexible enough to be adjusted to fit, the personal and individualistic desires and aspirations of the tenant.

Central to this increasingly multi-layered conceptualisation of the housing problem was, as this thesis has demonstrated, an equally complex conceptualisation of the figure of the prospective tenant. Largely conceived of in narrowly sanitary terms as a subject whose needs were principally physiological and biological during the interwar period, the council estate tenant had by the 1970s come to be remoulded into a far more variegated being with needs and aspirations that were at once physical, social, personal and emotional. Furthermore, there was also an increasing recognition that because definitions of 'needs' were so closely bound up with changing economic, social and political circumstances they were unlikely to stay the same for long, with bodies such as the CHAC's Housing Management Sub-Committee taking it upon themselves to remind local housing authorities that they ought to 'be looking for hidden needs, for needs which are not being met elsewhere, and for needs which may arise in the future.'⁸⁸⁰ Perhaps unsurprisingly, not all those involved in the provision of public housing welcomed these developments, with figures such as Cullingworth ruefully noting in

⁸⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁸⁸⁰ DoE, *Council Housing Purposes, Procedures and Priorities: Ninth Report of the Housing Management Sub-Committee of the CHAC* (London, 1969), p. 148. See also, Cullingworth, *Essays on Housing Policy*, p. 31.

1975 how ‘nothing is any longer certain, the rules of the game have changed, and we have no clear guide-lines as to what the new guide-lines are...once there was a time when only the public was confused: now we all are!’⁸⁸¹

The Council Estate Tenant: A Modern Subject?

Finally, then, I want now to return to one of the main issues at the heart of this thesis and consider how my investigation into the changing ways in which the those involved in the provision of public housing in twentieth-century England conceptualised and conceived of the figure of the prospective tenant contributes to our understanding of modern modes of power. In particular, I want to assess what exactly my work contributes to our knowledge of the processes through which different sorts of people have been targeted and made visible as subjects in need of governing by states and other governmental bodies in contemporary western societies. In order to do this it is necessary to go back over the changes that took place in terms of how the domestic needs of the figure of the prospective tenant were conceived of and dealt with.

Fast-forwarding now to the present and it is clear politicians and social commentators are no nearer today to being able to agree on what role the state should play in the housing market. This has recently been demonstrated with the controversy that followed the publication of figures by the Department for Communities and Local Government revealing that more than £9 billion worth of council housing is, because of inheritance,

⁸⁸¹ Quoted in, Campbell, ‘Foreword’, in Lever (Ed.), *Home Sweet Home*, p. 7.

now owned by people who have not qualified for government aid.⁸⁸² Again, this confusion is reflective of the fact that there is still so little consensus as to *who* exactly the subject and target of state-subsidised housing is, with some commentators maintaining that the residents of England's council estates are 'spongers' who are leeching money from the state, while others insist that they are the forgotten and deprived victims of an increasingly ruthless and market-orientated social system.⁸⁸³

One figure who has found an innovative way of dealing with these sorts of issues is Adrian Nicholas M. Thaws (a.k.a. "Tricky"), the experimental trip-hop artist and former frontman of Massive Attack, who in the summer of 2008, after nearly a decade away from the industry, made his musical comeback, with the release of his eighth album, "Knowle West Boy". Named after the Bristol council estate where he grew up, the record was very much centred on the problems currently facing those living in and growing up on England's council estates.⁸⁸⁴ Nowhere was this more in evidence than on

⁸⁸² See, 'Council House Tenants set for Eviction Rule Change', in *The Guardian* (22 November 2010), p. 4; E. Harding, '£9billion worth of council homes are inherited by 90,000 people who don't need government help', in *Daily Mail* (19 October, 2010) [Online]. Available at ><http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1321738/9billion-worth-council-homes-inherited-people-dont-need-government-help.html>< [Accessed: 28 June, 2011].

⁸⁸³ For stories of the 'sponger' variety see, S. Doughty, 'Council house tenants should get a job, says the poverty czar', in *The Daily Mail* (30 October, 2007) [Online]. Available at ><http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-490785/Council-house-tenants-job-says-poverty-czar.html>< [Accessed: 28 June, 2011]; J. Churcher, 'Wealthy Council Tenants Face Review', in *The Independent* (4 June 2011) [Online]. Available at: ><http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/wealthy-council-tenants-face-review-2292973.html>< [Accessed: 28 June, 2011]. For stories that portray the tenant as a 'victim' see, K. Haywood and M. Yar, 'The "Chav" Phenomenon: Consumption, Media And The Construction Of A New Underclass', in *Crime, Media, Culture*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2006), pp. 9–28; S. Glover, 'The left claim "chav" is a term of class hatred. Nonsense, It's today's tragic underclass they should be fighting for', in *The Daily Mail* (16 July, 2008) [Online]. Available at: ><http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1035814/Stephen-Glover-The-Left-claim-chav-term-class-hatred-Nonsense-Its-todays-tragic-underclass-fighting-for.html>< [Accessed: 28 June, 2011]; K. McCann, 'Housing cost hitting 'generation rent' hard', in *The Guardian* (20 June, 2011) [Online]. Available at: ><http://www.guardian.co.uk/housing-network/2011/jun/20/housing-cost-utility-bills-rent?INTCMP=SRCH>< [Accessed: 28 June, 2011].

⁸⁸⁴ 'Things I have learnt' (2008). Interview with Tricky by Luke Turner. *The Quietus* 18:12 (15th October 2008) [Online]. Available at: ><http://thequietus.com/articles/00557-tricky-on-englishness>< [Accessed: 12 June, 2011].

the first single released from the album; the ‘prickly’, ‘complex’ and ‘intensely personal’ “Council Estate”.⁸⁸⁵ Playing with many of the popular stereotypes currently used to portray council estate tenants in the English media, with one verse featuring the lines ‘they call you “council estate”; they call you “can’t go straight”; they call you “crime rate”’, the record very much represented an attempt to give a voice to the marginalized and dispossessed, with Tricky affirming in a subsequent interview that the aggression in the song was directed towards ‘the powers that be...the government, press, people who have no real knowledge of the world...the ones that call us “council estate”’.⁸⁸⁶

In terms of shifting ideas about the figure of the domestic subject, however, perhaps the most interesting thing about Tricky’s song is the fact that it seemingly throws into doubt the very notion of there being such a thing as a ‘typical’ council estate tenant. Indeed, throughout the song Tricky toys with concepts of subjectivity and self-knowledge, throwing any sense of stable selfhood into turmoil with lines such as ‘don’t know who we are, can’t really tell’ and ‘you can’t be who you be ‘cos you’re not who you are.’ The accompanying music video, which was actually shot on the notorious Aulnay sous Bois Estate in Paris, only serves to further problematise the council estate tenant’s sense of self, with one shot depicting Tricky in an unlit and rundown bathroom leaning over a filthy sink and staring into a bathroom mirror that is reflecting back a whole series of faces, none of which are his own. Special effects and stop frame animation are also used to distort and superimpose different features onto the faces of the other actors in the

⁸⁸⁵ See, ‘Review of *Knowle West Boy*.’ Emily MacKay. *NME* (3rd July 2008) [Online]. Available at: ><http://www.nme.com/reviews/tricky/9780>< [Accessed: 11 June, 2011].

⁸⁸⁶ Tricky unedited (2008). Interview with Tricky by Mark Fisher. *The Wire* 294 (August 2008) [Online]. Available at: ><http://www.thewire.co.uk/articles/1222/>< [Accessed: 11 June, 2011].

video, a truly heterogeneous mixture of old and young, male and female, black and white, as the film shifts from one grimy, rundown room to another.

Conceptually, then, Tricky's song seems to support the arguments of those such as Anthony Giddens, Scott Lash and Mervyn Bendle who have suggested that one of the characteristics of 'late-', 'post-' or 'high-modern' societies has been the general fragmentation and erosion of the social subject and the subsequent problematisation of the acquisition and maintenance of identity.⁸⁸⁷ In brief, these theorists have seen the huge increase in the number of explanatory frameworks regarding the nature of the self as vital in this respect as the, supposed, certainties of the past have been undermined and superseded by an 'indefinite pluralism of expertise,' with figures such as Zygmunt Bauman describing how 'more often than not, there are more signs at crossroads suggesting different locations for the sought destination or beckoning to other destinations...ambiguity and uncertainty abound, and become even more salient and ever more widely noted.'⁸⁸⁸ New, 'intrinsically erratic situations and events' are the inevitable outcome of the extension of abstract systems, it is claimed, resulting in identities that are increasingly 'fluid', 'constructed', 'multiple', 'impermanent' and 'fragmentary.'⁸⁸⁹

⁸⁸⁷ See, A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (London, 1991), pp. 194–195; S. Lash, *Another Modernity: A Different Rationality* (Oxford, 1999); P. Heelas, S. Lash, and P. Morris (Eds.), *Detraditionalization* (Oxford, 1996). See also, K. Woodward (Ed.), *Identity and Difference* (London, 1997); G. Browning, A. Halci, and F. Webster (Eds.), *Understanding Contemporary Society* (London, 2000); A. Elliot, *Subject to Ourselves* (Cambridge, 1996); R. Baumeister (Ed.), *The Self in Social Psychology* (Philadelphia, 1999); M. F. Bendle, 'The Crisis of 'Identity' in High Modernity', in *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 53, no. 1 (2002), pp. 1–18.

⁸⁸⁸ Z. Bauman, *Society Under Siege* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 73–74. See also, Z. Bauman, *The Individualized Society* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 57–70; Z. Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge, 2007).

⁸⁸⁹ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 31; Bendle, 'The Crisis of 'Identity'', p. 4.

Clearly, the transformations that have occurred in the public housing field can be used to support these sorts of theories, as the number of experts and professionals involved in the provision, design and management of the English council estate increased rapidly between 1920 and 1970 leading to far greater levels of debate as to what exactly the prospective tenant actually needed from a domestic dwelling. As a result, by the end of the 1960s there were a number of competing voices and experts all claiming to know what the council estate tenant needed from a council estate home. Some emphasised the tenant's physiological needs, stressing the importance of securing enough space, sunlight and fresh air, others prioritised sociological issues, claiming that the social and communal needs of the tenant were the most important factors, whilst others still chose to focus on consumerist issues, claiming that tenants needed to be given the freedom and powers to shape their own home in whatever way they wanted, a far cry from the 1920s when the council housing experiment was primarily viewed as an emergency response to the deplorable living conditions in England's inner cities.

Yet, whereas in some of the more expansive and theoretical macro-sociological studies these sorts of processes can sometimes come across as having been both inevitable and problem free, my study has sought to reground these ideas in specific historical situations; revealing in the process how more often than not these changes tended to occur in a far more complex and haphazard fashion.⁸⁹⁰ Indeed, new ideas and approaches were often dependent upon specific historical circumstances and were often hotly debated at both a national and local level. As a result, long-established biopolitical conceptualisations of the self did not simply wilt and fade away in the 1950s and 1960s

⁸⁹⁰ For more on this see, D. Gilbert, D. Matless and B. Short, *Geographies of British Modernity: Space and Society in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2003), p. 9; U. Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London, 1992), pp. 2–10.

as new sociological and consumerist theories of the self began to emerge, but rather overlapped and occasionally fused together in unexpected ways; supporting the arguments of historians such as Simon Gunn and James Vernon who have suggested that the modern state was ‘never the historical monolith that nostalgic social democrats boast of or that neoliberals caricature’, but was actually ‘multiform, not singular’ and ‘produced from different processes that proceeded at uneven rates and according to different logics.’⁸⁹¹

Moreover, by problematizing the historical narrative of public housing in England in this way, my thesis also directly challenges those accounts which have portrayed the birth of mass consumerism in the 1950s and 1960s as a process that automatically heralded the death-knell for the social housing experiment in England.⁸⁹² Indeed, far from wilting before the challenges posed by the increasing affluence of the 1950s and 1960s, this thesis has shown how many of those involved in the provision of social housing actively strove to incorporate consumerist ideals into their work in a bid to refashion the public housing sector. Ultimately, the hope was that these changes would be sufficient to satisfy the more individualistic domestic needs of the newly affluent tenant whilst simultaneously still enabling the state to work towards the goal of providing good quality affordable housing for all. That this ‘citizen-consumer’ ideal was ultimately overwhelmed by the self-regarding individualism of the present suggests

⁸⁹¹ Vernon, *Hunger*, p. 15; Gunn and Vernon (Eds.), *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity*, p. 13. See also, Conekin, Mort and Waters (Eds.), *Moments of Modernity*, pp. 2–3; M. Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity* (London, 1998), p. 17.

⁸⁹² See, Power, *Hovels to High Rise*, p. 212; Black and Pemberton (Eds.), *An Affluent Society?*, p. 8; Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain*, p. 197; Beauchamp, ‘Getting Your Money’s Worth’, p. 136; D. Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 9–16; L. Cairncross, D. Clapham and R. Goodlad, *Housing Management, Consumers and Citizens* (London, 1997), pp. 27–28; B. Jones, ‘Slum Clearance’, pp. 537–550.

just how important the neo-liberal, market-centred ideologies of the 1980s were in bringing about the demise of the welfare state in Britain.⁸⁹³

Overall, then, what this thesis about the changing ways in which the figure of the prospective tenant was conceptualised and acted in England between 1920 and 1970 contributes to our wider understanding of modern modes of subjectivity is an affirmation of the fact that questions surrounding, and ideas related to, the nature of the individual subject are open to debate and liable to alter over time as new explanatory frameworks emerge and as older ones develop. In this case, the major change that took place was, thanks largely to the emergence of new sociological and consumerist-orientated discourses of the self, the transformation of the figure of the council estate tenant from an overtly biological being with needs that were primarily physiological into a far more complex and multi-layered subject with needs that were at once physical, social, personal and emotional. As a result, the council estate tenant of today has seemingly developed into a strangely intangible but highly ostracised figure, subjected to a barrage of derogatory names in the media yet increasingly overlooked by central government; a figure who, as Tricky's song so viscerally affirms, is now deprived of any clear sense of self.

⁸⁹³ See, P. Jenkins, *Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution: Ending of the Socialist Era* (London, 1987); E. A. Reitan, *The Thatcher Revolution: Margaret Thatcher, John Major, Tony Blair, and the Transformation of Modern Britain, 1979-2001* (Oxford, 2003); P. Riddell, *The Thatcher Decade: How Britain has Changed During the 1980s* (Oxford, 1989); D. Kavanagh and A. Seldon (Eds.), *The Thatcher Effect* (Oxford, 1989); N. Thompson, 'Hollowing Out the State: Public Choice Theory and the Critique of Keynesian Social Democracy', in *Contemporary British History*, vol. 22, no. 3 (2008), pp. 355–382.

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