CREATING A MUNICIPAL GEMEINSCHAFT?

DISPUTATIONS OF COMMUNITY

MARGARET H. TAYLOR

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ABSTRACT

In 1926 two parcels of land outside the town's boundaries – the Arrowe Park and Woodchurch Estates – were purchased by the County Borough of Birkenhead. The intention was that the land would be utilised for housing, but it was over twenty years before a single brick was laid on the estate. Although the development of the housing estate in itself provides an interesting insight into urban planning it is the fact that there appears that there may have been a deliberate attempt to create community through the built environment, and it is with this that this thesis is concerned.

The main body of the work (Part III) has been divided into two parts, the first part of which examines the responses of four planners who submitted their schemes to the Town Council over two decades. It investigates the links between architecture and community in relation to the development of one particular municipal housing estate, and using architectural plans, and photographic evidence it will illustrate how each had, to some extent or other, followed in the steps of Unwin in order to create what they considered the ideal community.

To what extent their schemes were to fit the lives of the people who were to live there will be considered in the second part of the narrative on community and the built environment. Using taped interviews it will examine the lived experiences of a small sample of the original residents, and will illustrate how a sense of community existed on the estate, independent of what the planners had intended for the residents. It will also establish how the life that they had led in the working-class areas of Birkenhead was transferred almost intact to Woodchurch.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

This is to certify that the results and conclusions have not been submitted for any other academic award.

PART I

CHAPTER 1

PLANNING THE IDEAL SOCIETY: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

> In planning theory, communities were not so much to be 'planned for' as produced by physical means. Architects in particular were convinced that the science of Social Studies provides the information needed to plan a community, whether a town, village or housing scheme.[1]

As the visitor enters the Woodchurch Estate, Wirral, they may notice a plaque affixed to the gable-end of a row of houses which reads:

> The Woodchurch Estate on completion will contain the houses and other buildings necessary to the fully developed life of a community of some 10000 persons. The land was formerly part of the Royden Estate & was purchased by Birkenhead Corporation in 1926 and building operations were inaugurated in 1946.[2]

Whether they would be interested to know if the provision of the buildings and amenities had resulted in a fully developed sense of community is another matter entirely. If they were interested and found that a sense of community had existed there, they might also want to know what form that community took: how had it been expressed. Had the buildings and dwellings been instrumental in developing that sense of community? Having started on this enquiry they might then want to know what part the "science of Social Studies"[3] had played in providing the architects with the information they needed to create a community. The interested visitor might be surprised by the answers to these queries, and might even be perplexed by the complexities of the narrative as the story unfolds.

Planning the ideal society – The initial stage

In 1926 the Birkenhead Town Council was to purchase two tracts of land outside their borough boundaries: The Woodchurch Estate – belonging to (Sir) Ernest Bland Royden – was earmarked for housing; and The Arrowe Park Estate – once the

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[1] Ravetz, A. (2001) *Council Housing and Culture. The History of a Social Experiment*, p. 138.
[2] This commemorative plaque is placed on the gable-end of a house in Ackers Road, Woodchurch.
[3] Ravetz, *Op Cit.*

residence of Lord Leverhulme – was intended to become a 'tourist' attraction. To facilitate the purchase the Town Council were to borrow the sum of £69,743 from the Ministry of Health.[4] The decision to purchase land outside the town's boundaries was heavily influenced not only by geographical factors, but also by the encouragement of Lord Leverhulme whose view was that "councils should purchase land on their outskirts for their development"[5] given the fact that it was cheaper to purchase rural rather than urban sites. As a result of the purchase the local authority was to approach the renowned firm of "Town Planning Consultants", Thomas H. Mawson & Son, with whom Lord Leverhulme already had connections through his development at Port Sunlight. Their remit was to provide a proposal for development that encompassed both tracts of land. Like many towns and cities across Britain, Birkenhead had experienced rapid growth in the nineteenth century, and by the 1920s the housing situation was such that it was "characterised by an acute and widespread shortage"[6] to the extent that the purchase was regarded by many as "the most important area affecting the welfare of [the town] in the future".[7]

The town had expanded from a small rural hamlet of just 50 inhabitants in 1818, to a major shipbuilding area by the mid-19th century. The growth was sudden and rapid: as late as 1824 the area was described as rural, but just twenty six years later a "complete town had sprung up with wide streets, some several miles long" with railway links to the rest of the country.[8] Expansion continued throughout the Victorian and Edwardian periods and by 1911 the population stood at 130,794. By 1921 it had increased further to 145,577.[9] Speculative building had failed to keep up with demand and the *Birkenhead News* was to describe the borough as somewhere that was "a reservoir full to the brim with an overcrowded population"[10]: the purchase of the land was to provide the answer to the town's housing problems.

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[4] *Birkenhead News*, The Royden Estate Purchase. 5 October, 1926.
[5] Shippobottom, M. (1996) C. H. Reilly and the First Lord Leverhulme, in Sharples, J., Powers, A., and Shippobottom, M. (1996) *Charles Reilly and the Liverpool School of Architecture* 1904-33, p. 50.
[6] Cullingworth, J. B. (1979) *Essays on Housing Policy. The British Scene*, pp. xviii-xix.
[7] *Birkenhead News*. 5 October, 1926. *Op Cit.*
[8] Reilly, C. H. Sir and Aslan, N. J. (1947) *Outline Plan for the County Borough of Birkenhead*, Sctn. 3.
[9] Anon, n.p. *The Woodchurch Housing Estate,* p. 3. These figures were taken from the Population of the County Borough of Birkenhead Decennial Census.
[10] *Birkenhead News.* Untitled, 1 April, 1926.

The area purchased was, quite literally, a rural idyll: somewhere very different to the conurbation itself. To put this in context, the village closest to the land purchased, Upton, was described by Sulley[11] as somewhere that was situated 5 miles from Birkenhead, with the benefit of two public houses, the Eagle and Crown and the Horse and Jockey, and a beer house. The village also contained a police station and 116 dwellings. In contrast the village of Woodchurch, which was situated 4½ miles from Birkenhead, contained only 25 dwellings, one public house, the Horse and Jockey, a church which had "probably existed ... from Saxon times, certainly from Norman"[12] and little else besides. Although the population of both villages had risen throughout the 19th century[13] it still remained a sparsely populated area into the mid-20th century. Arthur Mee,[14] whose book on Cheshire had first been published in 1938, confirms how the rural nature of Wirral in general "with its dingles and villages ..."[15] had been retained. Although the publication postdates the Mawson proposal somewhat, it is interesting to note how Mee described Woodchurch, even in the late thirties, as a "tiny village nestling among the trees a mile or two from Birkenhead":[16] this was the area that the planning consultants were engaged to develop.

Planning the ideal society – The Second Stage

When the firm submitted their outline proposal for developing the two parcels of land to the local authority in 1929 their proposition contained more than a hint that they were intending that the area should be developed along the lines of Letchworth and Welwyn. Their plan and full report, containing detailed sketches of everything from housing elevations, zoning and road layout maps to suggestions on the type of foliage that would best suit certain areas, was submitted in 1929 but was revised several times over the next few years. Despite the time and effort expended by the firm the scheme was eventually abandoned during the 1930s and the land at Woodchurch was to remain undeveloped for well over a decade. Arrowe Park on the other hand fared a little better, although the innovations described by Mawson – improving the

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[11] Sulley, P. (1889) *Hundreds of Wirral*, p. 46.
[12] *Ibid,* p. 39.
[13] *Ibid*, pp. 39 and 46.
[14] Mee, A. and Lang, E. T. (1968) *Cheshire*, p. 6.
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] Haddy, A. (1978) Herbert James Rowse: An Architect of Quality, p. 124.

walks by careful planting to enhance their natural beauty; establishing tea rooms and an animal park; a palm house similar to the one in Sefton Park; and developing the lake for swimming – were not carried out but its natural beauty attracted visitors from across the borough.

Regardless of the fact that the decision was to cost the ratepayers of Birkenhead dearly in terms of the rate of interest attracted on the loan (to say nothing, of course, of the human misery brought about by the indecision) it was not until World War II, when the town was faced with an even greater housing crisis than that experienced in the 1920s, that the local authority were once again to consider developing the land. Poor housing and overcrowding had continued to be a serious problem for the town throughout the intervening years, and a pre-war inspection of the level of overcrowding had illustrated that the percentage of overcrowded dwellings was 17.6%:[17] far greater than the maximum laid down by the Housing Act 1936[18] and far above Liverpool's figure of 10.4%. The whole situation was exacerbated by the fact that many of the houses in the area were unfit for human habitation, with crumbling ceilings, damp walls, rat infested cellars and rotting floors being a common problem in a large percentage of the town's housing stock. Serious health problems were also a common feature of life for many, and an almost direct causal link could be made between overcrowding and the incidence of pulmonary tuberculosis in the town.[19] The situation was exacerbated when war with Germany was announced on 3 September 1939. The strategic geographical nature of the area meant that it was targeted for bombardment and, as with the neighbouring city of Liverpool, the bombing was intense. The town was to suffer particularly badly in both 1940 and 1941 when whole sections of the town, mainly close to the docks, but also in some of the town's suburbs, were destroyed or badly damaged as a result of enemy action. Quite naturally, when the local authority began thinking seriously about 'planning the peace' their thoughts turned once again to developing the land at Woodchurch. As a consequence, their Borough Engineer, Bertie Robinson, was instructed to prepare plans for the area and these were submitted to the Town Council for consideration in February 1944.

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[17] Reilly and Aslan, *Op Cit.*
[18] Ibid.
[19] *Ibid.*

In many respects the fact that two planners had now been involved in submitting designs for developing the same plot of land, and the amount of time that had elapsed between the two, might have been the sole contribution of Woodchurch to modern history and, had this been the case, Robinson's involvement in the scheme would have provided the penultimate chapter in the story: this was not the case. Following the submission of this second set of plans, the town was to become embroiled in a political controversy which resulted in the local authority being divided along party lines[20] when an eminent Professor – employed as a consultant to provide outline plans for the post-war reconstruction of Birkenhead – saw the Borough Engineer's proposals and did not like them. He intervened by scribbling his ideas over Robinson's plans, arguing that his own plan represented "community living"[21] and provided a far superior alternative to the suburban isolationism advocated by the Borough Engineer. Maurice Edelman was to write of the affair:

> Forty years ago, the Birkenhead Battle of the Plans might have provided the material for a farce. This would have been the plot. The Borough Engineer and Surveyor, Mr. B. Robinson, has made plans for the new Woodchurch Housing Estate. An architect, Professor C. H. Reilly, employed as the Planning Consultant by the Birkenhead Council, sees the drawings on the engineer's desk and says: "I don't think that people will be very happy on your proposed estate. Let me have a shot at making a different plan – without fee, of course."[22]

The furore that ensued had a great deal to do with the fact that Reilly was to mount a media campaign that was not characterised by tact or diplomacy, and was to involve some of his influential acquaintances from across the political spectrum as well as those within planning and architecture. The sequence of events has been well documented by Potter, but it is sufficient to note that his interference resulted in both his own and Robinson's plans being rejected. This meant that the Town Council were suddenly faced with something of a quandary, when a well-regarded Liverpool architect, Herbert James Rowse – originally engaged to design the housing for the

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[20] Potter, L. (1998) National tensions in the post war planning of local authority housing and the Woodchurch controversy.

[21] Edelman, M. Planning Post-War Britain: The Example of Birkenhead, *Picture Post*, 8 July, 1944, p. 17.

[22] *Ibid*, p. 16.

Robinson scheme – submitted a proposal which included designs for both housing and road plans for the area. The outcome of this intervention was that the architect was offered a contract to build a small number of dwellings on the estate. As far as some members of the Town Council were concerned Rowse's involvement was timely. Not only did he disentangle the ruling Conservative party from the rather embarrassing aftermath of the 'Battle of the Plans', he also provided a scheme that was far superior to those submitted thus far.

Structure of the Work

As has been documented, in this rather convoluted history a total of four planners – not all of whom were qualified architects – were to submit proposals for the scheme and the purpose of this research is to examine whether there were any links between the built environment and the development of community on this particular municipal housing estate. The work has been divided into three parts, each of which has been further subdivided into chapters.

In Part I the first chapter provides an introduction to the research; chapter two a description of the methodology used to underpin the work; and the final chapter of this section contains an evaluation of selected literature on the development of municipal housing and the complex relationship between community and the built environment.

In the first chapter of Part II the events surrounding the establishment of what has been described on the commemorative plaque as a 'community' will be examined. Work will focus on the individual schemes for Woodchurch and will attempt to establish whether or not the four people involved in submitting plans for its development consciously believed that they could create a sense of community just by providing the "houses and other buildings ..."[23] that were thought necessary for its development. The historical nature of this study has meant that many of the original documents have been lost or destroyed but, where possible sketches of the road layouts together with detailed drawings of the housing elevations, old pictures and recent photographs will be used to highlight how different ideas may have influenced the development of the estate.

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[23] Woodchurch Commemorative Plaque, *Op Cit.*

The final section will consider how the ideas of one of the planners concerned, Professor Sir Charles Reilly, were seized upon (with his permission, of course) by a little-known writer: Lawrence Wolfe. This was a person who had a vested interest in using the academic's scheme, unbeknownst to the latter, as a vehicle for establishing what he thought was the ideal society – a utopia that he described as "the Communit (Communal Unit) System ..."[24] It will exemplify how many of the Professor's ideas fitted perfectly with the bizarre, eccentric and evangelical writings of Lawrence Wolfe who undoubtedly wanted his own version of utopia establishing through the vehicle of what became known as the Reilly Green.

In Part III data gathered from a number of taped interviews with original residents of the estate will be utilised to assess how the estate's population, who were in the main from socioeconomic groups III(a) to group VI, reacted to the imposed relocation from a vibrant working-class area to a rural one some distance from the town with few amenities save fresh air and healthy surroundings. The interviews will be used to examine whether a sense of community emerged and what place the design of the houses, the amenities provided and layout of the estate had in the development of it.

The final chapter will illustrate the extent to which the individual planners were seeking to create community through the built environment and will highlight some of the similarities and differences between the four plans. It will be established that the built environment and amenities were less of an influence on the lived experience of the residents than the background from whence they came, by illustrating how their commonality – in terms of their social class and economic status – made it possible for them to transfer the sense of community that had existed in the town to the new estate, enabling them to forge a life for themselves that was very different from that imagined by the planners.

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[24] Wolfe, L. (1942) *The Road to Total War,* p. vii.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY – ANALYSING THE EVIDENCE

> The social sciences differ from the natural sciences in the degree to which models that describe the way the world works are both disputed and allowed to co-exist with others that challenge their most fundamental premises.[25]

In this chapter the methods selected for gathering data for the thesis will be outlined. There are a number of issues which should be considered when analysis or enquiry is undertaken and Lofland[26] contends that these are: the characteristics, causes, and consequences of a social phenomenon. As detailed in the previous chapter, the main purpose of this research is to determine whether or not there was a deliberate attempt to create community through the built environment at Woodchurch, a large municipal housing estate in what was then known as the County Borough of Birkenhead.[27] Part of the study has been undertaken using taped interviews with original tenants of the estate. The nature of the work is historical and as such fits the criteria for the use of qualitative methods for all three of the issues identified by Lofland. As others have contended, a significant factor in selecting a method for analysing data is the nature of the research itself,[28] because:

> … some areas of study naturally lend themselves … to qualitative types of research, for instance research that attempts to uncover the nature of persons' experiences with a phenomenon ….[29]

In this instance, the phenomenon is the growth of community on a municipal estate developed in a rural area meant to house 10,000 people from an urban working-class background. Although this was not unusual in itself; it is the circumstances surrounding its development that make the story so exceptional. It is because the

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[25] Mansbridge, J. (1990) *Beyond Self Interest*, p. 12.
[26] Lofland, J. (1971) *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis.*
[27] Birkenhead was incorporated as a municipal borough in 1877, and was given County Borough status with the passing of the Local Government Act of 1888. The Local Government Act 1972 meant that it not only ceased to be part of Cheshire (as did the rest of Wirral) it also lost its County Borough status, to be subsumed by the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral.
[28] Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*, p. 19.
[29] *Ibid.*

study involves the development of community, and part of the work deals with uncovering the nature of people's experiences, that qualitative methods were deemed a logical approach for the study.

From this approach has come a selective evaluation of the literature was undertaken in order to understand the nature of the debates before data gathering began. Some of this same literature has also been used as part of the narrative because it has provided an approach for sorting, analysing and organising other elements of the information gathered. It was, in effect, used as a tool to identify and quantify emergent themes and questions upon which to base the conclusions of the study. Other data takes the form of contemporary newspaper articles, journal articles, maps, architectural drawings and photographic evidence. The data also includes informal unstructured taped interviews with original tenants of the estate, and research notes associated with this element of the work have been incorporated in the analysis. More recently, someone with an intimate knowledge of the estate through working at a local church and centre has come forward to provide information on early community activity and the notes from this conversation have also been used for the case study.

<u>Aims of the chapter</u>

The aims of this chapter are to:

1. Address the issue of why the Woodchurch Estate was chosen as the site for the case study element of the research.
2. Provide a discussion on such issues as obtaining primary source material, gaining access to interviewees, recording the interviews and organising the data.
3. Provide an assessment of the methodology.

<u>Why Woodchurch as the site of the case study?</u>

The central topic of the thesis is community and its construction through the built environment, and Woodchurch was chosen because it seemed to encapsulate what were then still emergent debates about planning and community: debates that were to become increasingly important to politicians, planners and, eventually, to residents of

municipal housing estates in the post-war period. In many respects Woodchurch could be regarded as a typical municipal housing estate, and an outsider visiting the area would see a mixture of architectural types and styles in that section of the estate built between 1948 and 1953. Painted cottage-style houses – the design of which might be deemed a local vernacular[30] – mingle with larger red brick dwellings organised in groups of 2, 4, 6 and 8 with many of the blocks grouped around a quasi-village green; some of the houses have steeply pitched roofs with windowed gables and are the personification of a rural idyll.

In effect, the architecture and general layout of the estate appears to be very characteristic of the style and variety of housing most associated with Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin. The housing density too reflects their influence, as does the general road layout of the plans adopted for the estate. Although others have intimated that the plans had elements of Unwin's ideas in them, this has not been linked with the theme of community. It was when the style of the housing was juxtaposed with the wording on a commemorate plaque that the question arose: was there a deliberate attempt to create community through the built environment? Potter contends[31] that a community of sorts did develop but does not make any comment on how that sense of community evolved, nor does she define whether this had developed organically, or whether it was something that had arisen as a result of its design, layout and amenities. Ever since Ebenezer Howard first published his ideas for creating a garden city, planners have argued over whether or not community could be created through the built environment, as they think he contended, or whether community is a construct that is more organic. Whatever the case, planners in Britain and elsewhere seem to have accepted that, as far as municipal housing is concerned at least, designing community is something that has become a given. Other writers have alluded to the fact that those who criticise Howard have either never read his work or, if they have, they have misunderstood them.[32] But it is not so much his ideas and how they were applied or misapplied at Woodchurch that is the intention of this study; it is more concerned with whether any of the planners were deliberately trying

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[30] Mee and Lang, *Op Cit*, p. 6.
[31] Potter, *Op Cit*, pp. 111-112.
[32] Hall, Peter (2002) *Cities of Tomorrow*, and Purdom, C. B. *(1949) The Building of Satellite Towns: A Contribution to the Study of Town Development and Regional Planning.*

to create community through their schemes and then, subsequently, whether community was the outcome. That being the case, a further reason for choosing the Woodchurch Estate was the fact that the candidate lived there for forty years, and was an active member of the community, having undertaken voluntary work for a local school and the Woodchurch Play Association. When the ideas relating to whether or not there was a deliberate attempt at creating community through the built environment were first formulated by the candidate, the estate seemed to provide the ideal environment for such a study.

Emergent themes

During the course of the investigation the themes which emerged can be identified as:

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              ┌─────────────────────┐
              │  Created community  │
              └─────────────────────┘
                         │
         ┌───────────────────────────────────┐
         │  The role of planning and          │
         │  architecture                      │
         │  (including provision of amenities) │
         └───────────────────────────────────┘
    ┌────────────┐                  ┌────────────────────────┐
    │ Continuity │                  │ Creating a sense of place │
    └────────────┘                  └────────────────────────┘
                   ┌───────────┐
                   │  History  │
                   └───────────┘

                      Versus

              ┌─────────────────────┐
              │ "Organic" community │
              └─────────────────────┘
    ┌──────────────────┐         ┌──────────────────────┐
    │ Lack of amenities │         │ Dealing with officialdom │
    └──────────────────┘         └──────────────────────┘
           ┌──────────────────────────────┐
           │ Self-determination and self-help │
           └──────────────────────────────┘
```
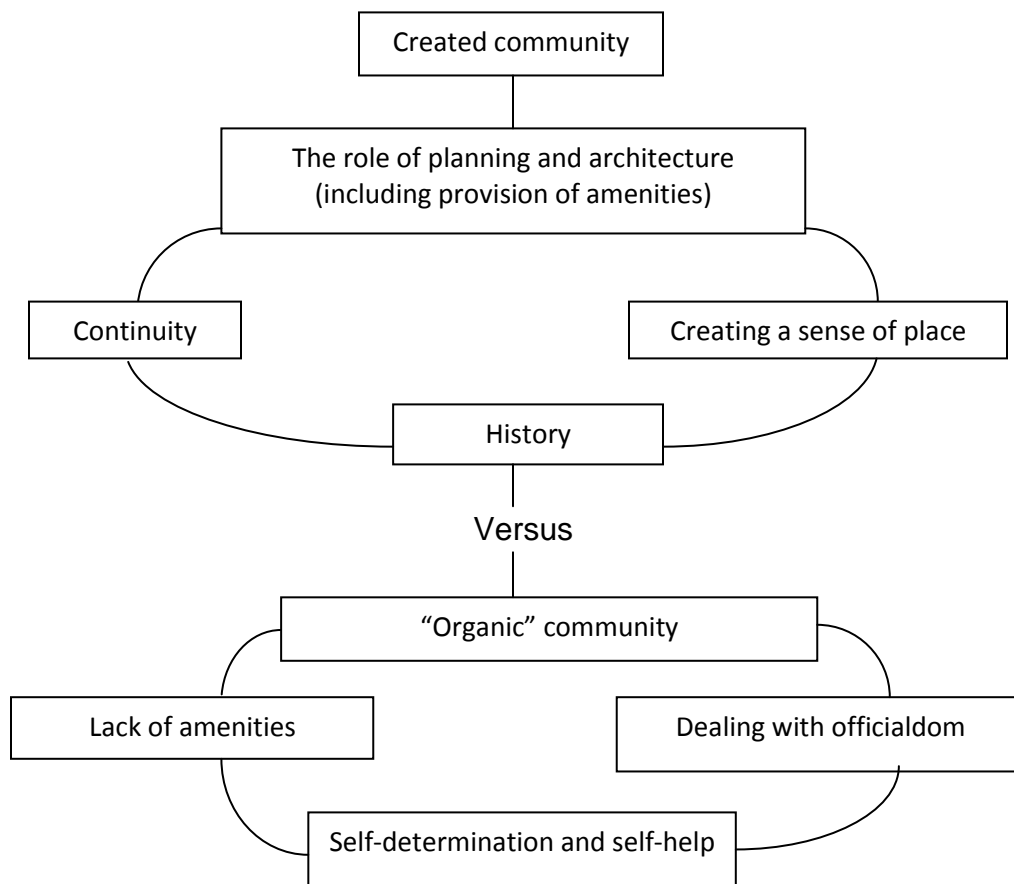
Unfortunately, the processes were not as neat and tidy as the diagram would suggest and quite often the different themes would be inextricably intertwined, or were not

evident in the data, but wherever possible the work was organised as illustrated above.

<u>The wider debate</u>

The literature which formed the background to this study has been used as data in order to provide a framework for the analysis and to clarify the general themes inherent in this debate. The evidence compiled as part of the case study has been used to identify key themes pertaining to planning of the built environment. This element of the study included government documents, the work of Raymond Unwin, and also that of more modern writers such as Ravetz, Turkington, Swenarton and others as examples of the debates that have surrounded community and the built environment.

<u>Data collection – primary and secondary source material</u>

The majority of primary and secondary source material has been obtained from the Wellcome Trust Library; the British Library; Professor Sir Charles Reilly's archive at the Sidney Jones Library (Special Collections), University of Liverpool; the Wirral Archive Service, in particular some of the architectural drawings for the road layouts of the estate and photocopies of newspaper articles in the *Birkenhead Advertiser, Birkenhead News*, and newspaper articles obtained from the offices of the Liverpool Daily Post and Echo. Photographs have been obtained from a variety of sources, including Ian Boumphrey's *Yesterday's Wirral* series of publications, others are personal photographs taken on location at sites around Wirral; and, finally, officers from Wirral Borough Council kindly provided photocopies of a small number of maps and line drawings of housing elevations for the Rowse scheme. To clarify the spatial context of the research, sections maps affording an overview of the general area of Woodchurch from 1930s and 40s have been included in this work. Other information has been obtained from the Picton Library in Liverpool, and a reproduction of the Mawson Report, complete with artists' sketches depicting how the estate might have looked, was obtained from Birkenhead Central Library. A major difficulty was experienced in collecting the primary source material because boundary changes, and the creation of the Merseyside County Council in 1974, meant that responsibility

for many historical documents was transferred to Liverpool and in the process a number of them seem to have been lost or mislaid. Despite strenuous efforts to trace the tenants housing cards for Woodchurch it has proved impossible to locate them and the general consensus of opinion is that they have been destroyed in the previously mentioned changes, or when the responsibility for housing was removed from the local authority's control. Similarly, it proved impossible to obtain an overview of employment patterns for the original tenants, partly because the data protection act was used to deny access in some cases, but also because many of the major employers of the town no longer exist. However, a possible method of cross-matching individual tenants with employment type has now been identified, but cannot be included in this study.

<u>Why taped interviews?</u>

From the outset of this section it should be stated that the taped interviews have followed the form of that employed by Elizabeth Roberts.[33] It is recovery history, a fact-finding mission, not a sophisticated theoretical discussion as used by some historians. That notwithstanding, the principal reason for employing this method of information gathering is the fact that oral history can provide new information and new insights into the past, particularly in those areas where documentary sources are unavailable. It can also add a human element to the context in which events have taken place. Oral history can also provide a balance by focussing on those people who are often ignored by standard texts.[34] Not the powerful and influential, not the planners or the councillors of Birkenhead, but the ordinary people whose lives were to be affected by the outcome of decisions made by those in power. It can make us challenge assumptions we have made from documentary evidence and, more importantly perhaps, in many cases it provides the missing pieces of the jigsaw that is our understanding of the past.

Abrams informs us that oral evidence has been used for creating documentary evidence for centuries, but when did the modern use of oral history begin? Alistair Thomson states that:

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[33] Roberts, Elizabeth (1995 edition) *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working Class Women 1890-1940.*
[34] Texas Historical Commission, *Fundamentals of Oral History*. Texas Preservation Guidelines, pp. 1-2.

[The North American tradition of] oral history was established in 1948 as a modern technique for historical documentation when Columbia University historian Allan Nevins began recording the memoirs of persons significant in American life.[35]

But, according to Patricia Thane, it was not until the 1970s that recent historians began to seriously investigate the uses of oral history. Unfortunately, it was much criticised in the early days because of its perceived over-reliance on and unquestioned acceptance of the "frailties of human memory."[36] But as she points out "documents throughout history have been derived from oral sources", and she cites the example of Geary's work highlighting the importance of oral testimony in land disputes during the medieval period, to illustrate this point. Written legal accounts of Court proceedings were "produced which were often derived from memories of how and by what means the family had acquired the land." As she contends, some historians would value this type of historical evidence, despite its roots in orality, over taped interviews that were produced in the last century. New technologies have expanded ways of generating documentary evidence – before the advent of machines for recording oral testimony the medieval cleric would write it onto vellum or parchment. The methods have changed; the tradition (broadly speaking) has not. Both use techniques for gathering information that are fallible and, as far as veracity is concerned, one does not have precedence over the other. As Thane states oral and literary sources are inseparably connected but neither sources are incontestably reliable.

Given its perceived unreliability one might question why a scholar might continue with its usage. Using the most basic interpretation of the term oral history it can be regarded as the act of recording the speech of people who have something interesting to say and then analysing their memory of the past. It is both a research methodology and a result of the research process where doing and interpreting are intertwined.[37] It is not only unique in that it crosses disciplinary boundaries; it is also

[35] Thomson, Alistair (1998) *Fifty Years On, An International Perspective on Oral History,* p. 581.
[36] Thane, Patricia M. *Oral History, Memory and Written Tradition: An Introduction* pp. 161-168.
[37] Abrams, Lynn (2010) *Oral History Theory*, pp. 1-2.

flexible and is ephemeral in nature.[38] Some would argue that its multidisciplinary nature and the fact that it has become a popular tool for gathering evidence have meant that the expression has become diluted to such an extent that almost any interview can now be termed oral history. However, Abrams would argue that this perceived dilution also has its benefits in that it brings together practitioners and theorists from a variety of viewpoints, and each has brought their own expertise to bear on the practise: not weakening it in any way, but enriching it in the process.

This has resulted in a vibrant and constantly changing form across the disciplinary spectrum[39] but it is also one that changes with time and place and with the subjects being interviewed. As Kristina Minister contends; for decades oral history methodology tended to "rest upon the assumption that interviewers will conduct interviews in the way men conduct interviews."[40] She points out that in North America "women's conversational patterns" did not match those of the male, "turn-taking approach of the standard interview".[41] As was the case with this study, she found that an interactive approach to the interview generated more effective communication and storytelling. There are also remarkable similarities between Graham Smith's work in Dundee with older working-class women; in this study too it was found that the women were used to talking about their lives among groups of other women in the corner shop before moving to Woodchurch, then on their doorsteps, in the workplace and so on. Just as in his study, women were more likely to open up than the males interviewed and the group interviews were an illustration of the way in which conversation would "spark each others' memories, stories, and interpretations."[42] Thomson advises the researcher that "there is one universal piece of advice about

[38] Portelli, Alessandro (1981) *The Pecularities of Oral History*, pp. 96-107.
[39] Abrams, *Op Cit*, p. 2.
[40] Minister, Kristina (1991) "A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai. Quoted in Thomson, *Op Cit*, p. 584.
[41] *Ibid.*
[42] Smith, Graham "The Widow and Her Sister: Gender Relations inside the Female-Headed Families of a Scottish Women's Town in the Interwar Years" presented at the <u>Voices, Narratives, Identities: Women's History Network Sixth Annual Conference</u> 1997. Quoted in Thomson, *Op Cit.*

oral history interviewing"[43] and that is that the interviewer should be alert to "particular cultures and circumstances"[44] in order to identify what might constitute good practice.

Identifying the "right" way of doing it

Does this flexibility then mean that there is no right or wrong way to undertake oral history? Attitudes have changed since that time when some early interview handbooks "sought to legitimize oral history by advocating a "scientific" model for the research interview."[45] In the early days the interviewer was advised that a carefully controlled interview was the key to obtaining the best results. They were directed to use consistent and carefully constructed questionnaires, to "control the focus and flow of the interview yet maintain a neutral and objective presence to avoid adversely affecting" what was recorded.[46] But as both Thomson and Thane contend, the criticisms of oral history have had their effect in refining the ways in which the "method is used and the outcomes interpreted."[47] Today, the practice is much more intuitive and is no longer reduced to "a set of techniques"[48] where the interviewer relies heavily on a set of procedures. Now it is more about the person being interviewed than about the interviewer.

The technique, of necessity, must change with the individual being interviewed. There has been a recognition that the interview is "a relationship embedded within particular cultural practices and informed by culturally specific systems and relations of communication". There have been those who have argued that because of the complexities of interviewing individuals from other cultures the interviewer should be "aware of local hierarchies" as well as the norms, "the order of the topics for discussion or various rituals relating to storytelling" because the interview process can be a potentially dangerous encounter if these idiosyncrasies are ignored. Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson advise the scholar that in some societies "group remembering" is

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[43] Thomson, *Op Cit.*
[44] *Ibid.*
[45] *Ibid*, p. 581.
[46] *Ibid.*
[47] Thomson, *Ibid* and Thane, *Op Cit.*
[48] Morrissey, Charles T. (1970) "On Oral History Interviewing" in Perks and Thomson (eds.) *Oral History Reader*, pp. 107-108. Also in Thomson, *Op Cit*, p. 582.

a more acceptable and familiar approach to gathering oral information.[49] This leads us to the conclusion that there can be no right or wrong way to undertake an interview although the researcher should still appreciate: the value of preparation; the need to establish rapport and intimacy with the respondent; the importance of asking open-ended questions and to refrain from interrupting. The interviewer should also avoid jargon, allow for pauses and silences, and minimise "the presence of the tape recorder."[50] Above all, the interviewer needs to listen to what is being said.

According to Abrams oral history is a creative, interactive methodology because it involves communication with living, breathing human beings. It is unique because human respondents cannot be analysed in the same way as documentary evidence. It is also a process that involves two people: the interviewer and the interviewee, and the interviewer is as much a part of the 'performance' as is the interviewee.[51] In this two-way process the interviewer must acknowledge their own presence in the narrative because they are drawn into the story.[52] Even more importantly, perhaps, the interviewer must also be aware that the 'performers' (including themselves) will each have a different agenda and in a two-way interview there may actually be three conversations. That is, an external conversation between interviewer and interviewee, and the internal one that is carried out by the researcher. What affect this may have on the interview is difficult to determine, but it is useful to acknowledge that it is there.

All the foregoing illustrates that there is no right or wrong way of undertaking oral history. The researcher must be aware of the environment in which the interviews are taking place; must take into consideration the age, ethnicity, class, sexuality and so on, of the participants; and above all, they must be flexible.

<u>Defective memory – its use in the research process</u>

As has been described, oral history is "an invaluable and compelling research method"[53] which provides the researcher with the opportunity to obtain information

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[49] Thomson, *Op Cit,* pp. 582-583.
[50] *Ibid.*
[51] Abrams, *Op Cit*, p. 19.
[52] *Ibid*, pp. 23-25.
[53] Thomson, *Op Cit*, p. 584.

about such things as personal relationships and domestic life. In this particular narrative the researcher was able to obtain information about the domestic life of the participants, their financial status and their ways of coping with hardship, amongst other things. We have observed that the method has been heavily criticised because of its perceived reliance on oral data; Thomson relates that chief amongst the criticisms was the assertion that

> ... memory was distorted by physical deterioration and nostalgia in old age, by the personal bias of both interviewer and interviewee, and by the influence of collective and retrospective versions of the past.

It has been observed that the reaction to criticisms of the interview process was to develop guidelines for their undertaking and, similarly, censure of the subjectivity of oral evidence was met with the same response. Borrowing from other disciplines, oral historians developed ways of determining bias and fantasy, the effects of the interviewer on the interview process and the importance of hindsight. They adopted methods from sociology, such as sampling and found ways of checking the reliability and "internal consistency" of their sources. But oral history, in the modern sense, has not been used as a stand-alone methodology, but has been combined with other sources to broaden our understanding of the past.

There has been a shift in perception regarding evidence based on distorted memory, and the "peculiarities of oral history" have become regarded as a strength rather than a weakness.[54] Passerini has acknowledged how individual memory can become entangled with the collective one[55] in her study of working-class Italians. She noted how the Fascist ideology had become deeply embedded in the individual interviewee's construction of identity. This phenomenon has also been observed by Portelli in his study of the people of Terni, who 'misremembered' the date of the death of a factory worker, Luigi Trastulli, and confused it with an event which had occurred four years later. To the townspeople Trastulli was a martyr, and Portelli contends that mistaken memory is vital to our understanding the *meaning* of certain events for

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[54] *Ibid*, p. 585.
[55] Abrams, *Op Cit*, has acknowledged that although there is a difference between individual and collective memory "one can become infected by the other". p. 23.

individuals. He maintains that "what is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings."

Oral history is a methodology where past and present are intertwined. Eliciting information through taped interviews is a way of discovering how people:

> ... make sense of their past, how they connect individual experience and its social context, how the past becomes part of the present, and how people use it to interpret their lives and the world around them.

No other methodology allows the flexibility of oral history. It is distinctive in that it is the only method whereby the researcher creates their own source material. It is creative and interactive and is one where people can transmit meaning, knowledge and experience in the course of the taped interview. Despite the fact that it is a subjective methodology and this does not detract from its veracity and utility[56] for this study. Despite the fact that memory stories are flawed, the data gathered as part of this research could not have been accessed through any other method.

Obtaining access

In order to organise the interviews, questionnaire was devised and ethical approval for carrying out the interviews was obtained. As many of the residents were now people living alone and in their late seventies and early eighties, it was thought advisable that two female residents, both part of the study, should be selected as facilitators in order to provide reassurance for possible interviewees. These two women proved to be of invaluable assistance in providing names and contact details of people who might be willing to take part in the study, and in facilitating introductions to possible interviewees. Following the advice of Morrissey,[57] the researcher began each interview by taking time to converse with the interviewees in order to establish a mutual rapport. While it is recognised that the interview was being conducted within the researcher's own society, it was not considered necessary to be sensitive to "relational and communicative patterns of particular subcultures" because almost all

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[56] Abrams, *Ibid.*
[57] Morrissey, *Op Cit.*

the interviewees were of the same gender, class, ethnicity, region and sexuality as the interviewer.

Once the first few interviews had taken place word of mouth meant that more interviewees were willing to come forward to take part in the research. As time constraints have meant that not all the original tenants still living at the time the interviews were undertaken could be interviewed it was decided that a sample would be chosen and whilst these were not, strictly speaking, self-selecting, their involvement in the research is described below.

Although it was originally intended that the original sample group should total twenty-five interviewees, the age and infirmity of some of the residents proved to be a greater hurdle than expected and the sample had to be reduced to seventeen. To compensate for this one of the facilitators suggested that she should invite friends to her home for them to reminisce and discuss what life was like when they had first moved to the estate, and this provided insight into the similarity of their individual experiences, and also allowed them to corroborate or correct each other's recollection of events. Detailed notes were taken at these get-togethers, which numbered two in all, and sections of the notes have been used in some elements of Chapter 6. In the analysis only the most relevant extracts have been chosen for inclusion in this study, but all the recorded data was used to obtain an overview of events. However, although the candidate has had to use selected extracts, and the sample was smaller than originally intended, we are informed that even a limited number of case studies can reveal a significant amount about the whole of a group being researched because:

> [W]e can't study every case of whatever we're interested in, nor should we want to. Every scientific enterprise tries to find out something that will apply to everything of a certain kind by studying a few examples …. We need the sample to persuade people that we know something about the whole class.[58]

It is therefore contended that the reduced sample has provided enough raw data for coding and identifying the emergent themes from the interviews and, by cross-

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[58] Becker, H. (1998) *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You're Doing It.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 67.

referencing these themes with other emergent subject matter, this information was of sufficiently high quality to render them useful to the overall research project.

An unexpected barrier to this element of the research occurred in the initial stages of sampling. It had been decided that a set of structured questions would be used to obtain information from the interviewees, but this approach did not supply enough information for the study because answers were shortened to a 'yes', 'no', 'don't know' response. In order to obtain more raw data, these first interviews were used as a pilot and, as a result, the approach was reformulated. After careful consideration it was concluded that informal unstructured interviews should be adopted with a loose set of prompt questions designed to encourage interviewees to expand on their answers, depending on what their responses had been. However, the unintended consequence of this approach was that it did, on occasion, result in too much information being provided. Nevertheless, it is considered that the interviewer was able to guide the discussion "enough to focus on the topic of interest"[59] whilst ensuring that the depth of the interview provided enough freedom for "all sorts of tangential matters which, for them, have bearing on the main subject".[60] In this manner a source of primary information was unearthed that might otherwise have remained undiscovered.

Transcripts of the interviewees were made more or less verbatim[61] and extracts have appeared in the research exactly as transcribed. It was considered that the recordings should not be edited because in this state they have provided a richer and much clearer picture of the reality of life for many of the early residents of the estate. Although grounded methodology theorists are not always in favour of undertaking taped interviews[62] one of the reasons for choosing this approach was the fact that as a former resident of the estate the candidate felt that the ability to use the knowledge and experience gained as a result would provide a deeper insight into the motivations, practices and emotions of the group of people interviewed: it is

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[59] Hakim, C. (1997), *Research Design: Strategies and Choices in the Design of Social Research*. London: Routledge, p. 27.
[60] *Ibid.*
[61] Only "ers" and "ums" have been removed. Everything else is as recorded.
[62] Strauss and Corbin, (1990) *Op Cit*, p. 19.

suggested that this approach has assisted in the analysis that was carried out to extract key ideas from the data.

All interviews were voluntary and, as interviewees were from the same socioeconomic group, the same set of loose prompt questions was used for all interviewees – apart from the pilot – and interviewees gave their informed consent to taking part in the research.[63] The interviews have been made anonymous and assigned an individual code number, mainly because many of the interviewees felt more comfortable with this approach although there were one or two respondents who were quite happy to have their names revealed, but for continuity it was considered that all should remain unidentified. A record has been kept of the individual names of the respondents and, apart from the road on which they lived their addresses have not been retained. Before beginning the interviews it was explained to each interviewee that the work would form part of a project being undertaken at Manchester Metropolitan University; that the work involved the experiences of the original tenants of the estate and that its goal was to give an insight into their experiences at the time they moved to the estate, particularly in relation to the development of community.

It is partly to challenge official assumptions, but also to redress the balance, that taped interviews were chosen as an element of the research methodology.

Recording and organising data: The process

Although Glaser[64] has contended that the observer should not record or take notes during an interview because "more understanding"[65] can be gained from the additional interviews that could be undertaken in the time it takes to "listen to and transcribe a tape recording", oral historians would challenge this with the claim that even a few examples can provide valuable results. Notes were made before and after the interviews to (a) gather additional information; (b) to provide clarity and identify emerging themes (key issues). Unfortunately, the data was not organised quite as

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[63] Silverman, D. (2000), *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook.*
[64] Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1994) *Grounded Theory Methodology. An Overview*, p. 273.
[65] http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/grounded.html *Grounded theory: a thumbnail sketch.* Downloaded 12/08/2011.

diligently as some recommend but[66] the data collection and analysis process has roughly followed the sequence advised. Work followed the sequence:[67]

Data collection*		
Note taking*		
Coding*		
Memoing*		
	Sorting	
		Writing

* Indicates phases that were overlapping.

Another of the difficulties experienced was in identifying the place of literature in the study and some time was spent in undertaking background reading in order to make sense of the data.[68] However, the fact that the study is based on emergent themes meant that data collection began early in the candidature. As the majority of the literature was historical in nature it was considered that this approach did not constrain other elements of data collection. As Strauss and Corbin maintain:

> Since its introduction 25 years ago, a number of guidelines and procedures have evolved through the research experience of its users; these are designed to enhance the effectiveness of this methodology *in* research. The suggested guidelines and procedures allow much latitude for ingenuity and are an aid to creativity.[69]

Since the research involves dealing with a set of people who would all have their own construction of a set of events it was considered that the methodology should have flexibility: it should allow latitude in its guidelines and procedures to enhance its effectiveness and aid creativity and for these reasons a grounded approach to the

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[66] *Ibid*, pp. 2-8.
[67] *Ibid*, p. 3.
[68] Glaser, B. (1978) *Theoretical sensitivity: advances in the methodology of grounded theory.*
[69] Strauss and Corbin, (1994) *Op Cit*, p. 273.

research was chosen. In this way a picture has emerged, perhaps distorted by time, of the lived experience of a particular group of working class people living on a post-war municipal housing estate.

Methodological approach to the data

In deciding on which methodology should be used for the study two approaches were considered: grounded theory and ethnomethodology. After some deliberation, it was decided that the former method would be adopted. Although there would have been a great deal of value in employing the latter – as is discussed below – the reasons for this decision were based on the fact that the object of the research is not to establish how people make sense of their world but to analyse the issues surrounding historically-based events. In the following paragraphs a brief review of the suitability or otherwise of the two approaches will be undertaken.

Ethnomethodology: its usefulness and limitations for the study

As already indicated, an ethnomethodological approach was originally considered for this work because it may have been useful for the oral history element of the work. It allows the observer to investigate the social world not from a set of preconceived or prior categories – although our world view may still be influenced by our political or other commitments – but from the "*common sense*" construction of reality that we all make in our everyday lives. It allows us to analyse stories and narratives that explain events and to find patterns, ways of doing things, and routines that are common to the group. It is a method of finding out *how* the social world is ordered in and through the processes of interaction, and *not by merely accepting the fact that it is ordered*. Ethnomethodolgy "*is not interested in the truth of members' claims* but in how they arrive at those claims."[70] Unlike other methodologies, it "implies no commitments of any kind as to the merits or otherwise of members' world views, attitudes, assumptions, and so on."[71]

The limitation of using this approach for the study is that, of necessity, there are commitments – a set of preconceived ideas, if you will – which are the result of the

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[70] Harper, R., Randall, D., and Rouncefield, M. (2000) *Organisational Change in Retail Finance: An Ethnographic Perspective*.
[71] *Ibid*.

candidate having been brought up on the estate in question, and of having lived there for four decades. Indeed, while undertaking the taped interviews the candidate was to assume the role of participant observer by spending significant periods of time on the estate in order to gather evidence. The bias in this case is that the study has been undertaken from a working-class, '*municipal housing estate*' perspective. This is neither a good nor a bad thing: it is different because:

> ... the main source of knowledge about the impacts of council housing ... is the considerable body of research from universities, institutes and, in some cases settlements or trusts.[72]

This body of work then removes the "uncrossable barrier between the observer and the observed"[73] and provides something closer to the lived experience of the residents of a municipal housing estate.

Grounded theory: its usefulness and limitations for the study

As has already been described, a grounded methodology was utilised to critically evaluate the available information. One of the reasons for this was because a central hypothesis could not be formulated. Just like the term community itself, the situation seems to have been one that was fluid: themes and questions have emerged from the collection of the data that were not evident when the work began. Refinements and additions to the general assumptions have also become apparent as new light has been shed on certain aspects of the debate. Grounded theory is defined as:

> … one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge.[74]

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[72] Ravetz (2001) *Op Cit*, p. 152.
[73] *Ibid.*
[74] Strauss and Corbin (1990) *Op Cit*, p. 23.

Grounded methodology then allows a greater flexibility for analysing the data. There are no hierarchies as regards the information that is gathered and this appeared to fit the nature of the information: data collection has the same status as, say, the taped interviews. The conclusions come from the evidence as it emerges, rather than beginning with a hypothesis and then attempting to find evidence to support it.

It is a relatively new methodology and, as such, it does not quite have the inflexibility of other methods of analysis and this allows the researcher to make sense of what they are examining or observing as the key issues emerge. The limitation of this approach may be that one should be responsive to the data, which can be difficult for an individual not familiar with this approach. Whilst every effort has been made not to be too rigid in the analysis of the information, it is accepted that this has been more difficult than was first envisaged. However, it was considered the most appropriate method for the study and has provided some interesting results.

CHAPTER 3

AN EVALUATION OF THE LITERATURE – THE ROAD TO NOWHERE?

> You do not manage to create a neighbourhood by having people living next door to one another, regardless of class or education. Architects and town planners should not set themselves up as social engineers. There will be many features of English society 100 years from now which are radically different from anything we now expect. But the society will decide for itself how it will develop; architects should follow trends not try to create them.[75]

> To build a town is nothing less than to build a community.[76]

Arguments over whether or not community can be created through the built environment have been in existence for centuries and have continued to this day almost unabated. But what is community? Can it be defined to such an extent that it can be artificially created? Any discussion of the meaning of *community* must begin with a recognition of the complexity of the notion itself. As Gallie notes it is, "an essentially contested concept".[77] It is not only a complex abstraction – one which stands for many things – but is also often used with interchangeable meanings.[78] It has become a "bewitching, tantalising word"[79] that has developed into the source of much "mental anguish"[80] for social investigators and commentators. In many respects the problem lies with the interchangeable nature of the concept, and is particularly pertinent where the notion has come to represent utopia, or sense of place. A raft of social reformers and urban planners, particularly in the 20th century, have struggled to give physical expression to the term through the vehicle of housing without really considering what the term 'community' represents to them. Without defining what they mean by the term, planners and politicians at all levels have been bewitched by the thought of creating the ideal society. It is beguiling to think that it is possible for

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[75] Leach, E. *Communities*, New Society*,* 15 May 1969.
[76] Purdom, C. B., (1949) *Op Cit*, p.380.
[77] Quoted in Gilroy, D. P. (1997). Significant redefinitions: A meta-analysis of aspects of recent developments in initial teacher education in England and Wales. Educational Philosophy and Theory. Vol. 29, nr. 2. Gallie, W. B. (1956), 'Essentially contested concepts'. Proceedings of the Aristolelian Society. Vol. 61. pp. 167-98.
[78] Minar and Greer (1969), *The Concept of Community. Readings with Interpretations*, p. xi.
[79] Kynaston, David (2007). *Austerity Britain,* p. 53.
[80] *Ibid.*

planners to create a society in which there is no loneliness, no alienation, no crime, no cruelty to children, and no dissent. But it is not the meaning of the term 'community' as such that we are seeking to define; it is the search for an ideal community and its links with a particular example of municipal housing that are the basis of the conundrum that we seek to characterise.

Society and the quest for social order

Much of the British obsession with ideas of creating the ideal society, or utopia, began with Sir Thomas More's revival of the subject.[81] Before this there had been no utopian writing in Europe for "a thousand years, perhaps longer".[82] His contribution to the debate on creating the ideal society through the built environment can be found in his Hagnopolis, which he described as a place where there were "54 city states joined together through a representative council"[83] with the "cities being divided into four equal zones".[84] In this, perhaps, we can recognise similarities in Howard's garden city, or Clarence Perry's neighbourhood unit. Both advocated dividing the city into equal zones and both promoted the idea of self-governance. However, their ideas did not rely on just the built environment for creating a more cohesive society, that was only ever a part of their contentions, and it is impossible to conclude that writers such as these ever meant that the answer would be so simple.

However, there was a process by which it became possible for urban planners to regard themselves as social engineers after 1945,[85] but the path to what we now regard as urban planning has been neither straightforward nor easy. To begin with the Victorians did not regard the town or city as a "physical or social entity" before 1830[86] therefore coherent planning for an area was an impossibility. In addition, Victorian attitudes to State intervention meant that town planning in its modern sense was not deemed a necessity. As Tarn maintains, historically the British had shown less enthusiasm for planned development than had other nations and, as a result

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[81] More, Sir Thomas and Turner, P. (2003) *Utopia.*
[82] Davis, J. C. (1983 Paperback edition). *Utopia & the Ideal Society. A Study of English Utopian Writing 1516-1700.* p. 42.
[83] *Ibid,* p. 50.
[84] *Ibid,* pp. 52-53.
[85] Burnett, J. (1978) *A Social History of Housing 1815-1970*, p. 279.
[86] Tarn, J. N. Housing reform and the emergence of town planning in Britain before 1914, p. 71, in Sutcliffe, A. (ed.) (1980) *The Rise of Modern Urban Planning 1800-1914.*

town planning was always weak.[87] However, rapid industrialisation presented the Victorians with a new problem: the stark contrast between the affluent suburbs and the disordered growth of housing and industry which typified industrial areas of the town. The incredibly high demand for housing meant that developments in the first half of the 19[th] century, when control was insubstantial, were typified by unfettered growth and low building standards. However, needs change over time and by the mid-1800s legislation to control the unregulated growth of towns and cities began to appear as improvement of housing for the working classes[88] increasingly became the concern of government. The ideas of social reformers, philanthropists and social thinkers such as Ruskin together with the "new socialist view of architecture" advocated by Morris and Webb all had their place in changing hearts and minds.[89]

Social commentators such as Charles Booth also played their part in initiating this change by highlighting the correlation between deprivation and crime. Undertaken in the 1880s his social survey of the people of London mapped levels of wealth and poverty on a street by street basis, where the red areas contained the well-to-do and the black areas those of the lowest class which consisted of "… some occasional labourers, street sellers, loafers, criminals and semi-criminals."[90] In the same decade Andrew Mearns had produced *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* which warned the reader that "... in the very centre of our great cities ... is a vast mass of moral corruption"[91] and that the "terrible flood of sin and misery"[92] could lead to insurrection. Other social reformers such as Maud Pember Reeves[93] and Clementina Black added their voice to those who championed for change: they were not just documenting facts but were urging reform, or at least trying to make a reformer's point concerning "the extent of hidden poverty in the midst of plenty ..."[94] to shake the Victorian upper- and middle-classes out of their complacency and for them to accept moral responsibility for the plight of the working-classes. But unresolved tensions within

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[87] *Ibid*, p. 77.
[88] Gauldie, Enid (1974) *Cruel Habitations. A History of Working-Class Housing 1780-1918*, p. 239.
[89] Tarn, *Op Cit*, p. 87.
[90] Charles Booth Online Archive http://booth.lse.ac.uk/static/a/4.html#colour-key Inquiry into the life and labour of the people in London (1886-1903). Downloaded 29 October 2012.
[91] Mearns, Andrew (1883). *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor,* p. 1. http://www.attackingthedevil.co.uk/related/outcast.php. Downloaded 30 October 2012.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Pember Reeves, Maude (1979), *Round About a Pound a Week*.
[94] Meachim, Standish (1977) *A Life Apart: The English Working Class 1890-1914*, p. 7.

Victorian society between *laissez faire* attitudes and the more liberal outlook of social reformers meant that the matter was never going to be resolved easily. As a consequence, legislation remained weak and, in the main, inconsistent.

However, things began to change, albeit slightly, with the introduction of the 'model-clauses' Acts of the 1840s which provided standard sections for inclusion in local Acts, but operation of them depended on the quality of local government and the "desire of the town to improve itself."[95] There was no compulsion for local authorities to adopt them and the fact that their inclusion may have resulted in additional costs for ratepayers acted as a disincentive to taking action for many local authorities. The slow pace of change continued and legislation remained permissive rather than mandatory. Building regulations had been included in the Towns Improvement Clauses Act of 1847 and the Public Health Act of 1848, but it was not until the Lodging Houses Act, which was passed in 1851, that there was any specific legislation pertaining to housing. As Gauldie maintains, the Act was radical in that the legislation made it possible for the State to assume responsibility for "the housing of the poor"[96] but there was no compulsion for its intentions to be pursued and the legislation had no impact on the problem. Even the Torrens' and Cross'[97] Acts, of 1868 and 1875 respectively, remained permissive in that councils were not compelled to take action. The legislation had formed part of Disraeli's social reform initiative, and even though the Prime Minister had extended the link between reform and sanitary improvement to include housing there was still a resistance to State intervention.[98] It was not until the passing of the 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act[99] that there was any imperative for councils to build houses for the poor to replace those that had been removed from insanitary areas.[100] Even after the Act came into force local authority intervention was limited to re-housing "at least half of

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[95] Tarn, *Op Cit*, p. 83.
[96] Gauldie, *Op Cit.*
[97] Yelling (1986) informs us that the Act "aimed to remove slums and put new working-class dwellings in their place ..." but the programme, although simple, "bristled with difficulties of all sorts. More fundamentally, they reflected problems in aligning the desired reconstruction with prevailing economic and social structures and processes." (p. 9).
[98] Ibid.
[99] Burnett, John (1978). *A Social History of Housing 1815-1970*, pp.180-181.
[100] *Ibid,* p. 180.

those displaced by demolitions"[101] but this statutory responsibility was confined to the capital. In those areas outside London the Royal Commission had assumed that the "speculative builders would provide"[102] and although Part 3 of the Act allowed local authorities to build – without central government subsidy – it was not encouraged.[103]

Under this Act, Birkenhead Corporation were said to have done "excellent work" in the removal of insanitary areas. They began with the first Egerton Street Improvement Scheme, and this was followed by a second scheme in the same area. Eighteen six-room houses (described as cottages in the town's Jubilee Souvenir) were completed by 1901 and they represented the first State owned housing in the Borough.[104] The local authority were to take action in other areas of the town and completed a block of tenement dwellings in 1903 and were to follow this up in 1904 with more accommodation of the same kind after which this type of accommodation became the norm in the town.[105] In total, 150 families from insanitary dwellings were re-housed within a fourteen year period.[106] While this figure may not seem remarkable, it has to be considered within its historical context: these activities were undertaken at the expense of the ratepayers, and the Town Council acknowledged that, given the circumstances, it was impossible to make greater progress. Even the powers given to local authorities under the Housing & Town ... Planning Act of 1909 remained discretionary, and its powers, in the main, limited to regulating "the layout and design of suburban housing ..." and tensions between central and local government were not uncommon in the "comparatively new and unfamiliar" concept of town and country planning.[107]

But there were many factors which contributed to the continued reticence of the State to become involved in the provision of housing. As Helen Mellor argues, changing

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[101] *Ibid,* p. 181.
[102] *Ibid,* p. 182.
[103] *Ibid.* Some local authorities outside the metropolis completed improvement schemes under the 1890 Act including Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield. Liverpool's clearance of insanitary areas appears to be impressive with 5,500 buildings having been demolished but the number of houses replacing these dwellings was much lower. Only 2,322 new homes had been constructed by 1912, resulting in a net loss of 3,178 houses as a result of the local authority action.
[104] Birkenhead Advertiser, *Incorporation of the Borough of Birkenhead,* 19 June 1927.
[105] *Ibid.*
[106] *Ibid.*
[107] Sheail, J. (1985) *Interwar Planning in Britain. The Wider Context.* pp. 331-335.

perceptions of citizenship played an important role in the expansion of provision, although at first the "concept of citizenship and urban renewal were not closely related".[108] As she depicts, although urban renewal was a "time honoured activity in Britain" the approach was not consistent, and it was only when towns and cities were obliged to absorb an ever growing population that efforts were made to halt "the decline of the physical environment".[109]   Continuing poverty and an increasing awareness of the impact of environmental factors in determining quality of life were to change the Victorians' idea of citizenship: it had now to involve people as well as place. As Mellor contends, redefining citizenship became a practical and philosophical activity and over time there was a slow acceptance of public responsibility for housing provision.[110]

Therefore, it can be understood that given the *laissez-faire* attitudes of late Victorian and early Edwardian society there was little to encourage the State to become involved in either the provision of better housing or the alleviation of poverty: philanthropic endeavour was to provide the answer to establishing and maintaining social order. These individual attempts at creating a better society through housing provision provide us with some of the antecedents to municipal housing. Such ventures, from the late Victorian and early Edwardian periods often represented a search for the ideal environment and some provided if not quite a blueprint for municipal housing, at least a guideline, for how things should (or should not) be done. However, providing housing for the working classes was not always an altruistic venture, and the reasons motivating some philanthropists were often associated with the need to maintain the *status quo* and to encourage a more efficient workforce, as is discussed below.

Philanthropy, housing and a more effective workforce

Philanthropic activities were often closely associated with religion or politics although the two strands were not always mutually exclusive but were often intricately

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[108] Meller, H. (1995) *Urban renewal and citizenship: the quality of life in British cities, 1890-1990.* pp. 63-84.
[109] *Ibid.*
[110] Daunton, J. (1984) *Councillors and Tenants.* p. 4.

interwoven. This relationship has been expanded on by Creese[111] who has detailed the amount and impact of the action of religious philanthropists who created settlements such as the Moravian community near Manchester. He notes that "Protestant utopian villages were built in England before the onset of the industrial revolution".[112] In addition, he has traced the endeavours of those industrialists, including Cadbury at Bourneville and Rowntree at New Earswick – both of whom were prominent Quakers – and illustrates how their efforts to provide a better environment were closely linked to a more effective workforce. Closer to the site of this study is the example of the industrialist William Hesketh Lever (later Viscount Leverhulme) who planned the development of a poor tract of land on Wirral for his workers at Lever Brothers.[113] Lever was a Liberal M.P. for Wirral and a member of the Congregationalist Church, whose ideals he applied to his business ethics.[114] Like Howard, Unwin and many others who were to follow, Lever believed that in the process of industrialisation something had been lost. However, this was not a philanthropic endeavour in its truest sense; there was a fair measure of self-interest in it too. As Swenarton maintains the underlying motive was not his religious beliefs but the conviction that by "making a dramatic improvement in the housing conditions of his employees" Lever could make them a "more contented" and "more productive" workforce.[115] The creation of the village of Port Sunlight was the latter's way of redressing the balance by recreating a mythical past where community had existed in "the good old days of hand labour".[116] The result was not perfect in many respects, and life on the estate was strictly controlled, but he had included almost everything that later planners were to consider necessary for encouraging community. In addition, he provided communal dining facilities for the workers in his factory. However, some amenities were missing from the overall design such as the shopping facilities, or a library, but whether this omission had any impact on the development of community is debatable.

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[111] Creese, Walter L. (1992) *The Search for Environment. The Garden City Before and After.* pp. 108-143.
[112] *Ibid,* pp. 6-9.
[113] Hubbard and Shippobottom, *Op Cit*, p. 2.
[114] Creese, *Op Cit*, pp. 108-143.
[115] Swenarton, M. *Homes Fit for Heroes*, p. 6.
[116] Creese, *Op Cit*, pp. 108-143.

These philanthropic endeavours may have created a sense of community in their own sphere and have provided a paradigm for planners of the future but compared to the problems facing British society, they were never going to be enough. As Tarn ascertained, the housing problem of the 19[th] and 20[th] centuries remained essentially the same: it was unbridled capitalism, "the growth of the working-class population in towns", and "the ways in which they were housed"[117] that was at the root of the problem, and anyone who could offer a solution would be offering salvation for the masses. The problems facing the State were colossal: the few endeavours undertaken by philanthropists had been a drop in the ocean compared to it. What was needed was a solution that would satisfy all elements of society. According to Hardy a number of idealists had argued that what was needed were cities that offered "the very antithesis"[118] of the *status quo* and the garden city ideal promoted by Ebenezer Howard seemed to offer just that. As Hardy observes:

> ... the logic was simple enough – to replace bad with good – and there was relatively little disagreement about what was bad .... [W]hat was infinitely more difficult, deceptively so, was to find agreement on what was good.[119]

Furthermore, his garden city was a place where:

> Past and future ... entwined in what emerged as a panacea closely matched to the particularities of an English cultural tradition ....[120]

This was a scheme which eschewed a political dogma and contained a mixture of elements that was to appeal to a broad spectrum of interests.[121] Furthermore, the "doctrines of the garden city movement" appealed to the State because they implied that by improving housing and the physical environment it was possible to make the people content with the status quo.[122]

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[117] Tarn, John N., (1971) *Working Class Housing in 19[th] Century Britain*, p. 1.
[118] Hardy, Dennis, (2000) *Utopian England. Community Experiments 1900-1945*, p. 60.
[119] *Ibid.*
[120] *Ibid.*
[121] *Ibid,* p. 61.
[122] Swenarton, *Op Cit*, p. 7.

Howard was not to get "the balance right first time"[123] but achieved his aim through a process of trial and error so that eventually he was able to produce his one book *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* published in 1898 and reprinted in 1902 with the new title *Garden Cities of Tomorrow.* Sir Ebenezer Howard's influence on "British and, indirectly, on European and American urban planners"[124] was profound but, as Osborn has contended, was indirect. It was, however, the catalyst for changing the ways in which town planning was envisioned.[125] Unfortunately, the indirect nature of its influence may, in many respects, have been its undoing and Howard's ideas have been misused and abused by many who contended that they were creating an environment that was designed on 'garden city' principles. Purdom has maintained that the term 'garden city' became bastardised and was used as an advertising mechanism by anyone who wanted to convince a buyer of the quality of their development, and:

> ... in the process of popularisation the term [has come] to be very loosely used .... The speculative builder, for example, has seized upon it eagerly [to exploit] the commercial value of an attractive name.[126]

It was not only the name 'garden city' that lost some of its meaning, the word 'community' has suffered the same fate. As the two became interlinked it was possible for planners wishing to convince people of the value of moving significant distances from their families, places of work and so forth, to use this as a metaphor to denote good practice in building and planning. They have then taken it for granted that by building municipal housing estates on what they consider to be 'garden city' principles they have thereby created 'community'.

Utopia, town planning and community

Hall has contended that the production of Howard's book was the moment when Utopia, town planning and community first crystallised.[127] Howard believed that city

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[123] *Ibid.*
[124] Heathorn, Stephen (2000). *An English Paradise to Regain? Ebenezer Howard, the Town and Country Planning Association and English Ruralism.* Rural History, 11, pp. 113-128.
[125] Osborn, F. J. (1946) Preface in Howard, E. (1902) *Garden Cities of Tomorrow,* p. 11.
[126] Purdom, C. B. (1921) An Introductory Chapter, in Lethaby, W. R., Pepler, G. L., Chambers, T. G. Unwin, Sir R, Reiss, R. L., (1921) *Town Theory and Practice*, pp. 14-15.
[127] Hall, *Op Cit*, p. 88.

planning could aid the creation of a totally new society: one in which there would be no social divisions. It would be a place where the living standards of all citizens would be improved through a process of participatory social democracy.[128] His garden city ideals were to represent a holistic ideology that would act as a vehicle "for the progressive reconstruction of … society …."[129] He was to promote them by arguing that his new socio-economic system represented an alternative to both Victorian capitalism and to "bureaucratic centralized socialism."[130] The physical embodiment of Howard's ideas was encapsulated in the creation of Britain's first Garden City, Letchworth. Its historical importance in urban planning terms is illustrated by Richard Morrison who maintains that it has been "the place that defined how most British people would aspire to live in the 20th century."[131] The innovations of the town – cottage-style houses, architecturally varied housing styles; tree-lined avenues with wide grass verges; large gardens; leisure facilities; and civic buildings – were to shape ideas of suburban and municipal planning for much of the 20th century. It was the building of a community, not in the physical sense but in terms of participation. It was to be somewhere that would "refine the lives, ennoble the characters and exalt the minds of all who reside on the estate."[132] Virtually all its residents found their employment locally, it maintained a spirited community life through the involvement of the population, and its health record was better than any other industrial town except for Welwyn.[133]

Although Howard was not a planner,[134] his ideas were to shape the whole area of municipal planning particularly after the perceived fragmentation of society in the aftermath of both World Wars. Lewis Mumford, in a specially written article for the 1945 edition to Howard's book, observed how the former's publication had "done more than any other single book to guide the modern town planning movement and alter its objectives".[135] However, we should not assume that attempts to recreate Howard's garden city have resulted in the spawning of mirror images of Letchworth or

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[128] Ibid.
[129] Hall, *Op Cit*, p. 88.
[130] *Ibid,* p. 95.
[131] Morrison, Richard (2003) In Their Heart of Herts. *The Times,* 17 November.
[132] Ibid.
[133] At Welwyn approximately 85% of the working population found employment in the town.
[134] Hall, *Ibid*, pp. 87-90.
[135] Mumford, L., (1946) <u>The Garden City Idea and Modern Planning</u> in Howard, *Op Cit*, p. 29.

Welwyn: many have highlighted the fact that his ideas have been misunderstood and misinterpreted.[136] As Purdom notes it was not surprising that the popularisation of the term resulted in its being very loosely used – the propaganda and promotion that had surrounded the publication of Howard's book had the consequence that its true meaning was lost, changed or somehow corrupted. He further observed that the term *garden city* was an expression that was lavishly used, but generally misapplied.[137] Mumford was to argue that, as with all classics, it had suffered the misfortune of being denounced by those who had clearly never read it, and been misinterpreted, or not fully understood, by those who had.[138] The latter argued that Howard's prime contribution to urban planning had been to provide an outline of what makes a balanced community and what steps planners needed to take to achieve it.

Hall contends that much of the confusion over Howard's principles can be laid at the door of one of his principal lieutenants, Raymond Unwin [139] who along with his business partner, Barry Parker, was chosen to prepare the plan for Letchworth.[140] Unwin, like Howard, was aware of the social forces and popular aspirations that were "to transform housing and factory design in the next generation".[141] His primary contribution to town planning, particularly where municipal housing is concerned, was his role as the principal originator of the Tudor-Walters Report, and subsequent 1919 Housing Manual, which established the 'house and garden' standard that was to become the pattern that characterised British building endeavours in the inter-war years.[142] Letchworth was to become the standard for housing reformers worldwide but emphasis came to be placed more on the housing standard and the minutiae of layout than the larger idea it was built to illustrate.[143] This then became the answer to how they could manage the growth of urban areas whilst providing working-class people with housing that had been built in a way that was mindful of its having "certain standards of construction, space, hygiene and comfort".[144] There was to be

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[136] Hall, *Op Cit*, p. 88.
[137] Purdom, (1921) *Op Cit*, p. 15.
[138] Mumford, *Op Cit*, p. 29.
[139] Hall, *Op Cit,* p. 88.
[140] *Ibid.*
[141] *Ibid.*
[142] *Ibid,* p. 13
[143] *Ibid.*
[144] Burnett, *Op Cit,* p. 3

no participatory democracy for the residents, no opportunity to create a sense of belonging through self-governance. Bureaucratic processes became more important than the fine detail. However, for those charged with initiating this standard of housing, with its inherent allusion to building homes,[145] Howard's ideas, through the filter of Unwin, were to create something that was to provide everything the planners could wish for and State subsidy for housing provided the catalyst for some local authorities to undertake large-scale housing projects.

Changes in State intervention and the advent of municipal housing

As has already been described, State intervention in the provision of housing in the late 19th century, and beginning of the 20th century, was slow and its impact inconsistent. The State accepted new responsibilities in 1919, before which almost all new housing in Britain had been supplied by the private sector. However, the First World War provided the impetus for change. Building activity had practically ceased during hostilities and the country was confronted with an acute shortage of housing. Faced with inflated building costs, a scarcity of labour and an acute shortage of materials private developers were deemed unable to provide housing in the quantity that was required. The Liberal government were forced to take action. As Titmuss argued,

> ... as the scale and intensity of the conflict grew to involve the whole population
> and as the resources necessary to wage total war demanded ever greater
> sacrifices from the people ...."[146]

The government's commitment to major social reforms came to constitute the other side of an unwritten social contract. Lloyd George's party had laid down the principle that total war was only acceptable if it held out the prospect of a better life for survivors.[147] As Burnett has written, the "idea that central government finance should

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[145] *Ibid.* He argues that any discussion on housing has quantitative and qualitative aspects to it: the physical structure which provides certain standards of construction, which fulfils the dual purpose of providing a place where 'the business of home-making can go forward effectively'.
[146] Titmuss, R. M. (1958) *Essays on the Welfare State.* Quoted in Burnett, John (1978) *A Social History of Housing 1815-1970,* p. 217.
[147] Burnett, *Op Cit.*

be used to subsidize local-authority building gradually became acceptable to the wartime planners of reconstruction."[148]

The Tudor Walters Committee was set up and their report was to suggest something that was qualitatively different to anything that had gone before. The 1919 Act introduced an open-ended subsidy which promised that "any loss in excess of the 1d. rate would be borne by the Treasury": emphasis for funding housing provision shifted from local (through the rate payers) to central responsibility.[149] It was a major innovation in social policy and one that was to change the character of working class life in the future. The introduction of the Act also meant that for the first time, minimum standards of building were enshrined in law as the 1919 Housing Manual on the Preparation of State-Aided Housing was introduced. Although the legislation was meant to increase local authority involvement in the provision of housing, private developers also qualified for the subsidy as long as their schemes complied with the strictures of the Housing Manual.

The whole idea of creating housing owned and managed by the State represented an far-reaching shift in attitudes and, Turkington has argued that with the passing of the 1919 Act and subsequent legislation the opportunity for housing provision to become a political and social experiment was not lost.[150] Not only were local authorities being asked to construct houses, they were also expected to provide other amenities and attend to the development of a "sense of community on their new estates."[151] Liverpool was one of those local authorities who were to utilise the Act, as McKenna notes,[152] and they were to build 5,808 dwellings – more than "any other municipality"[153] – under the legislation, but, as with elsewhere, the city's developments concentrated on the construction of dwellings and not the creation of community. As Turkington explains: "[W]hilst 'Community Centres were identified as the key to developing 'social life' the initiative remained largely with local people ...".

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[148] *Burnett*, p. 216.
[149] Daunton, *Op Cit*, p. 21.
[150] Turkington, Richard (1999) 'Corporation Suburbia': The Changing Fortunes of Norris Green, Liverpool, in *Changing Suburbs: Foundation, Form and Function*, Harris. R. and Larkham P. J. (eds.), p. 59.
[151] *Ibid.*
[152] McKenna, The suburbanization of the working-class population of Liverpool between the wars, *Social History*, Vol.16 : No. 2. May 1991.
[153] Turkington, Richard. *Op Cit,* p. 60.

At Norris Green, as in other developments throughout the country,[154] residents developed a social life through the "formation of 'tenants' associations'".[155] Understandably perhaps, given the severity of the housing problem, creating community was not a priority for those charged with the responsibility for providing accommodation for a large proportion of the population.

Despite the fact that successive governments were to continue with their commitment to the provision of municipal housing and a number of Acts were passed in the period 1923-1938, there remained a tension in Edwardian society when it came to increased State intervention. There were those who continued to argue that "the war had permanently changed the relations between social classes" but there were those traditionalists who opposed the whole idea of State involvement. The latter contended that "after the war, things would go back"[156] to the pre-war situation and that the provisions of the Addison Act were a temporary measure to an immediate crisis. However, the reach of the State continued to expand in this particular area of social policy during the inter-war period, although the financial contribution from central government was gradually reduced, as were the standards set by the Housing Manual. That notwithstanding, as Burnett illustrates,[157] the standards of the 1923 Chamberlain Act did not constitute a major departure from the Tudor Walters layout and plans, although houses were generally smaller and cheaper.[158]

When the Labour Party came into office the Chamberlain Act was replaced by new housing legislation. The Wheatley Act (1924) was to secure a continuous building programme for 15 years and to provide houses that, while still complying with standards similar to those set out in the 1923 Act, could be let at lower rents than housing constructed under the Addison Act. Need for working-class housing in 1924 was greater than it had been in 1919 and it was expected that the Act would raise output from "60,000 houses a year to between 150,000 and 225,000."[159] The clauses of the Act illustrate the way in which responsibility was slowly shifting from the private

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[154] *Ibid*,
[155] Thompson, F. and Thompson, G., (1942) *Community Centres: a Survey for the Community Centres Joint Research Committee*.
[156] *Ibid.*
[157] Burnett, *Op Cit*, p. 228.
[158] *Ibid.*
[159] Burnett, p. 228.

sector to the State. However, rental housing could still be built by private developers and qualify for subsidy, but only if they complied with the Housing Manual and were let at an approved rent.[160]

Despite further reductions in subsidy and building standards, the Act is "generally regarded as the most successful of the inter-war housing measures."[161] A total of 508,000 houses were constructed under the provisions of the legislation, all but 15,000 of which were provided by local authorities, whose involvement in the provision of housing constituted a "minor revolution in the standards of working-class housing and living." People were taken *en masse* from urban centres and re-housed in new garden suburbs on peripheral sites, often miles from their former homes. The involvement of local authorities in the provision of working-class housing in effect "institutionalized ... the process of suburbanization which the middle classes had followed since at least the middle of the nineteenth century" and, as a result, a new pattern of life emerged.[162]

Although the total number of houses constructed under the provisions of the Wheatley legislation had increased, the housing shortage remained and the reasons for this were complex. The introduction of the housing subsidy had not had the expected impact in terms of the number of completions. In addition, it was realised that there had been very little progress in eliminating the slums. One of the problems was that the housing constructed under the provisions of the 1919 Act had proved too expensive for a large proportion of the working-classes; another was that local authorities had continued to allocate housing based on the ability to pay the residual rent not covered by the subsidy rather than housing need. Consequently, those in greatest need had the least likelihood of obtaining subsidised accommodation.[163] Another of the problems lay in the fact that, as Alison Ravetz maintains, not only was it the case that the "energy with which national policies were applied in any locality depended on local politics and conditions",[164] it was also that none of the acts had

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[160] Daunton, *Op Cit.*
[161] Burnett, *Op Cit*, p. 229.
[162] *Ibid*, pp. 230-231 and McKenna, *Op Cit.*
[163] *Ibid.*
[164] Ravetz, Alison (1974) *Model Estate. Planned Housing at Quarry Hill Leeds,* p. 6.

served the needs of the "poor slum dwellers."[165] In order to rectify the matter the Greenwood Act was introduced in 1930, under whose provisions local authorities were granted the power to acquire clearance and improvement areas but before clearance could begin they had to re-house those displaced.[166] The subsidy introduced was very different to what had gone before, in that the £2.5s (£2.25) per annum for 40 years was for each person re-housed and not a subsidy per household. In addition, extra allowances were available where the site was expensive or where re-housing involved the erection of flats.

By 1933 it was a requirement that all local authorities should concentrate their efforts on slum clearance. A number were to take advantage of the Act including that of Liverpool, where Sir Lancelot Keay introduced an ambitious agenda for ridding the city of the slums. Under the programme blocks of flats, five stories high, were built in nine districts including Toxteth, Edge Hill, Wavertree, Scotland Road, Tuebrook, Old Swan, Dingle, Speke and Garston and, like the Quarry Hill flats in Leeds, were inspired by the Karl-Marx-Hof blocks of Vienna.[167] But unlike Leeds the local authority decided not to adopt the Mopin system[168] although Keay was "tempted to use reinforced concrete and other modern methods but conceded with regret that discretion was the best policy for public servants."[169] At the same time Keay was to maintain his impressive garden suburb inspired housing schemes in other parts of the city, including the suburban developments of Norris Green, Muirhead Avenue and Queens Drive.[170] In the inter-war period, Birkenhead was also to complete a number of new housing schemes including those on the Tranmere Hall Estate where 400 dwellings were constructed by a private developer. They were to be sold, with many of the purchasers obtaining their homes under the provisions of the Small Dwellings Act which allowed the occupiers to become owners of them through the payment of a small deposit and the balance paid in the form of a weekly rent. In order to obtain the

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[165] *Ibid.*

[166] *Ibid.* Local authorities were given the power to acquire slums that required total demolition.

[167] Ravetz, *Ibid*, pp. 46-69.

[168] Mark Swenarton maintains that the gravity of the housing situation after the First World War meant that the Government had to consider new methods of construction for them to complete their ambitious house building programme.

[169] *Ibid,* p. 55.

[170] L06 Liverpool Conservation Areas, Liverpool Heritage Bureau. http://www.walkingbook.co.uk/liverpool/

government subsidy even these private houses had to conform to the same standards as local authority housing.[171]

Unfortunately, rents for local authority accommodation remained high, even in the newly constructed flats: they were more expensive to build and consequently their rents were higher unless subsidised by the rates as at Liverpool.[172] But whether the accommodation was a flat or the more traditional house, the impact remained the same. Rebuilding in inner urban areas could only ever be a small and piecemeal solution because the price of land remained high and its ownership complicated. Increasingly, new estates were built on the periphery of towns and cities and more concern was being expressed about the tenants' sense of isolation caused by the disruption of moving away from family and friends. Wherever possible, local authorities attempted to relocate those displaced in the same 'community' they had been forced to vacate. In addition, although there had been serious attempts at reducing the rent of local authority accommodation, comparatively speaking rents remained high, and the ability to pay was still a fundamental consideration in allocation. As McKenna describes, Liverpool's new housing estates did not address the problem of re-housing those most in need but instead allocated it to those with the ability to pay the rent.[173]

Along with the high rents, residents of the new estates faced a totally new problem: housing 'managers' and the strict conditions of tenancy. In some towns and cities, including Liverpool, female housing managers were employed to enforce the high standards expected by the local authority. Their primary role was to inspect properties and instruct tenants on good housekeeping practices. This was to be the paradigm for local authority housing for the years up to the outbreak of the Second World War when house building was halted once again. This time though, the country did not wait until the cessation of hostilities to begin 'planning the peace'. As is described elsewhere in this study, Birkenhead initiated plans for the development of

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[171] *Birkenhead Advertiser,* Jubilee Souvenir, *Op Cit.* The houses had to conform to standards set out by the 1919 Housing Manual.
[172] Ravetz, *Op Cit,* pp. 78-79.
[173] McKenna, *Op Cit* and Turkington, *Op Cit.*

Woodchurch as early as 1942, and Chapter 4 discusses the circumstances surrounding this event.

Three quarters of a million homes were "destroyed or severely damaged" during the war.[174] This combined with the fact that, despite inter-war efforts to rid the country of the slums, there still remained "many appalling Victorian slums ... and large pockets of overcrowded, inadequate-to-wretched housing almost everywhere."[175] Once again, the sacrifices made by the population during the war had to be repaid and Lloyd George's "unwritten social contract"[176] was resurrected. Following the election of the Labour Party – for whom housing policy was a central tenet of their welfare reforms – in 1945 the Minister for Heath, Aneurin Bevan, was to announce a programme that was to severely restrict "private house-building and instead to pour as many resources as he could muster into new local-authority housing."[177] As Kynaston contends, there had been a "significant growth of such housing" since the end of World War One, but this policy was to represent the beginning of an essential "and long-term step-change" in the provision of local authority housing.[178] Bevan wanted quality as well as quantity believing that his party would be judged not just on the number that would be built, but also by the type of houses that were constructed. Although his plans had a somewhat shaky start, caused by a variety of factors including severe economic constraints, the shortage of building materials and "the immediate need for at least a million homes" he was able to recover to the extent that in the autumn of 1946 he could to announce that 750,000 new homes had been provided since the end of the war.[179] However, concealed in that figure is the fact that over half that number consisted of temporary housing (including the much derided prefabs), repaired housing and house conversions. Pressure on the government to provide new homes continued and it was estimated that the country would require "several million" houses by the mid-1950s even before slum clearance was considered.[180] The Government was in a paradoxical situation: on the one hand the

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[174] Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, *1949-1953*, p. 20.
[175] *Ibid.*
[176] Titmuss, *Op Cit.*
[177] Kynaston, *Op Cit*, p. 154.
[178] *Ibid*, pp. 154-155.
[179] *Ibid,* p. 156.
[180] *Ibid.*

ruling Labour Party had a resistance to the idea of constructing flats, while on the other, they had to contend with a huge unmet demand for accommodation. The consequence was that although their contribution to housing provision in the five year period since the war was immense, it was still not enough to guarantee them electoral victory in the General Election of 1951. The Conservatives were elected in October of that year and although they initially "increased the emphasis on new construction,"[181] promising a target of "300,000 houses per year",[182] they "never fully accepted the Keynesian welfare state" and "remained committed to private property, low taxes, and a more limited economic role for the government."[183]

According to Kynaston "two key documents were producing during the second half of the war" which, in the 1950s, was to tip the balance towards flats; one was Patrick Abercrombie and J. H. Forshaw's *County of London Plan*, produced in 1943; the other the Dudley Committee's report *Design of Dwellings.* The originators of the London County Council plan had concluded that if the local authority wished to relocate people in "their own familiar districts" a density of 136 people per net residential area would be required and flats of eight to ten storeys would be required to achieve this. Similarly, the Dudley Report had suggested that "large concentrated urban areas" would require housing at a density of 120 people per acre and, again, the implication was clear: high rise was the only solution. Added to this there were a number of modernist architects eager to become involved in the post-war reconstruction. They argued that the country needed to use more non-traditional building materials and greater utilisation of Courbusier's ideas to solve the housing problem. By the 1960s "streets in the sky"[184] had been adopted as part of the new planning vision that was to house the masses and rid the country of the slums. As Bullock contends, "amongst the new *avant* garde" there was a feeling of exasperation at the missed opportunities for adopting new building methods and new design concepts, combined with a sense of dissatisfaction with the ideas of the Garden City

[181] Yelling, Jim (1995). Public policy, urban renewal and property ownership, 1945-55. Urban History, 22, pp. 48-62 DOI: 10.1017/S0963926800011378.
[182] Weiler, Peter (2000) The rise and fall of the conservatives' 'grand design for housing' 1951-64, Contemporary British History, 14:1, 122-150, DOI: 10.1080/13619460008581575.
[183] *Ibid.*
[184] Shapely, P. (2002) The Press and the System Built Developments of Inner-City Manchester, 1960s-1980s. *Manchester Region History Review*, 16, pp. 30-39.

Movement.[185] However, the Dudley Report still recommended conventional housing for the majority of development, although the approved style changed from the 'garden suburbs' of the inter-war period to that of the 'neighbourhood unit' which provided specific guidelines for the spatial distribution of residences, community services, streets and businesses.

As regards the location and layout of local authority housing, Burnett maintains that "opinion ran strongly against the further development of amorphous suburban council estates"[186] Additionally, its location was planned to a much greater extent than in the past: the State was no longer averse to becoming completely involved in housing policy. In 1948 a Committee on the Appearance of Housing Estates[187] had highlighted the fact that although some housing estates were laid out in a fashion that was neighbourly and pleasant, many more were typified by unattractive and endless rows of identical semi-detached housing where all individuality had been lost. It was here that attitudes reflecting "the concern for environment and community" combined with the desire to encourage variety, preserve harmony and "prevent the spread of further suburban dormitories which had neither the advantages of town or country" came to dominate local authority housing policy for the future[188] and in 1946 the New Towns Act was passed. At its second reading the Minister of Town and Country Planning, Mr. (later Lord) Lewis Silkin, had referred directly to Sir Thomas More's Utopia as the inspiration for the spatial planning of the new towns. He advised the House:

> If the towns to be built under this Bill are new, neither the need for them, nor the idea, is in any sense new. My researches on new towns go back to the time of Sir Thomas More. He was the first person I have discovered to deplore the "suburban sprawl," and in his "Utopia" there are 54 new towns, each 23 miles apart. Each town is divided into four neighbourhoods, each neighbourhood being laid out with its local centre and community feed centre.[189]

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[185] Bullock, N. (2002) *Building the Post-War World. Modern architecture and reconstruction in Britain*, pp. 136-137.
[186] Burnett, *Op Cit*, 279.
[187] Central Housing Advisory Committee, (1948) The Appearance of Housing Estates, pp.1-27.
[188] Burnett, *Op Cit*.
[189] *HC Deb 08 May 1946 vol 422 cc1072-184*

Although the impact of the New Towns was not large in terms of the percentage of population housed there, its "importance in the development of British society"[190] was significant. Their aim was not just to reinvigorate town planning by restricting the growth of existing towns and cities by dispersal. It was also to create new communities "which would enjoy the benefits of planning ... social admixture and a range of industries providing employment for a substantial proportion of the inhabitants." As John Burnett contends, in many respects it was nothing more than a return to Howard's garden city ideas (or perhaps a return to Sir Thomas More's) "which had subsequently been misapplied in the creation of suburban housing estates".[191]

By 1950 fourteen new towns had been designated after the passing of this Act. Eight were established in the south-east, one in Northamptonshire, two in the north-east, two in Scotland and one in Wales.[192] After a lapse of eleven years, eight more were designated between 1961 and 1967: this time, mainly in the north of England. A total of twenty-two new towns were created in England and Wales during the period 1946 and 1972, and their total population was 611,000 or 1.2 per cent of the population. Layout of eleven of the new towns created in that first period was based on the 'neighbourhood unit' principle, but by 1955 the influence of the design principle had waned and was abandoned "by the new town planners."[193] Although it had not been anticipated that application of the principle would ensure the creation of cohesive communities, it was anticipated that the opportunities it provided for greater "association amongst the residents" would stimulate community growth.[194] But as far as the success of the neighbourhood unit principle as a social experiment is concerned, its impact has been inconsistent. Burnett notes that if user satisfaction is used as the measure for assessing this, then many have been successful. However, some seem to have suffered the same fate as many local authority housing estates, in that there was "an inadequate phasing of house-building with the provision of

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[190] Simmonds, Alan G. W. (2001). Conservative governments and the new town question in the 1950s. Urban History, 28. pp. 65-83 DOI:10.1017/S0963926801000141.
[191] Burnett, *Op Cit,* p. 280.
[192] *Ibid* and Kynaston, *Op Cit*, p. 159.
[193] Homer, Andrew (2000) Creating new communities: The role of the Neighbourhood Unit in post-war British planning, Contemporary British History, 14:1, 63-80, DO1: 10.1080/13619460008581572.
[194] *Ibid.*

shops, schools and other amenities" often neglected. They were not to be the answer to the country's housing problems as many had believed when the notion was first heralded, and did not represent "a radical shift in the established pattern of cities and suburbs."[195]

The State's contribution to the total housing programme continued to grow although it was subject to peaks and troughs and periods of deceleration mainly brought about by economic circumstances. It was still assumed that the most common housing type would be the brick-built semi-detached, even though there was some experimentation with non-traditional materials. There was also some thought given to greater provision of flats, which were not universally popular, for areas where high density was unavoidable. In addition, there was a strong preference for 'mixed development' schemes, that is, they contained a variety of building types such as different size housing, flats and maisonettes which were meant to accommodate a blend of social classes. The idea was derived from the views of some sociologists who argued that the single-class housing estate was responsible for neurosis and the segregation of classes. As has been described, housing standards had improved considerably compared to those of the immediate post-war period but, inevitably almost, it did not take long before the patterns of the past began to repeat themselves. By the end of the half-decade following the war, there was a reduction in standards, particularly in the minimum space standard of 900 sq. ft., an increase in zoning densities and community facilities were not produced. As Burnett contends the advances in housing standards were "beginning to turn into an ordered retreat in the face of growing economic pressure."[196]

The beginning of the next decade was to witness two developments which were to have a profound impact on the physical appearance of local authority housing estates and on the lives of the people who were to live there. The first was the adoption of the 'Radburn' layout for local authority housing. The idea had been developed by Henry Wright and Clarence Stein in the USA, and one of its most notable features was the separation of pedestrians from motor vehicles. It also included other design innovations such as the underpass and overpass whose purpose was to ensure that

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[195] Burnett, *Op Cit*, p. 281.
[196] *Ibid,* p. 285.

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the motor vehicle would remain the servant of the people. The idea was that a pedestrian could start at any given point and proceed on foot to school, shops or church without crossing any roads used by motor vehicles. Unfortunately, despite the good intentions of those responsible for introducing this planning principle, its introduction did not have the desired outcome. During the same period there was a significant shift in the type of housing considered suitable for municipal housing. Local authorities reduced the number of traditional houses they were building and began to construct more flats. By 1964 maisonettes and flats of all storeys accounted for 55 per cent of all tenders, although the growth of high-rise was slower and accounted for only 9 per cent of total local authority building in the period 1953-1959.[197] The latter housing form was not universally popular, even with their most ardent proponents, and was unloved by their users. After the optimism of the immediate post-war period, this was probably the lowest point in the history of local authority housing.[198]

Birkenhead had introduced some high-rise blocks to the town in 1958 with the construction of Oak and Eldon Gardens in a working class area near the town centre which had been destroyed during the war. Locally notorious, the flats were beset by problems which were to increase over the years until the local authority had no alternative but to have them demolished. These two high-rise blocks were finally blown up in 1979,[199] despite the fact that they were just over twenty years old. High-density living was also introduced at Woodchurch, where two tower blocks of fourteen storeys were erected in 1960[200] accompanied by the development of maisonettes which occupied the majority of the central area of the estate. These were followed by a further three blocks at the Upton end of the estate later in the decade. The history of the local authority's attempts to introduce Modernist planning principles is not a happy one. As with other areas of Britain they had used them to house families with young children, although this was never their original intention. Tenants of the high-rise flats were faced with appalling problems including vandalism and lifts being used as toilets. There was no security and burglary was a common problem of the design. By

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[197] Burnett, *Op Cit*, p. 286.
[198] The government had increased the subsidy with the height of blocks over six storeys and this led to some local authorities adopting "tall point blocks of up to twenty-two storeys ...". Burnett, *Op Cit*, p. 286.
[199] Lyall, *Op Cit,* p. 43; and Coleman, Alice *Utopia on Trial* (1985).
[200] *Birkenhead News,* no date.

the early 1980s the local authority – now the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral – began moving families out of Leamington, Lynmouth and Lucerne Gardens to be re-housed elsewhere. The flats were refurbished and designated as accommodation for single people and couples with no children, but by this time high-rise as a design concept had become almost universally unpopular, and they were eventually demolished. The earlier blocks of flats fared a little better: after renaming and undergoing the same process of refurbishment, they were designated as suitable accommodation for older people. The flats became high security accommodation, with intercom access and a 24-hour concierge service. Unfortunately, they are now showing signs of 'concrete fatigue' and their future is uncertain.[201] The local authority's experiment with maisonettes at Woodchurch was also doomed to failure, but their story had a happier ending than that of any of the high-rise flats. After years of suffering the same social problems as the high-rise, in the 1980s tenant action in the form of campaigning by the Central Woodchurch Tenants' Association, resulted in the local authority selling them for redevelopment as traditional terraced housing by a private company, who would then sell them on a freehold basis.[202]

None of the planning principles introduced by the State appear to have brought security and happiness to the residents of local authority estates. Enough has been written about the alienation caused by the dreary monotony so typical of some post-war housing estates and the feelings of helplessness that this engendered without reiterating it here. The top-down approach to housing provision continued throughout the decades, tenants had no control over their environments and the expectations "created by interventionist post-war governments were constantly frustrated"[203] and, as a result, residents felt powerless to change the status quo.

Things were to change dramatically in the late 1960s with the rise of a new self-determination among those in need of local authority housing, as tenants' perceptions of their own position changed. No longer were they inert users of housing, they began

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[201] One of the ladies who took part in the interviews had moved from a conventional 3-bedroomed house on the estate to the tenth floor of one of these blocks. In 2011 she offered to take me around to view this deterioration in the fabric of the building.
[202] *Birkenhead News,* no date, *Op Cit.*
[203] Shapely, P. (2006) Tenants arise! Consumerism, tenants and the challenge to council authority in Manchester 1968-92, Social History, 31:1, 60-78, DOI: 10.1080/03071020500424532.

to regard themselves as consumers. In the early 1960s there were not many local authorities with "formal consultation arrangements or exercises" and the attitude of politicians, whether central or local, towards residents was that of a charity bestowing its bounty on recipients. Shapely has illustrated how the rise of "consumer interests in the political arena" created a "partial reform within the context of social thinking on rehousing."[204] As he describes, tenants were beginning to "react against a litany of housing failures ...."[205] He writes of how, as in Manchester, "the late 1960s witnessed a wave of tenant action across Britain".[206] Although it is not required to restate what Shapely has already described, it is perhaps necessary to record that tenant action across the country provided the catalyst for change. In the 1980s a legislative framework was introduced that "forced councils to consult tenants on a regular basis" and local authorities became service providers not producers of housing.[207] It could be argued that this represents the beginning of Howard's 'participatory democracy', but whether it will encourage the growth of community spirit still remains to be seen.

Summary

When it comes to the provision of local authority housing there has been a great deal of concern expressed about the perceived loss of community but little has been done to create it. One of the difficulties may be the fact that both its existence and subsequent loss are based on individual perceptions. As Kynaston suggests, there was an assumption that "a uniform, collective spirit"[208] was apparent at some point in the past, and perhaps it was but only at certain time and in certain places: it has never been constant or consistent. The term itself remains a nebulous concept; it changes with time and place, so that when social observers seek it out in modern society they can only ever draw the conclusion that the spirit of a bygone age is no longer evident. Despite this, as the 20th century progressed there were those who argued that communities had to be planned to ensure that community develops, but then that begs the question: whose community is to develop? Does planned community not become a place where "[T]here is no allowance for idiosyncrasy or

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[204] *Ibid.*
[205] *Ibid.*
[206] *Ibid.*
[207] *Ibid.*
[208] Kynaston, *Op Cit.*

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individuality"[209], somewhere where "[E]very Utopian's daily life is subject to some form of regulation ..."?[210] These questions do not appear to have been considered by those who would argue that planners must "immerse themselves in the urban system in order to understand it thoroughly".[211] Instead they believe that their activities make them "valid agents of change"[212] which are "are among the mechanisms for regulating and organising human settlements".[213] Unfortunately, attempts at social engineering can have a negative impact because the complexity of the problem becomes increasingly byzantine the deeper one delves. In other words, the social engineer, be they politician, architect or planner, should beware. They may not have solved anything by their intervention and may instead have set in train a set of consequences which they could not have predicted when their plans were first conceived.

Howard himself could not define what he meant by the term community: he may have found the task impossible. Does this then mean that by defining community and attempting to create a municipal environment around that definition it then becomes something that is based on shifting sands? Even if this is the case there are some who would still argue that urban planning and designing community are intrinsic elements in the development of an area so that the discussion has now become a tenet of housing provision.[214] In this respect architects and planners in their self-appointed role of 'social engineer' have created dwellings that are physically divorced from the lifestyles of the people who were intended to inhabit them. [215] Although planners have misguidedly created planning trends they have also been guilty of having been swayed by them and it is often difficult to define where the former ends and the latter begins.

Planners had continued to argue about the benefits of planned environments to foster a sense of community without considering whether it can be defined to such an extent that sustainable communities can be built around them. As has been illustrated, ideas

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[209] Davis, J., *Op Cit,* p. 53.
[210] *Ibid.*
[211] Lozano, Eduardo E. (1990) *Community design and the culture of cities: the crossroad and the wall.*
[212] *Ibid.*
[213] I*bid.*
[214] Ravetz, *Op Cit.*
[215] Lyall, Sutherland (1980) *The State of British Architecture*, p. 42.

of community are temporary and what is acceptable in one period is not in another. Therefore, if it is believed that a sense of community can be created simply by arranging houses in certain ways in order to encourage interaction then planners are guilty of having accepted created community as orthodoxy, as a result the intentions of planners and theorists ultimately become patronising, authoritarian and insensitive.

As has been illustrated, the need to create community through the built environment, without tenant participation, became deeply embedded in the practices of 20th century planners of local authority housing developments. As Shapely *et al* contend, housing policy "had a huge impact on the quality of life in post-war Britain"[216] but those responsible for local authority housing provision did not seem to appreciate this. They did not recognise that the whole point of Howard's arguments about the value of participation for creating a sense of ownership, a sense of belonging. His idea was about people, not about the physical environment, and it is not a difficult concept to grasp.

Research questions

Although there is no easy answer to whether or not community can be created through the built environment, a number of questions have arisen in the process of undertaking this research. They are:

1. What were the planners trying to achieve?
2. Did any of them believe that by providing certain physical features the built environment at Woodchurch would encourage or sustain community?
3. If that was the case, what type of community did they think would emerge as a result of their plans?
4. Was community the outcome and if so had the built environment had anything to do with its development?

The answers to these questions will be discussed in later chapters.

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[216] Shapely, *et al, Op Cit.*

THE WOODCHURCH
✠ ESTATE ✠
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10000 PERSONS. THE
LAND WAS FORMERLY
PART OF THE ROYDEN
ESTATE & WAS PURCHASED
BY THE BIRKENHEAD
CORPORATION IN 1926
BUILDING OPERATIONS
WERE INAUGURATED
IN 1946

Commemorative plaque: Ackers Road, Woodchurch.

Reilly, C. H. and Aslan, N. J. (1947) *Outline Plan for Birkenhead.* The map illustrates the position of Birkenhead in Wirral and its relationship to the rest of Cheshire and to Liverpool.
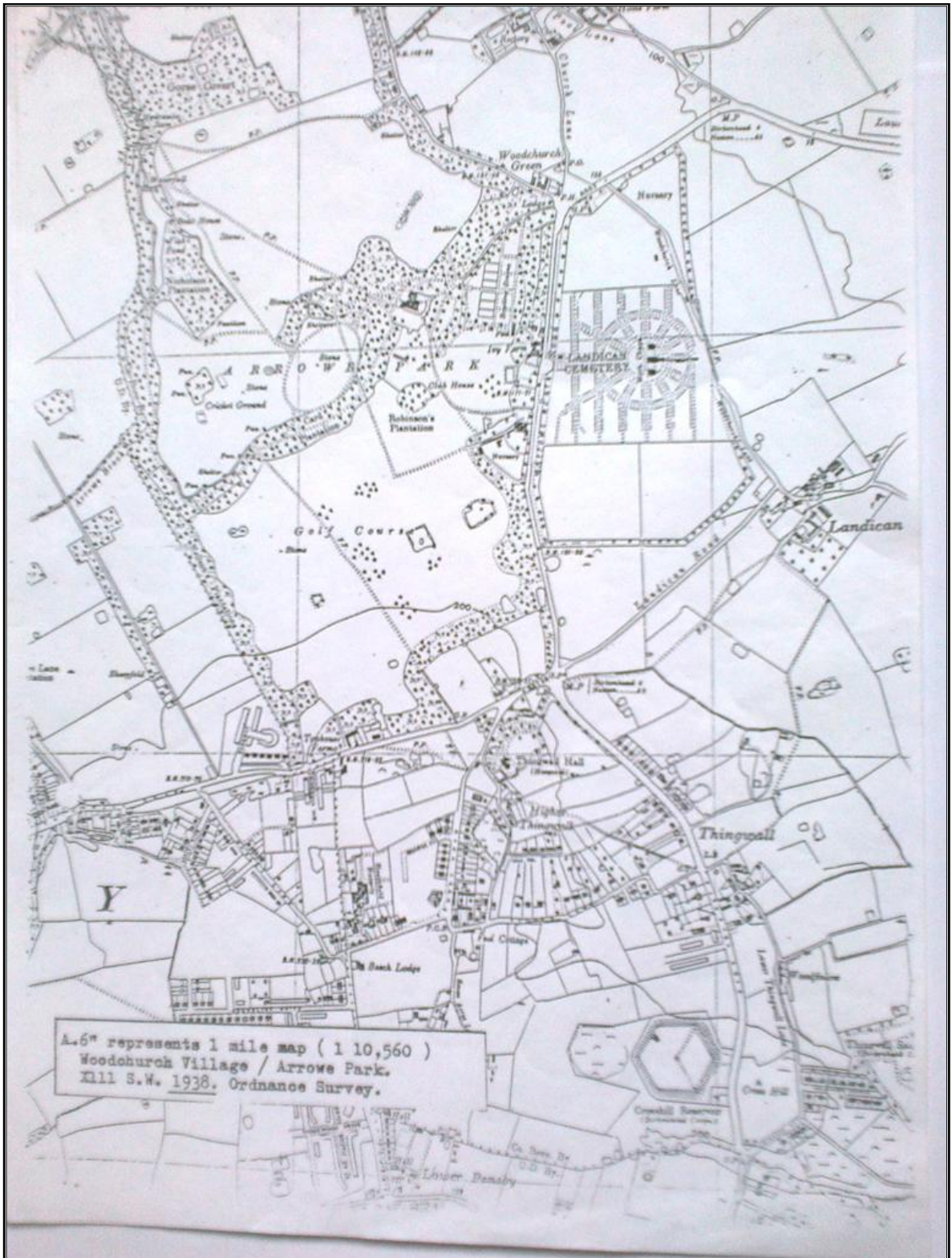
Section of 1938 Ordnance Survey map showing Woodchurch and surrounding area. Source: Birkenhead Central Library.

D. Rowse plan for Woodchurch estate. Shows planned social provision in central area and the Fender Park. Reduced from copy in Birkenhead library archives.

The Rowse plan for Woodchurch. Source: Birkenhead Central Library.

Two views of war damage in Birkenhead.
Top: the quiet suburb of Oxton.
Bottom: part of the busy shopping area of Birkenhead.
Source: Ian Boumphrey, *Yesterday's Wirral.*
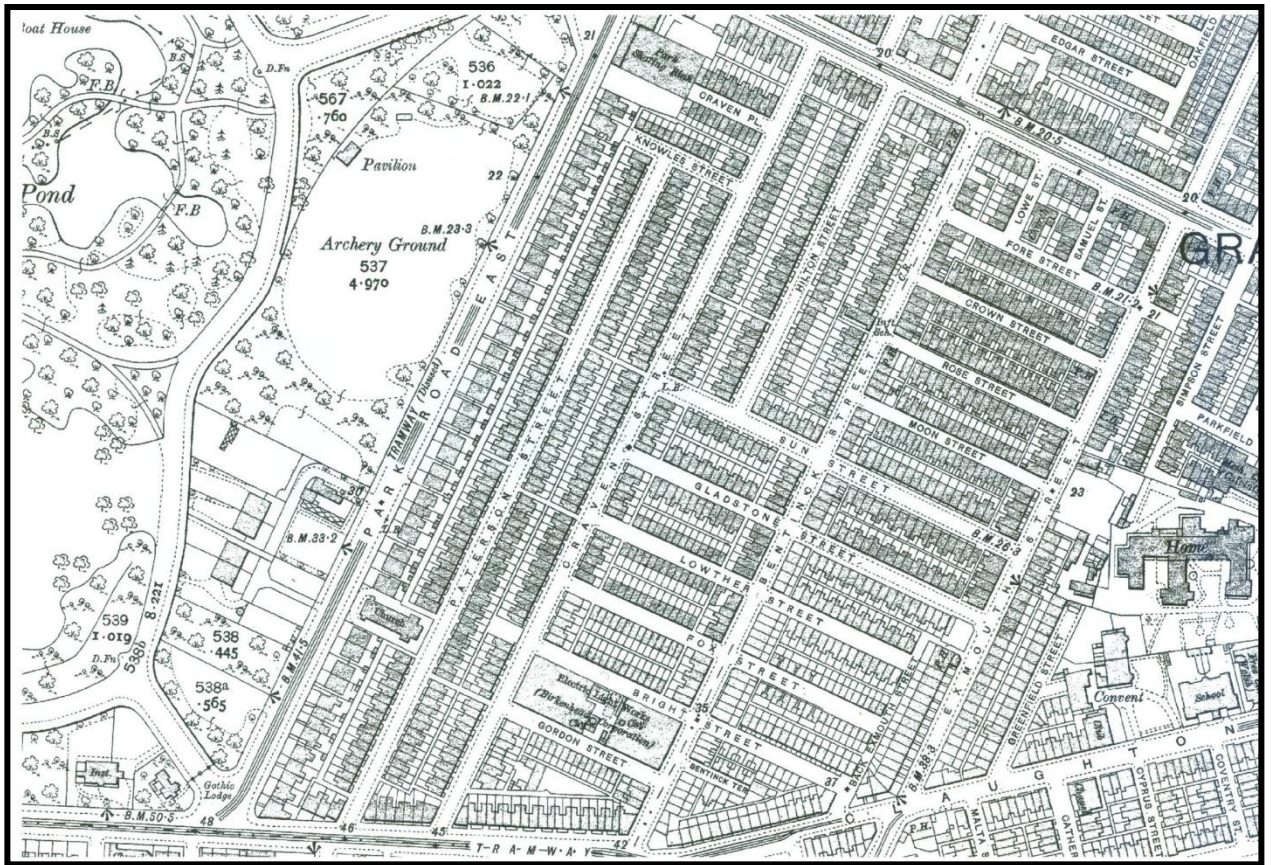
Birkenhead: the original residents of Woodchurch came from these and similar close-knit streets which had changed little from Victorian times. Source: Ian Boumphrey, *Yesterday's Wirral*.

The rural nature of Woodchurch before development is illustrated by these two photographs: (top) this tiny cottage housed Woodchurch Post Office; and (bottom) a lone cyclist makes his way along Arrowe Park Road on the edge of the Woodchurch Estate. Source: Ian Boumphrey, *Yesterday's Wirral*.

PART II

CHAPTER 4

FOUR PLANS, ONE COMMUNITY?

<u>Section I – Background to the Mawson scheme</u>

When Birkenhead Corporation first purchased the land at Arrowe and Woodchurch (formerly the Royden) Estates, they could not have known the daunting task that was to face them, nor could they have envisaged the in-fighting that would hamper their progress in developing the majority of the land for housing. Had they been asked, the members of the Town Council at that time would probably have found the suggestion that it was going to take more than twenty years for the first bricks to be laid ridiculous, but this was the case.

In terms of the town's house building endeavours, this was to be Birkenhead's biggest single development, covering as it did approximately 800 acres of land, with roughly 400 acres devoted to housing.[217] The remainder was reserved for development as a leisure facility for the whole of the Borough – although a small amount of housing was planned for the Arrowe Park Estate[218] – and, after the initial purchase at least, the early stages of the process at least seem to have been dispatched in a relatively efficient manner. In 1926 the town's Estates and Development Committee were to instruct the Town Clerk to make contact with the renowned firm of Thomas Mawson and Son inviting them "to state the terms upon which they would be prepared to submit a scheme for the layout"[219] of both the Arrowe Park and Woodchurch Estates. Why Birkenhead Council might have thought it necessary to seek the services of a firm with such a high reputation may be explained in part by the fact that the work of the senior partner would have been known to them through the firm's involvement with a project at Port Sunlight.[220]

Town planning as a profession was in its embryonic stage[221] and although the 1919 Manual on the preparation of state-aided housing (Housing Manual) stated that the Local Government Board considered that all schemes submitted for approval should

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[217] *Birkenhead News,* Untitled, 21 March, 1926.
[218] Thomas H. Mawson and Son, (1929) [n.p.] Report on the Designs for the Development of The Arrowe Park Estate. (*sic*)
[219] Estates and Development Committee Minutes, 19 November, 1926.
[220] Shippobottom, *Op Cit*, p. 45.
[221] Purdom, (1949) *Op Cit*, p. 3.

have a plan prepared by a qualified architect, they considered it sufficient that a local authority's "properly qualified engineer",[222] with the assistance of a competent architect, was all that was necessary for plans for a housing scheme to be prepared. As it was not a statutory requirement the company may have been flattered by this recognition of their expertise.

Whatever the case, it is in the choice of the architectural firm that there may be a clue to the fact that the Town Council were hoping to create community through the built environment. It is possible that not only did they hope to create community, but that they also intended to establish the first garden city outside the South of England at Woodchurch. The town had a history of adopting innovative ideas and, as a result, the local authority may have regarded themselves as pioneers in town planning. The Jubilee Souvenir celebrating fifty years of incorporation publicised the town as somewhere that fulfilled all the requirements of a garden city. It promoted the opportunities for shopping that could be found in the town (without spoiling the residential nature of the area); all the requirements for culture; recreation with professional and amateur theatricals; sport, including baseball, basketball and lacrosse; debating societies together with museums and art galleries; and for the working man: there was whippet racing![223] The Souvenir claimed that the innovative nature of the town was reflected in the fact that it had given the world "ships of iron ... ships of steel";[224] the town was showing the world how to construct railways and floating docks. The first public park – designed by Joseph Paxton (later Sir) – outside the capital was established in Birkenhead; in 1860 they had established the first (horse-drawn) tram system in Britain with the help of George Francis Train of Chicago; and had also, with Liverpool, established the first underground railway outside London. They were not afraid of bold ideas nor were they frightened of implementing them, so it is entirely possible that establishing a third garden city was something that the local authority was seriously considering.

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[222] Manual on the Preparation of State-aided Housing Schemes, 1919.
[223] Jubilee Souvenir: Incorporation of Borough of Birkenhead, *Birkehead* Advertiser,19 June, 1927, pp. 16-28.
[224] *Ibid.*

As town planners the firm of Thomas H. Mawson were thoroughly versed in modern approaches to town planning – the senior partner had been one of the early pioneers of that movement[225] – and this would have had a significant bearing on their proposals to Birkenhead Town Council. There is a clear indication that the latter were hoping to manage the land in a similar fashion to Letchworth. That is, they were proposing that the land should be sold to developers on a leasehold basis with the revenue thus created accruing to the local authority. However, there is no suggestion that the area would be self-governing, no hint that a separate company would be set up through which the revenue would be retained for the sole use of the development. It was never meant to become another town. This was simply a revenue-generating strategy solely for the benefit of the ratepayers of the town through improvements to the whole borough.

The firm were to proceed with the work of preparing a scheme for the layout of the two parcels of land and the Town Council were to receive a preliminary report on 23 March 1927.[226] This was followed up by E. Prentice Mawson attending a meeting[227] at which the Town Council were to consider the report. It was here that the latter was to explain the proposed layout for the whole area, and on this occasion he also took the opportunity of visiting the Arrowe Park Estate to inspect the portion designated for cemetery purposes. The meeting concluded with a resolution that further discussion of the scheme was to be deferred until the architects had submitted "particulars of their further detailed consideration of their proposed lay-out Scheme of the Estate."[228]

The first documentary evidence of their plans appears in an unpublished typewritten report, dated 1929 complete with sketches, schemes for the road layout and zoning of the area, street planting proposals, and line drawings of the housing elevations. The report contains a number of interesting suggestions which may provide further evidence that the area was to be developed along similar lines to Letchworth and Welwyn. It is interesting to note that they also chose to duplicate a quotation from the

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[225] Shippobottom, *Op Cit*, p. 47.
[226] Estates and Development Committee Minutes, 13 April, 1927.
[227] Estates and Development Committee Minutes, 25 July, 1927.
[228] *Ibid.*

1920 edition of the Tudor Walters Report, which directly refers to the link between urban development and creating community:

> The site should be considered as the future location of a *community* (italics not in original) .... having many needs, in addition of that of house room. Their social, educational, recreational, and other requirements should, therefore, be considered and, when not already adequately provided for on the surrounding areas should be met as a part of the layout of the scheme .... It is generally allowed that, to cover large areas with houses, all of one size, and all likely to be occupied by one class of tenant, unrelieved by other types of dwelling occupied by different types of society, is most undesirable, even when the depressing effect of monotonous, unbroken rows of houses is avoided.

> To be content merely with satisfying the utilitarian ends of a scheme would be false economy, the amenities should be considered. The care and thought that are required to secure economical provision for the practical requirements, if exercised with training imagination, may at the same time make of the necessary parts of the plan a coherent design grouped around some central idea and preserving existing views and features of interest and beauty.[229]

There were vague hints and suggestions that these first planners of Woodchurch were intending to create a community, perhaps even unity, continuity and social cohesion by employing a number of devices advocated by Unwin. To what extent this was the case will be discussed in the next section.

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[229] Taken from the Tudor Walters Report (1920), Part V, pp. 11-24, and reproduced in the Mawson Report of 1929, pp. 155-156.
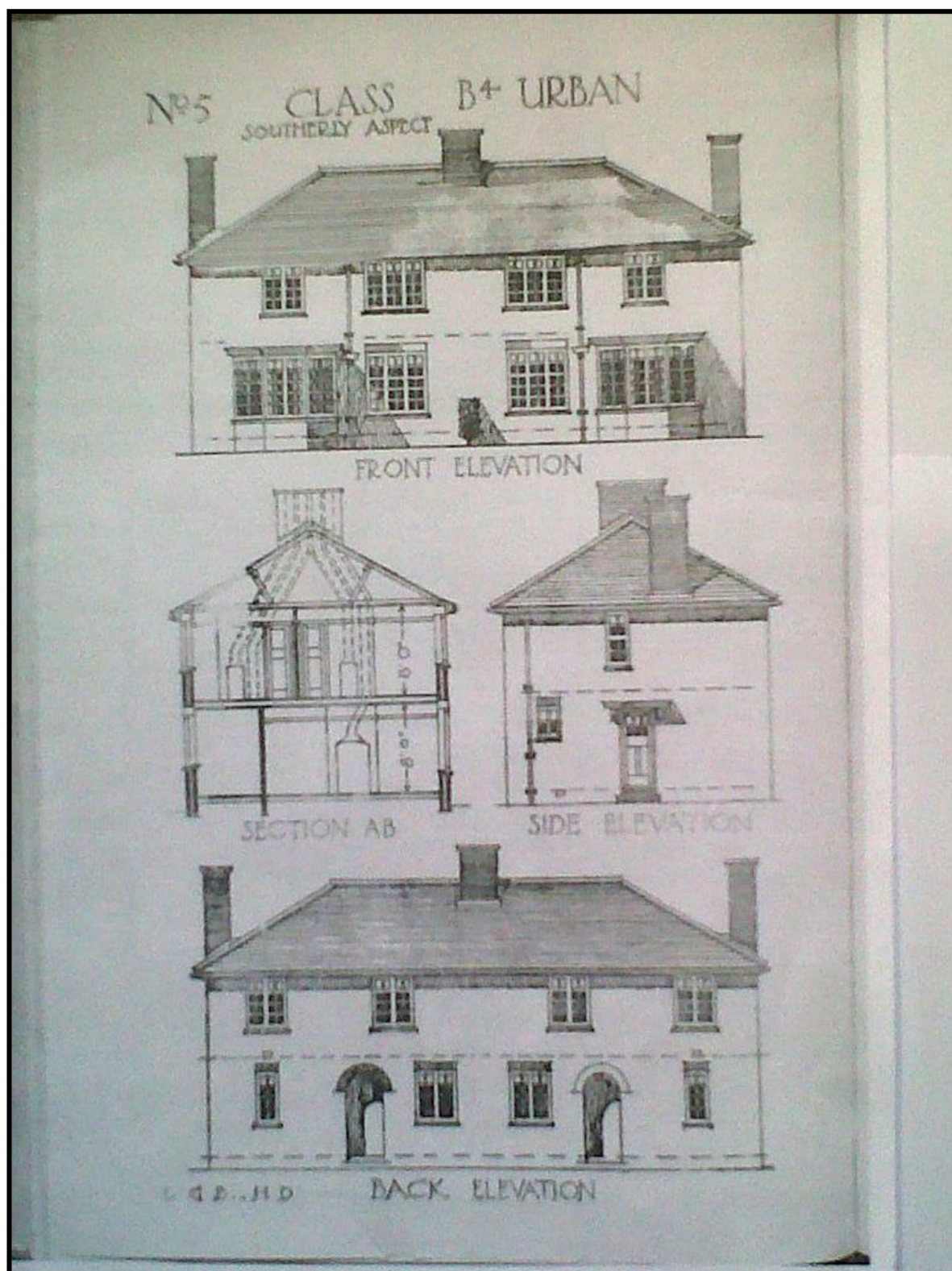
Housing elevations from the Manual on the Preparation of State-aided Housing, (1919).
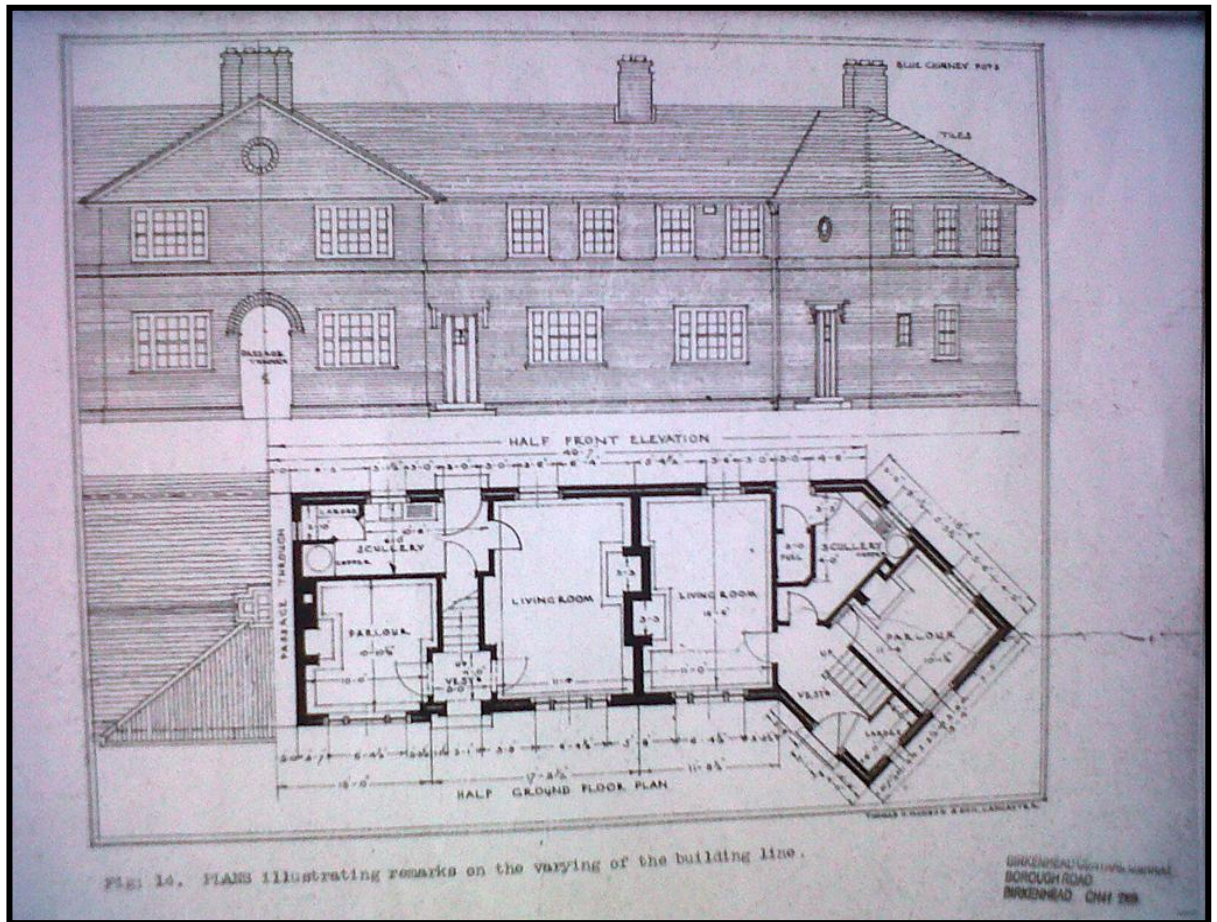
Mawson's elevations and floor plans for municipal housing: note their similarity to the sketches in the Manual on the Preparation of State-aided Housing (1919). Source: Birkenhead Central Library.
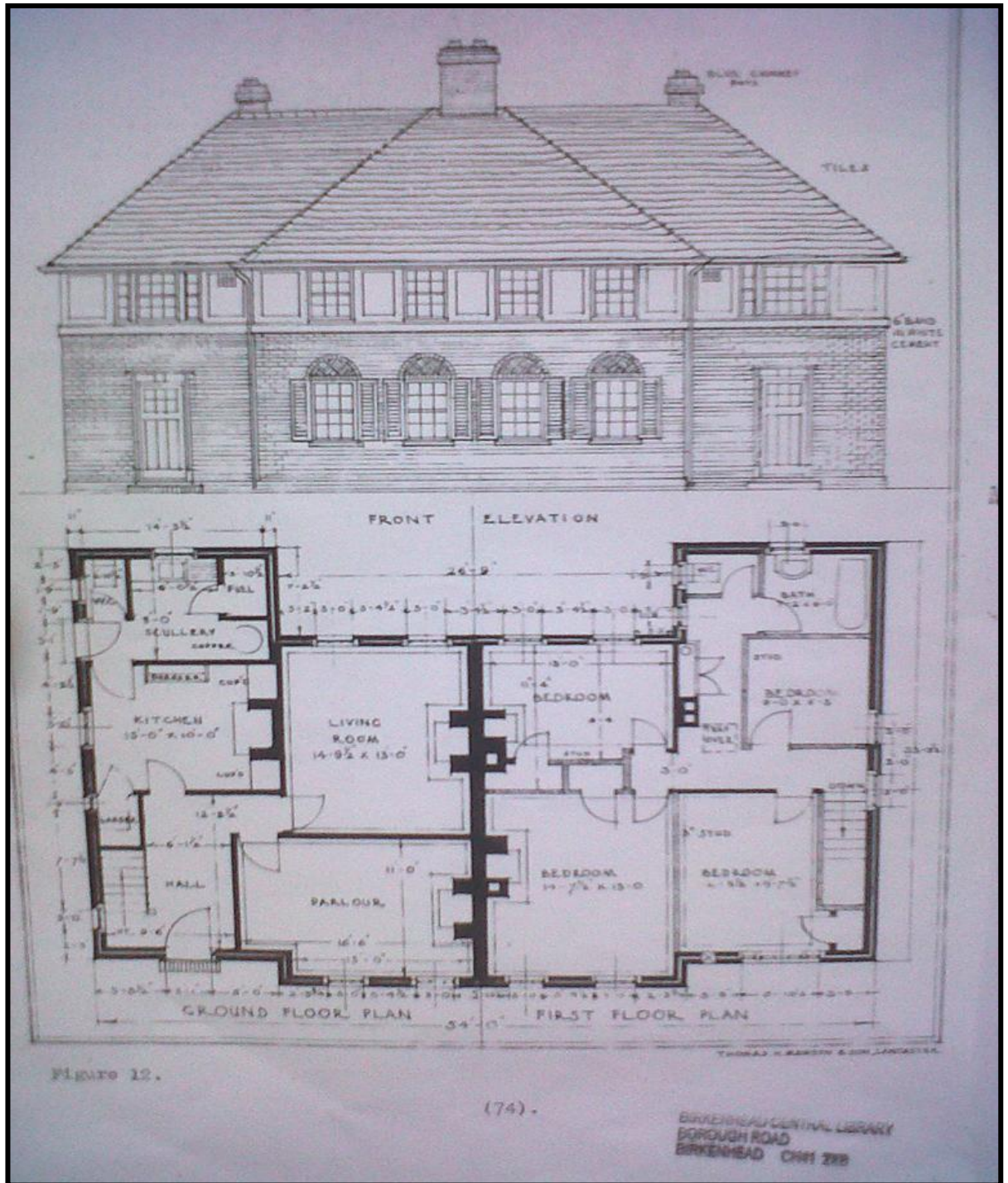
Another example of municipal housing in the Mawson scheme illustrating how the external appearance of the houses could be varied. Source: Birkenhead Central Library.
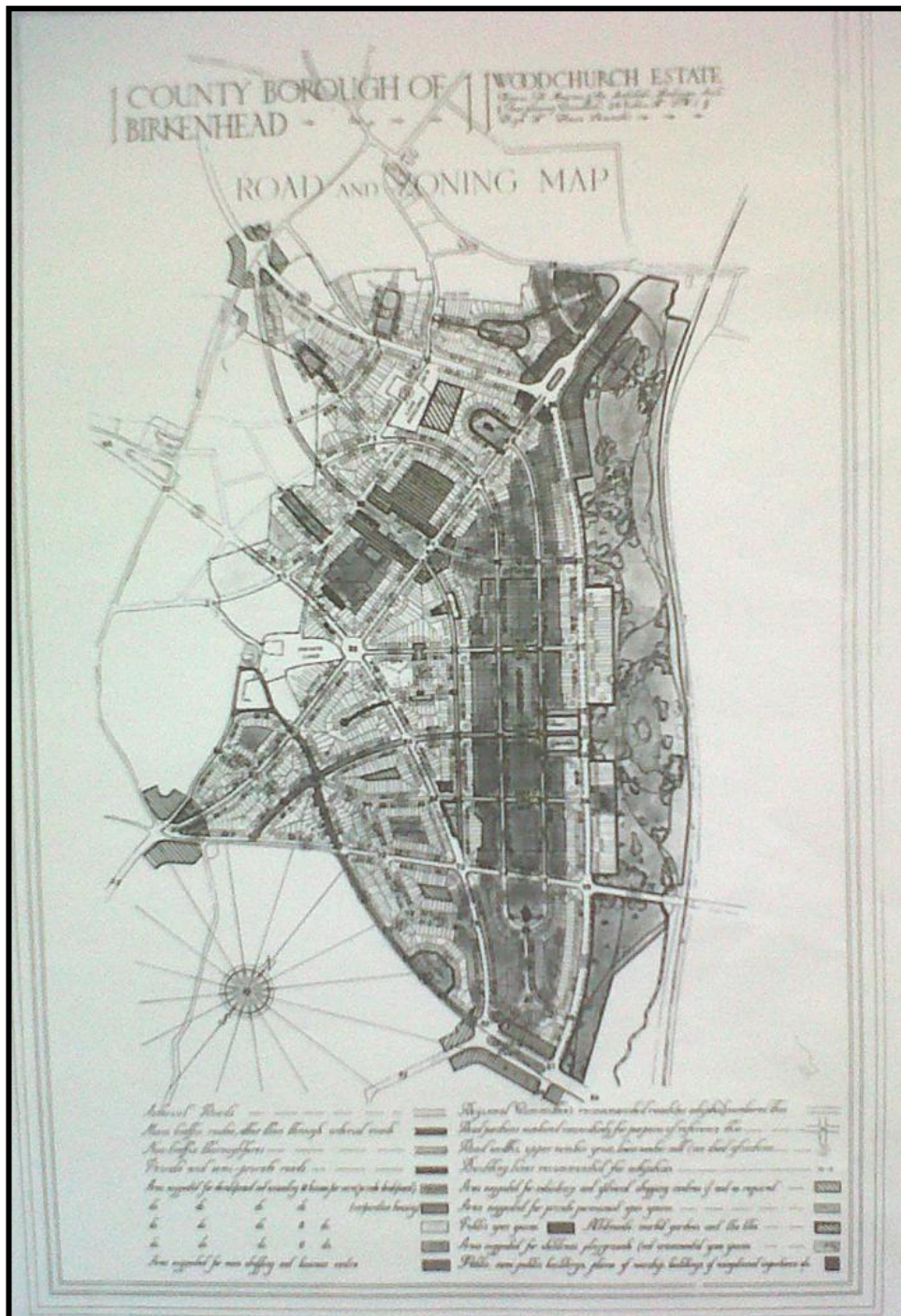
The Road and Zoning Map for the Mawson scheme. Source: Birkenhead Central Library.
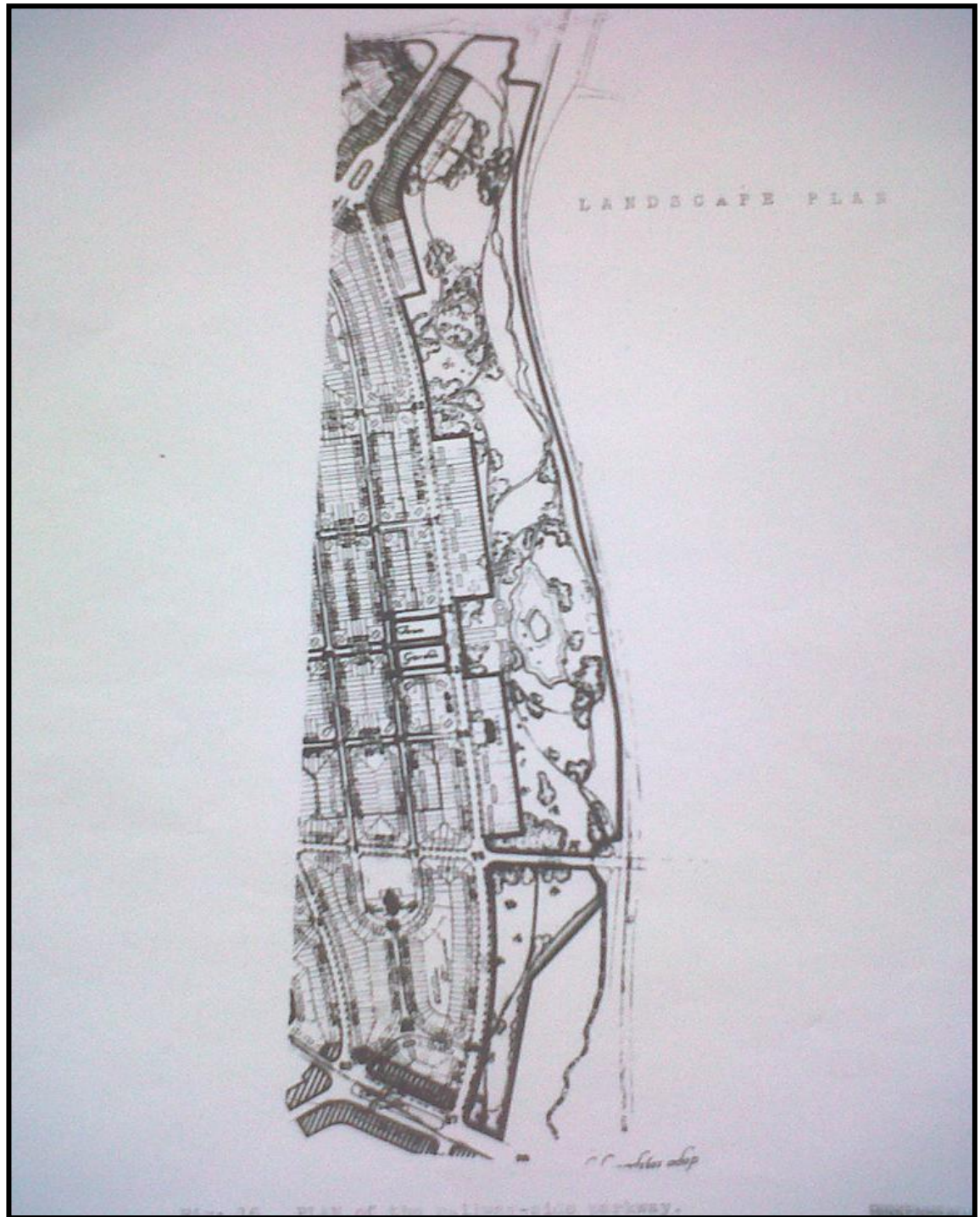
Mawson's treatment of the land bounded by the River Fender at the edge of the municipal area: there are gardens and a riverside walk. The area was to be planted with water-loving plants to help with drainage. Source: Birkenhead Central Library.

Mawson's proposal for the municipal area of Woodchurch.
Source: Birkenhead Central Library.

A sketch showing Mawson's plan for a town garden in the centre
of the main shopping area. Source: Birkenhead Central Library.

Mawson's sketch for school buildings using "local traditional styles of architecture". Source: Birkenhead Central Library.

Mawson's treatment of dwellings in the sections of the
estate to be developed at 6-8 dwellings per acre. Source:
Birkenhead Central Library.

<u>The Mawson Scheme</u>

> The good or bad taste of an architectural design – say, if you like its correctness or incorrectness, is, to a considerable extent, a matter of logical reasoning, of which you must accurately know the premises, before you can form a just conclusion ...

> The characteristic of a really good plan, is that it should appear as if it were quite a natural and almost inevitable arrangement.[230]

When the firm of Thomas H. Mawson & Son presented their "revised, elaborated and redrafted"[231] proposals to the Town Council not only were they to provide greater detail on the planning of the two areas but were also to establish what they considered to be the limitation of their expertise. Although they considered that they had made every attempt to familiarise themselves with the area for development, including its topography, it was to the members of the Town Council that they looked for specialist knowledge about the district including its history. This is, perhaps, a suggestion that the firm were following Unwin's principle that the past should be used to express the future.[232]

<u>Understanding the past</u>

The necessity to understand the past was one of Unwin's key principles in creating housing that worked. The idea itself cannot be attributed solely to Unwin: it followed the ideas of both Morris' and Geddes' in their contention that the "social artist" (the architect or planner) should have an awareness of the past in order to recreate the best life of an area.[233] Throughout planning in general there had been a renewed consciousness of tradition to accompany the creative process and this was a process of evolution: the 'new' was to evolve out of use of the 'old' and a "brittle epoch would become fluid once more and begin to move in a constant direction ...."[234] The company were keen to suggest that their proposal would "produce a scheme that

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[230] H. Heathcote Statham. "Architecture for General Readers" quoted in the Mawson Report, *Op Cit*, Preface.
[231] *Ibid*, p. 7.
[232] Creese (1992) *Op Cit*, p. 170.
[233] *Ibid*.
[234] *Ibid*.

shall be of benefit ... to posterity – aesthetically, hygienically, practically and in every way"[235] and the development would "be the nicest and most tasteful of its kind in the Kingdom".[236] Art and beauty were to become an integral part of the development in order for the planners to create an environment that fulfilled all the requirements of this statement.

<u>The use of art and beauty in planning Woodchurch and Arrowe</u>

The firm had begun the discussion of their proposals with a quotation which suggested that good planning was a matter of logic that was based on an in-depth knowledge of the area that led them to a conclusion that was to fulfil Unwin's requirement that development appeared to be organic.[237] To this end arguments for the aesthetic enhancement of the area began with their proposing that the ancient village of Woodchurch be preserved for its picturesque qualities and artistic potential, and went so far as to suggest how certain improvements could enhance its overall aesthetic value. They even went so far as to suggest that by purging the village of "certain undesirable elements,[238] it would be capable of becoming an "artistic asset of the very first importance."[239]

The architects also thought that the recently purchased Arrowe Park with its lake, wooded walks and mansion, which lay within a few minutes' walk of the existing village, had the potential of becoming not just a recreational facility for the housing development but also a major tourist attraction for the whole of Wirral if it was properly dealt with. They suggested improvements such as an animal park, the provision of changing facilities for swimmers wishing to use the lake during summer and the inclusion of suitable resources for serving refreshments to the expected crowds. They also thought that the area could be greatly improved by the inclusion of carefully chosen additional plants, foliage and trees. This was to be something that would provide boundless opportunities for the artist, the sportsperson and those who wanted nothing more than to simply stroll after the toil of work, and in order for the

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[235] Mawson Report, *Op Cit*, p. 8.
[236] *Ibid.*
[237] Creese (1992) *Op Cit*, pp. 171-173.
[238] They were possibly referring to the fact that the cottages relied on external toilet facilities, and this was still the case when the properties were demolished in 1963.
[239] Mawson Report, *Op Cit,* p. 4.

local authority to take full advantage of these facilities every endeavour was to be made to attract the surrounding population. It is obvious from many elements of their report that they were of the same opinion as Unwin: beauty was a prerequisite of good design not only for its own sake, but also for the mental and physical well-being of residents.[240]

The firm had been established by an experienced and talented landscape architect, whose eldest son had followed in his footsteps, so naturally they would be bound to view any landscape with an eye to improvement. However, although this makes it difficult to determine whether this attention to artistic detail can be attributed solely to Unwin's influence, it is certainly the case that his influence as the chief architect of the Addison Act, and the 1919 Housing Manual made these considerations a prerequisite of good planning and design. That the firm were to make it clear in their report that they were adhering to all the requirements of the Act and the manual is significant if we are to believe that the Mawson scheme was, simply put, an expression of Unwin's ideas.

The attention paid to artistic features in the public park was to be carried through to the proposals for the housing estate itself, which was to be beautified with grass verges, lines of trees which were to be carefully selected for size and shape to suit the roads and their contours – one of the suggestions of the Housing Manual[241] – with further improvement of the development being achieved by the provision of small plots planted with attractive shrubs. As was reported in a local newspaper, they suggested that the local authority could also take the "somewhat unusual step"[242] of further enhancing the best areas of the development by adopting their suggestion of planting roses instead of trees "along the street in some of the residential areas".[243] It had been used successfully by the firm at Waldingham in Surrey and they suggested that by adopting this proposal the local authority might expect to achieve a positive effect on land sales on which the rateable value could be trebled.[244]

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[240] Creese (1992) *Op Cit*, p. 171.
[241] Housing Manual 1919, *Op Cit*, pp. 1-52.
[242] Mawson Report, *Op Cit*, p. 40.
[243] *Liverpool* Echo, Untitled, *Liverpool Echo,* 16 August, 1933.
[244] Mawson Report, *Op Cit,* p. 40.

Their experience as landscape architects was to assist them further in their attempts to make the new area as attractive as possible for potential developers and buyers of the housing. They made suggestions for which types of shrubs would be suitable for which areas of the estate – once again reflecting suggestions in the Housing Manual – and their plans for dealing with the area of highest density at the lower end of the development illustrate how adept they were at turning a problem into something of an advantage. The housing was to be erected close to a local railway station at Upton, and the area tended to retain more moisture than other areas of the estate because of its proximity to a small local river. In order to rectify this problem the planners were to suggest that water-loving plants should be used in order to absorb excess moisture in the soil to provide an attractive feature on what could otherwise become an extremely unappealing portion of the development.

Other features which were suggested for the sake of art, beauty and well-being were to be included in the overall design, with layout of the houses orientated in such a way that "as many roads as possible were arranged in a North-east to South-west line".[245] In this way homes could benefit from as much natural light as possible, and this suggestion seems to reflect the influence of Unwin's proclivity for "sunshine" homes.[246] However, it was not just for the sake of art, beauty and well-being that aesthetics was of such prime importance. Planning was a relatively new discipline and they were trying to convince their audience that there was much to be gained from their ideas. There had to be a practical purpose to them in order for the local authority to make the additional expenditure: they had to be persuaded of the economic benefit to the town. The firm argued that not only would acceptance of their proposals increase the incremental value of building plots; they would also make them more saleable. Although some of the influences of the Housing Manual have been illustrated above there are many more which could be considered but they do not need reiteration here.

However, one of their more interesting suggestions for creating 'community' should be mentioned because it almost directly reflects Howard's enthusiasm for communal living. They considered that boulevards could be combined with narrower, "private

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[245] Potter, *Op Cit,* p. 83.
[246] Creese, Walter L. (1967) *The Legacy of Raymond Unwin,* p. 17.

and semi-private"[247] streets which would form groups of houses which "may be so planned as to form a self-contained unit"[248] such as could be found in the "more up-to-date cities of America ...."[249] The firm were eager to encourage co-operative effort by proposing that the groups of houses could be controlled by one individual; and that a further opportunity for communal effort would be afforded through joint maintenance of the private drive and possible garden "after the style of the private squares in Bloomsbury".[250]   The report's suggestions for co-operative living and creating community are further explored when they suggest the establishment of a special group of middle class dwellings (which they called The Albany) as an experiment. They suggested that The Albany would have the benefit of a common heating system, a hot water supply, a block which would contain club rooms, and an assembly room that would be available for hire for "private functions too large for the surrounding small houses."[251] All tenants were to have the benefit of a common kitchen and dining room. The whole was to be built around a central feature, which reflects Unwin's enthusiasm for this type of spatial organisation which, he contended, brought "a sense of unity, a complete whole, which lifts it out of the commonplace in a manner that nothing can accomplish for a mere street of cottages."[252] Through the use of this device the firm were not only attempting to break down what they referred to as the "national insularity"[253] but also to encourage a sense of community. Howard himself had suggested that there should be an effort to introduce communal activities in his garden city when he proposed that some of the houses should have "common gardens and co-operative kitchens ..."[254] and by the time the firm came to develop their scheme for Woodchurch there had been a practical example of communal living established at Letchworth.[255] Homesgarth, where Howard lived until his move to Welwyn, was his brainchild and was intended for others like him.

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[247] *Ibid*, p. 22.
[248] *Ibid,* p. 24.
[249] *Ibid*, p. 24.
[250] *Ibid*, p. 32.
[251] *Ibid,* p. 33.
[252] Unwin, Sir Raymond (1902), *Cottage Plans and Common Sense*, p. 4.
[253] Mawson Report, *Op* Cit, p. 32.
[254] Howard, *Op Cit*, p. 54.
[255] Buder, Stanley, (1990) *Visionaries and Planners: The Garden City Movement and the Modern Community*, p. 119.

...one of those numerous fold of the middle-class who have a hard struggle for existence on a meagre income ... those who require domestic help, but can very ill afford it.[256]

The fact that the venture failed, partly due to the cost needed to cover administrative and other expenditure, and partly because investment in the scheme dried up,[257] does not appear to have dissuaded the firm from suggesting that this idea would be an asset to the development. The search for the ideal environment probably reached its zenith in the early twentieth century and, although there were influences from earlier centuries, the ideas expressed in that era were a product of their time,[258] and the firm were following the general trend and do not appear to have suggested anything that was truly radical.

Creating Community – The Role of Planning and Architecture in the Mawson Scheme

As with Letchworth and Welwyn, the estate was to be developed as a neighbourhood containing a broad socioeconomic mix of residents through the provision of a number of larger houses mixed with smaller middle-class dwellings and, finally, the artisan homes which were to be built in small terraces.[259] The tenure and density of the housing was also varied with the greater majority being developed for sale on a leasehold basis at densities of 6 and 8 per acre. The area of municipally owned, but privately built, housing for rent to the artisan classes[260] was designed at a density of 12 houses per acre. The similarities between the proposals for Woodchurch and Letchworth, where a hundred municipal houses had been built for the Rural District Council,[261] are striking. But the firm were eager to avoid the mistake of Letchworth where social stratification was expressed through monotony of design.[262] They suggested that monotony could be avoided by the introduction of variation in the elevations of the properties. Whether social stratification could be avoided in this

[256] Beevers, Robert, (1988) *The Garden City Utopia. A critical biography of Ebenezer Howard*, p. 112.
[257] *Ibid.*
[258] Hardy, Dennis, (2000) *Utopian England. Community Experiments 1900-1945*, p.11.
[259] Mawson Report, *Op Cit*, p. 51.
[260] Beevers *Op Cit*, p. 114.
[261] Purdom, (1949) *Op Cit*, p.65.
[262] Beevers, *Op Cit*, pp. 114-115.

manner is open to question. As Potter reflects, the arrangement of the housing would effectively maintain class divisions by ensuring that:

> ... those intended for occupation by tenants of the corporation were on roads laid out to a rigid pattern of straight lines in the areas of highest density, whereas in the zones scheduled for densities of eight and six to the acre, where the houses were for sale, the roads were tree-lined and make use of the culs-de-sac and follow more irregular lines ...[263]

As has already been indicated, the planners were eager to ensure that the municipal area should be at least as attractive as the privately owned areas, and they suggested that, although they were restricted to "two types of house for the areas of highest density"[264] they made a number of suggestions for making the neighbourhood more attractive. They were to include "little town square"[265] to augment their other propositions, although one might question why the area should need further enhancement when the housing was planned at such low density, but Charles Purdom[266] has already provided us with the answer: the houses built for the local authority had to be as well built and must also look "at least ... as well as middle-class houses."[267] Whilst this would suggest that although it was not for altruistic reasons that the working classes were being provided with attractive homes in pleasant surroundings – it was simply that creating inadequate housing and providing a less attractive environment might deter buyers of the private housing envisaged for other parts of the estate – the culmination of these plans would have meant that even those who could not afford to buy their homes would have had a social mobility virtually unknown to that class at that time.

As with Letchworth and Welwyn the world of work was not to be forgotten in this scheme and employment opportunities were to be provided by the inclusion of small warehouses, offices, and shops. There would be provision for those supporting trades

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[263] Potter, *Op Cit,* pp. 82-83.
[264] These were the type A (non-parlour) and type B (parlour) houses as laid down by the Local Government Board *Manual on the Preparation of State-Aided Housing Schemes* (1919), which was issued to all local authorities in that year. It stated that housing would only be eligible for the subsidy if they were built at a maximum density of twelve per acre.
[265] Potter, *Op Cit*, p. 83.
[266] Purdom, (1949) *Op Cit*, p.65.
[267] *Ibid.*

that were regarded as essential to the smooth running of the business district such as work rooms, light engineering, carpenter's shops, forges and garages. Although the planners were to suggest that "in other cases one would add to the above list ... factories and workshops, together with large warehouses ..."[268] they agreed with the local authority that the inclusion of heavy industry would be completely out of place here. Some of this reticence might be accounted for by the fact that there had been considerable opposition to building housing in the area, to the extent that development of the Fender Valley had always been regarded as a menace to some of the town's best suburbs, particularly as it was felt that this would inevitably lead to the depreciation of property values in adjacent middle class areas.[269] It was not just a concern for the residents' well-being that motivated the planners to suggest better, that is less dirty, employment for the residents. The firm recognised that they had a vested interested in ensuring that they did not put forward ideas that would result in their scheme being rejected out of hand.

As has already been recorded, delays to the adoption of the scheme were to continue throughout the late 1920s and into the early 1930s, with the local authority requiring further consideration and revision of the plans on a number of occasions. The Minutes of the Birkenhead Council Meeting held on 16 April 1933 record that there was opposition to a recommendation of the Estates Committee giving authority to the surveyor to invite offers for leasing the land at Woodchurch, subject to development of the Mawson plan. The objection was based on the fact that a new Ward – the Wirral Ward – had recently been created, and its members had not had an opportunity of examining the firm's plan, and the matter was deferred.[270]

It might be considered that an element of urgency was introduced to Birkenhead Town Council's deliberations concerning the adoption of the Mawson scheme when the local authority were informed that the current number of people applying for state-owned housing had now reached between four and five thousand,[271] but this was not the case. The local authority may have considered that the number of state-owned

[268] Mawson Report, *Op Cit*, pp. 51-52.
[269] *Birkenhead News*, Untitled,14 August, 1926.
[270] Birkenhead Council Minutes, 16 April, 1933.
[271] Birkenhead Council Minutes, 8 January, 1931.

houses planned would not make a significant difference to the situation; they may have been deterred by reductions to the government subsidy; whatever the reason, they were to terminate their discussions with the firm. The events surrounding this event and the date when ties were severed cannot be determined but the local authority were still in contact with the firm in August of 1933, when another plan devised by the company was published in a local newspaper under the title *Woodchurch Estate Development Plan.*[272] The report contained an image of the proposed layout and informed the reader that:

> The Corporation is considering development mainly by private enterprise, the land to be sold on lease. The proposals include an arterial road from Upton Station to Arrowe Park gates, shopping centres, a school, a church, and parks and recreation grounds. The whole area west of the railway and along the brook is reserved for a park with an ornamental lake.

And this appears to have been the last mention of the Mawson scheme as far as the town was concerned.

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[272] *Liverpool Echo*, 9 August, 1933.

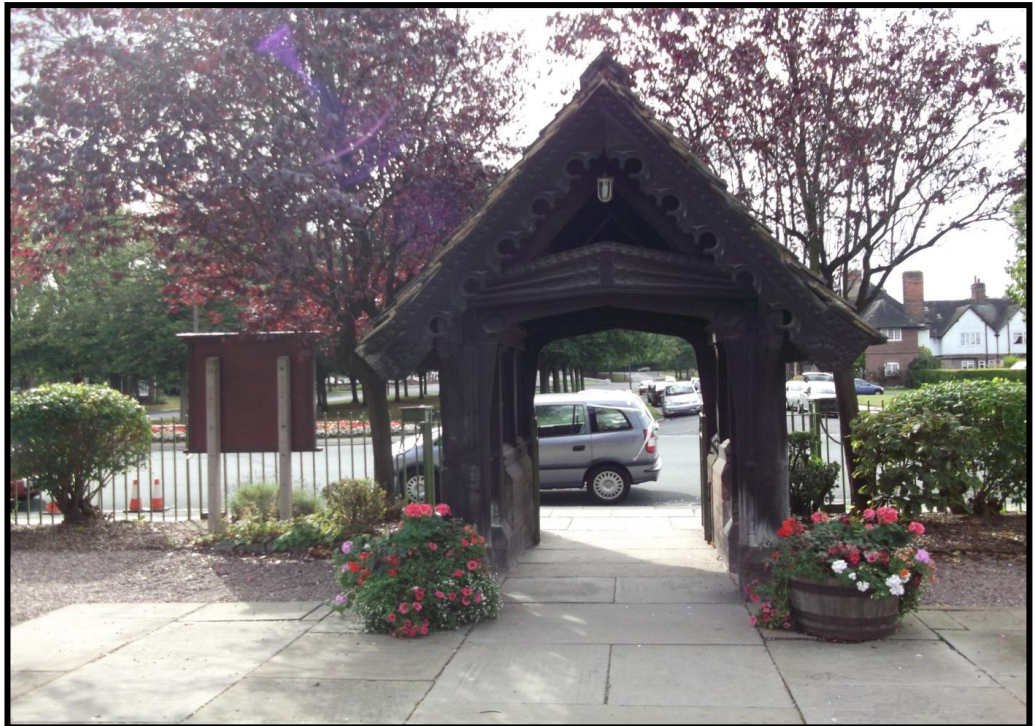Two views of 'mock-Tudor' houses at Port Sunlight. These and the following photographs illustrate how Mawson's ideas may have been influenced by designs at Port Sunlight.

Housing variety at Port Sunlight.

Top: A slightly different interpretation of 'mock-Tudor'.
Bottom: Part of the original school house at Port Sunlight, now the Lyceum.

Top and bottom: Two views of the self-consciously 'ancient' church at Port Sunlight.

<u>Section II – Background to the Robinson scheme</u>

There can be no doubt that increased state intervention as a result of the war aided many local authorities in developing their housing schemes after 1945.[273] The war-time government had indicated its commitment to reconstruction by establishing a committee to consider the whole question of planning with particular reference to housing on 20 March 1942, under the Chairmanship of Lord Dudley. Although the report was not published until 1944,[274] Birkenhead Town Council had plans in place for development of Woodchurch even before it was released. The local authority's Borough Engineer, Bertie Robinson, had been instructed to prepare plans for a municipal housing estate on the site purchased in 1926. His plans were submitted to the relevant committee for approval and submission to the appropriate government agencies in February 1944.[275]

In many respects the local authority were surprisingly quick off the mark in signalling their intention to develop the land solely for municipal housing and the fact that they were the sole owners of it (a luxury that many local authorities could not claim) must have given them added confidence that the scheme would be carried through without hindrance. It was still not necessary for them to appoint a qualified architect to prepare plans and execute the scheme: appointing a suitably qualified Borough Engineer was still a relatively common practice. There was no reason why there should be any opposition to their scheme either locally or nationally: but they had reckoned without the interference of a well-respected professor from the University of Liverpool and, in many respects the provision of municipal housing in the borough provided the setting for a drama that was to have major repercussions for the Conservative-led Council and the town for many months. However, the professor's intervention did not occur until after Robinson's first proposal had been submitted and there are some elements of this plan which suggest that Robinson was making some provision for community planning in his scheme, although it was not possible to

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[273] Peter Hennessy, (1992) *Never Again*, p. 10, informs us that: "Everything ... had altered visibly ... including the reach of the state ..." as a result of the war.
[274] Design of Dwellings (1944).
[275] Robinson's signed and dated plans, February 1944. Source: Wirral Archive Service.

categorise them in the same manner as the plans submitted by Mawson because the supporting evidence was somewhat scarce.

Creating Community – The Role of Planning and Architecture in the Robinson Scheme

Robinson's first proposal was supported by an undated article that begins with a description of the topography of the area and the leisure facilities available in nearby Arrowe Park. Although the suggestions for the beauty spot were almost a side issue, the two tracts of land were still being considered in tandem. His commentary continued with a statement on how the estate would be built along "garden city"[276] lines, and was to be established on the basis of the "neighbourhood unit"[277] principle – which indicates that he was familiar with an idea that had gained popularity in the United States and had been attracting favour in British planning circles since the 1930s. The Dudley Report described how:

> The conception of the urban "neighbourhood," in the sense in which the term is used here, is of very recent date. It is only during the last decade that the special meaning which now attaches to the term has been developed in any clear way.[278]

Although planning areas on the neighbourhood unit principle became more popular after 1945 and the publication of the Dudley Report, Robinson would have been aware that it had expressed concern for a perceived loss of 'community spirit'. The Report contained many references to the ways in which a sense of community could be fostered through the built environment but the Borough Engineer's only concession to this was his mention of the proposed size of the population which was to be in the region of 10,000. The Report had suggested that this was the optimum size for a neighbourhood unit in order that the "proper well-being of the ... town" would be ensured.[279]   In many respects this was an isolated suggestion that can be

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[276] Robinson, B. (1944a) [n.p.] Layout for the Woodchurch Estate, Birkenhead, p. 1.
[277] *Ibid.*
[278] *Report of a Study Group of the Ministry of Town Planning on Site Planning and Layout in Relation to Housing*, (1944), pp. 58-73.
[279] *Design of Dwellings*, Op Cit, p. 59.

attributed almost solely to the Report; other facilities for the estate reflected the earlier work of Mawson and the suggestions of the Housing Manual.

His first proposal was to be rejected by the Town Council, mainly because the Labour Party was not happy with what was being recommended. This state of impasse was not unusual; it would appear that the divisions between Left and Right in the town were so deep that anything proposed by one party would have been rejected by the other side almost automatically. Revised plans were duly submitted in August 1944, although there is little to differentiate them from those submitted in February, apart from the fact that a great deal appears to have been omitted from this second proposal compared with the first. His allusion to the construction of the Upton by-pass to divert traffic from the busy shopping area in "the nearby Village of Upton",[280] was missing from the supporting documents for the second plan, as were the elements of it that were to fit into future proposals for development of not just the town but the whole of Wirral. The improvement of the River Fender, on the eastern edge of the area, as a "streamside walk" had been removed.[281] A similar plan had originally been suggested by Mawson in order to deal with a problem area which was prone to retaining water. The walk proposed by Robinson was to encompass 76 acres of land extending into another borough, Wallasey, "in the north" of the peninsular and was to continue "two miles southward" through Birkenhead to form a "distinctive co-ordinated town planning feature".[282] The rejection of his first proposal resulted in the abandonment of his ideas for the treatment of this difficult piece of terrain and the most picturesque aspects of the narrow river were later destroyed when it was diverted using concrete culverts to accommodate improvements to the motorway network with the construction of the M53.

Neither the proposal submitted in February 1944, nor the one submitted later that year, contained anything particularly controversial. The basis of both was the establishment of a typically neat garden suburb which would contain 2540 dwellings on the 350 acre site, and the Borough Engineer had calculated that "based on 4¼

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[280] Robinson, (1944a) *Op Cit,* p. 1.
[281] *Ibid.*
[282] *Ibid.*

persons per family, this would represent a population of 10,800."[283] He envisaged that the area would contain a mixture of housing densities with the majority being constructed at 12 per acre (2,402 houses in total); 133 at 8 per acre; and only 5 at 4 per acre, a proposal that once again reflected the strictures of the Housing Manual. In addition he was to introduce housing variety to avoid monotony by introducing a selection of parlour and non-parlour styles of 2, 3, 4 and 5-bedroom houses "suitable for north or south aspect" that would be built in "blocks of two, up to terraces of eight".[284] In this respect the influence of Unwin and the Housing Manual is very evident and there are other allusions which indicate that many of his influences were more rooted in the earlier guidance, than in the more recent Dudley Report.

Although there was not the same level of detail supporting his proposal as that submitted by Mawson and Son, Robinson had still thought it important enough to mention that the orientation of the homes should be such that they would catch the maximum amount of sunlight, he proposed the use of "culs-de-sac, quadrangles and embayments"[285] to enhance the area; suggestions which all suggest that the district was to be developed along Unwin's 'garden suburb' lines. The plan included a central feature – both figuratively and literally – in the form of a "shopping and social area"[286] laid out around a rectangular town square which would lie on a wide axial avenue, the orientation of which would give it a vista up to Woodchurch Parish Church, and his inspiration for this suggestion may have come from the City Beautiful movement, although it is just as likely that it was an almost direct imitation of an area of Port Sunlight; a neighbourhood that he would have been familiar with as a native of Birkenhead.

The square was to contain approximately 40 shops, a branch library, a public hall and community centre as suggested in the Design of Dwellings, plus a cinema, banks, and a post office. The estate was also to have the benefit of two subsidiary shopping centres, each with approximately 12 shops, giving a total of 64 shops "per 10,000

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[283] Robinson, (1944a) *Op Cit*, p.1.
[284] Ibid.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Robinson, B. (1944b) *Descriptive Memorandum*.

persons"[287] – a clear reference to the Dudley Report and spatial organisation – which Robinson felt represented a "reasonable ratio".[288]

He had specified that all shopping areas should be placed off the main estate roads, "so as to minimise danger to children and customers, and to obviate standing vehicles interfering with traffic." [289] He also made allowance for ten schools which were to be sited in such a way as to "minimise walking distance for children in the north, central and southern areas"[290] of the estate. Three churches (including the existing C. of E.) were included in his proposal but amenities such as "hotels, public houses, or petrol filling station"[291] were almost an afterthought: should the local authority want them, space could be found. The provision of children's homes and "homes for aged persons"[292] were dealt with in the same casual manner, which left plenty of scope for certain aspects of the proposal to be altered at will.

His plan and the supporting documentation seem to suggest that there was some confusion as to which set of principles the Borough Engineer would be adopting. The influence of the Garden City Movement and Unwin, through the 1919 Manual, is strong in many of his suggestions. He advocated that the roads of the estate should be laid out on "attractive lines with grass verges, shrubs, trees and gradual curves"; houses would be set back to "varying building lines"[293] and privacy would be afforded to the individual residents by the provision of hedging and front gardens, but there was also enough to suggest that some of his motivation derived from the Dudley Report. Whatever the case, the Borough Engineer was in a paradoxical position caught between the 1919 Housing Manual and the Dudley Report: one was outdated and the other had not yet come into force.

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[287] *Ibid.*
[288] *Ibid.*
[289] *Ibid.*
[290] *Ibid.*
[291] *Ibid.*
[292] *Ibid.*
[293] Howard, *Op Cit*, was to write of the "general observance of street line or harmonious departure from it" being one of the "chief points as to house building...." p.54.

Robinson's reluctance to allocate space for the construction of hotels and public houses in his proposal becomes more understandable given the number of Welsh and other non-conformist chapels and churches – with their strict rules on abstinence – within the borough.[294] Their influence on local policies was incredibly strong and, as expected the Free Church Council was to protest when it was reported that the Labour leader, Alderman McVey, had announced that three sites for hotels on the estate had been selected. The church council were to write to the Town Clerk protesting that:[295]

> The provision of hotel accommodation within the Woodchurch estate housing scheme is viewed with disfavour by the above Council. The citizens of our borough ought to know that if such a plan is submitted and accepted the Free Church Council will raise the strongest possible objection.[296]

They complained that as the area was to provide housing for working-class people including sites for hotels would deprive people of accommodation. They also protested that by including drinking establishments in the plans the development of a true community life – which ought to be the primary aim of the Estates Committee and the Town Council – would be damaged. In the view of the Free Church Council the provision of ample facilities for educational, cultural and social welfare – already incorporated in Robinson's proposal – was the correct way to develop community life. In typically alarmist fashion they cited societal problems – which included the bad drinking habits of girls in their teens, irresponsible parents and the widespread lack of parental control – as the basis for their concern, and argued that providing hotels for the area would exacerbate these difficulties by giving irresponsible parents the opportunity for abandoning their offspring in favour of "public-house fellowship".[297] It was quite obvious from press reports that there were many in the town who regarded the future inhabitants of the estate as "unthoughtful"[298] citizens who, as a group,

[294] http://www.ukbmd.org.uk/genuki/chs/birkenhead.html
[295] Housing and Hotels. A Birkenhead Free Church Protest, *Liverpool Echo.* 9 September 1944.
[296] *Birkenhead News.* Untitled. 22 September, 1944.
[297] Ibid.
[298] *Ibid.*

already constituted a social problem. The outcome was that the non-conformist churches' opinion held sway and no hotels or public houses were to be built on the estate until some years after it had been established and the neighbourhood was to remain 'dry' until 1953. If a resident wished to have a drink, they had a fairly long walk to one of the public houses that already existed in some of the nearby villages.

The Robinson scheme proposed that residents should have the benefit of a health clinic and for relaxation each house was to have a garden.[299] Provision was also made to provide permanent allotments for those who desired to "cultivate more extensively than that possible on the site ...."[300] Two sites were earmarked for this purpose, which would add to the space already established for cultivation by 1.3 acres (allotments existed near the Upton Cemetery and covered an area of 2.76 acres). The Borough Engineer calculated that this would provide one allotment for every 25 houses, but added that "should further demand be experienced, room could be found on the open reservation".[301]

His concentration on ensuring that everything conformed to the Town Planning Act Schedule – he does not state which one – and did not infringe local byelaws is an indication of his attention to detail, and is a reflection of the concerns expressed by Mawson almost twenty years earlier. He did not provide details of the floor plans for his scheme because he felt that the interior design of post-war houses in general would "differ from those hitherto erected".[302] As it transpired, his assumption was correct: the Dudley Report was to abandon the parlour and non-parlour type housing recommended in the earlier manual. The new guidance suggested that the ideal internal layout should comprise either a living room with separate kitchen/diner and a utility room for laundry; or a kitchen living-room with a scullery and sitting room.[303]

The fact that the Borough Engineer did not provide greater detail of his scheme than two brief supporting documents and the road layout and zoning plans make it difficult

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[299] Robinson, (1944b) *Op Cit.* The gardens were to be of varying sizes but, "unless the Council decide otherwise, none should have less than the minimum plot size, or a greater percentage of its site taken up by building than those suggested by the Town Planning Model Clauses issued by the Ministry".
[300] *Ibid.*
[301] *Ibid.*
[302] *Ibid.*
[303] Design of Dwellings, Op Cit, pp. 33-35.

to ascertain his intentions. There was much to recommend Robinson's submission, but his ideas were not new and he borrowed heavily from ideas expressed in other parts of Wirral. He had as a model the "picturesque"[304] suburbs surrounding some parts of Birkenhead and the model village of Port Sunlight. He would also have been familiar with the earlier proposal submitted by Mawson and Son. There are similarities between his road layout and zoning plan which reflect those of the latter, but it cannot be suggested that he was reproducing the ideas of others verbatim.

Throughout his work Robinson showed a meticulous attention to detail which is illustrated by the fact that his first submission wove together all the strands of planning that were taking place in the wider context of Wirral by including references to broader local and regional proposals for road networks, as required by the later Dudley Report. With the submission of his second proposal he also took care to ensure that all opportunities to attract the government grant were maximised. No detail was missed in order to obtain the necessary approval of the various ministries for his scheme but his efforts were to no avail and the progression of his scheme was halted when Professor Sir Charles Reilly intervened.

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[304] Fishman, Robert (1987) Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia, p. 2.

Robinson's road layout and zoning plan. The houses were to be designed by Rowse. Source: Wirral Archive Service.

They had a vision that you could just have sunshine and light and you could make that a New Town. They were a great invention. They were things that were created, where you created a community that wasn't just houses – but here were all the amenities and they could be created so that if you wanted to take a population out of the overcrowded south east from London you could do that.[305]

The social essence of my scheme is that the houses look towards one another across the greens, and not, as was suggested, away from one another, so that the people from the little streets who are to live in this town may retain and increase the distinctive kindliness and friendliness to one another they have learnt in their old homes.[306]

It is difficult to understand why someone of Professor Sir Charles Reilly's eminence should become embroiled in the political in-fighting that resulted from his intervention in the planning of Woodchurch. He had been appointed the Roscoe Professor of Architecture at the newly created University of Liverpool[307] in 1904;[308] had been instrumental in promoting the subject as an academic discipline; and had trained many of the country's most prominent architects.[309] There was little more that he could do to increase his professional reputation, but like planners elsewhere it may have been that he was "motivated by a vision of a new environment whose success would enhance ... leadership".[310] He claimed that he had a strong urge to establish the principle of "community planning"[311] at Woodchurch; but whatever his reason, his involvement was to spark an acrimonious conflict that was to have repercussions both locally and nationally. He claimed that he was motivated by the fact that there was evidence of the isolationist nature of society – a recurring theme in this narrative –

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[305] Northern Heritage Consultancy Ltd. (1990), *Flashback: Story of the North East 1939-85.*
[306] Unknown. (1944), *"Satellite"* Town for Birkenhead. The Rival Plans For Woodchurch Estate Developments. *Liverpool Echo*, 12 May.
[307] What had been the University College became the University of Liverpool in 1902.
[308] Reilly, C. H. (1938), *Scaffolding in the Sky*, p. 68.
[309] Shippobottom (1996), *Op Cit,* p. 45.
[310] Shapeley, P. (2002-03), The Press and the System Built Developments of Inner-City Manchester, 1960s-1980s, p. 30.
[311] Edelman, *Op Cit*, p. 17.

added to which was his abhorrence of the semi-detached suburbia that typified so much of Britain. His contention was that:

> One can live in an ordinary straight or curved road for a dozen years, particularly when the front gardens are cut off with hedges, and not know half-a-dozen people; on the other hand the people from the little streets have not only learnt to know one another, but to be kind and helpful in emergencies. *It is obviously necessary that this good community quality should be preserved.*[312]

He was an advocate of community living and had written articles on the subject praising what he described as the sense of neighbourliness, or community, which existed in certain areas of Britain's towns and cities. He claimed that it was in the slums that the qualities he so admired could be found; here that "certain valuable qualities, such as ... quickness of brain" could be discerned. These were attributes which he contended must not be lost and although he had originally advocated a limited regeneration of the slums his efforts now turned to rebuilding their "closer life" by designing his ideal community.

Whether his socialist views or his admiration of the way of life in Soviet Russia influenced his paradigm for social living is a moot point. He had a "rather idealistic view of communal living"[313] which he planned to superimpose on an unknown population and Woodchurch provided the ideal place for such a social experiment.[314] The *Design of Dwellings* suggested that a more sociological approach should be taken to planning and Reilly was more than willing to play the role of sociologist. His own ideas on creating community chimed well with the views of the report's authors who suggested that a sense of neighbourhood could be produced through the provision of certain facilities:[315] Woodchurch was large enough to accommodate them all. The very fact that the report's authors were reluctant to define what they meant by a sense of community gave Reilly enough scope to develop his ideas on how community might be created, or at least how 'community as defined by Reilly' was to emerge. He could incorporate some of their suggestions – such as the community

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[312] Reilly C.H. and Aslan N.J. Op Cit, p. 95.
[313] Ibid.
[314] By 1944 Reilly was claiming that every planner should be a sociologist.
[315] Design of Dwellings, Op Cit, p. 58.

centres – and expand on the theme of community planning enough perhaps to convince the local authority that they would be stealing a march on other areas by adopting his plans. They owned the land, and if they adopted his scheme they could claim another first for the town: the first neighbourhood unit to be established in Britain.

<u>Creating Community – The Role of Planning and Architecture in the Reilly Plan</u>

Reilly spent a great deal of time and effort promoting his ideas on community and the built environment. He suggested that his plan was radical with, in his own words, "a good deal of kick in it"[316] although he was later to modify this statement by the admission that it was not a new planning principle but something that was "semi-new".[317] The fact that he did not bother to separate out the new elements of his scheme from the rest or to explain what gave them their 'kick' leads the observer to wonder whether there was anything new or radical in them at all. However, he seems to have been confident enough that no-one would question him on this point, to the extent that he was able to criticise others for creating suburban areas where "each house with its inhabitants keeps itself to itself".[318] He was to promote his own scheme by advertising as fact that it espoused all the virtues of community planning versus the suburban isolationism that he believed was responsible for many societal problems.[319] We are informed that his ideas had an element of Radburn in them, [320] and this, at least in part, is true. Reilly was much more a follower of fashion than an innovator: he was not quite the man of ideas that he liked others to believe. Given that the Dudley Report was already referring to the concept of the Neighbourhood Unit as the basis for municipal planning he was, in many ways perhaps, trying to pre-empt its recommendations by having the Reilly scheme adopted at Woodchurch as a practical example of suggestions made in the report. Nonetheless, many of his proposals owed as much to Unwin as to those of Clarence Perry.

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[316] Wolfe, Lawrence (1945) *The Reilly Plan.* Introduction by Professor Sir Charles Reilly, p.11.
[317] *Ibid*, p. 10.
[318] *Ibid,* p. 11.
[319] *Ibid.*
[320] Ravetz, *Op Cit*, p. 138.

Similarities between the Reilly Plan and Unwin can be found in the fact that both were admirers of the medieval method of societal organisation. They both advocated the arrangement of houses around a "village green or common"[321] as a way of breaking down class barriers through the playing of games. Unwin had spoken of the village green as a place where the "squire's son and the agricultural labourer's son"[322] fraternised and Reilly suggested that children would belong to a "cricket team or football team"[323] and "play against and make friends with members of the teams of the other greens"[324] free of class barriers. Similarly, Reilly was an advocate of low-density housing and suggested that dwellings at Woodchurch should be built at a density of 10.4 to the acre.[325] He also believed that class barriers could be broken down through the introduction of a mixed socioeconomic environment, as had existed in the traditional English villages and, to this end, he proposed that the area should contain a mixture of detached, semi-detached and terraced housing, not spatially segregated as in the Mawson proposal, or as at Letchworth, but with different housing types placed around the green to ensure that class divisions were not perpetuated. Although this might suggest the influence of the Dudley Report it is entirely possible that he was more inspired by Unwin's admiration of the English village.

He would have been aware of the Dudley Report's criticisms of earlier housing developments and had taken care to include housing for a mix of socioeconomic groups and for a variety of family sizes in his proposal. That post-war housing should rectify this omission had been a recommendation of the Dudley Report.[326] Once again his influences were a mix of the Dudley Report and the earlier Housing Manual, although his proposal did lean more heavily in favour of the former, and as such could be regarded as an attempt by Reilly to persuade those in power that adoption of his scheme would provide all the benefits required by the Dudley report. The layout of the greens in the sketches for Woodchurch show a number of houses arranged around a community building. Reilly described this arrangement as being "like the petals of a

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[321] Creese, (1967) *Op Cit,* pp. 184-185.

[322] *Ibid*, p. 184.

[323] *Birkenhead News*. Labour Support Reilly. Council Asked to Adopt Plan. *Birkenhead News*, 24 May, 1944.

[324] *Ibid*.

[325] Unwin, Sir Raymond (1912) *Nothing Gained by Overcrowding! How the Garden City type of development may benefit both owner and occupier*, pp. 1-24.

[326] Design of Dwellings, *Op Cit*, pp. 12-13.

flower" on more than one occasion,[327] but he conceded that he was prepared to compromise: they could be designed in any shape desired. His plans were flexible enough to allow approximately a third of the houses to be built in the "ordinary way on ordinary roads"[328] to accommodate those who preferred a more traditional arrangement which included the provision of both back and front gardens "as in the ordinary suburb".[329] The homes positioned around the greens were to have only a back garden: their front garden being the green itself and Reilly considered this an advantage because it would be "two to three hundred times the size of any suburban front garden".[330]

Unfortunately, his ideas changed with time and place. They were decided on a whim and seem to have depended entirely on his audience at the time: there was no consistency to them. The changeable nature of his utterances is illustrated by an article in a local newspaper, in which he described the "social essence"[331] of his plan. Despite what he had said earlier regarding individual gardens, in this version of his ideas he was to describe how each house was now to have a small flower bed at the front of the house "about 12 inches wide against the house walls, just sufficient for planting hollyhocks and other tall plants or creepers."[332] He also picked up the theme of the village greens describing how some of them might be used by the girls for playing "hockey and tennis",[333] and the men for "for tennis and bowls."[334] Unfortunately, Reilly was prone to ignoring certain details and he did not consider the nuisance that these activities might cause to residents living around the greens. He did not judge that the positioning of an inn or clubhouse on the greens might be an annoyance to the residents, particular if they were to serve alcohol; nor had he thought about the upkeep of them. In one statement Reilly proposed that the licensees should have responsibility for their care, but was later to advocate that it should be the residents. He stated that:

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[327] Edelman (1944) *Op Cit*, pp. 16-26.
[328] Wolfe (1945) *Op Cit*, p. 13.
[329] Ibid.
[330] Ibid.
[331] Unknown. Undated. *Liverpool Echo*.
[332] Ibid.
[333] *Ibid.*
[334] *Ibid.*

[H]e would like to see a committee of the residents round each green take over this responsibility. [...] and he did not think that people who lived in the houses would allow the beauty to be destroyed either by children or by other people.[335]

We should not assume that by suggesting the formation of a maintenance committee he was proposing ideas of self-governance but he may have been suggesting that in his ideal society the residents would be self-policing. Reilly was a charismatic figure and an eloquent public speaker: he was certainly a brilliant self-publicist who promoted his grand ideas without thought being given to the practicalities of his proposals. He was someone who plucked ideas out of the ether without thinking and was prone to making conflicting statements.

Debates regarding the suitability of his plan versus the Robinson proposal continued throughout 1944 with Sir Charles continuing to extoll the virtues of his scheme and the economic benefit that would accrue to the town as a result of his proposals being adopted. The greens by their very existence, he announced, would add value to the properties. He likened them to the "famous London squares and, locally, Abercromby and Falkner Squares in Liverpool"[336] but failed to mention that both amenities were private and strictly controlled. He was to suggest that allotments could be provided on the development, as had the Borough Engineer, but unlike the latter's plan, they would be located "behind the back gardens."[337] This was an ideal society of his own invention and he could include or exclude any ideas he wished without thought to the size of the area to be developed. He had not bothered with the careful calculations so typical of Robinson, and the area expanded to fit his flights of fancy. As mentioned he had talked about games being played on the greens, and about allotments being provided behind the houses without thought for the space needed for either. In addition Reilly believed that the size of the greens was crucial for providing that nebulous and intangible thing: a sense of community. He contended that to preserve or encourage this his greens should contain as little as 30 and as many as 60 dwellings. He expanded on this theme and his choice of these two rather arbitrary figures by explaining that anything smaller than the lower figure would be inadvisable

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[335] *Ibid.*
[336] *Liverpool Daily Post*. 12 May 1944. *Op Cit.*
[337] *Liverpool Echo*, undated. *Op Cit.*

because the dynamic of the community could be adversely affected by the presence of one unpleasant family; while the maximum figure represented the optimum for communal living.

It is even more difficult to understand how his greens would have provided anything that could encourage or preserve a sense of neighbourliness. A number of the descriptions of his scheme are somewhat bizarre. Some of his more fantastic utterances that illustrate this point include describing access to the greens, which were to have a single exit and entry point, as having a path "like the drive at a country mansion"[338] which was restricted to what he called domestic traffic, that is, people who could walk or ride in on a bicycle. In this version of his ideas, traffic would be restricted to baker's carts and the grocer's and butcher's bicycles. There is no mention of the footballers, the cricketers, the tennis players, or the bowls enthusiasts who would play games on his greens; and no consideration anywhere for the residents who were to inhabit his ideal environment.

There is no doubt that some of the proposals made by Reilly would have provided an improvement in the condition of the working classes of the town, in particular his suggestion that:

> A progressive local authority … would provide them ... with district heating, so that all the buildings would be centrally heated and hot water for any purpose would be available at any hour of the day or night.[339]

But even this suggestion has its disadvantages. Individual families would not have had the freedom of choice as to how much energy they could consume. He had suggested that the Garchey system of automatic rubbish disposal should be installed as standard in all the houses. Even though the system was to prove unpopular and problematic in many areas where it had been installed[340] the very fact that it was such a modern convenience might initially have proved very alluring to residents who had only been used to the conventional method of refuse collection. Central heating too, with the promise of constant hot water, would have been something that would have

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[338] Reilly and Aslan, (1947) *Op Cit.*
[339] Wolfe, (1945), *Op Cit,* p.15.
[340] http://www.barbicanliving.co.uk/f2e.html [Accessed 31/07/12]

been an attractive proposition for a population that was more used to a cold tap, albeit inside the house, and little else besides. Whether these improvements in living conditions would have been enough to compensate the residents for the loss of control over their lives is not difficult to determine. The people of Birkenhead, like their neighbours in Liverpool, were alike in their perception of self: their everyday attitudes and behaviour was "assertive and defiant in their ... refusal to bend the knee to anyone"[341] particularly to those in authority, and the Reilly scheme would probably have cost them too much in terms of lost self-respect and independence.

The Reilly scheme was never adopted by Birkenhead, possibly because the Conservative-led Council were not prepared to adopt anything which so obviously had the backing of the local Communist party. Or it might have been that so much of his scheme was vague, unrealistic and impractical, lacking as it did any clear sense of focus and the Councillors may have realised that Reilly's ideas could never become a reality. Potter contends that the reason for the town not having adopted Reilly's plan was that:

> Birkenhead in 1944 was neither the place nor the time to introduce a revolutionary concept in the form of a council estate. The step from conventional garden suburb to village green and communal living was far too great to be taken by a Council who were Conservative in every sense of the word.[342]

But it could not just have been his 'revolutionary' concept that caused them to baulk at the idea of implementing the scheme. It was possibly a number of things that resulted in the rejection of the plan. It was not just his village green idea; it was the size and number of them that would have been a problem, and the fact that he promoted the idea of competitive games on them. He had promised that there would be thirty such greens each of "more than one acre"[343] (he had talked of creating forty four greens at one point);[344] that at the rear of each property there would be gardens the average size of which would be 25 feet by 50 feet, although many were "as large

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[341] Lane, T. (1987) Liverpool Gateway of Empire, p.109.
[342] Potter, *Op Cit,* p. 11.
[343] *Liverpool Echo,* Village Greens, Or – Birkenhead Considers Two Plans. 14 April, 1944.
[344] *Birkenhead News,* 24 May 1944. *Op Cit.*

as 25 x 100 feet or more"[345] with the smallest gardens measuring "25 feet by 30 feet";[346] added to which was the commitment that there would "be allotments adjacent to the houses".[347] He had also suggested that in some cases the houses would also have the benefit of a garage despite his earlier contention that traffic would be restricted. Birkenhead Town Council must have quickly realised the impracticality of Reilly's plan. He had also snubbed the Borough Engineer – a well-regarded member of the local authority's staff – by scribbling over his plans in the first instance, and then by questioning his competence as someone fit to provide the scheme. He had exacerbated an already fraught relationship between the Labour and the Conservative councillors; and the ephemeral nature of his ideas which he changed on a whim must all have had a bearing on the final decision not to accept his proposal.

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[345] *Liverpool Echo*, Prof. Reilly And His Plan. Some Misconceptions Put Right. 19 May, 1944.
[346] *Ibid.*
[347] *Ibid.*
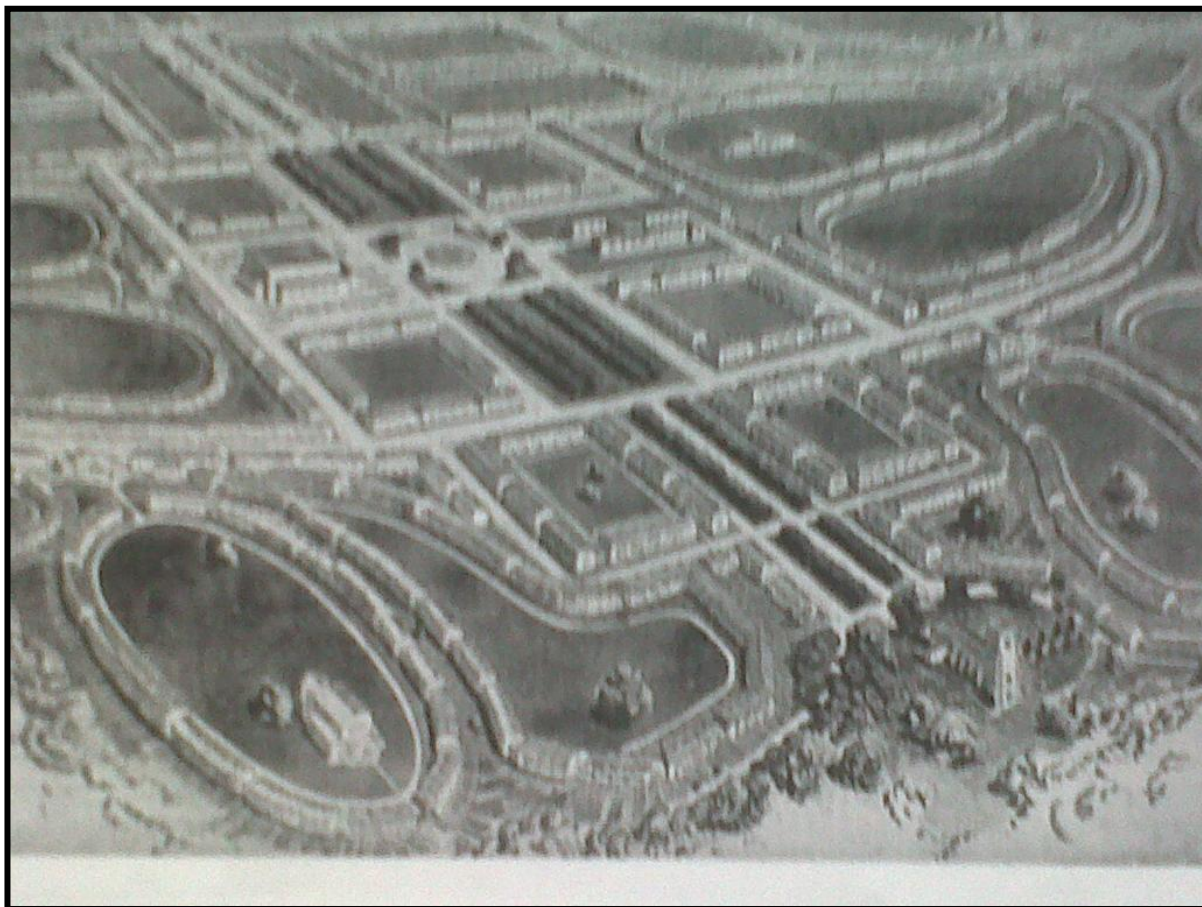
An aerial view of the Reilly Greens.
Source: Outline Plan for the County Borough of Birkenhead.
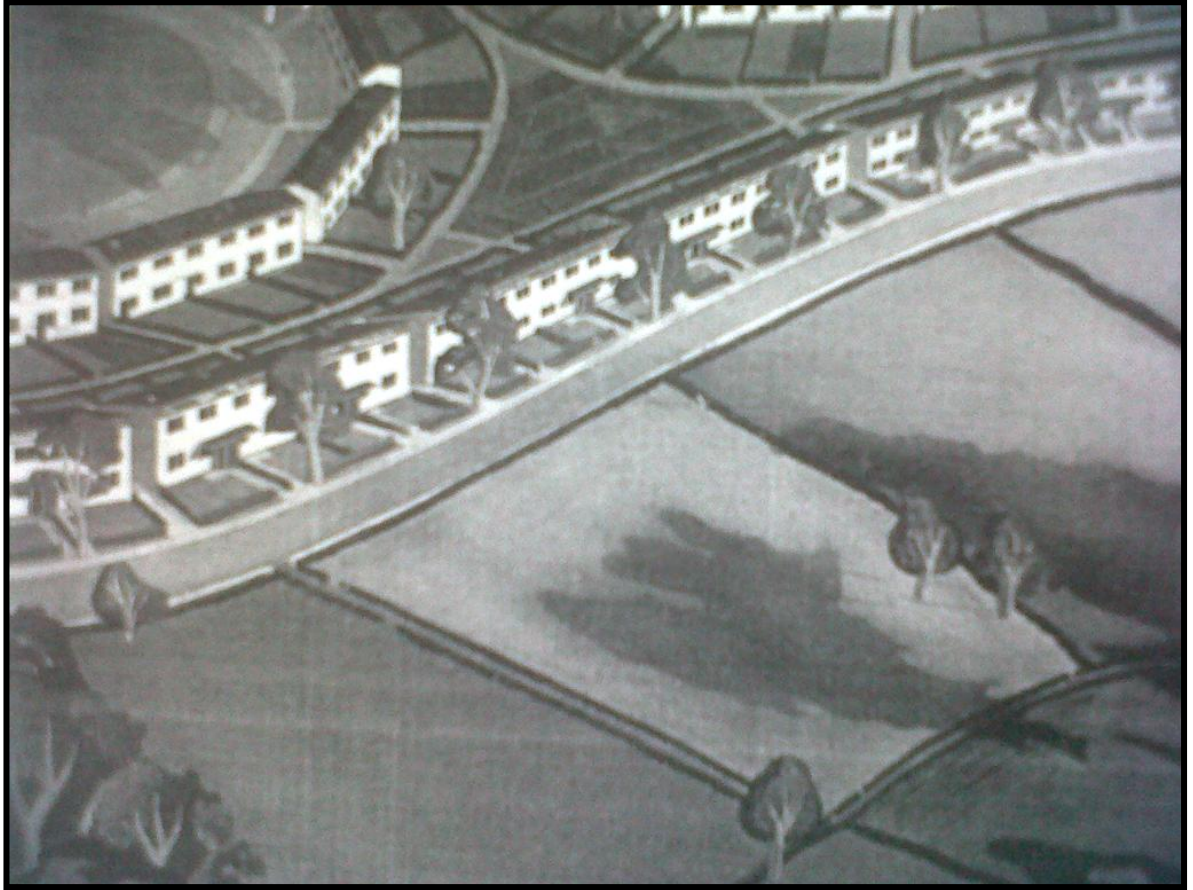
Woodchurch as it might have looked if the Reilly Plan had been adopted.
Source: *Outline plan for the County Borough of Birkenhead.*

A section of the Reilly Green. Source: Outline plan for the County Borough of Birkenhead.
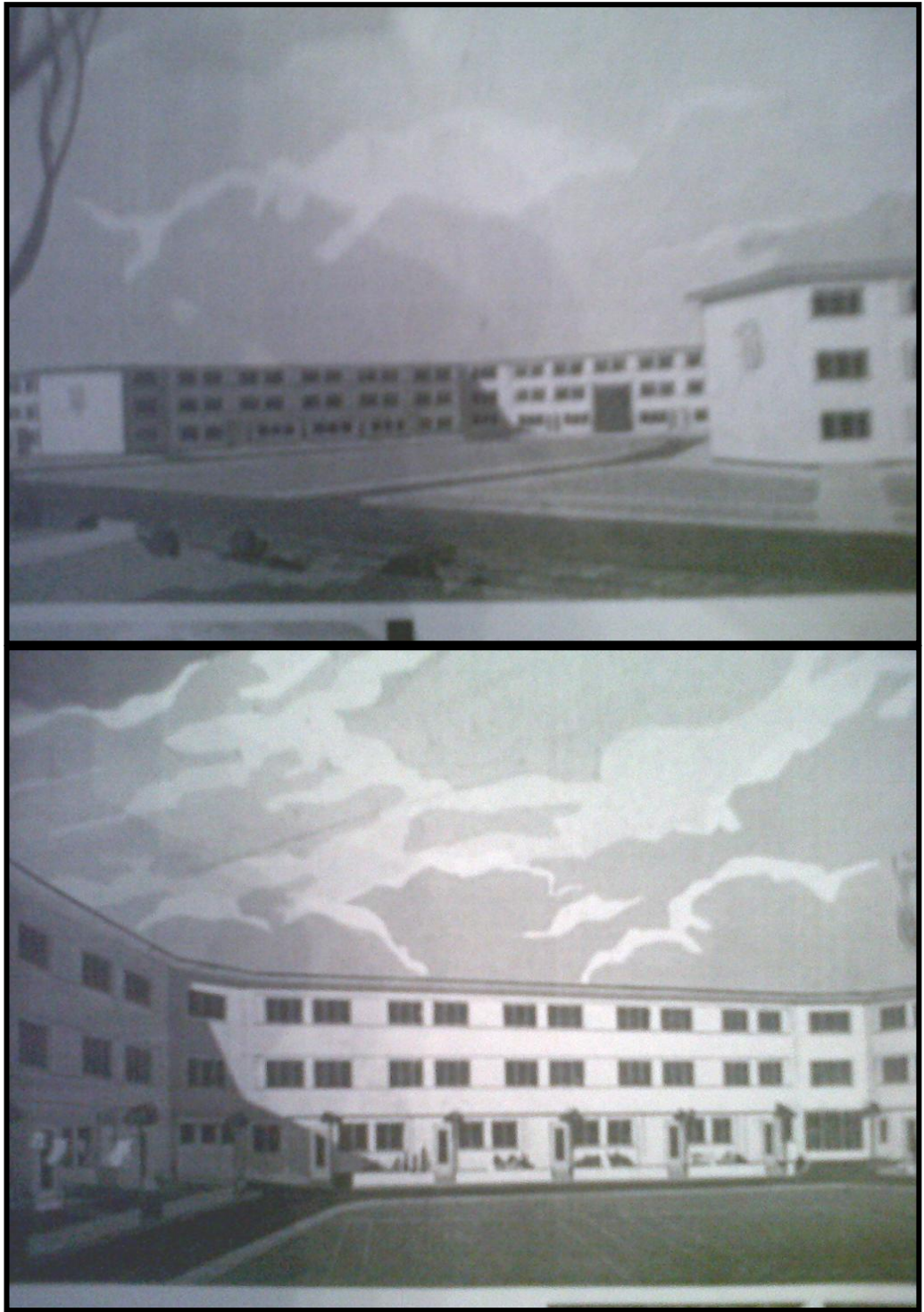
Top and bottom: External and internal views of apartments planned for Birkenhead using hexagonal planning; note that the apartments surround a green. Source: *Outline Plan for the County Borough of Birkenhead.*

Huge greens used for playing bowls were already in existence at Port Sunlight when Reilly formulated his ideas. They are surrounded by housing and the Hulme Hall (the village hall) is visible to the left of the photograph. Reilly may have got his inspiration for some of his suggestions here.

Section IV – Background to the Rowse scheme

On the 13 January 1945, two local newspapers were to report that on the previous evening the Birkenhead Town Council had received a third post-war plan for the development of the Woodchurch Estate submitted to them by the renowned Liverpool architect, Herbert James Rowse. Both newspapers were to report that his plan differed materially from its predecessors in that it was far superior to both the Robinson and the Reilly schemes. Rowse had originally been retained by the local authority "to draw up designs for the houses to be erected on the estate"[348] for the Robinson scheme. He was a highly successful architect, and a former pupil of Reilly's, with a thriving private practice in Liverpool, and his involvement with the development of Woodchurch came about as a result of the Royal Institute of British Architects recommendation that he should be employed by Birkenhead to "design the ... houses and buildings" for the Borough Engineer's scheme.[349]

Although Rowse was a highly regarded architect amongst others of his profession he was (and probably still is) little known outside it, despite his "significant impact on the city" of Liverpool.[350] His designs for the Merseyside area include the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall; the entrances to the Queensway Tunnel; the Martin's Bank Building; the majestic Grade II listed India Buildings;[351] and the ventilation shafts for the Mersey Tunnel. Dunne and Richmond[352] suggest that he was one of the most influential Liverpool based architects in the inter-war years having also gained an international reputation through his work in North America, Spain and India.[353] His reputation was well-deserved as he was someone who paid meticulous attention to detail to the extent that his aim was to make "the best possible plan; even if it meant

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[348] *Liverpool Daily Post*, Latest Plan for Woodchurch. 13 January, 1945 and another almost identical article appeared on the same date in the *Liverpool Echo.*

[349] *Birkenhead News*, Council Sensation. Labour Walks Out Again. Dramatic End to Debate. 23 September, 1944.

[350] Macdonald, R. (n.p.) Liverpool As Architectural Palimpsest: Rise and Fall of Empire: Herbert J. Rowse (1887-1963). http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/home/ahzsh1/Empire/MacDonald%20Paper.pdf Accessed: 03/12/11.

[351] *Liverpool Echo. 14 November, 2013.* It was reported that India Buildings was upgraded by English Heritage to Grade II to halt the threat of alterations to the structure.

[352] Dunne, J. and Richmond, P. (2008) *The World in One School. The History and Influence of the Liverpool School of Architecture 1894-2008.*

[353] Haddy, A. (1978) *Herbert James Rowse. An Architect of Quality*. Unpublished MPhil submission.

overstepping the terms of his appointment."[354] To what extent his proposals were superior to the Reilly and Robinson schemes is discussed below.

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[354] Potter, Lilian, *Op Cit,* p. 108.

A section of a terrace of houses on Home Farm Road, Woodchurch. Source: Haddy.
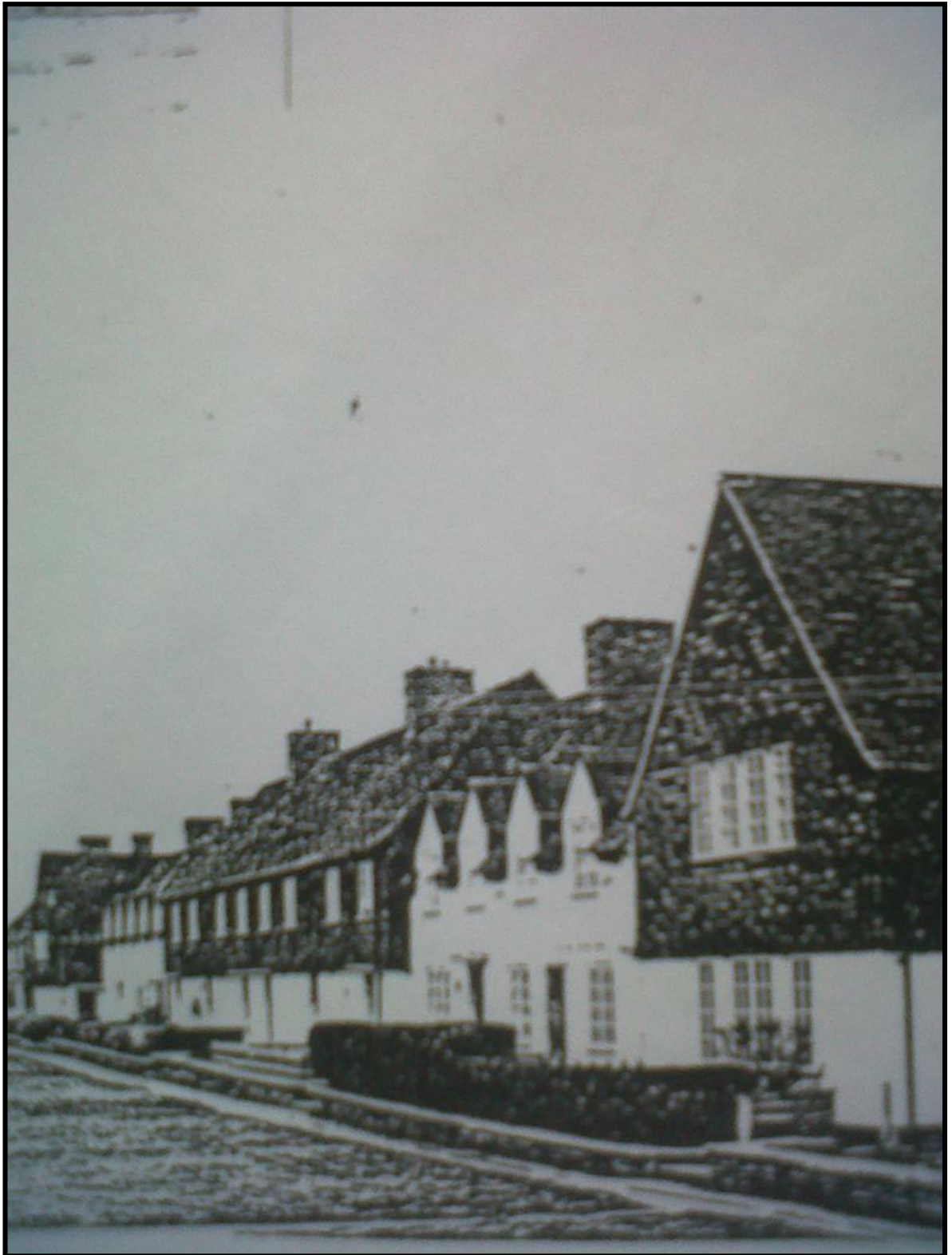
A full view of the same terrace shows how a repeat design was used in some of the terraces on the estate: repetition without monotony. Source: Haddy.
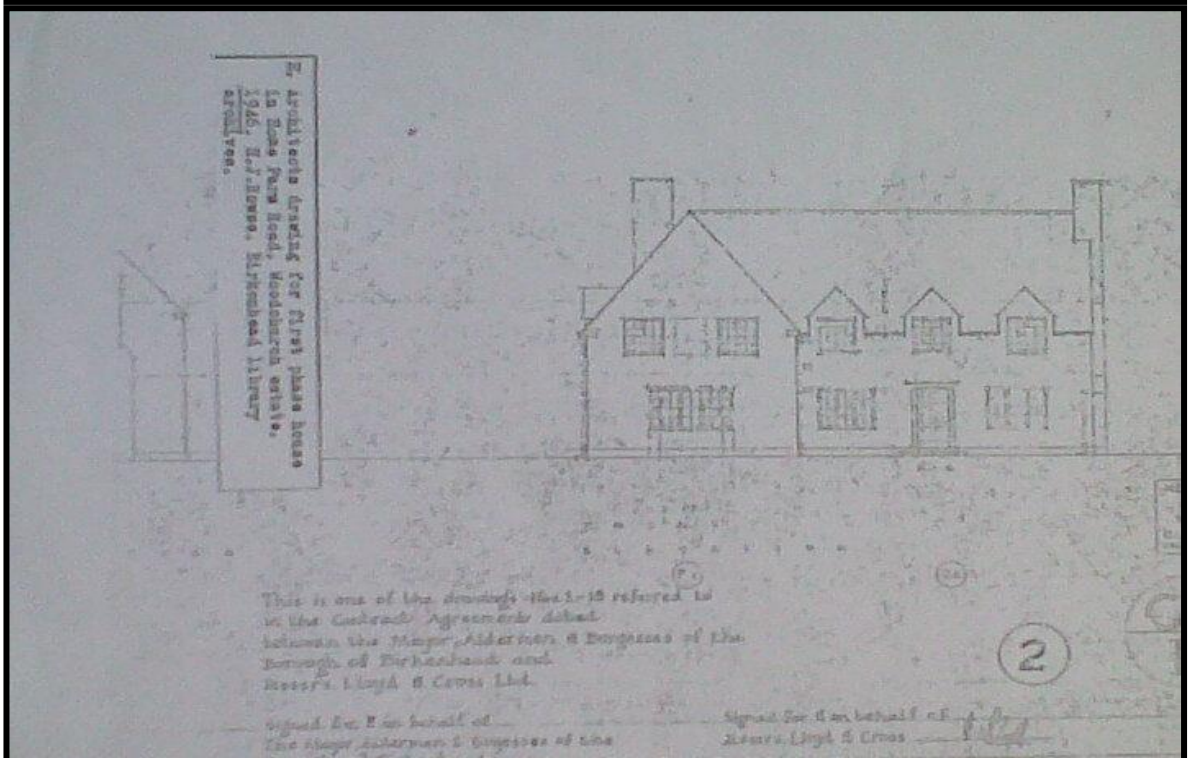
Top: Compare Castle Coombe Source: Moriarty, D. *Buildings of the Cotswolds*; and Rowse's designs (bottom) for these semi-detached houses. Source: Birkenhead Central Library.
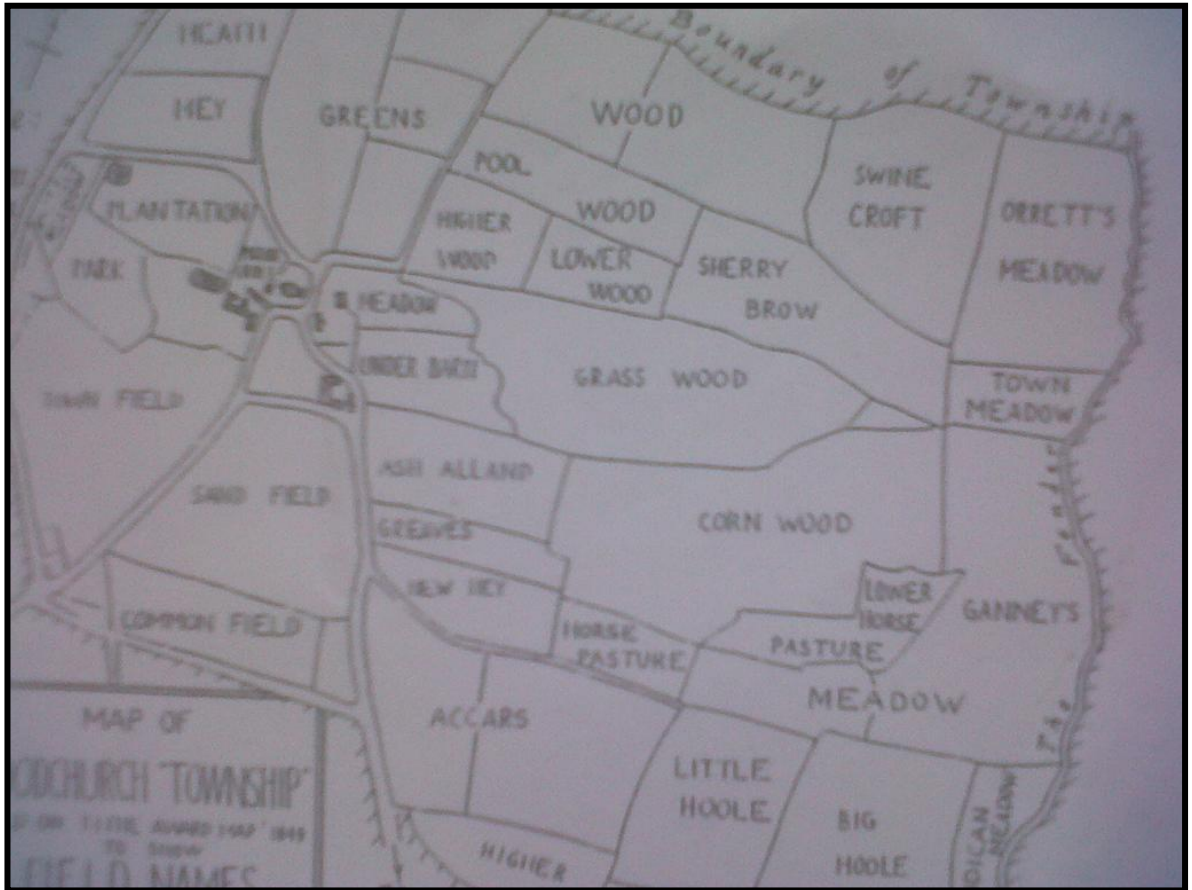
Rowse's use of old field names to provide continuity with the past is illustrated by consulting the above map based on the Tithe Award Map 1849 and comparing this with the names of roads on the estate. The names used across the neighbourhood are: Ackers, Hoole, Commonfield, New Hey, Sandfield, Grasswood, Orretts Meadow, and Ganneys Meadow. Source: Wirral Archive

Continuity expressed in Rowse's designs.
Top: Church Terrace (source: Ian Boumphrey, *Yesterday's Wirral*).
Bottom: houses in Sandfield Road, Woodchurch. Source: Haddy.

Two views of Eastham Village, situated about 5 miles from Woodchurch, illustrating (top) the same mix of local brick and whitewashed housing used in the Rowse scheme and (bottom) whitewashed houses following the curve of this ancient road.

Creating Community – The Role of Planning and Architecture in the Rowse Scheme

The plans submitted by Rowse provided for the construction of 2,522 single occupancy family homes, and his road layouts illustrate how the estate would be divided by three radial avenues all leading to the highest point on the estate: the ancient Parish Church of Woodchurch. Reminiscent of the Beaux-Arts movement, it was a device that had been used to good effect at Port Sunlight, where the designs of one of Sir Charles Reilly's students, Ernest Prestwich, had been carried out with slight modifications by Thomas Mawson.[355] The central avenue was to be formed out of a twin road that would constitute the main shopping centre "of the garden village",[356] while the other two were to be bordered by wide grass verges "dotted with shrubs and trees."[357] Potter confirms that Rowse "utilised the contours of the area and the remnants of Woodchurch village"[358] and in many respects this fulfilled Geddes' requirement that "the historic origins of a region"[359] must be studied "in order to revive its best life."[360]

The main facilities for the estate were provided by the inclusion of a "branch library, swimming baths, community centre, cinema"[361] and other unspecified buildings. Like the earlier Mawson and Robinson plans, Rowse suggested that residents should also to have the benefit of two smaller shopping centres at other sites on the estate. Five schools with spacious playing fields were to be provided and were to be situated "at the lowest point of the estate close to the wooded walk along the Fender valley"[362] in what was termed the educational district; an idea established by Robinson. In addition the plan provided for two nursery schools and two clinics situated in the central section of the development. A new arterial road connecting Wallasey with mid-Wirral, then on to Chester and beyond was planned, but there was to be no access from the estate to the proposed road. He had, however, made provision for the car and designed the roads to allow two private vehicles to pass each other in order to

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[355] Creese (1992) *Op Cit*, p. 133.
[356] Potter, *Op Cit*, p. 108.
[357] *Liverpool Daily Post,* Latest Plan for Woodchurch Estate. 13 January, 1945.
[358] Potter, *Op Cit*, p. 108.
[359] Creese (1992) *Op Cit*, p. 170.
[360] *Ibid.*
[361] *Liverpool Daily Post*, 13 January, 1945 *Op Cit.*
[362] *Liverpool Echo*, New Features In Latest Plan For The Woodchurch Estate. 13 January, 1945.

exclude heavy traffic from the development. The reduction in the width of the roads had been made possible by relaxations in the Ministry of Health's model town-planning clauses. Although this allowed for an extremely attractive layout when car ownership was virtually unknown, rapid changes in lifestyle and improvements in income have meant that he, like many others, failed to appreciate the impact that increased use of motor vehicles would make to his designs..

The architect in some notes on the plan, explained that he had developed the estate based on the natural topography; and that he had tried to maintain the rural nature of the area with the use of "planted green closes, forecourts, quadrangles, recreation spaces, and the allotment gardens".[363] The estate was to be graced with groups of houses and trees that would give it the general character of "a modern version of the traditional English village scene."[364] The original plans for the estate illustrate the extent to which its design was influenced by Unwin's garden suburb; the houses themselves reflect the style of some of those at Letchworth[365] but are also very reminiscent of the Cotswolds,[366] in particular Castle Coombe.[367] Influences can also be found in the development of Wythenshawe, where Barry Parker the business partner and brother-in-law of Raymond Unwin, was commissioned to mastermind Manchester's "new garden city"[368] and in Sir Lancelot Keay's municipal garden suburb developments in the Queens Drive area of Liverpool.

Historical continuity was to be maintained through the use of locally manufactured brick for the construction of the houses, the majority of which were to be painted white (later cream) interspersed with larger red brick dwellings. In the very early stages of development there was criticism of the appearance of the estate because the dwellings had been painted in a "shocking pink and completed with doors painted blue ...."[369] There was also some suggestion that this trend would be continued by the use of different colours for houses with a rendered facing. It was announced that the intention was:

[363] *Ibid.*
[364] *Ibid.*
[365] Purdom (1949) *Op Cit*, Houses in Rushby Mead and Jackmans Place, Plates IV, V and VI.
[366] Moriarty, D. (1989) *Buildings of the Cotswolds*, p. 54.
[367] Creese (1967) *Op Cit*, pp. 174-5.
[368] Deakin, Derick (1989) *Wythenshawe. The Story of a Garden City*, p. 24.
[369] *Liverpool Daily Post,* Shocking. 3 May, 1949.

... to colourwash in varying shades the majority of the new houses in the area, when the new satellite will really justify the name of Rainbow Village.[370]

The objections raised had the desired effect and by the early 1950s all the painted houses were being given a uniform white treatment[371] and further criticism was deemed unnecessary. Whether intentionally or otherwise, by using the technique of a white or pale cream colour wash for the exterior of a proportion of the houses, Rowse was following a tradition that went back at least to Morris. In this respect it also reflected Reilly's scheme, as well as with the local village vernacular which corresponded completely with Unwin's design philosophy.[372] However, given Rowse's attention to detail and his knowledge of the area it is not surprising that the treatment of the exterior of the houses reflected those to be found in the ancient village of Woodchurch and other rural settlements throughout the peninsular. Residents from across Wirral would have been familiar with the traditional architecture of such local beauty spots as Irby, Hoylake or Eastham and would have recognised it in Rowse's designs at Woodchurch. His use of local brick, Georgian windows and whitewashed cottage-style housing expressed a continuity with the past that was inescapable

On 3 March 1945[373] the local authority were to accept Rowse's plans for both the housing and layout of the estate: coincident with this was a resolution to rescind their previous decision to accept the Robinson plan. That Rowse's plans were accepted in their entirety seems have been somewhat serendipitous given that, like Reilly, the architect had submitted his plans uninvited,[374] but it provided the local authority with a perfect opportunity to save themselves further embarrassment given the adverse publicity and political in-fighting that had typified the preceding twelve months.[375]

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[370] *Ibid.*

[371] According to an interviewee whose husband had been employed as a painter for the local authority, the material used was a product called *Snowcem.*

[372] Potter, *Op Cit,* reflects that "there are a number of variations in both style and materials used for exterior finishes ... as at Port Sunlight" p. 109

[373] Unknown. (1945) New Plan for Woodchurch. Mr. Rowse's Design Approved. *Liverpool Echo,* 3 March.

[374] Unknown. (1945) Untitled, 8 February.

[375] A former employee of the local authority has provided the information that Robinson and Rowse got on well together, and were to collaborate on the overall design of the estate. The Borough Engineer on the roads and utilities; and Rowse on the design of the interior and exterior planning of the dwellings.

Regrettably, this did not bring the matter to the satisfactory close the Conservative-led Council had hoped: heated arguments in Council persisted, and local press reports recorded that Labour continued with their objection to the acceptance of any plans before Reilly's ideas had been given due consideration. There was to be another "full-dress debate" with Labour proposing that all three plans for the estate should be submitted to the Ministry of Health and that the decision should be left to them.[376] The motion was defeated by the narrow margin of twenty-nine to twenty-two votes[377] and the Conservatives were to continue with the Rowse scheme.

Nowhere in the discussion of his plans did Rowse voice the opinion that by adopting his scheme a sense of community would be created, the observer has been left with too little evidence to establish this point, but Potter contends that a sense of community did emerge on the estate.[378]   What its dynamic was and whether its formation was as a result of the built environment will be discussed in Chapter 6.

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[376] *Liverpool Echo*, Woodchurch Estate: Mr. H. J. Rowse's Plan Accepted. 8 March, 1945
[377] *Ibid.*
[378] Potter *Op Cit*, pp. 111-112.

Woodchurch today – Top: Home Farm Road, with modifications for car ownership. Bottom: the old school house after extension to the left of the original building.

Despite the intrusion of modern 'street furniture' Rowse's designs seem to have a longevity about them that has not been the case with other areas of Woodchurch.

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CHAPTER 5

REILLY, WOLFE, WOODCHURCH AND THE TOTAL REORGANISATION OF SOCIETY?

> *The Communit is an association of a number of families and individuals acting in common in all matters in which their interests and wishes coincide, but retaining complete independence in all other respects.*[379] [Italics in original.]

> The definition of the "sense of community" that emerges from all this is: An ingrained awareness on the part of the family and the individual that their self-interest coincides with the interest of the immediate community, and that the interest of the immediate community is merged with that of the wider community.[380]

As has been discussed in the preceding chapter adoption of Reilly's scheme was, despite some interference from the local Communist Party, reduced to a straightforward ideological fight between the two main political parties in Birkenhead.[381] There is little to suggest that the furore in Birkenhead ever had quite the national prominence attributed to it by the *Picture Post.* Professor Sir Charles Reilly[382] was to write a few brief articles and a short report of the Labour Party Conference at Central Hall, at which a resolution had been carried to the effect that:

> ... the community basis of town planning, as illustrated by Professor Charles Reilly's plans for Woodchurch estate, Birkenhead, would best serve to solve post-war housing needs ....[383]

appeared in *The Times,* but little else besides. Potter has already supplied us with the information that there was no interest from architects, planners or sociologists, apart

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[379] Wolfe, Lawrence (1942) *The Road to Total War*, p. 82.
[380] Wolfe, (1945) *Op Cit*, p. 97.
[381] *Ibid,* p. 10.
[382] *Ibid*, p. 11. Reilly, in his introduction to *The Reilly Plan*, contended that: "Not only the local but the national Press began to take an interest in the Birkenhead controversy, *Picture Post* publishing a fully illustrated article which had repercussions over the Empire."
[383] Unknown. (1944) Housing Problem. Demand for Bolder Measures. *The Times,* 12 December.

from two articles – one of them in the *Architectural Journal* – and "an appreciation in the <u>Leader</u>".[384]

At what point the academic was contacted by Lawrence Wolfe cannot be ascertained. Reilly himself did not reveal when he was approached by him but Potter contends[385] that it was after the former's scheme had already been rejected by the Conservative-led Birkenhead Town Council.[386] With the dismissal of his scheme the academic needed someone to analyse and promote his plans[387] if there was ever to be a chance of them being implemented: someone with evangelistic zeal and enthusiasm enough to convince a sceptical audience that his ideas really were the answer to all societal problems. Enter, as if on cue, Lawrence Wolfe.

There is little known about the writer and his true identity is still not known but Reilly was to describe him as "a student of life from the angle of the planned for and ... a student of both mass and child psychology"[388] but it is clear from his introduction to *The Reilly Plan* that he was not personally acquainted with him. The academic claimed that Wolfe had entered into correspondence with him as a result of the *Picture Post* article immediately after its publication, and the former "from that moment became an enthusiastic propagandist for my plan."[389] The academic praised the writer for his intervention and was to contend that if his plan was "carried out in the next few years"[390] it would be due to Lawrence Wolfe. Reilly was not a well man by this time[391] and there can be little doubt that the establishment of the Reilly Greens would probably have been his last great endeavour. It would have been a lasting memorial to his dedication to the discipline of planning and Wolfe's inexplicable enthusiasm for the scheme must have seemed like an ideal opportunity for promoting

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[384] Potter, *Op Cit,* p. 100.

[385] *Ibid.*

[386] Unknown. (1944) Battle of the Plans for Woodchurch Estate. Birkenhead Council Rejects Professor Reilly's Scheme. *Liverpool Daily Post*, 27 May. In this article Reilly was to storm that it was "simply ludicrous, and I am afraid that Birkenhead will be a bad joke because it settles a matter of planning, aesthetics, and sociology, and all kinds of human interest entirely on political party lines."

[387] Potter (1998), *Op Cit,* p. 100.

[388] Wolfe (1945). *Op Cit*, p. 11

[389] *Ibid.*

[390] *Ibid.*

[391] Larkham, P. J. (2004), <u>New Suburbs and Post-War Reconstruction: The Fate of Charles Reilly's 'Greens'</u>, pp. 12-14.

it. He was flattered by the attention he was receiving from the writer and was to claim that:

> [I]f "The Reilly Plan" ... is carried out in the next few years – and it seems likely that it will in several places – it will be due to [Wolfe]. I shall then at long last, and as a very old man, if I live to see such a culmination, sit back and be happy, for I am convinced that the community life the plan makes possible would ... brighten the lives of the residents, young and old ....[392]

The writer was to suggest to Reilly that he had missed many of the "implications to be found in the plan"[393] which he had not fully appreciated when he drew it.[394] As a result, Reilly was to accept Wolfe's proposal that he should write an analysis of the plan for him because he was convinced that his ideas would create "intelligent communities"[395] and by this he meant a well informed population who would take action on "matters of vital national concern."[396]

If we are to accept that Reilly's reasons for accepting Wolfe's offer were based on an overwhelming conviction that his plans had a universal validity that deserved to be put into practice the question arises: what was Wolfe hoping to gain by his association with the Professor? Potter contends that although Reilly had acquired a supportive mouthpiece, the benefit for Wolfe was that he now "had the opportunity to be associated with an influential figure in both architecture and journalism."[397] However, the writer may have had much more to gain from his association with the academic. Did he, perhaps, have a hidden agenda? Was it possible that Wolfe had already formulated his own ideas of the ideal society and had these ideas already been rejected? Did the academic's ideas coincide, at least in part, with the writer's own? Simply put, the answer to these questions is that Wolfe did have a hidden agenda; he had already formulated his own ideas on creating the ideal society which had been rejected; and there were vague similarities between his scheme and what Reilly was proposing. Potter records that:

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[392] Wolfe, (1945). *Op Cit,* pp. 11-12*.*
[393] *Ibid.*
[394] *Ibid.*
[395] *Ibid.*
[396] *Ibid*, p.12.
[397] Potter, *Op Cit*, p. 100.

... as far as can be ascertained there is no record of the publication of another volume, presumably on a similar theme, to which Wolfe refers in a letter, with verifiable address, to the then *Manchester Guardian.***[398]**

The previous publication to which Wolfe referred in his letter is a booklet entitled *The Road to Total War* published in 1942 in which he sets out his plans for the complete reorganisation of society. It is obvious that he had been formulating his ideas for some time before its publication. He claimed that he had "first begun to hawk around"[399] his proposals *before* the outbreak of war but his ideas had been rejected everywhere on the grounds that they were "too fantastic".[400] However, he claimed that changing times had meant something of an alteration in attitude amongst his former critics and they had been magnanimous enough to acknowledge their mistake.[401] Unfortunately, he gives no indication of where he had promoted his ideas, no hint of to whom, and gives no evidence to support his contention that a number of his former critics had "sought [him] out to acknowledge their error."[402]

Wolfe – using similar terminology to that of the academic regarding his own scheme – acknowledged that his ideas were not completely new and described his plans as "only a bare outline of a *new-old* economic and social system"[403] (Reilly, had talked of his ideas being based on a semi-new planning principle) which he called the "Communit (Communal Unit)".[404] Like Reilly he described his plans as revolutionary but that its principles were firmly based on the existing tendencies of the masses. He did not bother to expand further on the theme of their radical nature. He could not provide the relevant statistics and data to support his theory, but promised that the outline contained in his book would be enough to convince people that the only way to organise society effectively was by embracing his ideas.[405]

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[398] *Ibid*, p. 101.
[399] Wolfe, (1942)*, Op Cit*, p. vii.
[400] Wolfe claims that he had first begun publicising his ideas five years earlier than the book's publication.
[401] Wolfe, (1942) *Op Cit*, p. vii.
[402] *Ibid.*
[403] *Ibid.*
[404] *Ibid.*
[405] *Ibid.*

The importance of this earlier booklet is that it is crucial for understanding Wolfe's motivation for commandeering Reilly's ideas and to appreciate the similarities and differences between Wolfe's own proposals for community planning and the scheme devised by the academic. A note of caution should be sounded here: it has not been possible to identify whose ideas were being expressed in *The Reilly Plan* or in the section on Woodchurch in Reilly's outline plan for Birkenhead. Whether they can be attributed to either Reilly or Wolfe is not completely clear but it is assumed that the description of the "Physical Features of the Reilly Plan"[406] at least were the academic's own work, although the latter does state that he was responsible for the analysis of the former's ideas. Potter notes that after the academic became associated with the writer the former did not hesitate to "promote fully"[407] previously unappreciated social benefits of his plan.

Wolfe's first booklet began with a sustained and vitriolic attack – which he described as "blunt and dogmatic"[408] – on the country's leaders who had, he claimed, got it wrong. But it was not just them who were guilty of this mistake. His ire is aimed at the majority of the population, particularly those in suburbia, who were guilty of everything from subverting the law, to downright criminality.[409] Using alarmist propaganda he attacks everything from the waste of the country's resources carried out by what he calls the "Wasting Industry" – wasting everything from raw materials to foodstuffs[410] – to sadistic fathers;[411] from pathologically selfish parents who "deliberately foster a father or mother complex in their children"[412] to juvenile crime. No-one escapes his wrath. He presents a frighteningly bleak picture of society in order to convince others of the benefits of his scheme.

Which individuals, or what group of people, Wolfe thought were responsible for all the waste, all the confusion, all the criminality that he had cited as plaguing society at that moment? Using a body politic argument he describes the culprit as the isolationist

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[406] Wolfe (1945), *Op Cit*, pp. 13-19.
[407] Potter (1998) *Op Cit*, p. 101.
[408] Wolfe, (1942), *Op Cit,* p. vii*.*
[409] Ibid, p. 25.
[410] *Ibid,* pp. 41-60.
[411] *Ibid,* p. 68
[412] *Ibid.*

family,[413] whose organisation made them a "weak cell", who were responsible for "all the failures of [our present] war planning."[414] He argued:

> What is the most characteristic feature of the family today? Its separatism, its isolationism, its almost complete detachment from the rest of society, its stupid, stubborn refusal to associate, to co-operate, even where its own most vital interest is at stake.[415]

Something had to be done to stop the family – and society – from disintegrating completely. It is here that we begin to understand the link between Reilly's hatred of ordinary suburban planning, which encouraged people to keep themselves to themselves in isolation from one another[416] and Wolfe's own world view. It is evident from the foregoing that both the academic and the writer believed that the time was ripe for a radical change in the way society was organised. Both claimed that a change was needed in the way people were housed because housing shaped their whole way of life and was responsible for what they became. Both men contended that the isolationist way of life was responsible for the evils facing society.

By the time Wolfe came to write *The Reilly Plan* the situation had changed considerably since that mid-point of the war when he had produced his first treatise on community planning. He did not need quite so much of the alarmist propaganda when he came to write his second booklet. His task was aided by the fact that there was a great deal of similarity between his own ideas on society and those of Reilly. The war was over, and people were beginning to consider the task of reconstruction. The Dudley Report had been published recently and was to set out the government's proposals for the development of municipal housing estates in the post-war period. The fact that the report was so critical of inter-war housing estates and their failure to create community must have seemed like the answer to a prayer for our two protagonists.[417] The report's authors' maintained that the earlier Tudor Walters Report

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[413] *Ibid*, p. 35.
[414] *Ibid*, p. 36.
[415] *Ibid*, p. 37.
[416] Edelman (1945), *Op Cit.*
[417] The report was published in 1917, from which came the Housing, Town Planning &c., Act 1919 (also known as the Addison Act).

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represented an outmoded planning strategy and they were concerned that there should be:

> ... a new conception of planning which involves the creation of independent and semi-independent mixed social communities provided with all the industrial, social and other activities and amenities on which community life depends.[418]

The authors of the Dudley Report did not make clear what they thought constituted community, limiting their observations to phrases such as "the full development of community life"[419]; a "sense of neighbourhood"[420]; and to the provision of "community facilities"[421] but the publication of the report must have encouraged both men to think that there could be no doubt that Reilly's scheme, as interpreted by Wolfe, was close to adoption.

<u>The total reorganisation of society</u>

Perhaps the greatest similarity between the observations of Reilly and the work of Wolfe is that neither individual was completely clear on the fine detail of their schemes. However, it is evident Wolfe's imaginary Communit (which had been 'established' on Average Street, Surburbia) of his first booklet became the Reilly Green of his second. It did not matter that the middle-class, semi-detached homes that were typical of the imaginary area bore no resemblance to the housing normally associated with the working-classes: there was still a supposedly docile population to be exploited and moulded into becoming communally-minded citizens. The times had changed and the means by which the Communit could be established had changed: it could now be organised around a Reilly Green with much less trouble than it would have taken to organise the Communit of the earlier book.

It is clear that everything in the Communit was strictly controlled, and it is assumed that the same can be said for the Reilly Green. In the first booklet order was to be achieved by the establishment of an organising committee, led by a male, who would be elected to manage all aspects of the residents' daily lives. Of course, the

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[418] Design of Dwellings, *Op Cit*, p. 9.
[419] *Ibid,* p. 58.
[420] *Ibid.*
[421] *Ibid.*

organising committee would need somewhere to carry out their day-to-day activities and the writer proposed that two semi-detached houses conveniently situated in the middle of the street[422] – and even more conveniently, and voluntarily, vacated by the residents – could be used for administrative purposes. The writer must have recognised how much simpler managing the total reorganisation of society would be with the introduction of the Reilly Plan. No longer would he have to worry (if he had ever done so) about moving homeowners out of their homes, nor would he have to consider the implications of undertaking a "few *minor* structural alterations"[423] in order to provide the type of buildings needed for organisation of his ideal society. The type of architectural determinism that the Reilly Plan promised meant that whole sectors of society would be moved *en masse* to peripheral housing estates as the British Government put into action its post-war reconstruction plans. He would not have to wait for "a single streetful of enlightened families"[424] in order for him to carry out the experiment. With the Reilly Plan, Wolfe had the benefit of a government manual to support his ideas on co-operative living. He contended that his method of organisation:

> ... creates a physical setting in which spontaneous co-operation between neighbour and neighbour [is likely to develop] and with it a "sense of community" which the Dudley Report is unable to define, but which here defines itself.[425]

The Reilly Green was the physical setting in which a sense of community would define itself, but by reading both publications on the subject it is clear that he never meant that community would develop organically. Wolfe continued:

> How the "sense of community" is likely to emerge from the ordinary processes of the residents' daily life will be clear from the following interpretation of the physical features of the Reilly Plan ....[426]

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[422] Wolfe (1942), *Op Cit,* p. 85.
[423] *Ibid.*
[424] *Ibid*, p. 111.
[425] *Ibid*, p. 87.
[426] *Ibid.*

And it is possible that he thought that his utopia would emerge as a result of his booklet being adopted as an addendum to the Dudley Report: a kind of secondary housing manual if you will.

In this second booklet his polemic began by explaining the principles of the Reilly Plan and continued by arguing that without it, "very considerable and very vital parts of the problem will remain unsolved".[427] He complained that no-one had bothered to define what the housing problem was; no-one had asked the question "What is housing?" In order to answer his question he lists four principles which he contended would avoid the mistakes of the past. Planners, he contended had got it wrong because they had been too busy concentrating on the house as the whole of the home: the correct principle on which all development of housing should be based was "The "Inner Circle" and the "Extensions"[428] because:

> [T]he term "housing" signifies not merely houses, however perfect, but homes, in the sense of the complete setting of the family's and the individual's non-vocational daily life.[429]

By providing the residents of an area with what he called the 'extensions' to the dwelling, community, through the process of what he called "spontaneous co-operation",[430] would develop.

His polemic then goes on to define what he maintains was at the root of all societal problems, and it is no surprise to discover that isolationism was where the problem lay. In the first booklet it was the "isolationist family"[431] in the second "the isolationist way of life"[432] but the conclusion was the same: societal organisation was at fault. The Reilly Plan, he argued, would provide the paradigm for a new way of living: for the total reorganisation of society, in fact. As has been described, Wolfe's contention was that the emphasis on the house as constituting the entire home was totally incorrect.

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[427] Wolfe, (1945) *Op Cit*, p. 21.
[428] *Ibid*, p. 29.
[429] *Ibid*.
[430] *Ibid*, pp. 34-35. Wolfe describes "spontaneous co-operation" as something that is not voluntary but "selfish" and claims that it is the "only form of co-operation that will last without constant propaganda and renewed menaces".
[431] Wolfe (1942), *Op Cit*, p. 35.
[432] Wolfe (1945), *Op Cit*, p. 40.

By adopting the Reilly Plan the house became only a very small part of the 'home' and facilities such as the nursery, nursery school, and community centre all became extensions to the home and, he stated, in this way community would develop. With a bizarre and confusing evangelical zeal he contended that the immediate community was always in the house in spirit, and because of this exclusiveness and isolationism could never develop there. The home, he claimed, was protected from these twin evils by the extensions which linked it to the wider community.

He then goes on to consider the benefits of "the Green"[433] and here we find that they are no longer a place where adults and children would play competitive games to instil the team spirit,[434] as was Reilly's contention, they are now a metaphysical extension of the home: they were now a place for "impromptu merry making",[435] and for "the revival of folk dancing and singing, even to the revival of the Maypole."[436] The idea that somehow people would dance and make music in the streets as a result of improvements in their environment reflected Reilly's own view that his "[B]righter slums"[437] would result in "dancing at nights on smooth pavements to the gramophone"[438] but whether Wolfe had actually read any of the academic's work is open to question. Wolfe also proposed that another benefit of the green could be found in its use as an informal crèche for children aged 0-5 where the infants were "perfectly safe from attack by an animal and from any other accident, for the green ... is so designed that every internal point is clearly visible from every other ...".[439] The greens were multipurpose and always usable because the weather in this ideal society was almost always fine[440] and, as a result, they were the place where a spirit of community could be fostered. Wolfe insisted that quintessentially the physical setting of the Reilly Plan allowed "spontaneous co-operation"[441] to develop between neighbours and although he had not used this term in his first publication, he had referred to co-operation being the means by which society could "raise the standard

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[433] *Ibid,* p. 89.
[434] Birkenhead News, 24 May 1944, *Op Cit.*
[435] Wolfe, (1945) *Op Cit*, pp. 118-119 and Potter, *Op Cit*, p. 102.
[436] Wolfe, (1945) *Ibid*, p. 126.
[437] Reilly, (1934) *Op Cit*, p. 65.
[438] *Ibid.*
[439] Wolfe, (1945) *Op Cit*, p. 106.
[440] *Ibid.*
[441] *Ibid*, p. 87.

of life to the highest possible level ..."[442] and develop a "communal mentality, a communal conscience"[443] whether this was what the residents wanted or not. The dynamic was that the mothers:

> ... having their babies on the same green for several hours nearly every day cannot help meeting, getting into conversation and, from sheer self-interest, acting in a neighbourly manner.

Wolfe continued his metaphysical analysis of the other extensions to the house claiming that the private and the public space associated with the scheme merged in one amorphous but benign mass to create an environment where community became not just a way of life, but a way of being. As Potter contends,[444] he disregarded the needs and wants of the individual and pontificated on how his ideal society conducted itself from childbirth through all the stages of life but carefully avoided referring to death apart from a brief mention in "The Supreme Integrating Principle"[445] where he states that all planning, all social endeavour is governed by the need:

> ... to create conditions under which every individual shall be able to live out his life, from the womb to the grave, to the best advantage of both himself and the community.[446]

As with his first publication where the establishment of the Communit was the answer to all social problems effecting society, the Reilly scheme was to be the vehicle, not only for creating housing that worked, but also for eliminating loneliness, delinquency, cruelty to children, venereal disease, extra-marital relationships and illicit love affairs, from society. One might question how all this was to be achieved and Potter concluded that it was Wolfe's ability to absorb "Reilly's characteristics" particularly that which enabled him to 'float over limitations'"[447] and this is partially true. As has now become evident, the writer had formulated his ideas long before he contacted Reilly and his personality was remarkably similar to the academic's in that they both

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[442] Wolfe, (1942), *Op Cit,* p. 84.
[443] *Ibid.*
[444] Potter, *Op Cit,* p. 102.
[445] Wolfe (1945), *Op Cit,* p. 28.
[446] *Ibid.*
[447] Potter, *Op Cit,* p. 102.

had a tendency to brush objections and difficulties aside. The fact that Wolfe ignored the possibility that his ideal society might be more difficult to establish than he imagined and had written as if Average Street already existed is an illustration of this point. He glossed over issues of staffing of the facilities by announcing in both incarnations of his Utopia that it was the work of volunteers who would support all the services that were to be provided for the residents. Needless to say it was the female residents[448] who would work in the kitchen in both sets of plans, they who would provide the staffing for the informal crèche on the Reilly Green and them who would be cast into 'voluntary' servitude in the "communal laundry" of his Communit.[449] He had written of how "[o]ne of the ladies who owned a washing machine [would become] the Communit's laundress".[450] It was apparent that in both incarnations of Wolfe's ideal society, people were going to lose their freedom for no better reason than that he considered that co-operation was far better for society than isolationism.

In addition to glossing over difficulties, the writer also managed to practically eliminate anyone that he considered objectionable, although one could argue that his language was somewhat toned down in is later publication. For example, the "childless couple"[451] reviled as typical of the isolationist way of life of his first booklet was transformed in the second. Here they are described as "[A] childless couple, or a couple with one or two of their own, or a couple whose children have already left home ..." who would "adopt" (quotation marks in original) "anything from one to five parentless children."[452] This, of course, referred to those who were not deliberately childless transformed into useful members of society. Those married couples who chose to remain childless were treated separately. They had no place on the village green, he said, because "it is simply not the place for such couples."[453] For him they did not "belong"[454] because they would make little use of the green and their presence was a nuisance because they gave little to the community, and evaded

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[448] *Ibid,* p. 100.
[449] Wolfe (1942) *Op Cit*, p. 91.
[450] *Ibid.*
[451] *Ibid*, pp. 47-48.
[452] *Ibid*, p. 121.
[453] Wolfe, (1945) *Op Cit*, p. 126
[454] *Ibid*, p. 127.

"their responsibilities as citizens ...".[455] In the same way the "backward"[456] children of the first publication were replaced by children suffering from all manner of 'mental health' problems. Wolfe contended that this was the fault of mothers who were "at present incapable of safeguarding the mental health of their children in early childhood."[457] What were the 'mental health' problems he considered children should be safeguarded from? It was an over-reliance on their mother, shyness and self-consciousness which "frequently develops into a more or less pathological complex in later years."[458]

Wolfe posed possible objections to the establishment of his war-time society[459] in six points ranging from "If there is to be no compulsion, who will establish the Communit?", to "Is this Communism in disguise?" and finally, "What will happen if the individual family is unable to pay the per capita charge, no matter how low it is?" By comparison *The Reilly Plan* lists nine possible objections[460] ranging from the cost of building the housing and the facilities; the social balance of the neighbourhood; to the danger to the family unit. Needless to say Wolfe was able to answer his own questions by glossing over the fact that he had no evidence to support his contentions. Average Street only needed one example to "set the ball rolling" he stated; [461] and he was equally dismissive of his own suggestion that the Communit might be communism in disguise. He replied that "it would offer all the advantages of Communism without violence and upheaval ...."[462] His last question was dealt with by the 'reassurance' that: "In such cases the family would be given a bare table and only half portions of every dish."[463] Further failure to pay would result in the family being given "bread and margarine for all their meals"[464] beyond that they "would be kicked out of the Communit because the sight of their sufferings might otherwise break the hearts of the other members."[465] From this one statement the nature of Wolfe's ideal

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[455] *Ibid.*
[456] Wolfe, (1942), *Op Cit*, p. 65.
[457] Wolfe, (1945) *Op Cit*, p. 46.
[458] *Ibid.*
[459] Wolfe, (1942) *Op Cit*, pp.111-121.
[460] Wolfe, (1945) *Op Cit*, pp. 136-155.
[461] Wolfe, (1942) *Op Cit*, p. 111-112.
[462] *Ibid*, p. 119.
[463] *Ibid*, p. 120.
[464] *Ibid.*
[465] *Ibid.*

society is revealed: there was no freedom, no co-operation, no compassion and there was certainly none of that neighbourly spirit so admired by Reilly.[466]

The 'objections' to the Reilly Plan were dealt with in the same peremptory manner, as one might expect. The cost of building the housing and the facilities was dismissed by 'calculating' the savings that would result from the fact that there would be less money spent on construction through the establishment of "kitchenless homes"[467]; less spent on the laying of roads; and on the construction of a communal garage rather than "200 private"[468] ones. Savings would also accrue from the elimination of juvenile crime; the prevention of ill-health; and because this new way of life meant that the need for "boarding out [of] parentless children" was eliminated, further savings were inevitable. As far as the social balance of the neighbourhood was concerned, we find that the Reilly Plan, rather than the Communit, is the vehicle through which "social balance ... by a levelling up ..." was "very likely to lead to the abolition of class"[469] and if there was no social class, there could be no concerns about social balance. However, his answer to concerns about the danger posed to the family by this new method of societal organisation was to reach new heights in terms of its inadequacy. He contended that currently the home was "really a prison"[470] where the tendency was for members of the family to "break out as soon as possible".[471] He argued that it had become self-destructive and through reorganisation to the principles of (Wolfe's interpretation of) the Reilly Plan the strength of the family would be restored and reinvigorated. It would be possible to continue *ad nauseam* on Wolfe's treatment of (his own) objections to establishing his ideal society, but it is sufficient to state that any 'opposition' to the Reilly Plan or the earlier Communit were dealt with in the same arrogant and dismissive manner. Both publications were works of pure fiction masquerading as a discussion of community planning.

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[466] Reilly, (1934) *Op Cit*, p. 65.
[467] Wolfe, (1945) *Op Cit*, p. 136.
[468] *Ibid*, p. 137.
[469] *Ibid*, p. 147.
[470] *Ibid*, p. 153.
[471] *Ibid.*

Whether Reilly's attitude was ever as high-handed as the writer's cannot be established but there is evidence that the academic had a tendency to brush aside practical objections to his scheme and to ignore any detail that might illustrate the impracticality of his plans. As an example of this latter point, his calculations for 44 greens, huge gardens and thirty to sixty houses per block illustrate that he had not taken the size of the area to be developed into consideration. We have witnessed too that he was prone to changing his mind and to embellishing statements he had made earlier, but there is little to suggest that his primary motivation was anything more than an enthusiasm for having his ideas adopted. Whether he would have been quite so enthusiastic about Wolfe's involvement had he been aware of the latter's first publication is another matter. Indeed, *The Road to Total War* can be regarded as a chillingly deterministic vision of society: a Brave New World almost. It is a vision of a world in which every element of life was to be strictly controlled if not by the State, then by a self-policing society. It could be argued that there are elements of anarchism in both of Wolfe's works but there are also elements of communism in them. He was certainly advocating that the class system should and would be destroyed by "the very nature of the Communit system"[472] which tended "to wipe out the barriers between class and class"[473] and all this would be achieved through people choosing freely to adopt his system.[474]

Potter concludes that *The Reilly Plan* was "essentially a manual of idealist social theory using a housing scheme as a context"[475] and considers that the optimism prevalent in the country at the time was taken to extremes. Be that as it may, when Wolfe's two publications on the subject of community planning are analysed, it becomes clear that his ideas were more terrifying and apocalyptic than *The Reilly Plan* would suggest. Far from falling under the Reilly "spell"[476] Wolfe can be seen as a thoroughgoing opportunist who took advantage of a sick and ageing academic in order to promote his own ideas for the complete reorganisation of society.

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[472] Wolfe, (1942) *Op Cit*, p. 118.
[473] Ibid.
[474] *Ibid,* pp. 111-121.
[475] Potter, *Op Cit*, p. 105.
[476] Ibid.

<u>Postscript</u>

As a postscript to this chapter, and to add to the body of work undertaken by Larkham and Potter, it can be stated that, given the new evidence compiled during this research, while Wolfe may not have been the writer's real name it is unlikely that it was a *nom de plume* for someone in the architectural profession.[477] Larkham[478] has written that Potter[479] contended that there was a suggestion that it was someone who disagreed with the claims made by Reilly, and that the booklet was a parody of the Reilly scheme. This contention was based on "the suggestion that one of the illustrations is in the style of the *Architectural Review*"[480] whose owner and editor H. De Cronin Hastings had adopted the pseudonym L. De Wolfe. However, it seems unlikely that De Cronin Hastings could be the culprit, even though Reilly was to describe him as someone who was a great caricaturist.[481] The Professor was a personal friend of the Hastings family, father and son,[482] and to have written such a parody would, at the time, have overstepped the bounds of good taste and friendship. In addition, although it may have made sense to view the volume as a parody of the academic's scheme when only one publication by Wolfe was in circulation, the discovery of two books on the same subject suggests that whatever Wolfe's true identity, it was not De Cronin Hastings.

Wolfe appears to have been a prolific writer. Other publications bearing his name include: *Dachau: The Nazi Hell from the Notes of a Former Prisoner at the Notorious Nazi Concentration Camp* (with G. R. Kay), published in 1939 by Francis Aldor; *The Road to Total War,* published in 1942 by Wells Gardner, Denton & Co. Ltd.; *A Short History of Russia* published in 1942 by Nicholson & Watson; and *Sabotage* published in 1942 by the same company. And if the hectoring tone, the conviction that he was the only person who was right and the general style of writing is anything to go by, then the author is undoubtedly the Wolfe of this study.

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[477] *Ibid,* p. 100.
[478] Larkham, *Op Cit*, p. 14.
[479] Potter, *Op Cit,* p. 100.
[480] *Ibid*, and Larkham, *Op Cit*, p. 12.
[481] Reilly, C. H. (1938)*, Op Cit*, p. 120.
[482] *Ibid,* p. 119.

Added to this, there are a number of translations by a Lawrence Wolfe who was responsible for translating Imre Hofbauer's *My Little Englishman* (an autobiography) published in 1945 by Nicholson and Watson. He edited and compiled *Hungaria. An Anthology of Short Stories by Contemporary Hungarian Authors* (with an introduction by Alexander Korda, the Hungarian born British film producer and director) and was responsible translating the stories from Hungarian to English. Other such translations include two books written by Illes Kaczer: *Fear Not, My Servant Jacob* – a novel about Jews in Hungary, published in 1947 by Methuen; and *The Seige of Jericho* published in 1949 again by Methuen; and finally, the translation of Ferenc Kormendi's work, *Years of the Eclipse,* published by Bobbs Merril in 1951. It is also possible that he may have written phrase books in both Spanish and Italian over the same interval but given the scope of this work it has not been feasible to ascertain whether or not this was the same person.

His period of activity as a writer and translator was brief and frenetic (1939-1951)[483] and although the true identity of Lawrence Wolfe is still not known, given this body of evidence on his activities it now appears even more unlikely that his alter ego could have been H. De Cronin Hastings and it is suggested that a connection may be found at one of the publishing houses with which he was associated if they are still in existence. It is possible that, given his background of translating plays and novels from Hungarian to English, combined with his association with high profile Hungarian immigrants, Wolfe was Hungarian by birth (possibly Jewish by religion) and may have changed his name on entering Britain, hence the difficulty in identifying him. It is certainly the case that many Hungarian refugees like Korda (who was born Sándor László Kellner) and Illés Kaczér, the Hungarian author and journalist, changed their names on arrival in Britain[484] and this may also have been the case with Wolfe. However, it has not been possible to follow this line of investigation because it was not a focus of research.

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[483] It has been possible to obtain copies of *The Road to Total War* (1942), *The Reilly Plan* (1945); *Sabotage* (1942); and *A Short History of Russia* (1942) as part of this study.
[484] http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/kaczer.html [Accessed 15 March 2012]

PART III

CHAPTER 6

THE COMMUNITY ON COMMUNITY

> ... [T]he enforced collectivism ... began to change the nature of individual relationships and the wider configurations of British society ....[485]

Once the Rowse layout had been accepted by the local authority press coverage of the controversy was to decline dramatically although there was still some agitation from the Left on the subject of "community planning".[486] Reilly continued with his work on the outline plan for Birkenhead, in which he included the 'greens' plan under the title "A Rural Area" probably because he was still hoping that his plan for communal living would be taken up elsewhere. Larkham has established that it was certainly the case that he continued to lobby various contacts[487] – often former students – in an effort to establish one small example of his scheme. He was to be consulted on a small, privately funded housing scheme in Reading,[488] and had also had some contact with local authorities in the West Midlands,[489] but the greens, as devised for Woodchurch, were never to materialise.[490] Significantly perhaps, although the Reilly Greens were never adopted at Woodchurch, his proposals were the only ones which clearly established the planners' intention of creating community through the built environment. From Mawson to Robinson, through Robinson to Rowse: none had so clearly expressed the belief that a sense of community would result from the adoption of their particular scheme.

However, the commemorative plaque made it clear that the local authority considered that by providing the necessary amenities community would be the outcome, but in many respects this may have been political posturing. By the time of the estate's official opening the town was now led by Labour and as the party most supportive of the Reilly Plan it may have been expedient to maintain their commitment to the idea that community could be created through the built environment. It is evident that

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[485] Hennessy, *Op Cit*, p. 12.
[486] Potter, *Op Cit*, p. 111.
[487] Larkham, *Op Cit*, pp. 12-14.
[488] Potter, *Op Cit*, p. 113.
[489] Larkham, *Op Cit*, pp. 12-14.
[490] Potter, *Op Cit*, p. 122.

members of the Town Council did not question how this sense of community was to be achieved: that was, after all, it was not their responsibility. As Potter contends: "[T]he planner's problem is to find ways of creating within the urban environment a sense of belonging."[491]

Creating Community – The Role of Planning and Architecture: The Status Quo

By the time the first contract between the local authority and the architect had been signed the town was facing a severe housing shortage, with 150 "fresh applications a week" being received for housing. The possibility of a real housing crisis loomed large[492] but building at Woodchurch was not to begin until the spring of 1948, when the wooden frames for doors for some of the houses went into position and bricklayers began laying the first course of bricks. Even then acceleration of building work was hampered by post-war shortages of vital building materials. However, the number of completed dwellings continued to rise in accordance with the Rowse scheme, but his plans for the amenities deemed so necessary by others to promote a sense of "neighbourhood"[493] were missing. Perhaps this was a consequence of the pressure the local authority were under to construct more houses, rather than a complete setting in which community was believed to occur. Whatever the reasons for this shortfall, the residents of the estate were to wait many years for them to be provided.

Even Rowse's grand double boulevard, sweeping from the ancient church of Holy Cross down to the Fender Valley with its shops, cinema, community centre, library[494] and other facilities, was never developed. The original plan illustrates that it was centrally situated and would have provided that focal point that Caradog Jones had felt was so crucial to the transformation of the residents "from a heterogeneous

[491] Potter, *Op Cit,* p. 111.
[492] *Birkenhead News*, (1945) 2,300 Families Want Houses. Birkenhead Prepares to Face Crisis. 14 July.
[493] Design of Dwellings, *Op Cit*, p. 58.
[494] *Liverpool Echo* (1944) Houses For Workers. Is Woodchurch Too Far? 3 October. There is a suggestion that the library situated on Ford Road, Upton, was intended as part of the Woodchurch Estate development. This is illustrated by a comment from Councillor W. E. Power, who had bemoaned the fact that although "the … estate was bought in 1926" not a brick had been laid on it "apart from the laundry and the library".

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collection ... into a social unit".[495] Woodchurch was not unique in this respect: this sort of omission was not unusual in municipal planning terms. Liverpool's Norris Green provided a local example of an area that typified rapid and "massive growth, accompanied by a remarkable lack of social planning and a wholly inadequate provision of local amenities."[496] Indeed, it appears to have been something that was a widespread phenomenon in the planning of municipal housing in the interwar years. As Turkington contends, it was not surprising that with "the sudden and near-overwhelming responsibilities of housebuilder and landlord"[497] local authorities failed to give sufficient attention to the "provision of amenities and to the development of a sense of community"[498] on the new estates, but this was a new era and the recently published *Design of Dwellings* had warned that the mistakes of the past should not be repeated in the post-war era.[499]

However, the poor example of its neighbour did not encourage Birkenhead to provide adequate amenities for the residents. All four of the planners involved in submitting schemes for Woodchurch had been at pains to include a "focus for the activities of the district"[500] but still the local authority refused to heed evidence which suggested that the provision of certain amenities played a pivotal role in creating community. By this time local and central government agencies had had decades to learn from their mistakes but it was evident from a very early stage that the blunders of the past were to be repeated at Woodchurch. It was not until 1953 that the first group of shops – sited on Home Farm Road and not in the central area advocated by Rowse – was completed. The residents of the estate were not to enjoy the benefit of a branch library until 1959 when it was housed in the newly opened Woodchurch Secondary Modern School, although residents had always been able to use the existing Upton branch. Even when it was relocated in two adjacent shops that had originally been the Co-operative Store (general grocery and butchers) in Home Farm Road[501] there were many of the residents who still preferred to walk the distance to the larger and better

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[495] Carodog Jones, D., (1934) *The Social Survey of Merseyside,* Vol. 1, p. 264.

[496] Turkington, *Op Cit*, p. 64.

[497] Turkington, *Op Cit*, p. 59.

[498] Caradog Jones, *Op Cit*, p. 264.

[499] Design of Dwellings, *Op Cit*, pp. 9-75.

[500] Carodog Jones, *Op Cit*, p. 264.

[501] Potter, L. *Op Cit,* p. 118 notes that it was "re-located (*Sic*) in part of a block of shops which had been vacated by the Cooperative Butchery Department."

stocked library at Upton. Some of the women recalled that they were content to walk through to the library, across the fields on a summer's day to choose books, although in winter the cold, rain and mud – not to forget its distance from Woodchurch – made it an unwelcome prospect. If it were not for the threat of a fine they could ill afford, some of the respondents considered that they would not have bothered in such weather.

The Co-op itself had relocated to much larger premises in a parade of shops constructed in the central area where it occupied a block combining supermarket, off-licence and chemist. This was not to be the grand array of shops and other facilities planned by Rowse it was simply a more modern version of what already existed in Home Farm Road. The estate was to remain without a community centre until 1965 – and was hailed as something that was to turn the estate into "a community ins[t]ead (*sic*) of a collection of houses"[502] but it soon transpired that the facility was for the benefit of the whole of Wirral rather than just residents of the estate. For many of the residents the community centre was not somewhere where they could "come together to carry on social, educational and recreative activities"[503] despite the fact that it fulfilled many of the requirements of the government report on the matter.[504] A number of the interviewees recalled that they only went there for Bingo "on a Tuesday night"[505] or "when someone was havin' a 'do'."[506] The general consensus of opinion was that the centre had been established a little too late in the estate's history for it to have had any impact on the creation of community. Furthermore, a number of the interviewees expressed surprise that a building of itself could create community and all were of the opinion that it was from the people themselves that it derived.

So how was a sense of community to emerge if the residents were to wait for more than a decade for the amenities to be provided? Did a sense of community emerge without these provisions and if so, how was it expressed? Had it been developed

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[502] Unknown. (1965) Clinic on Estate at Woodchurch. Welcomed By Residents. *Birkenhead News*, 9 April.
[503] Report on *Community Centres*, (1946), p. 3.
[504] *Ibid*, pp. 3-40.
[505] Interview No. GB3.
[506] *Ibid.*

"through the formation of 'tenants' associations",[507] or was it the case that the residents were never to be anything more than a "heterogeneous collection of people"[508] and that the estate was to reflect the semi-detached suburbia typified by "isolationist"[509] attitudes so loathed by Reilly and Wolfe? Perhaps the dynamic of community was created by professionals as at Sheffield's Manor Estate?[510] These are rhetorical questions, and, it may, on analysis, prove to have been some or none of these things.

Community? Whose Community?

It should be reiterated at this juncture that whether imposed or organic, Potter has already contended that a "community of sorts"[511] did emerge on the estate despite the lack of facilities, but there has been an historic assumption that has permeated discussions of municipal housing and the creation of community, and the central question still remains: does the emergence of community depend entirely on the built environment? That there should already have been a community existing in the town that was transferred to Woodchurch, its fabric almost undamaged, rather than a community emerging on the estate has not been considered and it is argued that this was indeed the case. Unfortunately because much of the evidence, including the tenants' housing cards, has been destroyed it has been necessary to rely entirely on the oral evidence to substantiate this claim.

There is no evidence to suggest that the residents organised formal tenants' associations. What might be lost in all this is the fact that the residents were members of the working classes, not the middle-class inhabitants described by McKenna in her study of Liverpool housing estates between the wars.[512] In addition, the great majority of residents were couples with young children and it would have been the women, whose lives revolved around home and family, who would have been called upon to organise such things and it is doubtful whether any of them would have time to spare for such organisation.

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[507] Turkington, *Op Cit*, p. 59.
[508] Caradog Jones, *Op Cit*, p. 264.
[509] Wolfe (1945) *Op Cit*, pp. 40-105 for a full description of the "Isolationist Way of Life".
[510] Ravetz, A. (2001) *Op Cit,* p. 136
[511] Potter, *Op Cit,* pp. 111-112.
[512] McKenna, *Op Cit*, p. 182.

It has not been possible to find any evidence that professionals intervened to establish community associations on the residents behalf, as at Lewisham where one "was set up by social workers living" in the area.[513] As Ravetz contends, this "pattern of intervention ... always carried the risk of alienating residents"[514] who saw this as an invasion of their privacy. This was certainly the case at Woodchurch were members of one of the joint interview groups revealed that any attempts at this type of intervention would have met with "short shrift",[515] that is, it would not have been tolerated. Lively interaction during the group interviews revealed that the dynamic of community that had existed in Birkenhead had somehow been carried over to Woodchurch and the following statement best sums up this contention:

> ... It wasn't just the fact that we were all from Birkenhead, we'd all been through more or less the same experiences ... been in the same kind of housing ... lost loved ones or our homes during the war. We were just glad to be alive an' we weren't goin' to shut the door on a neighbour who needed a hand ... where we came from it wasn't the done thing ...[516]

Collective memory of the war may have played a large part in assisting the preservation of community, but this still does not answer the question of whether or not the lack of amenities had a negative impact on the residents' spirit of communality in those early years.

<u>Lack of amenities</u>

As already mentioned, there was an absence of amenities on the estate, but how did this impact on daily life and was it detrimental to the development of community? In order to identify what these impacts were the some of the emergent themes identified in the methodology have been used in this section to organise the data. Unfortunately, the process was not straightforward and there are many side issues which have been considered in this section because the interviewees considered them important enough to talk about them, often at length.

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[513] *Ibid.*
[514] *Ibid.*
[515] Joint interview, JI/1.
[516] Interview No. GB2.

How did the lack of amenities impact on the early residents of the estate? Potter contends that the impact was significant, and the dislocation caused by moving to the estate meant that "young mothers with pre-school children, or those who did not go out to work ... walked to their former homes on an almost daily basis"[517] for support and "companionship",[518] but this provides only one facet of the story. The majority of those involved in the study had moved to the estate in either 1952 or 1953, and they remembered that the buses stopped at the front of the estate, which meant a long walk for anyone living near the centre. Poor transport links were not the only problem: the prams in those days were not built for any kind of travel except walking. As one mother with pre-school children at that time put it:

> Y'had to walk everywhere from up here, even if there had've been a bus into the estate. Y'had those big Silver Cross prams in those days ... normally second-hand mind ... an' y'couldn't get them onto the bus! Even if y'were lucky enough to have a pushchair they were so awkward an' heavy, an' some of the drivers weren't helpful ... They'd leave y'standin' at the stop if y'took too long t'get the thing down.[519]

But the unwieldy nature of prams was not the only problem as a number of interviewees were to mention. Fares too were a barrier to the use of public transport, and travelling by bus was almost unanimously declared a luxury. For many, the only solution was to put the smallest child in the pram and sit the rest around the edge if one wanted to travel at normal walking speed. At this rate a journey into town would take more than an hour to complete and an almost daily journey of this nature would be neither feasible nor desirable.

For those lucky enough to have school-age children and access to a bicycle a daily journey into town was more reasonable. One respondent described how she would cycle to her parents' home every day but admitted that they lived on the closer Mount Estate, however, she would not leave the house until it was spick and span. She recollected that she would be up before 6 a.m. each morning and would have the housework finished and the evening meal partly prepared before she set off to see

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[517] Potter, *Ibid*, p. 117.
[518] *Ibid*.
[519] Interview No. GA3.

her mother at 10 a.m. "It took me about half an hour to get there, I was so used to cyclin'. Lunch at me mam's an' then back about two."[520] She was to confide that there was an element of self-interest in her actions because having lunch at her mother's, who was in a much better financial position than the interviewee and her immediate family, meant that she "saved a bob or two"[521] each week. Most of the women interviewed were able to recall that they had visited their family about once a week and one respondent remembered how his in-laws had arrived almost without fail every Friday and were to continue this practise for life.

However, there were some individuals in the study whose experience of family life had not been a positive one and they tended to undertake the journey to their former homes as little as possible. One male interviewee explained how he and his wife were glad to get away from his mother-in-law because: "She was jealous of my wife"[522] and he described how the friction caused by the situation had put a strain on other family relationships. Another interviewee was to describe how, as a late addition to her family, she had been "pushed around from pillar to post"[523] by her mother: a situation which made her feel like an interloper. Things did not improve when on marriage the couple had had to move in with the husband's mother and two brothers. The cramped conditions meant that once again she felt her presence was unwanted and she described how tensions had mounted as they waited for their own home.[524] Moving to the estate had been an opportunity for this couple to build a life of their own, and visits to both their families were to remain occasional. However, a number of the respondents confirmed that they did miss their families but there does not appear to have been the level of dependency contended by Potter. The consensus of opinion among the respondents was that when they took up residence on the estate their lives were with their husbands and families, and daily visits to the extended family were neither possible nor practicable.

Clinics, doctor's surgeries and schools were also lacking and these all had an impact on the residents' lives. Temporary solutions were found to some of the problems

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[520] Interview No. GA3.
[521] Interview No. FL1.
[522] Interview No. GA4.
[523] Interview No. GA5.
[524] Interview No. FR1.

when a clinic was set up in the Church of England 'village' hall and many of the children were bussed to schools in Birkenhead, but the local authority could not attract a G.P. to the estate and residents continued to walk to surgeries in the town up until 1954. The churches which had been such an integral part of both the Mawson and Robinson schemes were also missing. There was the ancient church of Holy Cross, but many of the residents belonged to other denominations. The lack of a Roman Catholic Church has been documented by Potter, but provision for the non-Conformists was also absent. The Methodist Church was not to be built until 1958[525] and the completion of the Roman Catholic Church was not realised until 1965[526] but this did not mean that church services were completely nonexistent. Members of the Methodist Church were to form a Sunday School in 1952 and adults began meeting at houses in Commonfield Road[527] to celebrate their services. Word of mouth ensured rapid expansion of the congregation and they soon outgrew their temporary accommodation; as a result the services were transferred to the Co-operative Hall on Woodchurch Road, above the existing grocery store.[528] The congregation continued to grow and pressure for a permanent place of worship eventually resulted in the construction of the church in Pemberton Road.

The informal nature of the non-Conformist method of organisation was repeated in some respects by Roman Catholics living on the estate. The parish priest had been allocated a house on Home Farm Road[529] and had visited some of his new parishioners but without the enthusiasm of some of them it would not have been possible for services to be organised as quickly as they were. Despite the lack of a proper place of worship, members of the congregation began by visiting the homes of other Roman Catholics they had known in Birkenhead.[530] Services began in 1952[531] in the Priest's house and a few of the interviewees recalled the almost informal nature of the services, with some remembering how crowded the little place became at

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[525] Smith, David (2012) Woodchurch Methodist Church and Centre Coordinator. Interviewed by M. Taylor [Telephone] 20 November.
[526] Potter, *Op Cit*, p. 118.
[527] David Smith, *Op Cit.* A Sunday School was organised as early as 1952 but a record of where this was held could not be obtained.
[528] Potter, *Op Cit*, p. 118.
[529] *Ibid.*
[530] Interview No. GA4.
[531] GENUKI.EU (2012) *GENUKI: St Michael and All Angels Roman Catholic Woodchurch Cheshire.* [online] Available at: http://www.genuki.eu/CHS/Church594.htm#Website [Accessed: 20 Nov 2012].

Sunday Mass. They commented that it resembled a meeting of friends rather than the more formal (and carefully stage-managed) church services they had been used to. As the estate grew there was a corresponding expansion in the congregation and some of the interviewees confided that they had often preferred to walk approximately a mile to the Roman Catholic Church in Upton because there was always the possibility that they could not get into the service at Woodchurch. A number of residents remembered that:

> Y'couldn't move in there ... I think the services were held in the front room but even that was too small for the number of people wantin' to attend. Most of us were familiar with each from down town, but we didn't always want to get that familiar![532]

A slightly more permanent solution to the problem was found even before the church proper was built, when an altar was set up in the hall of St. Michael and All Angels School and services were transferred to the building in nearby New Hey Road. All services were held there until the new church was consecrated. Many of the churches that the residents attended before moving to the estate no longer exist: there are few of the Welsh Chapels left despite the fact that the town had a large number of them at one time. St. Lawrence's R.C. church (one of the largest in the Borough) and school were demolished, but there can be little doubt that strong church connections played a significant and important role in maintaining a strong sense of belonging to the same community as the one they had recently left. In some respects it could be considered that both denominations played an important role in reinvigorating or reinventing the sense of community because their involvement in organising church services led them to recreate links with people they had known previously, as well as allowing them to meet new people.

Links with the town

In the course of the taped interviews it emerged that there was a high proportion of the sample who confirmed that members of their wider family had been allocated housing on the estate. One interviewee revealed that her mother had been allocated

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[532] Interview No. FR2.

a pensioner's bungalow, and her three sisters had obtained houses on various parts of the estate after she had moved there. Some felt that this had helped them in the transition from town to country, but others contended that it had not had any great impact. The majority of interviewees remembered that a number of friends and neighbours from the town had also transferred to the estate at the same time as themselves. They told of their delight at discovering that friendships formed in the town were reaffirmed at Woodchurch. The experience is best described by an interviewee who discovered that her friend "from before the war" was, once again, a close neighbour:

> Well, we moved up here in March fifty three, [names husband] was at work so I was up to my eyes in kids, tea chests, stuff wrapped in newspaper ... it was a nightmare. I couldn't find the kettle but didn't have the cooker put in to boil it up anyway ... I was waitin' for the Gas Board to come and deliver and fit it ... an' there was a knock at the door. When I went to the door there was [name] standin' there with a tray an' a pot of tea. We just couldn't believe it when we saw each other's faces. We'd lived in adjacent roads up near Bidston, had been good friends ... childhood friends for many years ... before the war an' she was my next-door neighbour! I couldn't believe it, it was like bein' with family.[533]

The very fact that the development of the estate was piecemeal also seems to have assisted in re-establishing close ties. Others in the study mentioned former schoolfellows who had taken up residence on the estate at around the same time and this may also have provided a sense of continuity with town life: it was, in effect, a case of people from a small town being transferred to an even smaller housing estate. Continuity with town life was also assisted by the nature of employment in the Woodchurch area. The residents of this new estate were not to give up employment and find it closer to home: Woodchurch differed from places like Letchworth and Welwyn – and later developments such as Kirkby, Runcorn and Winsford – in that there were very few local employment opportunities other than those which had already existed on the surrounding farms. For Birkonians the world of work was dominated by shipbuilding and ship repair, manufacturing, and trades allied to the

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[533] Interview No. GB1.

Port of Liverpool. Reilly and Aslan's analysis of employment figures for 1939 illustrate just how restricted the variety of employment opportunities were. They recorded that 29.80% of the town's population were employed in shipbuilding and repair; 20.46% in distributive trades; 10.45% in building and public works; 6.62% in harbour, river and canal service; 4.08% in marine and general engineering; a residual number were engaged in entertainments, sports – a category where the women outnumbered the men – railways, buses, other transport services; national and local government service; laundry and dry cleaning; shipping services; other industries, professions and services; bread, cakes and drinks; oil, glue, soap and matches; followed by gas, water and electricity; grain milling; and, finally, printing and publishing[534] where surprisingly the number of women employed was almost equal to that of the men.

Many respondents to this study referred to the fact that their husbands worked, or had formerly worked, with others from the estate at one or other of the major employers located in Birkenhead, Port Sunlight and Wallasey and this may have been a contributory factor in retaining, rather than creating, that sense of community that Potter refers to. However, it cannot be claimed that any of the foregoing of themselves resulted in a sense of community being transferred from the town to the country: it is more the case that apart from the new environment there was little to distinguish life at Woodchurch from their lives in Birkenhead. The problems they faced were different, but the respondents of this study felt that things had changed for the better when they moved to Woodchurch.

The Points System and Family Size

In order to qualify for housing at Woodchurch a number of the women recalled that there had been a system, which Potter has referred to as "the well established points system",[535] in operation. Few could recollect the dynamic of it, and some contended that it was their husband who had dealt with the officialdom: it would, after all, be his name on the rent book, and his signature would be required when the keys were handed over. The fact that the system was not well established in Birkenhead is

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[534] Reilly and Aslan, *Op Cit*, p. 29.
[535] Potter, *Op Cit,* p. 112.

illustrated by an article in a local newspaper. Its novelty for the town was enough for the *Birkenhead News* to report:

> A 'points' scheme for the allocation of new houses on a priority basis has been devised by the clerk to the Wirral U.D.C., Mr. W. F. Roberts, in association with the Housing and Town Planning Committee. Each applicant for a new home is awarded 'points' under five headings, each of which carries a maximum of five points. It is possible for a man to achieve the maximum number of 25. The system is, frankly, weighted in favour of the ex-service man, and of people with long residence in the district. Size of family is also a material factor. No allocations will be made until it is thought that all applications are in, and in any case there are no new houses to allocate yet.[536]

Points were allocated for each child with extra points if a couple had children of both sexes. Existing accommodation and its condition was also taken into account, so people living in insanitary, overcrowded or unsatisfactory housing were allocated additional points. However, Potter maintains that some of the original residents may somehow have played the system in the following manner:

> Although ... many young couples added to their families with little thought of their future income, in the hope that the extra points would place them higher up the waiting list for properties allocated under this system, *none of the residents interviewed would admit to taking this rather drastic step.*[537] (Italics not in original.)

It is little wonder that none of the residents would have admitted to this, not only because for a large majority the accusation would have been false, but also because, as has been noted above, the system was heavily weighted in "favour of the ex-service man"[538] and "people with long residence in the district".[539] Although it cannot be stated with any degree of accuracy that none of the future residents had added to their families in order to gain extra points it is doubtful that many of them had resorted to this. Had Potter examined this question in any depth by either ascertaining how

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[536] Unknown. (1945) Houses on 'Points'. A Wirral Allocation Scheme. *Birkenhead News*, 1 April.
[537] Potter, *Op Cit,* p. 112.
[538] Unknown. (1945) *Birkenhead News*, *Op Cit*, 1 April.
[539] *Ibid.*

many children they had had before moving to the estate, and how many after, she would probably have found that the majority were similar to those in the sample interviewed for this research. Almost all the respondents reported that they had had one or two children before moving to the estate, with their families being added to afterwards. Some did have more, although the maximum recorded for this research was three children prior to moving to the estate. Contraception such as the pill was not in general use (and there was an aversion, at least on the part of the males, to using certain types of contraception once legally married) that was the problem, not a desire to somehow buck the system. Religion, lack of contraception and the attitudes and mores of working-class life would all have played a part in family size. As one original resident described it:

> I just had to look at my wife and she was pregnant. When we lived down town we ended up with three kids and I thought that was that. I'd had to give up my trade, and the work I was doing wasn't well paid, so we had to struggle a bit really. Family planning wasn't something we considered ... So, of course, we came up here and added three more to the family [laughs].[540]

Other interviewees confirmed this point, but it would seem that for some, large families were not a problem. The majority of the women in the sample had families which ranged in size from three to six children. One interviewee explained "... we had four in the end ... two of each ... and, well, the more the merrier he used to say ..."[541] Working-class people had always added to their families "with little thought of their future income":[542] if they had had to consider the future at all it is doubtful whether they would ever have started a family. A number of those interviewed described how the lack of money was always an issue in those early days. In some cases the husband's work was seasonal and in others it was where their spouse was employed that caused the problem. Some of the interviewees whose husbands were employed in shipbuilding remembered the number of strikes there had been in the 1950s. The decision to start a family or to add to its number, based on future income was not a consideration. In addition, as one lady commented, there was an expectation

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[540] Interview No. GA4.
[541] Interview No. FR1.
[542] Potter, *Op Cit,* p. 114.

amongst the older generation that their children would produce children of their own and in many cases that the family would be large:

> Well, we were married now an' ... well ... there was an assumption that we'd 'ave a family. Parents expected grandkids really. As far as kids were concerned my feller could take 'em or leave 'em ... 'e wouldn't 'ave cared if we didn't 'ave none, but ... well ... it always looked a bit odd in them days if y' didn't 'ave none ... so we ended up with four! [Laughs].[543]

Housing visitors and officialdom

As with Potter's sample, many of the respondents vividly remembered the housing visitors who were tasked with inspecting existing accommodation while the application was being processed, and to ascertain the applicant's ability to pay the rent.[544] How the housing official did this seems to have been through the simple medium of checking that the applicants had a 'clean' rent book. They do not seem to have bothered to enquire about the applicant's personal circumstances with regard to income, and they did not consider that those living with relatives might not be the tenant. This anomaly was not totally lost on the interviewees, and some described how the procedure worked. To quote one:

> Well, it was daft really. I showed this housing visitor the rent book – which was up to date – but it wasn't mine. It was me Mam's really, an' we paid ... well we didn't really pay her rent, but we gave her some money towards ... like. But it wasn't questioned, so I just thought "Oh, well" an' I kept me mouth shut an' said nothin'.[545]

The fact that being up to date with the rent was an important factor in the decision-making process caused problems for some after taking up residence on the estate. There had been no consideration of the relationship between rents and income, and the challenges residents faced were many. Poor pay and insecure employment were an accepted part of their existence but the ability to "show a clean rent book" played an important role in self-perception and a number of women admitted that they would

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[543] Interview No. GD1.
[544] Potter, *Op Cit,* p. 114.
[545] Interview No. GD1.

rather "do without themselves than be in arrears". Housing officials were also required to assess the standards of health and hygiene[546] of the applicants as a condition of tenancy. Potter mentions one such individual who was vividly remembered by the residents of her sample, a Miss Crook, and this was the case with the sample for this research. She would fanatically check furniture and bedding, any clothing that happened to be visible, the cleanliness of the floors, and the general neatness of the dwelling. A number of the interviewees recalled how they had dreaded the prospect of Miss Crook arriving to assess their suitability as a resident of the new estate. One interviewee remembered that:

> She seemed to relish it, y'know? I mean, everyone I've spoken to about it remembers the way she used to check the beds – the sheets, the blankets an' that – she'd run her fingers over surfaces to check for dust, an' the look on her face if she found any! It was like "Not dusted today then dear?" When she came to do a visit, she arrived without warning, and I'd just put some washing on the maiden ... it's lucky I'm clean really because she went through all the baby's clothin' includin' the nappies that I had dryin'. Well, she did congratulate me on the standard of cleanliness, but by the time she'd finished doin' her rounds I was ready to explode. But we just had to put up an' shut up. Y'didn't argue with authority at that time."[547]

It would appear that Miss Crook was a firm believer in the 'Octavia Hill' style of household management, as was demonstrated by her insistence on checking every detail of the premises and her propensity for making suggestions on how standards of housekeeping could be improved through efficient time management. The consensus of opinion among the women was that it was easy to see that she was a childless spinster otherwise she might have had more empathy with their situation. Hopeful future residents were judged on the standards of hygiene present in the home they occupied and it was automatically assumed that it was those of the applicant that prevailed. It was not until people actually moved to the estate that it became clear that, in the official view, a few of the residents were not quite as clean as they should have been. An interviewee who was critical of one such neighbour complained:

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[546] Potter, *Op Cit,* p. 114.
[547] Interview No. GC2.

How she got a house on this estate I'll never know ... you couldn't exactly call her dirty, but it wasn't clean if y'know what I mean? The nets always looked mucky, the fire grate always 'ad cinders in it, an' ... well everythin' just had a film of dirt on it. It smelt dirty too ... an' if where she'd lived before 'ad been as bad as that she'd not've got a house 'ere. [548]

Another described how, as a former nurse, she had been called to attend a neighbour who was having a miscarriage and was shocked to find that the house was filthy and the children were in a neglected state. A doctor had to be called and the 'welfare' brought in, after which time the recalcitrant neighbour's house was always immaculately clean and tidy, to the extent that the children were barred from certain rooms in the house. However, the majority of the residents were incredibly proud of the fact that they might not have had much, but what they had got they kept clean.

As Potter[549] contends, housing visitors continued to visit the homes of residents for some years after they took up residence on the estate to ensure that the dwellings were kept clean and to inspect them for damage. Once again, Miss Crook was the most memorable of them because she took her duties extremely seriously. This was recalled by one respondent who commented that the official:

... was red hot. And she came in and, of course, she was lookin' all round, y'know, seein' what's what. "Oh. I'd like to go upstairs." Well, I knew the bathroom was clean anyway. Me bedrooms were clean, but I hadn't made the beds. I mean, they were thrown back, because I mean I always used to throw 'em back for a few hours, windows open, let them air off, y'know, sweeten 'em up in case they were stinky, and, "Oh," she … "well. This is very nice. You haven't got much furniture." I said, "Well I didn't 'ave much furniture to come up 'ere with, but what we've got we've got." I said, "There are no carpets." Y'know. "No carpets upstairs." An' I only 'ad a big rug that covered part of it, but we used to go round the composition floors.[550] You were only allowed to use Johnson's Wax and that's what we used, 'cos "you're not allowed to use anything else, it

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[548] Interview No. GD1.
[549] Potter, (1998), *Op Cit,* p. 116.
[550] The composition floors referred to by this interviewee were on the ground floor of the homes.

will damage it." Until we realised it wouldn't bloody damage it at all! (Laughs). So we'd use Mansion polish and all sorts. But it was always polished.[551]

It seems that Miss Crook was also in the habit of making personal comments and was not averse to asking if the women had nothing to do if she caught them chatting on their doorsteps. She was also known for her acerbic comments if a tenant fell below the standard that she felt was required, to such an extent that some of the tenants whose houses were "none too clean"[552] feared her visits. One woman went into such a panic that she was not unwilling to knock on neighbours' doors to request items of clean bed linen when she received notification that a housing inspection was imminent.[553]

Self-determination and self-help

Many of the interviews illustrated that the financial burden was often borne by the women, some of whom showed a great deal of resilience and skill in financial management which enabled them to keep hearth and home together. Potter relates that "most mothers with young children stayed at home"[554] but this was not the whole story. Some were able to find employment as cleaners in the larger houses of Oxton, Heswall, Pensby or Irby while the children were at school. Working in the local farmer's fields' potato picking during the season also appears to have been quite a common, if irregular, way of obtaining extra cash for the family coffers. It was customary for the women, once the youngest child was attending nursery or school, to take the opportunity of finding employment even if this only meant a few hours a week. Those women whose children were too young to attend nursery or school were able to supplement the family income through a variety of means. One woman described how her husband had bought her an Olivetti typewriter second-hand so that she could earn money typing envelopes. The employment ended when he saw just how many envelopes she had to prepare for very little financial reward.[555] Another was to turn her skills as a seamstress to good use by advertising in shop windows in

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[551] Interview No. GA1.
[552] Interview No. GD2.
[553] Interview No. FR1.
[554] Potter, *Op Cit*, p. 116.
[555] Interview No. FR1.

well-to-do areas of the borough and was able to pick up work making curtains and items of clothing.[556] The work was not particularly well paid but did help to ease the financial pressures on the family budget: "The work was long and hard, I used a treadle machine, but it did help to buy necessities."[557]

Of course, there were some examples of the men taking an active role in providing extra cash, and not just through the traditional method of working overtime. One of the male interviewees remembered how, when he worked shifts, he had used his days off to undertake odd bits of D.I.Y. in the homes of former neighbours in Birkenhead. He recalled that he did not earn a great deal, but it had helped to put food on the table. Others recalled how their men-folk had hunted for a second source of income. Examples of a spouse who had found part-time work behind the bar in pubs or social clubs close to the estate or in the town were given. One of the women spoke of how her husband had "walked across the ridge to Oxton", a journey of approximately three miles, to undertake bar work in a social club to supplement his income as a labourer; another spoke of how her husband was able to find employment behind the bar of the local British Legion. Not all could, or even wanted to, find a second job but this did not mean that they did nothing to assist. Some had turned their gardens into highly productive allotments to provide a supplement to the weekly fare, and interviewees recounted tales of the lively exchange of produce, seeds and cuttings that went on in the early days of the estate. Of course, not all the respondents could report that their husbands had been so supportive and, as one woman was to comment:

> Well, 'e didn't care. 'E was close with 'is money an' kept most of it to 'imself. Five kiddies we 'ad in all, an' they couldn't thank 'im for the shirt on their backs, or food in their mouths ... but y'just stuck with them in those days. It was a case of y'made y'bed so y'had to lie in it. [558]

Those whose children were old enough to attend school were able to find work further afield as Potter reports although, for these respondents at least, the employment seems to have been confined to the Wirral peninsular. There were none in this study

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[556] Interview No. GE1.
[557] *Ibid.*
[558] Interview No. GD2.

who could report that they had worked in Liverpool. Childminding was ever the issue: school age children could be anything from 5 to 15 – the older ones could look after themselves it was felt – but the younger children needed someone to "keep an eye" on them until a parent came home.[559] There were examples of neighbours willing to oblige, but this appears to have been a very localised phenomenon – a practise that seems to have been developed between groups, or blocks of houses – and help from a neighbour often depended on the age of the children concerned. For many the school meals service was to provide an ideal solution to the problem. Mothers could leave for work after their children had left for school – or could take them to school on the way to work – and be at home before their offspring.[560] All the women in this sample had found ways of supplementing the family income and the methods they employed show a level of resourcefulness and tenacity that can only be admired.

<u>Our lives in our words</u>

One rewarding aspect of this study has been the opportunity to listen to ordinary people describing their lived experience. The foregoing has illustrated that life for many residents of the estate was not easy. It was, after all, the post-war period and rationing was still in operation which meant shortages of almost everything. New furniture was often of the functional but unattractive 'utility' variety and there was still the "make do and mend"[561] attitude to any shortfalls in home furnishing. Many of the respondents recalled that what they had were often hand-me-downs from relatives, or friends of the family. Most residents were relatively content with the situation as long as they had somewhere to sit, a table to put meals on and a bed to sleep in, even if the furniture was sometimes inadequate for a family. Having somewhere to sit did not mean that what they possessed constituted conventional furniture. A drawer from a dressing table would be utilised as a makeshift cot for a new arrival,[562] wooden fruit crates could be crafted to provide temporary seating, normally for the younger children. Even when couples were lucky enough to have conventional furniture for

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[559] Two respondents from the same road reported that their children had been looked after by a neighbour until they came home from work, and one that she had looked after children. Two more from a different road reported that they had looked after children for neighbours.
[560] Some interviewees reported that they had worked for the school meals service, some as cooks in charge and others as kitchen staff or dining room/playground supervisors.
[561] Ian Boumphrey, *Op Cit.*
[562] Interview No. GA2.

the home, it was not the case that it was enough to fill every room in the house. As one resident recalled:

Well, we'd got the basics. A bed for us, one bed for the kids – all three of 'em – a wardrobe in our room and a dresser. There was nothing in the box room … that came later …. Then, downstairs we had a table in the kitchen and some kitchen chairs … we just shut the door on the dining room because we couldn't afford furniture for that. Then the living room … well, we had a radiogram that'd been given to us and two easy chairs, and that was it really. We had lino on the floor when we first moved in here, and then later we picked up a carpet square second-hand ….[563]

A number of other interviewees confirmed that most of the residents had very little furniture when they moved to the estate, very unlike the picture painted by a visitor to the area quoted at length in Potter[564] where the residents wanted everything new to go with the new houses. The truth is that some moved to the estate with very little, and that that they did have was a mixture of cast-off and new furniture:

[A] dining room suite that was a wedding present and a bedroom suite for the main bedroom ... But as for the rest of the house we had a double bed that someone had given us for the kids, and a cot that we'd had for all three of the kids. There was a gramophone in the dining room but it was really old-fashioned because we'd bought it off a dealer before we'd married …. Good for music but quite an ugly thing … really boxy. Then we had a leather sofa that someone had given us and from the look of it was probably Victorian [laughs] and a couple of mismatched chairs that we'd obtained the same way. Somehow there never seemed to be enough seats in this house!

Internally the houses were equipped with built in cupboards similar to those illustrated in the Dudley Report,[565] a larder, or pantry as they were popularly referred to locally, with a reinforced concrete slab to keep certain items cold, a Belfast sink and a wooden draining board. In no sense could they be described as a fitted kitchen, but

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[563] Interview No. GA3.
[564] Potter, *Op Cit.*
[565] Design of Dwellings, *Op Cit*, p. 44.

they were an improvement on what the tenants had been used to. A cooker was not part of the fixtures and fittings as Potter's visitor to a house on the estate seemed to think.[566] A few of the interviewees recalled that they had had to buy a cooker "from the Gas Board"[567] but few could remember how much this had cost them. One woman thought that it was approximately 14 shillings (70 pence) a month[568] and another recalled that the money could be taken from the rebate on the "gas money".[569] Some were to bring cookers with them, or resorted to buying second-hand when they moved to the estate. Although some people were lucky enough to have been provided with Utility furniture as a wedding present,[570] or had been able to buy a few items themselves,[571] there were not many lucky enough to have a fully furnished home of the most modern kind. Many of the women made use of Sturla's department store in Birkenhead to furnish their homes bit-by-bit. The owners of the store had quickly seen the advantage of sending a van to the estate once a week containing different items of soft furnishing and clothing which could be paid for weekly. They also allowed customers to buy items of furniture (although it could not be included on the van) and pay for it in the same way. The fact that they were probably charged extortionate rates of interest was not lost on the interviewees, but as some contended:

> It was the only way we could get anything ... we were never goin' to be able to save the money to buy essential items of furniture or clothing so this seemed like the ideal solution. Now we've got a bit more money we'd be more careful but at the time they were the only ones who provided this service ... and we were grateful for it at the time. [572]

For those who could not afford, or who did not want, to pay weekly ("on the never-never" as one interviewee described it) there was a very active, but informal, system

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[566] Potter, *Op* Cit, p. 116.
[567] Tenants were not given the choice of gas or electric for cooking: the houses only had a gas pipe in the kitchens and the heavier wiring required for electric cookers had to be installed at the residents' own expense.
[568] Joint interview JI/1.
[569] In the 1940s and 50s gas supply was purchased through the installation of a meter, which had to be "fed" one shilling (5 pence) coins in advance. The meters were set at a rate higher than the actual price of the fuel and householders would receive a rebate when the "gas man" came to call.
[570] Interview Nos. GA4 and GA3.
[571] Interview No. FR1.
[572] Joint Interview JI/2

of recycling. One of the male respondents described how he had given his leather couch, described above, uncomfortably stuffed with horse hair, and second-hand when he had acquired it, plus two (unmatched) armchairs to another neighbour when he and his wife had bought their first three piece suite.

> They had nothing, the [name] family. They were even worse off than we were and we didn't have much. My wife always felt sorry for her because she said that he knocked her around, but I don't know how true ... anyway, the house was so sparsely furnished that I don't think they had enough seats for all of them. So when my wife asked Mrs. [name] if she wanted this stuff that we had she jumped at the chance. It was good furniture even though it was old.

Another interviewee confirmed the fact that furniture and even items of clothing were regularly passed on to neighbours, and that she had been the recipient of the latter herself:

> We often used to pass clothin' an' stuff to one another, particularly when another baby came along on this block ... We knew where it came from an' that we were all clean, so we didn't worry about it. I got a cot from one neighbour when I got pregnant with my last one, an' someone else gave me a mattress .... Curtains, a few bits of furniture. We didn't throw stuff out because we couldn't afford to .... There were probably a few who were too proud but most of us were in the same boat. [573]

As with Potter's study, it has not been possible to substantiate the weekly wage of the main earner, although some women did hazard a guess that their husband's 'take home' pay was somewhere in the region of £3.10s.0d. (£3.50) for an unskilled worker, and £5 for a semi-skilled worker. Skilled workers, that is engineers, electricians, plumbers and so on seem to have been paid a higher rate. If the oral evidence is correct, pay in the area appears to have depended on not just the *type* of work but also the employer and opportunities for overtime. Working for Lever Brothers, for example, not only meant a decent steady income, but also the possibility of overtime. It was not just the inability to remember accurately that accounted for this lack of

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[573] Interview No. GD2.

knowledge. When asked about their husbands' earnings, some of the women confided that they were never privy to this information, receiving instead a regular amount of housekeeping each week. This regularity of income seems to have been much more important to them than the amount their husbands earned.

The average weekly rent is somewhat easier to identify. A standard three bedroom house cost £1 8s. 0d.,[574] (£1.40) but it varied according to housing type and size.[575] In Potter's sample the resident's seemed to think that the rents were "quite reasonable"[576] compared to the cost of food and clothes. Whilst it is true that the rents were reasonable when such a comparison is made[577] it should not detract from the fact that the financial situation of the residents had not been taken into consideration when they were offered accommodation on the estate. To put this in perspective, if the memories of those interviewed are correct we can assume that average earnings were approximately £5 0s. 0d. per week, this would have left only £3.11s.6d. (approximately £3.55) for food, cleaning materials, heat, light, clothing and fuel for cooking. Although the same reticence to reveal their true financial situation was evident in this sample, as in Potter's, when the women began discussing their strategies for managing scarce resources they disclosed the true nature of their situation at that time. Housewives used their skills in making a little go a long way: one interviewee recounted how she would buy boiling fowls for half-a-crown (approximately 12 pence) and how it would:

> … see us through two or three days and I hadn't … I'd got big saucepans, but not one big enough to take that to steam it first, so I used to use two saucepans, one on top of the other, you see, 'cos I didn't have a steamer like I have now … I might get a ham shank as well, and he'd have pea and ham soup … we used to all have it because it saved money …. All I cared … you looked like ruddy soup and chicken and ham shank and, you know. But still, it was food and money was

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[574] *Liverpool Daily Post*, (1949) Rent of New Houses "A Scandal". Birkenhead Council debate. 5 May.
[575] *Ibid.* A three bedroom house was to cost £1 8s. 0d. (£1.40) per week and a four bedroom dwelling £1 9s. 0d. (£1.45) per week.
[576] Potter, *Op Cit*, p. 117.
[577] *Birkenhead News*, (1944) Sloans Bold Street Fashion Salons were advertising "tax free coats" Cherry Model Model Coats (perfectly tailored), camel coats and a variety of underwear and hosiery for sale in their Liverpool store. 4 October. A ladies coat could cost £12, underwear and hosiery 14s 8d (75p) and *Birkenhead News*, (1944) Lewis's special promotion advertised: *Lewis's for Frocks for Mother and Daughter*, 26 July. ladies blouses could range from 11s 9d (60p.) to 35s 3d (£1.76).

hard then, because when [husband's name] came … when we came up here, [husband's name] was only on £3.15s.0d. [£3.75] a week wages ….[578]

Minced beef, mutton, ham shank and other cheaper cuts of meat seem to have been the dietary mainstays for many of the residents. Filled out with pearl barley or lentils "… half a pound of mince"[579] could feed the whole family. Others would choose to make a two course meal consisting of soup and a steamed pudding:

> My husband and the lads thought they were gettin' more because they got two courses ... daft buggers …. I made the soup out of scraps. Y'could get bacon scraps from the market an' chuck in some bits of veg that weren't enough to do for a meal … then the steamed puddin'. It probably wasn't that healthy really but ….[580]

And:

> Well, I used t'bulk the meat out with lentils … y'know, if I was doin' a shepherd's pie then I'd put the lentils in and make it really savoury so that no one would notice there wasn't that much meat in there. Y'could use mash as well t'hide the fact that the meat was almost none existent. Meat n' potato pie I used to make, mainly mashed potato, onion and a few carrots … as long as everyone got fed ….[581]

Some of the housewives were to make use of the rural environment as a means of providing fruit and a greater variety of food for the family:

> We used to pick crab apples and I'd make crab apple jelly an' if we went up to the farm up by Arrowe Park we could find windfalls so they came back and were made into apple pies. If y'knew where to look y'could find plums, so that made jam. There was always plenty of blackberries round here an' y'could come home

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[578] This lady's husband, she confided after the interviewee, was an accomplished musician and would play at the British Legion to earn extra cash as well as working behind the bar in a local pub.
[579] Interview No. GC2.
[580] Interview No. GC1.
[581] Interview No. FL1.

with pounds of the stuff. Apple and bramble pies, jellies … all sorts. There weren't any freezers in them days but y'knew how to preserve things. [582]

But some of the interviewees also recalled how they would walk into rural areas to pick fruit even when they had lived in the town. Others would use the last of the season's home grown fruit and vegetables, or produce that was brought home from an allotment belonging to a relative, to make chutneys, jams and preserved fruit. As one man explained nothing was wasted and everything was utilised including the last of the seasons' tomatoes – still green – which were used to make chutney.[583]

There were many examples of people 'swopping' vegetables they had grown with other residents to provide greater variety in their diet, and examples of women trading their skills with others. There is the example of one woman, an expert cook, who would provide her neighbour, whose skill as a cook was basic, with scones, jams and preserves, in return for knitted garments for her children. She recollected that she was to "provide the wool"[584] and wait for the expertly fashioned garments to be brought to her. Others were to undertake the icing of "special occasion cakes"[585] and although there was no expectation that the favour would be reciprocated these interviewees confirmed that they almost always were.

The foregoing has provided, in some part at least, a "concerted working-class voice"[586] specific to a certain time and place, although it is possible that the stories in their telling and retelling have become distorted with time: after all, the past is a different country. However, as much care as possible was taken in checking the veracity of the oral element of the study: this could only be achieved by cross-referencing individual interviews. There were slight variations between them but the core elements remained intact, and it has to be assumed that they are a true record of the early residents' experience. On the whole the interviewees presented a positive image of the estate, but these were people who had recently experienced the ravages of war and it may be that they considered the trials and tribulations of living so far

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[582] Interview No. GA3.
[583] Interview No. GA4.
[584] Interview No. FR1.
[585] Two of the interviewees were later to turn their skills into a profession.
[586] Ravetz, (2001) *Op Cit*, p. 151.

from town, without the conveniences they had come to expect there, as a minor inconvenience compared to what they had been through. However, not everyone shared this positive image of Woodchurch and the narratives of space depended on individual agendas. As an example, local newspapers had labelled the estate a hotspot for trouble and vandalism and were to report of social problems 'sweeping' the estate from the very first.[587] However, the last word should go to one of the original residents who described the estate as being

> ... as being as good as any private housing ... people didn't realise it was a council estate ... it was peaceful too in the early days. It was a good place to live an' a good place to bring up the children.

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[587] Unknown. (1952) Vandalism Sweeps Woodchurch Estate. £500 damage to bulldozer: No mercy for culprits, says housing chief, *Liverpool Daily Post*, 4 April.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS – A HUMAN PATTERN FOR PLANNING

As has been described there was a strong support network at Woodchurch in the early years –a sense of community – that could not rely solely on the old patterns of kinship.[588] Whether that sense of community was something that emerged as a result of the houses being arranged in a particular way or whether it was something that relied more on previous relationships will be discussed later. The relatively new science of sociology was becoming more important in planning terms[589] but only one of the planners – Professor Sir Charles Reilly – had confessed to using it in devising his scheme. However, the majority of the report submitted to the local authority was concerned with reconstruction of the town proper. Woodchurch, in many respects, was a peripheral issue. He had claimed to be a sociologist but to what extent had he used sociology? It is true that either he or Aslan had undertaken studies into employment patterns and so on,[590] but there had been no attempt to use observational research as part of their methodology in order to establish whether a sense of community already existed among the people who would become the first residents of Woodchurch. Without evidence the academic was imposing his own ideas of community on a working-class urban population. Reilly had written papers[591] and given lectures[592] on the subject of town-planning and the benefits of certain devices to encourage community (or a better type of community, at least). But he had not made any enquiry into the lives of the people who were to be affected by removal to a rural area so far from the town. He had also made assumptions about the character of the people who were to inhabit the estate by considering that there was evidence of the isolationist traits that he abhorred. Sociology's "scope and methods"[593] were still not decided and meaningful tenant consultation remained in the

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[588] Young, M. D. & Willmott, P. (1957) *Family and Kinship in East London.*
[589] Purdom, (1949) *Op Cit*, p. vii.
[590] Reilly and Aslan, *Op Cit.*
[591] Reilly, (1937) *Op* Cit, pp. 64-66.
[592] Reilly, C. H. *The Body of the Town,* D/207/6/2; *Architecture and the Community*, D/207/4/16; and *Rebuilding the Towns of Britain Today,* D/207/5/11. Private Papers, University of Liverpool Archive.
[593] Purdom (1949) *Op Cit*, p. 476.

distant future: early planning decisions were still characterised by "a top-down approach".[594]

Although Reilly was the only planner to make clear his intentions to create a community, we have to ask whether it is feasible that other individuals involved in planning Woodchurch were intending that a heterogeneous group of people could be transformed into a unified social unit as a consequence of their scheme. It is certainly the case that all four planners, including Reilly, had borrowed freely from ideas that had been in circulation from at least the 19[th] century: ideas which *seemed to suggest* that they could solve one of the greatest conundrums of that era: how could an obedient and homogenous population be created without too much expense to the State.[595] The chance to do this simply through the provision of housing and amenities must have seemed an attractive and tantalising proposition.

Maintaining social control could not be achieved under the old *laissez faire* system, where housing had been constructed without "any regard being shown for health, convenience or beauty in the arrangement of the town".[596] Poor planning was perceived as the problem from which all the evils of the industrial city and town stemmed. Others have written of the way in which the town planning movement evolved from concerns over rapid and uncontrolled growth and it is not necessary to reiterate its pathology here. It is enough to state that two of the characters in this narrative were active in the town planning movement: Mawson and Reilly.[597] There is no evidence to suggest that Robinson was involved in the movement, but Rowse, "served on many [committees] and towards the end of the war contributed ideas on planning and building for the Ministry of Works ...."[598] Discussions of creating community through the built environment had not reached the stage where planners were able to use the term community as something that allowed them "to cast a superficial romantic gloss"[599] over whatever they were creating, but planners of that era still strove to recreate "the elements of the village in accordance with a definitely

[594] Shapely, P. (2011) *Social housing and tenant participation*, pp. 1-13.
[595] Tarn J. N. (1973), *Five per Cent Philanthropy*, p. xiii.
[596] Unwin, R. (1912), *Op Cit*, p. 1.
[597] Shippobottom, *Op Cit*, pp. 43-62.
[598] Potter, *Op Cit*, p. 106.
[599] Walters, D. (2007) Designing Community. Charrettes, Masterplans and Form-based Codes, p. ix.

organised life of mutual relations ... which gives the appearance of being an organic whole ..."[600]. Community and ideas of it change with time, with place *and* with the individual: what seems like an ideal community for one might be stultifying for another. Planners themselves could not agree over what constituted the ideal community. On the one hand, Unwin and Mawson were concerned with 'art', the picturesque, and the completeness of life lived in such surroundings. On the other, Lethaby argued that life could be made if not beautiful, at least acceptable by the application of organisation, tidiness, smartness and efficiency.[601] The latter contended that the greatest purpose of "life in towns is to produce finer and finer types of civilisation and civility"[602] and whether each of the four planners had a different vision for Woodchurch is discussed below.

Community? Whose community?

The Mawson Scheme

The first plans for the Woodchurch estate, submitted by Mawson & Son, were not intended for occupation by one social class, instead they were intended to reflect, and possibly improve upon, Unwin's principle that an area should contain a mix of socioeconomic groups. Where "[t]he ... tenants, parson and flock, tradesman and customers, master and servant, farmer and labourers, doctor and patients ..."[603] should all be in "... direct relation and shared common interests forming a network of community life."[604] Unwin had thought this so important that he had included this statement in the Town Planning &c., Act 1919 and supporting Housing Manual. It is interesting to note that some of the same concerns expressed in the Housing Manual were to be repeated in the 1944 Dudley Report: the need for municipal housing to contain a "mixed social community"[605] and the need to create neighbourhood contained in the former was reiterated in the latter.

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[600] Creese (1992) *Op Cit*, p. 169.
[601] Lethaby, W. R. *Et al* (1921) *Op Cit,* pp. 47-62.
[602] *Ibid*, pp. 47-48.
[603] Creese, (1992) *Op Cit*, p. 169.
[604] *Ibid.*
[605] Design of Dwellings (1944) *Op Cit*, p. 9.

To what extent Mawson was to consider the importance of their development containing a socioeconomic mix of residents is made evident in their report, and many of its recommendations hint at the possibility of creating a third garden city at Woodchurch. The bold, far-reaching plans were to include all the elements necessary for ensuring that the inhabitants became a coherent "social unit".[606] The planners had considered the creation of a central square which some social commentators have contended would act as a focal point for activity and a driver for community.[607] Transport links that would connect Wirral with Chester and beyond with the construction of an arterial road from Upton Station to Arrowe Park gates had been included; there was to be a flourishing and diverse economy with the introduction of light industry to the area similar to that which had been established at Letchworth; playgrounds for the children – which were to be publicly owned[608] – were provided; and the churches in his plans achieved the status of a social amenity. It was Howard's heaven on earth, recreated at Woodchurch.

Although most of the report is concerned with the planning and layout of the estate there are broad references to art, to beauty, to organisation – all elements that were prerequisites of Unwin's medieval village ideal. But it is in their suggestion that the "national insularity"[609] could be broken down by the provision of the Albany: a "self-contained group of middle-class houses"[610] which was to have all the benefits of Howard's creation, Homesgarth, that we perhaps perceive Mawsons' intentions. As has already been discussed, there were a number of similarities to this development in their suggestion that make it clear that it was to be a social experiment. However, references to breaking down the national insularity and communal living are brief – he was, after all trying to appeal to middle-class tastes. He spoke of publically owned amenities – and he did not mean the local authority – and of people being involved in the governance of certain areas of the town, as was the case at Letchworth. He attempted to convince the reader of the economic wisdom of adopting their scheme and spoke of increasing land values for the ratepayer, as well as increasing property

[606] Caradog Jones, *Op Cit*, p. 264.
[607] *Ibid.*
[608] Mawson Report, *Op Cit,* p. 64.
[609] *Ibid,* p. 32(a). The report has been incorrectly numbered here and contains two page number 32, then continues with 33, 34, etc. To avoid confusion these pages are referred to as 32(a) and 32(b).
[610] *Ibid*, p. 32(b).

values for the individual. It was all there, but it was not enough to convince the local authority of the great benefit of the firm's proposals and, as has been illustrated, the scheme was eventually abandoned.

The Robinson Scheme

In many respects the Robinson scheme for Woodchurch was to bear all the hallmarks of what we have come to expect in municipal housing: the area would contain only members of the working-classes, not necessarily by design but of necessity because of the housing situation in Birkenhead, and Robinson was proposing that the estate should be developed along garden suburb lines. It was still to be heavily reliant on the town for certain elements[611] of daily life, but would be divorced from the town by distance. Residents would still rely on the town for employment, entertainment, and so on. It was to all intents and purposes a suburb of Birkenhead, although he had used such terms as 'community', 'garden city' and 'neighbourhood unit' to describe the scheme. As with the Mawson proposal, his scheme included provision of a town square, surrounded by amenities such as a bank, shop and a library with schools, additional churches, health centres and a community centre all included in the scheme. In fact, all the elements that Caradog Jones and others considered necessary for creating community. The fact that Robinson was concerned with the privacy of individual tenants[612] notwithstanding he at least included the principle of, if not community, the development of an area that would have all the amenities that the future residents had been accustomed to in the town.

He visualised the area as being laid out in three distinct sections, similar to the 'neighbourhood unit principle, with provision made for two smaller shopping areas (in the north and south of the estate) to help "give the impression of the corner shop"[613] an aspect "of town life with which the prospective residents would be familiar"[614] – and this may provide an indication that he was perhaps hoping to retain the friendly character of Birkenhead. However, it may have been that he was simply following the recommendations of the earlier Mawson Report which had suggested that two

[611] Fishman, (1987) *Op Cit*, p.2.
[612] Edelman, Op Cit.
[613] Potter, *Op Cit*, p. 87.
[614] *Ibid.*

"secondary shopping-centres"[615] should be created and sited "at the corners of the Estate".[616] He was a native of the town and would have been aware of the pivotal nature of the corner shop in working class districts where gossip was traded, where the plight of those less fortunate "would be considered and their plight eased at least temporarily by some individual or combined act of charity"[617] but there is little to suggest that he was trying to replicate this type of community at Woodchurch, nor was he concerned with creating a new one.

The few remaining pieces of evidence regarding Robinson's character tend to be those that can be gleaned from reports in the press, including the *Picture Post* article but we cannot take this as an unbiased source. We do know that he was a competent artist – some of his pictures hang in the Walker Art Gallery in Birkenhead – and we can conclude that he was extremely professional throughout the debacle created by Reilly. He refused to engage in the debates, and his comments to the press were very rare. True his site plan and zoning map indicate that there was more than an element of Letchworth[618] and Welwyn[619] in them, and some of his suggestions reflect the influence of Unwin, but there is not enough evidence to support the contention that his aim was creating community, although his scheme did not represent the isolationist environment depicted by Reilly: he was merely following the trend in planning for that period by creating a traditional garden suburb.

The Reilly Plan

We know from the evidence that Reilly's intention was the creation of community through the built environment: he made that perfectly clear on more than one occasion. From the very first he had made no secret of the fact that he did not like the scheme submitted by Robinson and had proceeded to change it by making "a rough tracing one week-end with my fountain pen over the Engineer's drawing ...."[620] As has been described, by this action he was to set in train a series of arguments over community versus suburban planning and the benefits that would accrue to a

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[615] Mawson Report, *Op Cit*, p. 56.
[616] *Ibid*, p. 57.
[617] Roberts, R. (1970) *The Classic Slum*, p. 42.
[618] Purdom, (1949) *Op Cit*, p. 143.
[619] *Ibid*, Plate XXVII shows an aerial view of Welwyn and there is a similarity to this in Robinson's plan.
[620] Wolfe (1945) *Op Cit*, p. 10.

neighbourhood if they adopted the former rather than the latter approach. He was an accomplished self-publicist who took every opportunity to promote his scheme in the local media, and to advance his community planning scheme by proclaiming that:

> [T]he motives of the scheme are the English Village Green and the small squares of the country town, where children can play and neighbours see one another and retain the friendliness of the little streets and slums. With pairs of semi-detached houses on the curved roads of the Garden Suburb type of plan this friendliness ... turns to suburban snobbishness through not seeing and knowing one's neighbours. The houses look away from one another and the people too.[621]

His scheme was, he said, something that was not completely new but was still a radical idea that contained many benefits. On closer examination it would appear that Reilly was not altogether truthful. His semi-new planning principle was a recycling of old ideas. His village greens were a variation of Unwin's quadrangles with the houses arranged around them to give a "sense of unity"[622] to the whole. Reilly's promotion of games on the green can also be attributed to Unwin who suggested that greens in the centre of a quadrangle "might be devoted to ... tennis or bowls".[623] The idea might also have come from the example at Port Sunlight where Lord Leverhulme had established bowling greens surrounded by housing and other buildings. Even his cream painted cottages could be traced back at least to Morris, the sunlit homes to Unwin[624] and his mixing of socioeconomic groups in a development can also be attributed to the latter. Reilly had suggested that the bank manager could live on a green next door to the ordinary working man, but this idea had already been expressed by Unwin who admired this arrangement at Castle Coombe, where: "... many different types of houses; the small ones of the poor, and the larger, handsomer types for the more affluent" were not separated.[625]

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[621] *Birkenhead News* (1944) Untitled, 12 April.
[622] Unwin (1902), *Op Cit*, p. 4.
[623] *Ibid*, p. 5.
[624] *Ibid,* pp. 5-6.
[625] Creese (1967), *Op Cit*, p. 173.

The academic may have thought that this close mix of small and large houses for different socioeconomic groups represented a breakthrough in planning terms but the social segregation by housing type evident in the medieval village was still to be reflected in the Reilly Green. The scheme itself was laden with contradictions, inaccuracies and impracticalities and, architecturally, "had even less to commend it than Robinson's predictable scheme"[626] although it was not just for this reason that his plan was ultimately rejected by Birkenhead Town Council. The significance of this move on the part of the Councillors cannot be appreciated unless one takes into account the academic's collusion with Lawrence Wolfe, the author of *The Reilly Plan*. Having compared both publications by Wolfe on the subject of 'town planning' it can be considered that the local authority saved future residents from a scheme that promised all the attraction of an authoritarian regime. True, there were still elements of Unwin in his ideas: Wolfe too was an admirer of the medieval organisation of society. He had advocated a return to dancing on the village green[627] for both young and old. It all sounded incredibly cosy with his "spontaneous co-operation" for ensuring that people helped each other. But hidden in all of this was a level of social control that is not normally witnessed outside totalitarian regimes. Some examples of this society include a complex arrangement for managing the crèche facilities[628] where every mother *had* to be on duty "once every three weeks".[629] Similarly, the Restaurant and Meals Service[630] – described as a "real communal service"[631] – was staffed by a mixture of professionals and "volunteers, that is lady residents ..."[632] who had to give up "a fortnight per annum to the catering service".[633] There were so many examples of the way in which this society was to be controlled that they are too numerous to mention and the gender bias is evident throughout his writings. What Wolfe's ideas amounted to was "an image of perfection [that] was a totalitarian community."[634] In order to take part in Wolfe's Utopia, the people would have to conform. These were his ideas, this was his community and Reilly's plans had

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[626] Potter, *Op Cit*, p. 122.
[627] Wolfe (1945), *Op Cit*, pp. 118-119.
[628] *Ibid*, pp. 107-108.
[629] *Ibid*, p. 108.
[630] *Ibid,* p. 98.
[631] *Ibid.*
[632] *Ibid*, p. 101
[633] *Ibid.*
[634] Mumford, L. (1971), *The Pentagon of Power*, p. 213.

provided a convenient vehicle for their promulgation. The fact that he had not understood the nature of municipal housing nor the people who were to reside in these developments did not matter. The Reilly Plan was to be used and abused as a means for promoting Wolfe's views on societal change.

The Rowse Scheme

The Rowse scheme, more than any of the proposals, demonstrates a return to pure Unwinian principles. He was to use the old field names for many of the roads, he utilised brick "manufactured from local material",[635] and produced in the area, for construction and left a number of houses unpainted to show their distinctive red shade, although the majority were painted white. Photographic evidence included in this work illustrates that this was a common feature of the area and it is known that Rowse had tackled the task of planning Woodchurch by providing "good houses in the English tradition."[636] However, more than anything the design of the houses themselves: some reflecting designs at Letchworth and others echoing Castle Coombe, in the Cotswolds[637] or Ware, in Hertfordshire,[638] display a marked similarity to the rural cottages dotted around Wirral. This more than anything seems to express a desire to ground his designs in a local village vernacular to create a sense of continuity.

Potter contends that "many of the houses at Woodchurch ... reflect the designs and grouping of houses built at Port Sunlight" and this may be the case, but Rowse's styles were neither as eclectic nor as eccentric as those established by Leverhulme. There is a greater similarity to groups of houses in Jackman's Place, Letchworth, [639] and some of the housing in Rushby Mead[640] – all municipal housing which could be mistaken for designs at Woodchurch – than to those of Port Sunlight. Although Rowse's designs at Woodchurch do contain a greater mix of architectural styles than the municipal areas at Letchworth, it is still possible that they may still have influenced

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[635] Potter, *Op Cit*, p. 109.
[636] *Ibid*, quoting Bradshaw, one third of the partnership of Bradshaw, Rowse, Harker. The firm had been established in 1918 by Herbert James Rowse.
[637] Moriarty, *Op Cit*, p. 54.
[638] Brunskill, R. W. (1997) Houses and Cottages of Britain. Origins and Development of Traditional Buildings, p. 96.
[639] Purdom (1949) *Op Cit*, Plates IV and V.
[640] *Ibid*, Plate VI.

his treatment of housing for Woodchurch. His inclusion of houses placed on three sides of a green – which Potter describes as "regularly shaped open areas of grass"[641] – reflects styles at Welwyn, particularly the group in Handside Close designed by Louis de Soissons.[642] The influence of Welwyn on Rowse's designs can be identified in a group of dwellings there designed for the "first housing scheme by the rural district council"[643] and can be compared with similar "tile hung"[644] houses in Home Farm Road, Woodchurch. The only elements of Rowse's scheme that reflects the influence of Port Sunlight was his use of radial planning and his suggestion that the gardens to the front of the houses should remain open-plan.

The influence of Lutyens can also be detected in the earlier housing[645] as can the influence of Reilly in the inclusion of "large open grassed areas".[646] Potter has acknowledged the influence of Robinson in the architect's decision to retain the educational area suggested in the former's scheme[647] but then we could turn the whole thing full circle and ask what (or who) had influenced this decision of Robinson's. The answer is never easy but whatever Rowse's influences he was to remain indifferent to "the preceding arguments concerning lifestyles"[648] and, after careful consideration, was to base his design on what he considered best for the area and for the people.

As ever, the difficulty in tracing the influences on one individual's ideas and motivations is an almost impossible task, but ideas do not occur in a vacuum: there is a kind of infinity to them: an endlessness that moves through time. There will be elements of More's Utopia, the English Arts and Crafts movement (through William Morris and others) and Ebenezer Howard[649] in the work of Unwin; so too will there be elements of the early philanthropists in the development of town planning[650] and by extension municipal housing for it is here that planners have been able to exert the

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[641] Potter, *Op Cit*, p. 100.
[642] Purdom (1949) *Op Cit*, Plate XXI.
[643] *Ibid*.
[644] *Ibid*, Plate XXIV.
[645] Potter, *Op Cit*, p.109.
[646] *Ibid*, p. 110.
[647] *Ibid*.
[648] *Ibid*.
[649] Creese, (1992), *Op Cit*, pp. 158-159.
[650] Lawless, P. & Brown, F. (1986), *Urban Grown and change in Britain: An introduction*, p. 41.

most influence. The human race would not have "lasted without the influence of others"[651] and the fact that we are still here "is the result of endless influences which have transcended nationality and ideology."[652]

<u>Design and its impact on community at Woodchurch</u>

To what extent did Rowse's designs for Woodchurch influence the development of community? If the evidence of the residents is to be believed – and there is no reason to contend that it should not – the design of the houses and layout of the estate was to have very little to do with retaining a sense of community. What emerged from the interviews and supporting notes is that there was a general satisfaction with the style of the houses, which the respondents felt were of a superior standard to anything that existed in the town. They were to express the opinion that the housing they occupied rivalled many of the surrounding suburbs and could be compared as equal to the middle-class neighbourhoods of nearby Thingwall, Barnston, and some parts of Noctorum. When asked whether the houses and layout of the estate had helped to create a sense of community those who replied were not convinced that they had. That the houses faced each other across a green or a road was nothing new, they contended, it had been the same in the streets of Birkenhead: whatever the layout, the orientation of the houses was still the same. There was a general consensus that there was a continuum at Woodchurch: school friends, church-fellows, neighbours and relatives had all obtained housing on the estate and this had been crucial in maintaining the sense of community they had known in the town. There are echoes of what Roberts has established as the propensity for working-class areas to fold "within itself a cluster of loosely defined overlapping 'villages' ..."[653] which are "... almost self-contained communities.[654] As in Roberts' Salford, the communities that developed at Woodchurch had a geographical aspect to them developing as they did around clusters of houses, but they overlay each other in a series of community on community. Neighbours whose gardens backed onto each other would sometimes open part of the fencing if it meant ease of access to services for themselves and a

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[651] Ward, (1991), *Influences: Voices of Creative Dissent*, p. 7.
[652] *Ibid.*
[653] Roberts, *Op Cit*, p. 16.
[654] *Ibid.*

neighbour. Individuals may have belonged to different roads – to overlapping communities if you will – but this did not matter. In this respect the piecemeal nature of development of the estate may, through sheer serendipity, have enabled the continuation of the community that had existed in the town.

What about the open plan design for gardens on the estate? It would appear that this particular design concept of Rowse's was very quickly modified by many of the residents as fences of different varieties, privet hedges and other barriers such as heavy chain fences sprung up around the estate. These barriers were erected to delimit the playing of ball games or to stop children using the gardens as extensions of the greens – we will call them that because that was the original intention, although they were known as 'the field' to the residents – and the surrounding pathways. Although Rowse had included children's playgrounds in his scheme many continued to play in front of their homes: the greens had become the new street. The playgrounds were situated behind groups of houses and were not a popular feature for residents who lived close to them. As one respondent whose house backed onto a playground recalled:

> It was a bloody nuisance. All the kids of the day would come in an' y'd have them screamin' an carryin' on. An' of course there was no one to keep an eye on them so the bigger ones'd get up to all sorts, y'know ... bullyin' the littler ones, smashin' bottles an' that sort of thing. Well, it didn't take long ... we'd go out an' chase 'em. Y'd get cheek but y'could always identify at least one whose mum or dad or other relative y'knew down town. So y'd go f'that one ... go f'the bloody throat. "I'll tell y'mam" or whatever [laughs].[655]

Threats from residents living adjacent to the playgrounds, backed up by threats from parents, soon guaranteed that they were deserted without recourse to the authorities. Eventually the gates to the playgrounds were permanently locked and a number of them were filled with pensioners' bungalows (for which an access road had to be laid) in the late seventies and early eighties.

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[655] Interview No. FR1.

As has already been mentioned the green or field at the front of the houses was used by the children and it may be remembered that Reilly had suggested that games such as football or cricket could be played by males of all ages on his greens, and it was certainly the case that they were used for such pastimes. However, this was not the civilised games of the Reilly scheme where adults and boys would learn social skills through competing with teams from other greens. There was no real organisation to these activities, goalposts were created from a variety of clothing, or with bricks from one of the building sites dotted around the estate. Stumps would be created from a variety of materials 'borrowed' from some unsuspecting father's shed. Unfortunately, when there were no stumps arguments would ensue as to whether a boy had been caught LBW (leg before wicket) and this would normally herald an acrimonious end to the game. These were unorganised, impromptu and normally raucous events, participation in which depended on at least one member of the team being an occupant of a house facing the green: the possession of a football or cricket bat was also crucial for inclusion in these affairs. Boys who owned the required sports equipment became instantly popular and other youngsters from surrounding roads would quickly gather to make up teams. Unsurprisingly, this did not always meet with the approval of the adult residents of housing around the green, and many a lively game would be broken up when the ball hit a window or a privet hedge too many times. The boys would disperse only to reassemble a little while later when they judged that the complainant was no longer at home. It was, according to the evidence, normally the fathers who did the complaining but their reasons for so doing were often completely understandable:

> ... he was always out chasin' them but then he did shifts ... I didn't mind when he was on days an' I just let 'em play. They were out from under me feet ... but he didn't like it .... [656]

For the mothers the biggest problem of this design feature was that they became mud baths in bad weather, bringing filth into the homes as children continued to play on them in all weathers.

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[656] Interview No. GD1.

Cricket and football were not the only games played on the greens. The girls would organise games of "Sly Fox", "What's the Time Mr. Wolf?", "Farmer's in the Den" and other activities requiring a cluster of them: residence on the green of at least one of the children was again the key to inclusion and, once again, children from other areas would often join in when they saw a game in progress. The paths surrounding the greens were made full use of and generations of children learned to skate, ride bicycles, play skipping games and hopscotch on them. The boys made trolleys[657] out of planks of wood, old wheels and bits of rope and 'raced' them around the track created by the pathways. Both the greens and the paths were to be exploited in ways that the planners would never have considered when they drew up their designs.

Parents too were to use the greens, but not for the activities envisaged by Reilly. The adults' use of the greens was confined to street parties to celebrate national events, and the Queen's Coronation was the first time that the bunting appeared. Tables from the houses were dragged onto greens around the estate, with each neighbour providing something for the celebration. A number of the respondents recalled with fondness how everyone had "mucked in"[658] to help with the preparations. There was a general recognition that some neighbours had not been able to provide as much as others but that did not seem to matter. The residents were keeping alive the tradition of the 'street parties' they had known in the town. The times had changed, habits had changed and so to had some ideas of community. The younger generation had aspirations that their parents could never have imagined: moving to Woodchurch represented not only an improvement in living conditions but also a real opportunity for fulfilling their aspirations. Combined with other improvements in welfare provision – the NHS and the tri-partite system of education – a number of interviewees considered that following the war there was a new confidence in the future. The early residents of the estate may have wanted to be of the town, but they did not want to be in it and they expressed the former by transferring that sense of community to their new environment.

To conclude, the community that existed at Woodchurch had much more to do with the people, what they were, and where they came from than the built environment.

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[657] A 'do-it-yourself' and very primitive version of a go-cart.
[658] Joint interview JI/2.

Rowse's designs required no changes in the residents' pattern of living: they could still live the way they always had. The children could play on the field in front of the houses or in the back garden, just as they had always played in the street or the back yard; people could still make casual passing acquaintance in the road, as they had done in the street; the corner shop was replaced by the doorstep as the place for exchanging gossip; and the old street patterns of behaviour, such as cleaning the front step *en masse* could still continue even though this was an unintended consequence rather than something deliberately planned. Rowse had not set himself up as a social engineer he simply provided the best possible scheme and in so doing inadvertently allowed the residents to avoid the dislocation to their way of life that had been experienced on similar estates elsewhere.

Full use of the 'greens' (fields) was made by children of the estate as this photograph illustrates. Children are engaged in the peaceful pastime of making daisy chains but the fields, and the surrounding paths, would be used for noisier pursuits. Source: Wirral Archive Service.

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